

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MAY 2022

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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL®

9127 S. Jamaica St. #400, Englewood, CO, USA 80112
+1 720-439-5050

www.toastmasters.org

CONTACTING WORLD HEADQUARTERS

For information on joining or building a club, visit:

www.toastmasters.org

Article submission:

submissions@toastmasters.org

Letters to the Editor:

letters@toastmasters.org

For general magazine questions:

magazine@toastmasters.org

TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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Cycling Through the Stages of Leadership

I was in the middle of a spinning exercise class when I had an aha moment. I had been pedaling and doing pretty well, but the instructor wanted more from us: “It’s going to get difficult. You haven’t needed me up to this point—but you will. Because when you’re ready to give up, that’s when I’ll be there. And I’ll get you through.”

I’m not sure whether it was his confidence, my exercise-induced endorphins, or some combination of the two, but his statement suddenly shifted my perspective. I realized that’s what a leader does—pushes and encourages. I began thinking of leadership as a Tour de France-style race that takes place in stages.



The Start

Leading is easy—at first. You lead yourself toward a goal, then begin to add other people who share your vision. At that point, everyone is on board and pulling in the same direction. There’s momentum and creative force behind it. You have energy and you want to win!

The Long Flatlands

Eventually, that surge of momentum will start to flag. Even endurance athletes don’t work alone; at some point, you’ll need to add team members to help you make the imminent uphill climb. You’ll need to tap into your confidence to help them see what you see. This is a paradox: At the moment you need the most help, you need to offer the most help. Once you master that balance you can move on to the next stage.

The Uphill Climb

This is when the long hours and hard work come in. You’ll need to prepare for mission fatigue and the inevitable “why are we doing this, again?” Your job is to keep spirits up and eyes on the prize. How can you listen to your team’s needs and help them evolve their skills so they are ready for the final climb?

The Summit

Those last few miles toward the top are the hardest! Tap into gratitude, make sure your listening skills are in top shape, and be prepared to give pep talks. There’s no starting over now—summitting is the only choice. Once you’re there, it’s time to celebrate!

The Downhill

You’re not finished with the race, but the hard part is over. Use this well-deserved rest period to reflect on what went right and what went wrong. What gains in strength and mindset will you take with you to the next race?

Leadership isn’t a set-it-and-forget-it role. It takes physical and mental endurance and a willingness to constantly reach for what’s next. You will trip and fall, even if you’re experienced—that’s the risk you take as a leader. That willingness to fail, and the ability to get back on the bike after disappointing yourself, isn’t a weakness. It’s what makes you a leader.

Margaret Page, DTM
International President

Features



14 CLUB QUALITY: Keep 'Em Coming Back

It takes creativity, energy, and some thoughtful attention to meet members' needs.

By Kate McClare, DTM

20 PERSONAL GROWTH: Increase Your Impact by Narrowing Your Focus

Connect with your audience by making the specific universal and reaching more with less.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Columns

3 VIEWPOINT: Cycling Through the Stages of Leadership

*By Margaret Page, DTM
International President*

8 MY TURN: The Many Sides of Leadership

By Michael Chojnacki, DTM

9 TOOLBOX: Understanding Your Communication Style

By Bill Brown, DTM

28 FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT: I Have No Idea

By John Cadley

Articles

10 CLUB OFFICERS: The Master of Promotion

Vice President Public Relations increases a club's visibility and helps attract visitors.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

12 TOASTMASTERS NEWS: 2022 Proposals

Make your voice heard.

18 CLUB EXPERIENCE: Squeezing in More Speeches

Speakathons help more members give prepared speeches and reach their goals.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

24 PROFILE: Blind Member Is Unstoppable

Bobby Blackmon, DTM, has overcome steep obstacles to accomplish one goal after another.

By Andrew Miller



26 LEADERSHIP: How Are Your Leadership Skills?

Self-evaluations and group feedback offer invaluable insight.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

27 CLUB PROFILE: Speaking With a New Purpose

Club helps members with neurological and movement disorders reclaim their voice.

By Laura Amann

Departments

5 TOASTMASTERS NEWS: News / Resources / Reminders

6 SEEN AND HEARD: Traveling *Toastmaster* / Member Recognition / Snapshot



News

New Corporate Club Webpage

Could your workplace benefit from a Toastmasters club? Corporate clubs are a great way to build soft skills, enhance communication, and boost interaction between people in different departments. Share the new corporate club [webpage](#) with your human resources department or upper management. They'll find the tools and resources they need to start a vital company club. From small companies to global giants like 3M, Google, Toyota, and Siemens, all types of businesses benefit from Toastmasters!



Toastmasters International Convention

Save the date for the 2022 International Convention! The first-ever hybrid convention experience will take place August 17–20. You can travel to Nashville, Tennessee, for an in-person encounter or enjoy inspiring speaker sessions from the comfort of your home. Registration opens soon. Visit the [Events webpage](#) for updates.

The Branded Images Gallery Has Moved!

Toastmasters is now using the platform Lytho to host Toastmasters-branded images. [Access](#) these professional photos for your marketing materials, social media channels, and more.

Resources

Promote Your Club

Add your club's information to the [Promotional Poster](#) and hang it around your community! Featuring a contemporary design, this marketing material comes in two sizes for your convenience.

Hybrid Meeting Help

A hybrid club meeting combines both in-person and online attendance, and many clubs have opted for this meeting format to allow members to continue their Toastmasters journey. [Discover resources](#) and helpful *Toastmaster* magazine articles with tips for online participation, supporting a hybrid club, technology setup, and more.

2022 Planner Available

Plan for success with the help of the [2022 Weekly Planner](#). Useful and attractive, this limited edition is available until supplies run out. Get yours now!

'Tis the Toasting Season Again

No matter where you live in the world, you're likely anticipating the season's upcoming celebrations—weddings, graduations, retirements, achievements, cultural holidays, and a multitude of other merriments. If toasts are made, you might be asked to speak, especially if guests know you're a Toastmaster. Need to refresh those toasting skills? Revisit these popular [toasting tips](#) articles.

Reminders

Beat the Clock

Toastmasters are talented clock-watchers—in running meetings, giving speeches, and completing Pathways projects. So make it your club's near-end-of-year membership goal to [Beat the Clock!](#) Check out the details for this and other club-building programs.

Leadership Evaluation Forms

Now is an excellent time for club and District leaders to assess their leadership year through new online tools. Club and District leaders can log into Leadership Central to access forms to self-evaluate and sit in for a 360-degree group evaluation. Read more about these evaluations in this issue.

DCP Drive

With the program year ending June 30, it's time to make that last push for [Distinguished Club Program](#) (DCP) credit. The annual award program is a measure of a club's success, recognizing achievements that provide a high-quality experience for members. The DCP is made up of [10 goals](#), with six of them focusing on education achievements in the Pathways learning experience. Get motivated to meet your goals!



Traveling Toastmaster



Members of **EPPING CLUB** of Epping, Victoria, Australia, enjoy a holiday dinner and printouts of the *Toastmaster* magazine.



GOVIND NEGI, DTM, of Muscat, Oman, summits Jabal Shams—the highest mountain in the Hajar Range and the first place to receive sunrise in Oman due to its high peak.

Toastmasters News

The Do's and Don'ts of Facebook Posts

Since its creation in 2009, the Official Toastmasters International Members Group has been available for members around the world. Toastmasters International is happy to provide a forum for members to discuss Toastmasters, public speaking, communication, and leadership, and to gain perspectives from members outside their clubs. However, there are a few rules to ensure that mutual respect and civility is maintained. Here are some do's and don'ts to keep in mind when posting on the page or responding in the comments section.

Do

- Be respectful of one another.
- Remember there is another human behind the computer screen.
- Abide by the Toastmasters International [Code of Conduct](#).
- Think before you share—is your post relevant to Toastmasters? Will your post benefit or inspire other members of the group?
- Invite fellow members to join the group.
- Consider turning off the comments if your question is answered.
- Credit the original source if you are posting a quote or idea that came from someone else.



Don't

- Personally insult or attack other members.
- Post solicitations for businesses.
- Share content that is not directly related to Toastmasters International, including topics related to politics, religion, or controversial or polarizing issues.
- Start “watch parties” or stream live events/videos.
- Post for the sake of complaining—posts that are questions or seeking solutions to problems are more valuable for all members of the group.
- Tag people who are not part of the group—they won't be able to see the post.
- Start arguments or leave sarcastic comments. This group is for helping and inspiring one another. Please avoid starting unproductive arguments with fellow members and remember that sarcasm often doesn't translate well over the internet.
- Try to share posts from the group to your personal pages. The group is a closed group, and most posts from the administrator are also posted on the public Toastmasters International Facebook page.



Snapshot



Members of The Millennium Toastmasters Club of Colombo, Sri Lanka, celebrated their officer installation in November 2021. The group boarded a floating restaurant on a boat for the evening but posed for this photo before setting sail.



Member Recognition

Erik Schneider, a member of AM Lockport Club in Lockport, New York, attended the online District 65 Table Topics Speech Contest while connected to an apheresis machine. As he participated in the contest, he was also donating blood platelets! Sam Mehta, DTM, a fellow member of District 65, says, “Bravo, Erik. We are proud of you and may you continue to help humanity with your magnanimity.”



The Many Sides of Leadership

Make an impact whether you're a club officer or not.

By Michael Chojnacki, DTM

As leaders we're accustomed to answering questions, resolving conflicts, and moving forward. However, I believe the most important question is, "How can I best serve others?" I regularly ask myself how I can best serve those I'm leading. Without knowing what's important to people, it's nearly impossible to help them achieve their goals.

It's easy to think that leadership in Toastmasters is all about the Club President and officers. Have you ever considered that leadership involves every member? Every time a member speaks, they are leading the thoughts and emotions of the club, and that influences everyone and shapes the club's culture.

Whether we are club officers or new members, all of us are involved in leadership development. There's a hidden benefit of being in tune with the needs of our club members. We actually develop the most important qualities of a great leader—integrity, empathy, humility, resilience, vision, influence, and positivity.

I discovered the power of influence during a club meeting. I felt the energy and morale sink when people confirmed their roles for the next meeting. Members answered with a listless, "Yeah, I'll speak," or "Well, I guess so, if nobody else wants to." Sitting there I thought, *These are brilliant people! What happened to the great meeting we just had? And, what a letdown this must be for guests.* My fellow members didn't realize how confirming their roles sounded more like a dreaded assignment than an opportunity to fulfill their goals.

When asked if I would be the grammarian, I answered with a resounding, "Yes! That'll be great!" People were surprised by my enthusiasm. When the members after me were asked to confirm their roles, they responded with more life in their voices. As if they were saying, "I want to play a part in the fun too."

Within a few weeks the energy level improved. What I didn't expect was the far-reaching effect of my enthusiasm. Over the



Michael Chojnacki, DTM

Whether we are club officers or new members, all of us are involved in leadership development.

next few months, the quality of the speeches improved, there was more laughter, and the members who had previously avoided challenging roles now accepted them. At the time I didn't hold a leadership position in the club. I simply wanted our meetings to be more enjoyable, and look what happened. Remember, every Toastmaster is a leader at some point in their journey.

Toastmasters, like all people, respond to encouragement and positive support, especially

when it's delivered in a way that's meaningful to them. When evaluating a speech, a balance of positive comments and suggestions for improvement is expected. What's unexpected, and much appreciated, is positive encouragement during a casual conversation.

I pay close attention to people's emotions and what they say, and if they happen to express doubt or uncertainty, I remind them of their past success; I compliment them on a skill. Giving a fellow member a sincere compliment or encouragement when it's not expected is especially important in building their self-confidence. It lets them know you're paying attention, and that you value them.

For example, a member once told me, "I don't know what to write about for my next speech," I reminded her of the brilliant Table Topics answer she gave a few weeks ago. She was surprised I remembered what she said and that her response had such a lasting effect. I suggested that she already had a great idea. All she needed to do was expand the subject, add a story or two, and create a smooth opening and conclusion.

Giving wholeheartedly to the people we serve develops mindfulness, self-awareness, and compassion in a very natural way, which creates an environment of inclusiveness and belonging. These qualities are the hallmarks of great leadership. The more we practice them, the more they are reflected and adopted by all club members.

Our leadership journey is never ending, because we are always developing, but the destination remains in sight because it is realized in the success of our fellow members.

Michael Chojnacki, DTM, is a presentation and leadership coach who teaches people to reduce stress and find a greater sense of belonging. He has been a Toastmaster since 2003 and is a former member of Surf City Advanced Toastmasters in Scotts Valley, California.

Understanding Your Communication Style

A fast breakdown of four types of communicators.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Have you ever had a project in Pathways that you would rather put off as long as you could? One of those projects for me was “Understanding Your Communication Style” in Level 2. The project has you take a test to understand your normal communication style and then discusses how you can best interact with people with other styles.

I have taken tests like this before. Sometimes it is for leadership style. Sometimes it's personality. But it almost always contains four categories. The names are different, but the characteristics are the same. I have always understood who I am. My problem is understanding how to work with all the other styles.

The communication style project is now the next one in my path. I could easily give a fluff speech, to just get it over with. I decided, however, to take a different approach, to actually figure it out. Maybe my journey will help you as well.

This concept is usually presented as something that is straightforward. Very quickly, in a fraction of a second, before you open your mouth, analyze the other person's style and then, just as quickly, craft an approach that meets their communication need. At least, that's what I heard. Easy peasy, right? Not!

The breakthrough came for me when I realized that this is not something that comes naturally and quickly. It is a skill that you have to develop. And this takes time. It's okay to get it wrong. Just learn from it.

That may seem obvious to you. But it was a liberating revelation to me.

The four styles discussed in the Pathways project are called Direct, Analytical, Supportive, and Initiating. I came in strongly in the Analytical category with Direct as my second. Yes, I am highly detail oriented. You may have picked that up from some of my articles.

The rub for me is quickly assessing another person's communication style. The project does an excellent job of describing each style in great detail, but when I am talking with someone, I am not going to remember all of the signs. I need a quick tool to help me out.



I have always understood who I am. My problem is understanding how to work with all the other styles.

I have reduced the four types to a brief description. I view the Direct as “no nonsense.” The Analytical is “details, details, details.” The Supportive is “caring.” And the Initiating is “the life of the party.” Are these exact? Probably not. But it gets me in the right neighborhood.

Next, I need to know how to relate to those of each type. With Directs, I need to get to the point. With Analyticals, I need to provide details. With Initiating, I should focus on stories. And with Supportives, I need to be calm and reassuring. And I need to have patience.

Not my strong suit. Yes, there's more to it than that. But that is where I am starting.

Obviously, if we have been working with someone for some time, we probably have a pretty good idea of their style, but what if we are meeting someone for the first time?

I asked myself, how would I react if someone approached me? If they were direct, I would ask them to provide more details. If they started with chitchat, I might ask them to get to the point. And if they started providing details, I would ask them questions so that I could receive the details that I wanted in the order that made sense to me. In other words, in each case, I would give the other person clues on how best to interact with me. I then need to become really good at picking up the clues that others give me.

As I said before, this is a skill that needs to be developed. And that will happen over time.

The project is targeted toward interpersonal communication. But does it have relevance to formal presentations? Yes.

If you are giving the presentation to one person, target it to their style. But if you are speaking to a group, you might have people there from each of the four styles. You should then craft your presentation to provide something for each style.

As I said earlier, this is a breakthrough for me. And I have a lot to learn. But for the first time, I am excited about the topic and the challenge. Hopefully I have challenged you, as well, to become more adept at this important topic and to embrace the “Understanding Your Communication Style” project, as I have.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette, and Evening Stars Club in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at www.billbrownsspeechcoach.com.



The Master of Promotion

Vice President Public Relations increases a club's visibility and helps attract visitors.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

When Greg Gazin, DTM, served as Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) for New Entrepreneurs Toastmasters in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, he never thought the experience would benefit him in his own professional endeavors to such an extent. Not only did his VPPR experience help him promote his business as a technology columnist (The Gadget Guy), but along with his Toastmasters experience, it also helped him launch a speaking career.

"As VPPR, you gain skills that you can take outside of Toastmasters," says Gazin, co-host of [The Toastmasters Podcast](#).

Serving as VPPR, he learned how to develop a publicity calendar, create more effective press releases, give better media interviews, tell more compelling news stories, and build branding materials. Additionally, Gazin began to facilitate workshops on promotional strategies for small businesses, which he credits as the catalyst for starting his speaking career.

"Being VPPR helped me build a lot of confidence."

The VPPR gains skills while executing the following responsibilities.

1 Create a public relations (PR) plan.

To get started, first take a look at the Toastmasters [public relations page](#) to learn about valuable tools and resources. Then evaluate your club's previous PR efforts, and, finally, work with your club officer team to set a few goals for how and when you will promote your club.

You may find it helpful to develop a [PR calendar](#), sketching out a plan for the entire year, and then revisiting your plan quarterly to revise and refine details. Your PR calendar may include promoting special meetings, club contests, your club anniversary, social media postings, press releases, and more.

Press releases may be an easy PR opportunity for clubs in smaller communities. Clubs in larger metropolitan areas are much less likely to get stories about their club in media outlets. See the Toastmasters publicity and promotion handbook [Let the World Know](#) for specific guidance on press releases.

Your club may want to consider a monthly newsletter, which can appeal to both club members and guests. This is a good way to keep guests engaged. (Ask them if it is okay to subscribe them to the newsletter list.)

As you create your plan, target your PR efforts to the audience you want to attract.

Ankur Yadav, DTM, VPPR for the Gurgaon Orators Toastmasters Club of Gurgaon, Haryana, India, suggests using the social media that your target audience uses. "In the Indian subcontinent, we use Instagram as we have many prospective members aged 20 to 30. Word of the Day posts are very popular."

To successfully execute your plan, use task or calendar reminders. For example, if you want to have your website updated after every meeting to showcase the next meeting, add a recurring task to do so.

PR in Corporate Clubs

If your club is a closed corporate club, your promotional tools will be constrained to the channels allowed by the corporation. Getting management and the human resources department's help in supporting the club can be critical and should be part of your overall PR plan.

"Corporate clubs need top leaders' buy-in. If you have that, Toastmasters can be included in new employee packets, corporate websites, etc.," says James J. Simms, VPPR of Carrollwood Toastmasters in Tampa, Florida.

Getting buy-in can be easier if you use language that connects with corporate culture. "Translate from Toastmasters jargon to corporate-speak, focusing on transferable skills," says Pat Johnson, DTM, Past Toastmasters International President, and author of [A Handbook for Building and Sustaining Vibrant Toastmasters Programs in Corporations](#). Johnson gives some examples of translating Toastmasters language to corporate language.

club	→	learning program
dues	→	tuition
club officers	→	leadership opportunities
evaluations	→	feedback
public speaking	→	communication and leadership training
Vice President Public Relations	→	Public Relations Liaison

Resources

Learn more about the VPPR role.

- ♦ [A one-page overview](#)
- ♦ [Public Relations Resources page](#)
- ♦ [Let the World Know](#) handbook
- ♦ [Club Leadership Handbook](#)



2 Keep public data up to date.

Many prospective members are looking for a Toastmasters club. Will they find your club? And, when they find it, will the meeting and contact information be correct?

At least once a year, check the Toastmasters [Find a Club](#) information for your club. In Club Central, you can update the club contact, meeting location, and schedule, and add the club website and Facebook pages. In the Club Demographics section, you can indicate whether your club accepts online attendance.

Does your club website have old or inaccurate information? A visitor shouldn't wonder how to visit or if your club is still meeting.

members having fun or being recognized for accomplishments. Engage prospective visitors by sharing stories of transformation. "If you have 20 to 25 members in your club, you have 20 to 25 stories of transformation that you can share on social media," says Yadav, of the India club.

4 Create materials that safeguard the Toastmasters brand.

As the VPPR, one of your responsibilities is to safeguard the Toastmasters brand, putting forth brand-consistent images to increase engagement and enhance credibility.

Create promotional images for events, including your club meetings, using pre-made

officer team, especially with the Vice President Membership. Work together on plans for special events, starting a few weeks out with promotion. Provide members with promotional material that they can use to invite guests. Ask members to share social media posts.

Also, look for your successor early in the Toastmasters year, and have them help you with promotional efforts, building their skill and confidence in a few aspects of the role. Consider creating a transition document for your successor and outlining club-specific information, such as how to access the club website and other promotional channels.

6 Learn from others.

As you grow in the VPPR role, take the opportunity to learn from other VPPRs.

"Learn from as many others as possible. Create a VPPR network in your Division or District so that you can share ideas," says Keith Sheldrake, DTM, of EloquenTIA in Rome, Italy.

Good ideas aren't limited to your District. VPPRs from around the world can offer you ideas. For example, you can network with other VPPRs in Facebook groups such as [Toastmasters VPPR](#) and [VP-Public Relations \(VPPR\)-Toastmasters across the World](#).

Grow your club by letting the world (or at least your target audience) know how they can benefit from your Toastmasters club.

"If you have 20 to 25 members in your club, you have 20 to 25 stories of transformation that you can share on social media."

—ANKUR YADAV, DTM

Additionally, photos of smiling members on your [home page](#) can make prospective members feel welcomed even before they visit.

3 Manage social media channels.

Social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Meetup, and many more) are free or very low-cost ways to get the word out and to engage with your target audience. You don't have to do all of them at once. It is better to pick one or two channels that resonate with your target audience and to post content consistently.

For most social media, images are more engaging than text. You can post pictures of

Toastmasters promotional material, or using your own creations (see the [Toastmasters Brand Portal](#), where you can find the [Brand Manual](#), Toastmasters logo, social media templates, and more). [Canva](#) is a popular graphic design platform for quickly creating eye-catching promotional material.

Branding-related knowledge can help you in other ways as well. "I learned how to build an arsenal of camera-ready branding materials for my business—which in the past were haphazard at best," says Gazin, the podcast co-host.

5 Work with other club officers.

Discuss and coordinate PR efforts as an

Diane Windingland, DTM, is a presentation coach from Saint Paul, Minnesota, and a member of two clubs: PowerTalk Toastmasters and Readership Toastmasters. Learn more at www.virtualspeechcoach.com.

2022 Proposals

Make your voice heard.

At the 2022 Annual Business Meeting in August, every Toastmasters club will have the opportunity to vote on proposed amendments to the Bylaws of Toastmasters International and the Club Constitution.

The Toastmasters International Board of Directors presents and endorses these amendments, which are outlined in Proposals A through L. Why are these changes being recommended? Ultimately, to modernize, clarify, and update the governing documents as well as give members a stronger, more effective organization.

of Toastmasters International and Member Clubs. These amendments preserve the meaning of these purposes but express them in a more concise, modern manner.

PROPOSAL C Inclusive Language for Gender

The Board proposes adding the phrases “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the organization’s nondiscrimination clauses in the governing documents to be more inclusive and align with California state regulations.

PROPOSAL D Communication and Technology

Amendments to the governing documents relating to methods of communication can help safeguard the documents against extensive future changes and ensure they align with current technology use.

By referencing the section of the Bylaws on “electronic transmissions” and substituting the words “in writing” for lists of written communication methods, the documents will be safeguarded against the need for further changes as terminology becomes outdated.

The Board also proposes amendments to the Bylaws of Toastmasters International and the Club Constitution to modernize references to methods of communication (such as including videoconferencing) and other technology.

PROPOSAL E Clarification on Voting Rights for Member Clubs

The Board proposes adding the words “in good standing” to the Bylaws to clarify that a Member Club must be in good standing to be entitled to their two votes at the Annual Business Meeting. This amendment is a clarification only and not a change in voting rights.

PROPOSAL F Announcements to Members

The Board proposes amending the Bylaws to confirm that announcements to the membership of any change in the



FOR

The Board of Directors asks for your support and recommends that your club vote in favor of all the Proposals.

To view the full text of the proposed amendments to the Bylaws of Toastmasters International and the Club Constitution for Clubs of Toastmasters International, visit

www.toastmasters.org/2022Proposals

PROPOSAL A Consistency and Clarity

The Board proposes a series of amendments to the Bylaws of Toastmasters International and the Club Constitution to make the language use and the style more consistent, clear, and in line with modern practices.

PROPOSAL B Restatement of the Organization and Club Purposes

The Board proposes amendments to the Bylaws of Toastmasters International and the Club Constitution to enhance the clarity and readability of the stated purposes



international dues, and of the International Leadership Committee report on International Officer and Director nominations, be made both in the *Toastmaster* magazine and on the Toastmasters International website.

PROPOSAL G Clarity on References to Geographic Regions

The Board of Directors is responsible for dividing the physical territory in which Member Clubs are located into geographic regions. The Board proposes amending the Bylaws to clarify that the geographic regions referenced throughout the Bylaws are those defined by the Board of Directors and not by any external entity.

PROPOSAL H Scheduling of Board of Directors Meetings

With the ever-changing global environment, it may not be possible for all Board Members to be on-site together before or after the Annual Business Meeting (ABM). As such, more time may pass between the dates scheduled for the Board of Directors meetings and the ABM than in previous years.

The Board proposes removing the word “immediately” from the Bylaws in connection with when the Board meetings before and after the ABM occur, in order to schedule their meetings according to the circumstances and global environment at the time.

The Board will continue to appoint the organization’s corporate officers (Secretary and

Treasurer) when they meet after the ABM. Adding “first” will ensure the new Board makes these appointments in their first meeting after the ABM so as not to unnecessarily delay the appointments.

PROPOSAL I Voting at the Annual Business Meeting

Conducting the Annual Business Meeting online the last two years because of the pandemic has allowed the Member Clubs to attend and participate in the meeting in record numbers.

Since the organization continues to adapt to the changing global environment, the Board proposes amending the Bylaws to provide flexibility in attendance and participation by offering members the option to attend/participate on-site or online.

PROPOSAL J Club Leadership Committee Chair

The Immediate Past Club President serves as the Club Leadership Committee Chair. There is an existing provision in the Club Constitution stating that a different member can serve as chair if it is in the club’s best interests. What this section does not identify is the possibility of the Immediate Past Club President role being vacant.

The Board proposes amending the Club Constitution to clarify that the Immediate Past Club President would not serve as the Club Leadership Committee Chair if that officer role is vacant.

PROPOSAL K Club Officer Requirements

To safeguard integrity and transparency in the club environment relating to finances, the Board proposes a change intended to eliminate any potential financial conflict of interest for club officers. Specifically, they propose amending the Club Constitution to prevent one member from serving in both the Club President and Club Treasurer roles at the same time.

Further, to preserve the values of service and excellence in every Toastmasters club, the Board proposes a required minimum of three club officers (Club President, a Vice President, and Club Secretary or Club Secretary-Treasurer). Each of these offices must be held by a different person.

PROPOSAL L Club Representatives on the District Council

As the world and Toastmasters International transition to a post-pandemic environment, we must develop best practices to maximize member engagement and participation in the business of the organization. For District leaders, that includes voting without the need for proxies.

The Club President and Vice President Education, the club’s two voting representatives on the District Council, must attend and vote at all District Council meetings. The Board proposes more flexibility by allowing each club to determine if one of its two representatives will carry the club’s two votes or if both representatives will carry one vote each.

Given the differences in District procedures worldwide, and the inherent complexity of processing proxies for both on-site and online attendees, the Board proposes that proxies be eliminated at the District level. Members will have the ability to attend District Council meetings either on-site or online, making it easier to vote directly, especially if only one club representative is required to vote. Thus, proxies are not needed. This move will make things easier for the District and allow leaders to benefit from the voting experience.

If you have any questions, please email boardcontact@toastmasters.org.



Keep 'Em Coming Back

It takes creativity, energy, and some thoughtful attention to meet members' needs.

By Kate McClare, DTM

Do your club leaders look at Toastmasters as just a numbers game? It's true that if you don't have the numbers, you don't have a club. But how you get the numbers means the difference between a club that just collects new members every six months and a club that keeps them coming back from one dues-renewal period to another.

It's always been a challenge, even before the pandemic put every member in a little square box on a screen. The various ways in which members attend meetings may have expanded in the past few years, but the overarching goal has remained the same: Give members what they need to achieve their goals, make it fun and engaging, and you won't be able to *stop* them from renewing—whether you're meeting online, in person, or in a hybrid format.

Why Retention Matters

Many clubs put their focus mainly on recruiting new members; but for true quality, it's critical to keep the existing ones. Member retention "is the vehicle that drives an organization to develop systems to keep its top talent and mitigate turnover," says Past International Director Suezy Proctor, DTM, now serving as Vice President Public Relations for Tennessee Valley Toastmasters Club and President of Redstone Club (in Huntsville and nearby Madison, Alabama, respectively). "We need a body of members who have worked the programs inside and out. If done right, retention attracts and subsequently equips a new set of emerging leaders. This should be an ongoing process.

"Losing people means losing knowledge," she adds. "Who is going to replace them, and what can they bring to the enterprise if there is nobody to look at who has done the job and been successful?"

Pandemic Effect

The pandemic and subsequent move to online meetings changed the game for many clubs—some transitioned seamlessly, others struggled and lost steam. Some leaders blame the online platform for driving down engagement while others say it's given them the opportunity to get creative.

There is a broader picture as well: The past few years have brought about a landslide shift in daily life, from making adjustments to everything



For District 95, which serves Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Sweden, Zoom hasn't chased away existing members but is keeping new people from joining, says Club Growth Director Katharina Zaiser, DTM. "That's the biggest issue we're struggling with," she says. "Nobody [new] is keen on going to a Toastmasters meeting online." The switch to online meetings is not the only issue for struggling clubs. "Members leave due to financial constraints despite the fact that the clubs are doing well," says Mahinda Karunakara, DTM, Club Growth Director for District 82 in Sri Lanka and Maldives. "For corporate clubs, the key issues are employee turnover, attrition, and their organization's demand [that employees] take on more responsibility to compensate for its lack of resources." Community clubs, he continues, find members dropping out because of changing family commitments and economic pressure; lack of desire to meet online is also a factor.

For many, it's not Zoom fatigue—it's just plain old fatigue from having to manage both job and family in the same workspace.

Embracing New Opportunities

With all of those challenges, many clubs and Districts around the world are finding new, creative ways to energize their membership.

"Most of our clubs are responding well by trying to accommodate the needs and conditions of the club members by supporting them," says Karunakara. District 82 is providing resource personnel, membership-building programs, and trainings, and is offering guidance on ways to balance Toastmasters, family life, and professional responsibilities. "It is a challenge, but measures are being taken to help the members out."

He recommends offering trainings that show how online skills can be transported to members' business and personal lives. "Tech buddies" can help each other learn the online meeting platform. "Keep the engagement

Give members what they need to achieve their goals, make it fun and engaging, and you won't be able to *stop* them from renewing.

going online, to adapting to changing financial situations, to finding a work/life balance. Those tremors rocked the foundation for some clubs.

"The pandemic really knocked the wind out of our sails," says Jatika Manigault, DTM, a member of two clubs in Georgia, including T-Toasters of Vinings in Atlanta. "T-Toasters was a powerhouse, with strong speakers and leaders, but then the numbers dropped off." T-Toasters has started recovering after switching to a hybrid format, club leaders say, but it has taken awhile.

going until the pandemic is cleared and the opportunity is there to meet physically. Just get them to join meetings although they might not actively take part in the meeting."

Manigault, the member of two clubs in Georgia, has also seen firsthand that not meeting in person offers other opportunities. Her Alpha 289 Toastmasters Club in Decatur, Georgia, is thriving in an all-online format. "They have online down to a science," she says. "They've got it nailed." Alpha 289 averages 22 people at each online meeting, which



Speech contest winners of the Gamuda Toastmasters Club, in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia, receive trophies and certificates.

Top Tips to Retain Club Members

- ◆ **Meet their needs.** Every member’s reasons for being in Toastmasters are different, and they also change over time. Make sure your club is meeting members’ individual and evolving needs. Pairing members with mentors can help with that.
- ◆ **Foster friendship and connection.** Camaraderie with fellow club members is key for many Toastmasters. Build relationships, instill a respectful and caring atmosphere, and take time for snack breaks, socializing, and after-meeting activities or special events.
- ◆ **Keep it creative.** Avoid becoming stagnant in your club routines. Try different formats and activities to engage members, such as themed meetings, costume parties, and fun puzzles or games.
- ◆ **Stress the benefits.** Make sure members, especially new ones, are aware of all the benefits Toastmasters offers. Remind them of available resources. Emphasize the value of feedback, and of gaining skills that boost professional and personal development.
- ◆ **Reach out.** If certain members haven’t been attending recent meetings, have a club officer contact them with a gentle, friendly message saying they are missed and valued.
- ◆ **Recognize!** Praise always makes people feel good. Recognize speaking progress and Pathways achievements in your club. Beyond club ribbons and prizes from the Toastmasters online store, you can recognize members on social media, in club newsletters—or with kind words and a simple thank-you.

Manigault attributes to creative ideas like game nights and “a Table Topics extravaganza”—an entire meeting devoted to Table Topics.

“It’s what I call magic—the things you do outside the traditional meeting can make magic.”

For members who are reluctant to join an online club, Manigault suggests pointing out the distinct advantages that virtual meetings offer. “I do not have to drive to get to a meeting, and I can visit any club anywhere in the world. You can visit and join clubs that are in other states, other time zones.”

For those who are fine with online meetings but miss seeing people, Zaiser, of District 95, recommends offering in-person gatherings after the meeting. She also urges clubs not to think of the in-person format as “the real meeting” and avoid talking about “when we get back to meeting in person.” It suggests that any other format is not legitimate and encourages people to hold back their full participation.

Rally Members

Themed meetings, creative education sessions, and “constant recognition” of achievement keep meetings fun, no matter what meeting format you use, says Karunakara.

There are many ways to foster a sense of camaraderie, he adds. Members can gather for 10 or 15 minutes after the meeting to brainstorm ideas for creative extras like quizzes, debates, and scavenger hunts. Refreshments add an extra note of hospitality.

When participation lags and membership renewals seem to be at risk, Manigault suggests having each officer call three people who aren’t attending the meetings and make sure they know they’re missed. “Don’t make them feel guilty, but you want them to feel needed.” Mention a value they bring to the meetings, such as, “She loves having you as her evaluator.”



Members of Wadsworth Center Toastmasters, in Detroit, Michigan, host a winter-themed meeting.



The Maine Thing Advanced Toastmasters Club, in Augusta, Maine, celebrates Mardi Gras with a themed meeting.

It's important to foster a sense of family, she says—"show people that they care. When I first went to Alpha 289, I was impressed by how much it felt like a family."

Recognition is always an effective way to keep people interested. Leaders recommend going beyond merely handing out ribbons at the meetings (although those are important) and getting creative with how you show the love. Have members vote for awards like Best Speaker and Best Evaluator at each meeting and recognize the winners (with their permission) on social media and in the club newsletter. Corporate clubs should be sure to publicize their members' achievements to the rest of the company.

"If members are learning and growing ...
it increases the likelihood that
members will achieve their goals."

—SUEZY PROCTOR, DTM

It's all about keeping the member experience at the forefront, says Proctor, the Past International Director.

"The focus needs to be on the member. What are the member's goals? How can we help them achieve their goals? If members are learning and growing, if proteges and mentors are utilizing the Pathways mentor program, it increases the likelihood that members will achieve their goals. Many times, it is just one or two established members earning all the education goals," she explains. What about the rest? They may be headed out the door.

One way clubs can easily gauge members' goals and interests is through [surveys](#). New members can fill out the [New Member Profile](#), while current members can take the [Member Interest Survey](#). Mentors may want to work on the survey with the new member to get a sense of their goals and offer guidance.

"I feel the Toastmaster's Promise is minimized at the onset," says Proctor. "New members do not have 'serving as a club officer' on their



Members of Foresea Toastmasters International Club, in Shenzhen City, Guangdong, China, celebrate their club.

minds. The existing officers may be burned out and are sending the wrong messages about leadership in the club. Members see that and it is not something they want any part of."

To try to fix this, Proctor says one of her clubs added a "Leadership Moment" to every meeting. Each officer takes a turn to talk about some aspect of their officer role. "I encourage them to talk about the real-world transferable skills of Toastmasters that most people need in their career path.

"Leaders cannot keep members engaged if they themselves are not engaged at a higher level of commitment. Members can see and respond to the differences."

What it really comes down to, then, is how you make your members feel. As poet Maya Angelou put it:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Or, as members often say:

If it isn't fun, it isn't Toastmasters.

Kate McClare, DTM, is Vice President Education for Miami Advanced Toastmasters in Miami, Florida, and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. She earned her DTM in 2018 under the traditional education program.

Squeezing in More Speeches

Speakathons help more members give prepared speeches and reach their goals.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

When the pandemic began in early 2020, the Dynamically Speaking Club in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, faced an interesting dilemma.

“We went from 24 members just before COVID to having 55 members now,” says Freddi Dogterom, DTM. With so many members, the club needed to determine how to have enough speaking slots.

Their answer? Speakathons.

A Speakathon (or Speech-a-thon, Speech Marathon, or Speak-out) is a Toastmasters meeting dedicated primarily to prepared speeches and evaluations. Its purpose is to enable more members to give more speeches. It opens up new speaking slots.

Dogterom says that Dynamically Speaking holds Speakathons at its regular Thursday morning meetings about four times a year. The club also hosts “value added” meetings two Monday nights a month: one devoted entirely to speeches and evaluations, the other to Table Topics®.

“We had to figure out how to best serve our members’ needs,” says Dogterom, an Accredited Speaker. She adds that each member in their club, new or experienced, has a mentor. “We also record every speech and send it to the members so they can learn from it.”

Achieving Education Goals

Helping members complete their education goals before June 30, the end of the Toastmasters program year, is a primary reason for conducting most Speakathons. Paul O’Mahony is President of Toastmasters4Golf (T4G) in Cork, County Cork, Ireland. The club, which meets online, organized a Speakathon last June.

“We wanted to help people complete projects and help our club gain education points on the Distinguished Club [Program],” says O’Mahony, also Vice President Education of Blarney Club in Blarney, County Cork. “We also

wanted to raise the profile of our club by opening the Speakathon to members of any club in the world.”

The T4G club is also planning an “evaluate-a-thon” this year, which will feature one speech (about golf) and as many evaluations as possible.

Speakathons, which may be held in person, online, or in a hybrid format, can only be organized at the club level. But more than one club can be involved: Two or more (from any District) can team up to organize such a program, and members of clubs other than the host club or clubs may be invited to attend and take on meeting roles.

Besides the practical benefit of a Speakathon, there’s another component as well, says Paul Arnhold, DTM, of The Morning Cup Toastmasters in Maryville, Tennessee. “It’s just plain fun to do,” he says. “It adds variety to a meeting.”

Clubs should probably do them more often, he adds, because the event “offers the perfect venue to keep members engaged so they do not lose momentum and leave the club.”

Mix It Up

Arnhold also suggests that clubs offer a twist to a traditional Speakathon.

“We have offered pro/con speeches, themes, and a speechwriting workshop,” Arnhold notes. “We wanted to offer opportunities to share with non-Toastmasters some of the fun things we do. What a great excuse to personally invite someone to a Speakathon!”

Since 2013, the Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina, has hosted a Summer Speech Spectacular, in which members from throughout District 117 are invited to participate in a Speakathon. Mike Eckardt, DTM, a charter member of Top Triangle, says that most of the club members have at some point been District officers.



Peggy Beach, DTM, explains the agenda at the Summer Speech Spectacular, an annual Speakathon hosted by the Top Triangle Toastmasters in North Carolina.

Photo credit: David Lindquist, DTM

“[Speakathons] offer the perfect venue to keep members engaged so they do not lose momentum and leave the club.”

—PAUL ARNHOLD, DTM

“We saw how so many people waited until the end of the Toastmasters year to complete their education goals,” he says. “We wanted to encourage members to work on their education goals in the beginning of the Toastmasters year.”

Since the pandemic, the Summer Speech Spectacular (also known as S3) has been a morning-only event held online in September. But prior to the pandemic, it was an all-day event in August and designed like a collegiate debate tournament: four rooms available for speakers and evaluators, with one meeting Toastmaster and a timer in each room, and three rounds of speeches, each round typically featuring four or five speakers.

Eckardt says many members begin working on their Pathways levels specifically for S3. “It puts the idea in their head to get that level finished and to start at the beginning of the year,” he says. The Top Triangle Toastmasters also hosts a Table Topics marathon each year.

It’s About Time

When clubs hold these speech-stuffed sessions, it is important to be cognizant of time constraints, just as in a regular meeting. “The Toastmaster needs to keep everything running smoothly,” says Eckardt. “This is a good event to learn to develop those Toastmasters skills.”

Timing is particularly key when members give a longer speech. “The club needs to determine the needs of the speaker and adjust the event accordingly,” says Dogterom, the Canadian Accredited Speaker.

Speakathons are a valuable aspect of the club experience. “They serve a good purpose for both larger and smaller clubs,” says Dogterom. “They don’t take away from a meeting—they add to it.”

Peggy Beach, DTM, is a Past District 37 Governor. She is a member of Hi Rise Toastmasters of Raleigh, North Carolina, and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina. She is a freelance writer and communications instructor. You can reach her via email at writereditorpeggybeach@gmail.com.

Speakathon Rules

Clubs organizing Speakathons should keep the following in mind:

- ◆ Such events cannot be organized at the District level. Clubs must organize them. Two or more clubs from any District can jointly organize a Speakathon.
- ◆ Members of clubs other than the host club or clubs may be invited. (They can take on meeting roles but can’t give speeches or evaluations.)
- ◆ Speakathons can be open to the public if the organizing club or clubs want.
- ◆ Although these events cannot be organized at the District level, Area, Division, and District resources, such as websites and social media, can be used to promote Speakathons.

Information about Toastmasters Speakathons are in the [governing documents](#) under Protocol 2.3: Club Programs and Events.

Increase Your Impact by Narrowing Your Focus

Connect with your audience by making the specific universal and reaching more with less.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Communication is filled with what I call inverse principles—relationships that seem counterintuitive and yet can increase the impact, engagement, and reach of your message. The following four inverse principles will help you with communicating, leading, job searching, and building your brand.

1 Greater Specificity for Greater Universality

Award-winning author and MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient Jacqueline Woodson says, “The more specific we are, the more universal something can become. Life is in the details. If you generalize, it doesn’t resonate. The specificity of it is what resonates.”

Oyin Egbeyemi, DTM, from Eagle Club in Lagos, Nigeria, agrees. She started learning about the power of greater specificity for greater universality in Toastmasters. Evaluators suggested she add detailed stories to illustrate her points and strengthen her speeches. Once she recognized the principle’s effectiveness, she started applying it to her communication at work.

Egbeyemi is a director and administrator of the Foreshore School, a private school for children ages 3 months to 11 years. Initially, she wasn’t connecting with her staff, which created disagreements. “In holding a leadership position, I realized I can’t speak in

generic terms and expect my staff to listen and understand fully,” says Egbeyemi.

“If you want to communicate with people about a shared vision, you need to be specific.”

Although not a trained teacher, she leads public speaking classes for students 7–10 years old. She started sharing the lessons she learned in Toastmasters after attending the school’s first graduation ceremony. One of the brightest students presented a speech but never established eye contact with the audience.



Egbeyemi realized the students needed to learn how to speak in front of people. The skill would be even more important when they graduated. “They needed to start speaking—and speaking in detail,” she says.

For a class assignment, one student presented a demonstration speech on the martial art of tae kwon do. During his talk, the class didn’t understand what he was doing. Egbeyemi could tell he was just giving the presentation to finish the project.

As a result, his audience was disengaged. “I could see on his face that he knew it,” she says. “I said he should stop and explain things.” She asked him to share the details of the moves and what he was doing. He changed his approach, and it worked. At the end of the class, she asked the students if they liked the speech. They said yes!

Accredited Speaker Mohamed Ali Shukri, DTM, from Vision Advanced Toastmasters Club in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, is



Oyin Egbeyemi, DTM, with some of her students.

also a strong believer in greater specificity for greater universality. A Toastmasters experience opened his eyes to the principle's power. During his second year in Toastmasters, Shukri entered the International Speech Contest. When he competed at the Division level, he described an experience he had with his father. In his speech, he went into great detail about the incident and their journey.

After the contest, a woman approached him. She was shaking. She told Shukri she had that exact experience with her dad. Here was a total stranger with the same story. "Our lives should be as individual as fingerprints," says Shukri, "yet they are identical in very weird ways." Now he incorporates the principle into

his work as a trainer and public speaker as founder and CEO of Y Access Training Solutions.

2 Talking to One to Reach More

Another inverse principle that involves specificity is talking to one to reach more. This means it's best to think about the one person who needs to hear your message and direct your communication to that individual. If you try to appeal to everyone, you will dilute your message and reach fewer people or have an impact on no one. By focusing your message, you reach more people.



Victoria Salem

"Our lives should be as individual as fingerprints, yet they are identical in very weird ways."

—MOHAMED ALI SHUKRI, AS, DTM

Victoria Salem, a former member of Covent Garden Speakers Toastmasters Club in London, is the founder and director of the Golden Network, a company focused on helping individuals communicate better and network with ease. She recommends defining your audience to ensure your message has the most impact. "You should really focus in," she says. "The more specific, the better."

Salem notes that this even applies when engaging on social media. "It is important to talk to one," she says. "You could have millions of followers, but if they aren't engaged, you're speaking to an empty room."

For Shukri, that one person is actually himself. "It is paradoxically beautiful," he says. When developing speeches, he'll consider what was a turning point in his life—something that made a difference to him. He will share that story.

The principle applies to marketing more broadly too. In his *Marketing Sage* blog, Jeffrey Slater shares his expertise and insights from 30 years in marketing, including work on \$100 million brands. He consistently advocates for defining a narrow audience.

In his December 19, 2021, blog post "22 Simple, Straightforward, and Sage Marketing Suggestions for 2022," Slater writes, "The more specific you can be in who you market to, the better. ... The best target audience is a precise individual with a problem you can solve, not a wide swath of the population with general interests."

3 Fewer Job Applications for Greater Success

Targeting is also important for job searches. This leads to the inverse principle of fewer job applications for greater success.

It's important to take the time to specifically target your resumes, CVs, and cover letters. That means each one is written for a particular job and couldn't be submitted anywhere else. When following that approach, you submit fewer applications but increase the likelihood of obtaining interviews. Those fewer but targeted applications will have a higher ratio of success than blanketing employers with generic documents. Based on my 20 years of experience, advising people from more than 43 different countries on job search strategies, tactics, and materials, I know this inverse principle works.

Consider the experience of Brilliant S. K., DTM, a member of the Bombay Toastmasters in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, and the online All Elite Advanced Toastmasters Club. He's also chief people officer at Times Professional Learning, a company that offers organizations customized learning solutions.

In 2010, S. K. began searching for a job that offered new challenges and greater responsibility. He focused on where he knew he fit in and researched those organizations. Next, he identified people he knew who

worked at the different companies and talked with them. Then he wrote customized cover letters and CVs for 15 applications. Nine organizations invited him for an interview, and he reached the final stages at all of them. He received two offers and accepted one.

The letters took a lot of time and effort. “It shows you’re serious,” he says. “You’re trying to build a relationship with your future employer.” He recommends a targeted approach to everyone. As a hiring manager, he knows there’s a payoff.

“Sometimes I read through a cover letter and a CV and I don’t understand what the candidate is trying to tell me,” he says. If he receives a generic email or cover letter, he doesn’t read it. If his email address is in the “bcc” of the message or the email is sent to multiple people, he marks it as “read” and moves on.

“On a weekly basis, I have thousands of profiles to review,” says S. K. “People don’t understand that for them it’s just one email, but for the person on the other side, it’s screening through thousands of profiles to match to one job.”

He remembers one cover letter in particular that used a targeted and strategic approach for a sales position. The applicant started the letter

by congratulating S. K.’s company for a recent business win. “It’s rare that people would take the effort to read about the company,” says S. K.

The applicant went a step further by describing why the company’s competitors failed to get the contract and then shared his experience and how he would fit with the company. “The effort the candidate put into the research was impressive and made me consider him,” says S. K. The applicant was hired and is now the head of a unit.



Brillian S.K., DTM

4 Fewer Platforms to Amplify Your Message

The final inverse principle is fewer platforms to amplify your message more effectively. On a micro level, this means it’s better to be active on a smaller number of social media applications and work on deeper engagement than to try and be active on so many that you only have sporadic or superficial engagement. Deeper engagement will create greater success in connecting with people and sharing your message.

Salem recommends starting with the audience and understanding who they are when deciding where to engage on social media. You should also know the answers to the following before becoming active on social media: Who are you speaking to? Why are you talking to them? Where do you find them? How can you best reach out to them?

“Your audience will not be on all platforms,” she says. “You want to select the platform based on who your audience is and the objective you want to achieve.” For her Golden Network company, Salem focuses her social media engagement on LinkedIn.

She notes that different platforms appeal to different age groups. Tone is important too. Is it professional or a more fun or personal message? Will you focus on text, or will images be better for your goals? You also need to know your audience’s WIIFM—What’s In It For Me? What are you offering them?

You want to have an overall goal for your engagement. Then each post will have its own objective that supports the larger goal. “That’s where people make mistakes initially,” says Salem. “They just share without setting a goal.” Once you define your goal, you can measure your engagement and know if you’re achieving success.

On a macro level, fewer platforms to amplify your message more effectively means that if your platform—in this case, your main message or what you stand for—encompasses too many topics or themes, you won’t be memorable. If you try to stand for everything, you won’t be remembered for anything. For example, a political candidate will achieve greater impact by focusing on one main theme. If using too many slogans, the campaign will be less effective.

If you’re not applying these inverse principles already, give them a try. And if you’re already employing them, continue to do so with intention. You will increase your communication’s impact, engagement, and reach, and your message will linger longer.

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of 5 Star Toastmasters in Arlington, Virginia, and a regular contributor to the Toastmaster magazine. Learn more at www.jenniferlblank.com.

Blind Member Is Unstoppable

Bobby Blackmon, DTM, has overcome steep obstacles to accomplish one goal after another.

By Andrew Miller

When Walter “Bobby” Blackmon, DTM, was 5 years old, he dreamed of playing basketball and football, even competing in the Olympics. But those dreams ended one day when he was at a babysitter’s house and ran outside to find out why the chickens were making a terrible racket. Suddenly, everything turned hazy, then dark.

An emergency trip to the ophthalmologist revealed that Bobby had severe glaucoma in one eye and cataracts in both. He would never see again.

More than 40 years later, Blackmon is a Toastmasters star, recognized in North Central Florida as one of the area’s most charismatic and sought-after speakers. He belongs to three clubs, including We Can Speak-Podemos Hablar Toastmasters, where he is President. He is a coach, a sponsor, and a mentor. He has received 61 Toastmasters education awards, including Distinguished Toastmaster.

In 2017 he placed third in a Toastmasters International Speech Contest semifinal at the International Convention in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The title of his speech was “The Day the Chickens Disappeared.”

Blackmon deals with his blindness constantly. “I have to believe in myself even when the odds seem incredible. Making things happen is what makes me flourish,” he says. “I keep trying and trying and know I’ll get there someday.”

Excelling Early On

Blackmon attended elementary school in Tallahassee, Florida, where he became fluent in braille, sang, played the trumpet, and wrote poetry. When he attended the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, he discovered sports that he could do: the shot put, track, and wrestling. After high school, he attended Florida State University and studied English and creative writing.

Later, he took up the weightlifting sport called powerlifting, and in 2006 set a world record at an International Blind Sports Federation competition in the Czech Republic, lifting 427 pounds.

Blackmon credits “mind vision” for changing his dreams into reality. He visualizes where he wants to be,

then figures out how to get there. Mind vision, he says, is behind his ability to accomplish work goals, navigate a room, even to play bumper pool, a billiards game in which he often beats sighted opponents.

Building a Career

In 2005 Blackmon was hired as a receptionist for the Division of Blind Services at the Florida Department of Education (DOE). He greeted visitors, transferred telephone calls, and answered questions. His coworkers noticed how warm and personable he was. One day a friend told Blackmon he should sign up for training in mediation, which involves helping two parties resolve a dispute.

He was the only blind person in a class filled with lawyers, judges, and other professionals. Some had been in mediation for years and were getting recertified. Although he felt intimidated at first, Blackmon did amazingly well, finishing third out of 20 in the class. When he returned to the DOE, he joined the conflict resolution team, where he helped interpret policy and resolve disputes for the visually impaired.

A work buddy suggested that Blackmon attend spoken word events in Tallahassee: weekly readings by writers and poets. He hesitated at first, but once there, Blackmon was entranced by the stories. He returned a week later with one of his poems. Although Blackmon says he “shook and shuddered all the way through,” the group’s director was impressed and asked him to return.

That night he decided to become a motivational speaker. “Reaching out to others—weaving a story—was super important to me,” he says. “And I always ended on a positive note, so everyone would know there was a reason for hope.”

Joining Toastmasters

When a friend realized Blackmon was interested in public speaking, he suggested Toastmasters. Again, Blackmon was hesitant, but in early 2016 he visited Early Bird Toastmasters in Tallahassee.



Bobby Blackmon, DTM, reads in braille to children at the My Children Childcare and Preschool in Tallahassee, Florida. Photos: Andrew Miller

“I was really blown away by their speeches,” he recalls. “Within 15 minutes, I was ready to join. This was a learning home for me, a home where I could learn and grow and become the speaker I wanted to be.”

Blackmon loved Toastmasters. His growing skills boosted his career at the DOE and within the year, he was leading the conflict resolution team. He realized that evaluating a speech was like resolving a dispute. “You have to listen carefully and identify the most important points.”

In 2017 Blackmon left the DOE to pursue motivational speaking, music, and writing full time. His colleagues hated to see him go. “He was always balanced and fair,” says former team member Michelle Levy. “His shoes were hard to fill.”

Technology Boost

Modern computers and iPhones have a host of special applications to assist the visually impaired. In 2009 Apple introduced VoiceOver, which translates text to audible speech for iPhones, iPads, and iPod Touches. In addition, there are third-party apps that identify colors, describe objects, estimate a person’s age, and identify the value of paper money. Using the iPhone camera, Blackmon can call a special helpline and get advice on which tie best matches his shirt.

On his personal computer, he uses JAWS (Jobs Access With Speech), which operates much

like VoiceOver on his iPhone. With JAWS, Blackmon sends and receives emails and uses Zoom.

He is so skilled with his technology that often people don’t realize he’s blind.

Giving Back

Blackmon’s Toastmasters mentees sing his praises. Lisa Curry is a new member of We Can Speak-Podemos Hablar Toastmasters in Tallahassee, who has known Blackmon since they were students at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. He helps her learn how to use nonverbal cues. She says he is “truly a wonderful person.” He also advises Derek Bell, another member of the We Can Speak-Podemos Hablar club, on how to be successful as a club and District officer.

Blackmon remains passionate about music and poetry. Much of his work is aimed at victims of violence. Blackmon had firsthand experience with domestic abuse. His stepfather, he says, was an alcoholic and often violent.

Blackmon also volunteers at prison Gavel Clubs. (Gavel Clubs provide the Toastmasters experience for those not eligible for regular membership). This past January he presented officer training for the Out of the Blue Gavel Club at the Jefferson Correctional Institution in Monticello, Florida. Afterward, the men said they appreciated how he treated them with



humility and respect. In response, Blackmon noted, “Being blind is like being in prison—every day you must deal with it.”

Chuck Rabaut, DTM, is a fellow Florida Toastmaster who has been volunteering at prison Gavel Clubs for many years. Once he and Blackmon visited a Gavel Club at the Franklin Correctional Institution in Carrabelle, Florida. After the meeting was over and the pair were in Chuck’s car on the highway, Bobby asked his friend, “Are we going back to Tallahassee?”

When Chuck said yes, Bobby replied, “Then we are going the wrong way.”

Bobby pays attention. And he knows the right way.

Editors’ Note: Learn more about Bobby Blackmon’s music videos, books, and speeches.

Andrew Miller lives in Tallahassee, Florida, and belongs to PMI Tallahassee Toastmasters. He is a retired biologist who now devotes his time to creative writing, volunteering in prisons, and environmental consulting. His website is www.andrewcmiller.com.

How Are Your Leadership Skills?

Self-evaluations and group feedback offer invaluable insight.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

Evaluations—the practice of giving supportive, constructive feedback—have always been at the core of Toastmasters’ philosophy of learning by doing, listening, and improving.

Feedback is so fundamental to the Toastmasters experience that evaluation forms have recently been created to give club officers and District leaders the opportunity to have the same type of helpful feedback that is so essential in club meetings. Until now, there hasn’t been a consistent process to provide performance feedback to leaders at the club and District levels.

Forms for [self-evaluation](#) and [group feedback](#) are available to club officers. District leaders can also access [self-evaluation](#) and [group forms](#) for feedback on their specific responsibilities.

The new leader evaluation process is intended to benefit not only those currently in leadership positions, but all Toastmasters. Clubs and Districts can only be strengthened by involving leadership levels in productive conversations about leadership qualities, setting priorities, role responsibilities, mentoring new leaders, and more.

Overall, the self-evaluations and the group sessions will give leaders at both levels a mix of feedback—some possibly surprising, some possibly not—for guidance in accelerating their communication and leadership skills.

A Sense of Self

Self-assessments allow club officers and District leaders to take a personal, candid look at their successes and challenges. Ideally, leaders will complete self-assessments at the beginning and at the end of their terms. This creates a performance baseline for self-review and a way to record progress throughout the year. Another benefit? A mid-year check on interactions with your club or District gives you time to make changes if needed. The self-evaluations are primarily for each leader’s personal use throughout the year.

Feedback From Multiple Sources

In contrast, group feedback is set up for a 360-degree style approach for club and District leaders. This means that feedback forms are distributed to fellow Toastmasters, various leaders, club members and others, to collect full-circle feedback from a variety of viewpoints. Are



leaders at both levels acting in accordance with the Toastmasters core values of integrity, respect, service, and excellence? Are they able to build and collaborate with teams, solve problems, and work well with fellow officers? Are leaders burnishing their abilities to manage change, set priorities, and motivate their colleagues? Are they setting strong examples for others to follow in their leadership footsteps?

Toastmasters who have used the 360-degree review have noted its value. Nikki Quinn, DTM, is a member of several clubs, including Sell the Sizzle, where she is Club President, and Carpe Diem Breakfast Toastmasters, where she is Vice President Public Relations. Both clubs are in Johannesburg, South Africa. Because she is active in several roles, Quinn has found group feedback most helpful. It’s important that a number of evaluators join the group feedback activity, so the person being evaluated gains a solid set of ideas and suggestions to consider. As always, constructive feedback on improvement is essential, Quinn says.

“Unless the person seeking evaluation encourages their peers to complete the forms, there isn’t enough of a cross section to make the feedback worthwhile,” Quinn notes. “And sometimes, reviewers forget the principles of feedback. They don’t give the recipient suggestions on how they can improve.”

Alison Nissen, DTM, Vice President Public Relations for Speak Up Houston Toastmasters, and a member of Talking Bull Club, both in Houston, Texas, agrees that evaluations are at the heart of the Toastmasters experience. Extending this time-honored practice to club and District leaders will enrich Toastmasters’ viability at every level.

“When someone goes above and beyond to offer feedback, it reminds us why we joined Toastmasters in the first place—to grow our speaking and leadership talents,” Nissen says. “Taking the time to reflect and offer positive, constructive feedback helps all of us become better Toastmasters, employees, and community leaders.”

Peggy Beach, DTM is a past District 37 Governor and a member of two North Carolina clubs: Hi Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh, and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville. Contact her at writereditorpeggybeach@gmail.com.

Speaking With a New Purpose

Club helps members with neurological and movement disorders reclaim their voice.

By Laura Amann

For more information, visit www.sop.toastmastersclubs.org.

Many people come to Toastmasters to become better speakers. But one club is reaching out to people who are adjusting to a new way of speaking. Members of Speaking on Purpose, an online club, which chartered in June 2021, are all adjusting to life with various physical and neurological disorders, from Parkinson's to multiple sclerosis to recovery from brain injuries and strokes.

The club is already having an impact, providing a powerful sense of community and support for members facing arduous challenges, both physical and emotional.

"By creating an environment with individuals who are experiencing similar issues, members are feeling less intimidated, more empowered through participating and sharing their stories," says Rick Taylor, former Club Growth Director of District 29, who helped get the club started.

Speaking on Purpose is the brainchild of Jeff Arnette, a Toastmaster since 1999, who was diagnosed in 2020 with Parkinson's disease (PD), a progressive nervous system disorder that affects movement, including tremors and stiffness, as well as softer and slurred speech.

After his diagnosis, Arnette began speech therapy, and although he gained a lot, some sessions frustrated him. "I could only speak at those classes for a very limited time," he says. "But I knew Toastmasters could offer a lot more."

He asked Taylor, "What if we were able to put together a club that helps people like me improve vocal variety?" Taylor had a family member with PD and knew the effects of the disease. With just two months left in his term, he saw the potential and swung into action.

Both men started reaching out to people in the medical community—neurologists, speech and language

pathologists, and people in support groups—as well as in Toastmasters to gauge interest.

Experienced Toastmasters were eager to help. Viki Kinsman, DTM, a Past International Director, advised the club leading up to its formation and then served as Club Mentor. Mike Schultz, a former District 27 Governor who suffered a traumatic brain injury, is Vice President Public Relations, and Arnette is the Club President.

They officially chartered only two months after conceiving of the idea.

"I've seen what Toastmasters can do," says Arnette, who helped charter a club back in 1999. "And in this club, although we all have different diagnoses, we all have one thing that's very similar—families that [unintentionally] start to ignore them.

"Maybe Dad doesn't talk as well or Mom is having an issue with something. So they drop out of the conversation. We can help minimize the symptoms and help people learn to speak well, speak loudly, speak clearly, and get people's attention. We can give them a chance to talk more and practice more as a group."

The club has had to relax a few Toastmasters guidelines. They don't count many ah's and um's, and often reduce time requirements to accommodate some members.

Members aren't required to speak about their condition or ability. Some feel validated talking about it; others prefer to give speeches on other topics. And while paying attention to the clock is still important, the club tries to balance the importance of telling your story with the need to do so in a reasonable amount of time.

Evaluations take into account members' differing abilities. "I always see a great sensitivity being given to the speaker regarding their ability—that is, what is in their control and what is outside their control," notes Taylor.

The club's online meetings went from being a daunting experience to a great opportunity. Members anywhere can join in and benefit without needing to drive or find someone to drive them to meetings if they're physically unable to do so.

In the past year, Arnette has noticed a dramatic increase in attendance and participation. Members come from across the country and the club recently participated in its first speech contest. As skills have grown, so has confidence.

Says Taylor: "It's really a testament to how Toastmasters can change people's lives for the better."



Laura Amann is magazine supervisor and editor for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

I Have No Idea

Where do writers get their ideas? If you know, please send directions.

By John Cadley

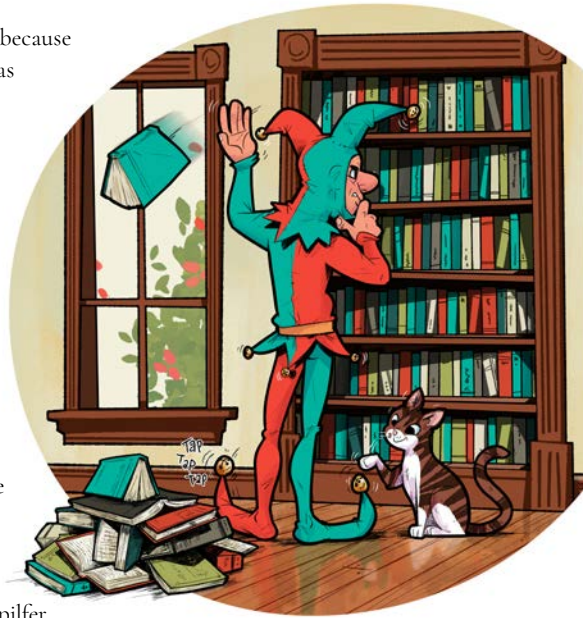
We have a problem. I say “we” because it involves you, my readers, as much as it does me, your resident court jester. I assume you read my column each month to see what topic I’m going to have a little fun with. That’s our problem. I have no topic this month. Zippo. Nada. Crickets. It’s not writer’s block; it’s the mental equivalent of Death Valley—barren, parched, infertile. If you look inside my head, you’ll see tumbleweeds blowing down an empty street in an abandoned mining town.

And yet I must write a column. I owe it to you, my faithful readers, and my creditors need the money.

We’ll start with my bookcase. Surely there must be something humorous I can pilfer from all these weighty tomes. Here’s one—Edward Gibbons’ *The History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. I read it years ago and all I can remember is something about barbarians at the gates, which I do not find amusing. It reminds me of the IRS coming after my tax returns. The Emperor Caligula making his horse a senator is funny, but what he did to the Roman consuls who thought so is anything but. Just so you know—laughing at an insane tyrant never ends well.

What else? Well, there’s *Les Miserables* (The Miserable Ones). I’m miserable right now and it’s not funny. Dostoevsky? I’m guessing that titles like *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *The House of the Dead* will not be target-rich environments for belly laughs.

How about *The Health and Wellness Encyclopedia*? No—a book full of diseases is more horrendous than humorous and I would end up imagining I have every one of them (although the word *bunions* has always made me laugh. I don’t know why, and I apologize to those who suffer from the condition. To me, “I have bunions” sounds like the person has stocked up on some type of exotic vegetable.)



The New Garden Book? My wife is the gardener. I am the rototiller operator, the stone remover, the wheelbarrow pusher, the mulcher, and the my-back-hurts complainer. More moaning than mirth.

I would call on the muse for inspiration, but it appears she’s lost my contact information.

A drought like this can make a humor writer wonder if he’s lost his touch. Yesterday, I had the tires on my car rotated. Thinking I’d make a funny little analogy to the aches and pains of aging, I said to the service person, “Boy, I wish somebody would rotate my tires. Treads are wearing a little thin.” He looked at me, puzzled, and said, “That’s what we’re doing.” “No, no,” I said. “I mean, you know, getting older ...” “Well,

it’s a 2018,” he said, “it’s not that old.” At that moment I thought: *Either this guy’s unconscious or I’m not funny.*

I would call on the muse for inspiration, but it appears she’s lost my contact information. In all my years as a scribbler she has never once paid a visit. What’s worse, “the muse” is actually nine muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne in Greek mythology, who inspired classical poets and dramatists. I could live with two or three writing me off, but all nine? That’s like getting shut out by a baseball team. I’m particularly ticked off at Thalia, the muse of comedy. She gives Aristophanes the classic comedy play *Lysistrata* and she won’t even help me with a crack about automobile maintenance. Thanks a lot, Thalia. If I ever win the Mark Twain Prize for humor, you will *not* be invited to the after-party.

Well, space is getting short, the well is still dry, and I have yet to fulfill my obligation to make you laugh. So I will now cast off all pretense of being a true humorist in the manner of Mark Twain and Oscar Wilde, and ... tell jokes.

I’ve just become a Frisbetarian—when I die my soul rises up and gets stuck on the roof. And did you hear YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook merged? They’re calling the new company YouTwitFace. Guy asked me for a donation to the local swimming pool, so I gave him a glass of water. My wife said stop imitating a flamingo and I put my foot down. You know what the right eye said to the left eye? Just between you and me, something smells.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I’ll be here all week. Be sure to try the veal, tip your server, and remember: Always borrow money from a pessimist—they don’t expect it back. G’night!

John Cadley is a former advertising copywriter and currently a musician working in upstate New York. Learn more at www.cadleys.com.

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Online Course

Take our online course to learn the strategies that will help make your book a best seller. For each strategy, a detailed audio and/or video explanation of the idea is included.




CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

We are happy to speak with you about your publishing needs.
Call us at 978-440-8364 or visit us at <http://www.eBookIt.com>.



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