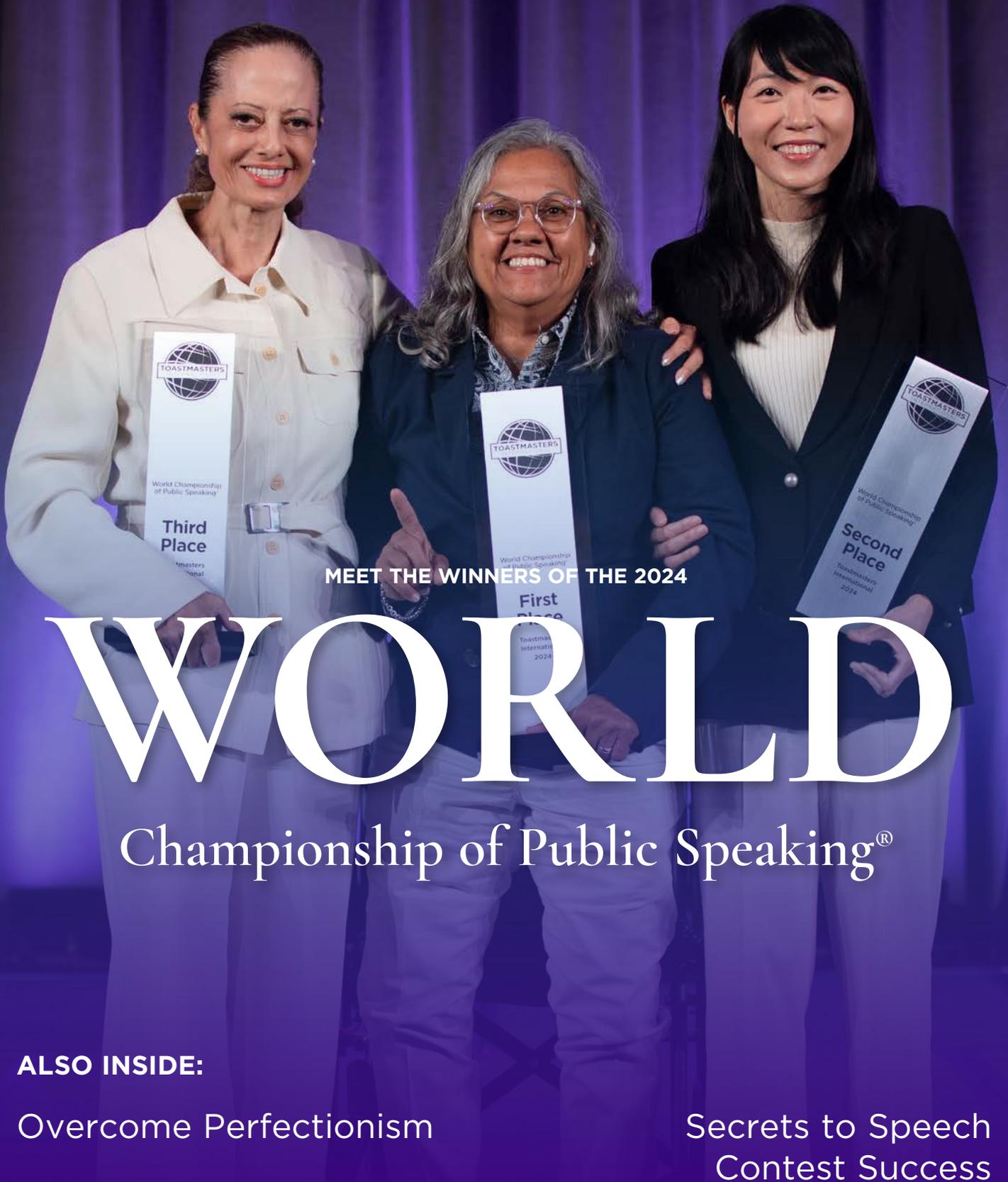


THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | NOVEMBER 2024

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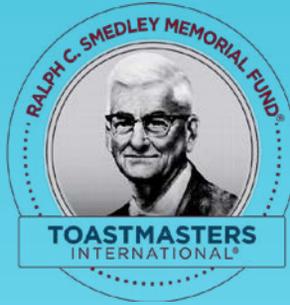
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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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The Immense Benefit of Speech Contests

Have you ever taken part in a Toastmasters speech contest? I believe it's the quickest way to grow as a speaker. I still vividly remember my first speech contest. I had these amazing slides prepared, but the projector malfunctioned, leaving me struggling with my clicker and facing an awkward silence.

Another time, as Club President, I couldn't get any members to participate in an upcoming speech contest, so I felt compelled to lead by example.

As the reality sank in that I would have to compete in front of people from different clubs, I felt nervous. Determined not to

make a fool of myself, I resolved to do my best and prepare thoroughly. In both instances, I learned invaluable lessons!

Many Toastmasters miss out by not participating in contests, which are a quick and effective way to improve. Contests compel you to critically evaluate and strengthen your speech, since you are judged against other contestants. This process refines your speechwriting and delivery skills, boosts confidence, and provides an opportunity to learn from others' diverse styles and perspectives. Contests push you out of your comfort zone, fostering growth.

I have found that contests also force you to carefully focus on two areas of speeches. The first is speechwriting—the foundation of any compelling speech. No matter what your topic is, or what type of speech you choose to deliver, you need to structure your thoughts clearly

and logically. A well-crafted speech typically includes an engaging introduction, a coherent body, and a memorable conclusion. Incorporating rhetorical devices such as metaphors, analogies, and repetition enhance your speech, making it more engrossing and impactful.

The second area of focus is the delivery. Techniques like voice modulation—varying your pitch, tone, and volume—keep the audience engaged. Effective body language, eye contact, and pacing reinforce your message and convey confidence. Eye contact builds a connection with the audience, making your speech more personal.

Pacing your speech ensures clarity and allows your audience to absorb your message.

Mastering speeches in Toastmasters is a journey of continual improvement. When you hear the polished speakers at the World Championship of Public Speaking, it's amazing to think of where they started and where they've reached. The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." I hope you enjoy your speech contest journey, and for those who haven't started, please give it a try. It is well worth it!

Happy travels, and who knows—you may be the next World Champion of Public Speaking!

Radhi Spear, DTM
International President

Contests push you
out of your comfort zone,
fostering growth.



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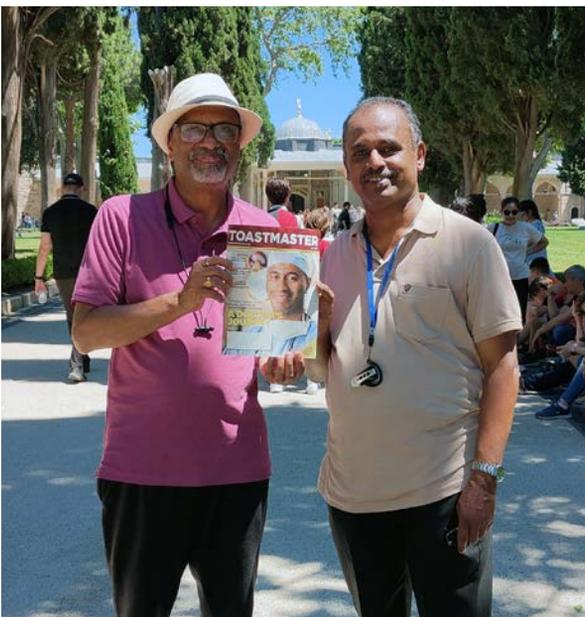
By Toastmaster magazine staff

Snapshot



Members of **Impact 21 Toastmasters Club** in Rahway, New Jersey, celebrate the past year with members of the **New Day Toastmasters** club from Staten Island, New York, and the **Art of Speaking** club from Edison, New Jersey. The clubs enjoyed a picnic at Rahway River Park and hosted their own Olympic Games.

Traveling Toastmaster



Surya Narayanan K., DTM, and **Raghavan Menon, DTM**, both of Doha, Qatar, visit the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, Turkey.



Dorothy Chanakira, DTM, and **Viola Dondo, DTM**, both of Harare, Zimbabwe, pose for a photo at the World's View site in Nyanga, Zimbabwe.

Gloria Steinem

ON PUBLIC SPEAKING



Photo Credit: Carly Romeo

How the famed feminist learned to face an audience.

By Paul Sterman

For well over 50 years, Gloria Steinem has fought persistently and passionately for women's rights. And that has meant doing a lot of public speaking.

As an author and activist, the 90-year-old feminist icon has spoken at conferences, hearings, street rallies, sit-ins, political gatherings, community meetings, college campuses, and many other places and events through the years. But when she first started out, Steinem was terrified of public speaking.

She did it anyway—and learned something vital in the process.

"I discovered that I didn't die. This was very important," she says with a chuckle during a telephone interview.

This was in the late 1960s. As a founding editor and columnist for *New York* magazine, Steinem had been invited to give speeches and make media appearances, but she consistently declined. Her fear, in fact, was longstanding. She once wrote of public speaking, "I spent most of my 20s and early 30s avoiding it."

Finally, the urgency of the women's movement compelled her to speak. As she continued to deliver speeches, she slowly grew more comfortable.

"I became a writer partly so I didn't have to talk," she says. "It's not my most natural form of communication, but once I stopped thinking of it as public speaking and thought of it as a conversation with individuals, even if they were in an audience, it helped."

She wanted her speaking to be an act of facilitation, sparking audience members to discuss issues and ask each other questions in a kind of "talking circle."

"So the time of speaking at the beginning [of the program] becomes mainly something that is shared for people to respond to," she explains. "But the interesting time is the discussion."

Steinem gave voice to women who wanted change. She spoke out against discrimination and societal constraints, and advocated for women's empowerment, including equal opportunities and pay.

Blazing New Trails

As her journey continued, Steinem became a cultural fixture. In 1971, she co-founded *Ms. Magazine*, the first feminist publication with a national readership. A familiar sight in her hip clothing and oversized glasses, Steinem gave voice to women who wanted change. She spoke out against discrimination and societal constraints, and advocated for women's empowerment, including equal opportunities and pay.

When she started out, she found comfort and courage in teaming up with friends for speaking appearances. Her speaking partners included Dorothy Pitman Hughes, a pioneer of multiracial childcare in New York City, and Florynce Kennedy, a bold and charismatic civil rights lawyer. Steinem, author of the 1983 book *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, says she learned much from these self-assured women.

Kennedy taught her to use stories, not statistics, to make powerful points about discrimination. Kennedy also showed her how to handle hostile audience members. While she was revered by many, Steinem, especially in her early years of activism, drew the ire of men (and some



Photo Credit:
Beowulf Sheehan

women) who preached the virtue of the status quo and resented “women’s libbers.”

In 1971, Steinem spoke at the annual Harvard Law School banquet. At the time, women accounted for 7% of its students, she said, and the faculty was composed entirely of white men. Her speech criticized the law school’s treatment of women. Among her comments: “Politics don’t begin in Washington. They begin with those who are oppressed right here.”

Afterward, a Harvard Law professor in a tuxedo rose from his table and angrily ripped into Steinem, berating her for daring to pass judgement on the venerable school. A law student in attendance later wrote that the professor’s boorish behavior made Steinem’s argument for her.

As Kennedy once advised her for such sticky situations: “Just pause, let the audience absorb the hostility, then say, ‘I didn’t pay him to say that,’” Steinem recalled in the 2015 memoir *My Life on the Road*.

At other times, she dealt disarmingly with men asking about her sexual preferences. “If someone called me a lesbian—in those days all single feminists were assumed to be lesbians—I learned just to say, ‘Thank you,’” she wrote in the same book. “It disclosed nothing, confused the accuser, conveyed solidarity with women who were lesbians, and made the audience laugh.”

The Value of Listening

Learning only happens when you listen, notes Steinem. She is at heart a journalist and has always made it a point, for example, to interview students before speaking on college campuses,

“It’s not my most natural form of communication, but once I stopped thinking of it as public speaking and thought of it as a conversation with individuals, even if they were in an audience, it helped.”

—GLORIA STEINEM

and to seek out many people and perspectives during her travels inside and outside of America.

“You don’t learn nearly as much by sitting in your office as you do going out on the road,” she says, “and doing it in an ‘on the road’ state of mind—that is, listening and paying attention, whether it’s somebody in the gas station, or someone in the airport.

“It’s an adventure. It’s a way of learning.”

As time has passed, Steinem has become a towering figure in the world of civil rights. She has spoken out on many issues beyond the women’s movement, advocating for racial and economic equality and LGBT rights, as well as various social and political causes. A longtime New York City resident, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by former

United States President Barack Obama in 2013, and in 2019, received the Freedom Award from the National Civil Rights Museum.

But Steinem isn’t much one for looking back and basking in accolades. Asked if she feels a sense of satisfaction with her life’s work fighting discrimination, she replies, “Well, yes and no. I certainly feel amazed and gratified by the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, the gay and lesbian movement ... but, of course, I’m not satisfied.”

She can’t be, she says, until “we’re each regarded as a unique individual without adjectives.”

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.



Photo Credit: Kaitie Lyman

My Journey Through Toastmasters Leadership Roles

How I became the first Asian American District 55 Director.

By Yiting Liu, DTM

I was not assertive enough to convince leadership of the benefits of my approach. I knew this had to change.

When I turned 23, I wanted to show myself and the world that I could survive and thrive on my own. I completed my bachelor's degree in China and moved to Kingsville, Texas, to earn my master's in computer science.

After graduating, my first job was as a software developer, and things were going well until I lost my husband when my daughter was 2 years old. As a single parent, I wanted to be a role model for my daughter and support us independently, rather than moving back in with my parents. However, once I became an information technology architect, I struggled to successfully promote my ideas to upper management. For example, there were times when I had simple technology solutions, but management chose to use costly vendor solutions instead. I was not assertive enough to convince leadership of the benefits of my approach. I knew this had to change.

In 2013, I started attending Toastmasters meetings as a guest at Armadillo Avenue Club, located across the street from my office in Austin, Texas. I remember the warm welcome and kind assistance from longtime members. My strong desire to provide for my daughter led me to officially join Toastmasters in 2014, but it was a daunting task to complete all the leadership and speaking projects.

From 2014 to 2020, I pushed myself to deliver speeches and participate in leadership programs. In 2020, I achieved the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) designation, and began to wonder what I could do with the DTM. But then the pandemic hit.

As a Division Director at the time, it was extremely challenging to retain Area Directors because people were relocating to different places or jobs. My Division did not achieve Distinguished status in 2020, which was a contrast to my accomplishment as a President's Distinguished Area Director the previous year. Feeling disappointed and frustrated, I took a break from leadership roles in 2021.

Then, former District 55 Director Wafae Owen, DTM,

encouraged me to consider running for the Club Growth Director position after District 55 lost 40% of its clubs and members. Wafae helped me realize that earning the DTM was just the beginning of my leadership journey, similar

to how obtaining a degree is just the start of a career. The purpose of leadership is not solely for personal benefit but to address challenges and meet the needs of members.

Despite my busy schedule with a full-time job and raising a teenage daughter, I took on the Club Growth Director role and helped the District grow its membership in 2022. The following year, as the Program Quality Director, I helped organize Toastmasters Leadership Institute programs, speech contests, and the upcoming spring conference. During my

tenure, I connected with many Toastmasters who helped me grow as a leader. It felt natural to run for District Director when it was my turn, and I was honored to be the first Asian American elected as the District 55 Director for Central and South Texas.

Reflecting on my journey, Toastmasters helped me become a leader. The communication and public speaking skills that I gained have also benefited me in my career. I became a steering committee member and speaker for public sector conferences, where I was recognized as a successful Asian American leader by Public Sector Network in May 2024. This recognition is gratifying because it proves my choice of being a Toastmaster is the right one for me.

Most importantly, Toastmasters rekindled my passion for leadership during the challenging pandemic year of 2020. I am grateful to have acquired knowledge and skills through Toastmasters, and I am confident that my journey has prepared me to be a successful leader in both the IT field and Toastmasters.



Yiting Liu, DTM

Yiting Liu, DTM, is Vice President Public Relations for Armadillo Avenue Club in Austin, Texas. She is also the District 55 Director.

Reaching for the Next Level

Discover the 5 benefits of speech contests.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Each one of us is a member of Toastmasters for our own reasons. My reason is to become a better speaker. That is why I am a big fan of the speech contests.

Should you participate in the contests? What value do they provide? As I reflect on my contest experience, there are five main benefits that I have discovered.

The first benefit is helping you build a habit. As you compete, you are driven to write and rewrite your speech to make it better. As “game day” approaches, you practice your speech many times, working to deliver it more naturally and more powerfully. Then, during the competition, you listen to other contestants’ presentations to see where you can improve. These steps develop a habit where you rigorously prepare every speech, even your regular club speeches. That is a good habit to have.

The second benefit is gaining valuable feedback on how good a speaker you are. Your club may tell you that you gave a great speech, but how good were you really? The contest provides you with more objective feedback because you’re being compared to others who are also pushing to improve their speaking skills. They are your peers. How well did you match up, and where can you improve?

The third benefit relates to your mindset. During speech contests, you take your speaking seriously and are driven to get better. But this isn’t confined to your Toastmasters speaking. You will find this establishing a pattern of



Marc Williams of Brooklyn, New York, competing at the 2023 World Championship of Public Speaking.

excellence in other aspects of your life. Excellence becomes a part of your mindset, not just your contest speeches.

Fourth, contest speaking prepares you to speak outside of Toastmasters. It prepares you for the real world. If you work for a corporation, your managers expect a presentation that is both well written and well delivered. If you deal with customers, they expect the same thing. There is a certain pressure that comes with presenting to a boss or customer. It is no longer the safe world of your Toastmasters club. The contests prepare you to excel in that environment.

And fifth, perhaps the best benefit that I have gained from Toastmasters is the contacts that I have made through my involvement. Most of my contest experience was before virtual meetings. The contests were held in person, and I got to know Toastmasters from other clubs, especially my competitors. They became my friends.

Recently I have competed in some virtual contests. It just isn’t the same. You still gain many of the benefits, but there is something to be said for that face-to-face contact, not only with the other contestants, but also with the leadership in your District. And in the process, it builds your bond to Toastmasters. You realize that you are part of a bigger organization. And, because of the people you meet, you are challenged to think bigger.

In addition, as you become dedicated to improvement, you will find additional resources within the Toastmasters family that can drive

you to the next level. I will never forget the time I attended a meeting of a speakers bureau club in my District. One of the World Champions of Public Speaking was there. He was asked to evaluate the featured speaker and was given permission to tell all that he saw—the good and the bad, with no sugarcoating.

I was in awe. I realized at that moment there was a lot I didn’t know about speaking, so I plugged into his resources. That took me to a whole new level.

My contest experience started the first year I joined Toastmasters. I had just presented a speech at my club, and they thought it was funny. It just so happened that our District had a Humorous Speech Contest two weeks later, and I was drafted to represent the club. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I said yes nonetheless. I topped out at the Division level, but I was hooked.

What if I hadn’t been asked? What if I hadn’t said yes? What if I hadn’t taken it seriously? I would have missed out—big-time.

What about you? Are you ready for a challenge? Are you ready to grow? And are you ready to go beyond what you think possible?

Entering that first contest was a watershed moment for me. I encourage you to do the same.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at billbrownsspeechcoach.com.

Exploring 5 Types of Speeches

Will you inform, persuade, entertain, demonstrate, or honor someone?

By Diane Windingland, DTM

Imagine preparing for your next Toastmasters meeting or an important presentation at work. You sit down, pen in hand (or at your computer), and ponder the best way to convey your message. Should you inform, persuade, entertain, demonstrate something new, or honor someone? Each type of speech has unique strengths and choosing the right one can captivate your audience and achieve your goals.

Identify the Right Speech Type

Just like different genres of movies, each type of speech has its own key elements. An informative speech is like a documentary—filled with facts and data. A persuasive speech is similar to a drama, full of emotional highs and lows. Entertaining speeches are like blockbuster comedies. A demonstrative speech is like a tutorial video, showing you how to do something. Ceremonial speeches are akin to heartfelt tributes. To identify the right speech type, consider your objective, audience, and context.

- **Objective:** Ask yourself, “What’s my goal?” Determine what you want to achieve with your speech. What approach will best achieve your goal? Will you primarily inform, persuade, entertain, demonstrate, or honor? Some speeches may combine elements of

several types, such as one that aims to both inform and persuade its audience.

Weddings, funerals, and award ceremonies all call for a special kind of speech. These are moments where words carry extra weight.

- **Audience:** Consider what will be most engaging and appropriate for your listeners. Imagine giving a ceremonial speech at a project update meeting at work—it just wouldn’t fit. “Assess your audience’s needs and what would be of value to them,” says Vickie Shoutz, DTM, of Hutchinson Toastmasters II in Hutchinson, Minnesota.



- **Context:** Consider the occasion and setting of your speech. In a formal business setting, an informative or persuasive speech might be most appropriate. For instance, if you're presenting quarterly results, an informative speech with detailed data and visuals would be suitable. On the other hand, if you're pitching a new project, a persuasive speech that combines logic and emotional appeal to win over stakeholders would be ideal.

Let's look closer at the different types of speeches to get a better understanding so you can choose the right approach for the right occasion.



Informative Speeches

Informative speeches feature data, facts, and logical structure.

Example: A presentation on the latest trends in digital marketing

Think about the last time you sat through a presentation so packed with information that you felt like your brain was going to explode. Informative speeches are all about delivering facts, but that doesn't mean they have to be overwhelming or boring. Take, for example, Sir Ken Robinson's TED Talk on "[Do Schools Kill Creativity?](#)" His engaging storytelling and use of humor made complex ideas about education accessible and thought-provoking.

Informative speeches aim to educate the audience about a specific topic. You are the researcher, gathering data, facts, and statistics. Typically, these speeches follow a clear, logical structure—introduction, body, and conclusion. Visual aids can also help explain complex information and keep the audience engaged.

Persuasive Speeches

Persuasive speeches feature arguments, emotional appeal, and usually a call to action.

Example: A speech urging people to recycle more

Consider Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. It wasn't just his powerful words that moved people; it was the emotional appeal and the call to action. Persuasive speeches are

your chance to change minds and inspire action. For this speech type, you are the advocate building a case.

Persuasive speeches aim to convince the audience to adopt a particular viewpoint or take specific actions. They are structured with an introduction, arguments supported by evidence, counterarguments, and a conclusion. Addressing counterarguments strengthens your position and makes your message more compelling.

Entertaining Speeches

Entertaining speeches feature humor and an engaging delivery.

Example: A humorous story about an embarrassing moment onstage

This speech type is all about engaging your audience. Think stand-up comedy or a story that has everyone on the edge of their seats. Picture yourself as a storyteller around a campfire, weaving a tale that captivates everyone. Use humor, suspense, and vivid descriptions. Knowing your audience and practicing your timing and delivery are also crucial for success. Engaging delivery and appropriate humor can make these speeches memorable and enjoyable.

If you don't see yourself as naturally funny, start with storytelling and aim for mildly amusing. "I'm not naturally funny, so presenting a humorous speech can be quite challenging for me," says Carolyn Becker, DTM, of the Lockyer Valley Toastmasters Club in Ropeley, Queensland, Australia. "I'm okay with storytelling, though, particularly if I can combine some lived experiences into the presentation."

Over time, as you gain confidence and experience, you can work up to more side-splitting humor. Remember, the goal is to engage and entertain, so let your personality shine through, and don't be afraid to experiment.

Demonstrative Speeches

Demonstrative speeches feature visual aids and step-by-step instructions.

Example: Demonstrating how to decorate a cake

Have you ever watched a cooking show and felt like you could whip up a gourmet meal by the end? Demonstrative speeches are like live tutorials. Think of British celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay in the kitchen, blending humor and skill to make even the most daunting recipes seem doable.

This speech is used when you want to teach the audience how to do something through step-by-step instructions. It requires clear explanations and often includes visual aids or hands-on demonstrations. Props can also significantly enhance understanding and keep the audience's attention.

Ceremonial Speeches

Ceremonial speeches usually feature personal stories and heartfelt emotions.

"The only way to improve presentation skills is through practice."

—VICKIE SHOUTZ, DTM

Example: A toast at a special event (wedding, funeral, graduation, retirement, award ceremony, or tribute)

Weddings, funerals, and award ceremonies all call for a special kind of speech. These are moments where words carry extra weight. Picture yourself at a wedding, toasting the happy couple. Your words have the power to add to the joy of the occasion. Keep the tone appropriate and use personal anecdotes to make your speech memorable and heartfelt.

Ceremonial speeches are given during formal occasions and are often deeply personal. The structure of this type of speech varies depending on the occasion but often includes a personal touch and emotional appeal. The Toastmasters Pathways project "Deliver Social Speeches," a Level 3 elective, teaches you how to compose various types of social speeches, including ceremonial speeches.

Experiment With Different Types

Sticking to one type of speech is like only ever eating your favorite meal. Sure, it's great, but you miss out on all the other amazing flavors out there. Challenge yourself to use different speech types. "The only way to improve presentation skills is through practice," says Shoutz, the member in Minnesota. "Do the work, show up, and deliver to the best of your abilities."

Understanding and using different types of speeches can significantly enhance your public speaking repertoire and help ensure you are using the right approach during your presentations. By experimenting with various types, you improve your skills and keep your audience interested and focused on your message.

So, are you ready to try a new type of speech at your next Toastmasters meeting or work presentation?

"Seize every opportunity and have a go," says Becker, the member from Australia. "Speak about what you know and speak from the heart."

Diane Windingland, DTM, is a communication coach from Spring, Texas, and a member of three clubs: Frankly Speaking Toastmasters in Spring, Texas, and PowerTalk Toastmasters and Readership Toastmasters, both in Minnesota. Learn more at virtuallspeechcoach.com.

PERFECTLY Imperfect

Tips on overcoming perfectionism from a Tall Tales Speech Contest champion.

By Don Colliver

I stepped off the stage in disbelief as the crowd roared. I had just taken first place in the final round of the 2017 District 1 Tall Tales Speech Contest with my speech, “Matt the I.T. Guy.” I wondered how I, a lifelong perfectionist, could possibly have made it all the way to the top. I thought back to the painful video self-evaluations, the cringe-inducing Ah-Counter reports, and the constant self-doubt I had faced as I competed in my club, Area, and Division contests. I realized that the contest process had required me to face my perfectionism head-on.

Fellow perfectionists, have you found that your need to be perfect has drastically slowed down your Toastmasters progress? You’re not alone. While I can’t say I’ve left perfectionism behind, my Tall Tales journey has revealed some actionable insights that you too can use to overcome the perfectionism holding you back.

What Is Perfectionism, Anyway?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines perfectionism as the “refusal to accept any standard short of perfection.”

One of the wonderful (and infuriating) things about public speaking is that you can *always* get better. There is no perfect! However, it’s important to note that perfectionism is not simply the desire to improve or meet high standards. Incremental improvement is what Toastmasters is all about.

So how do we, fellow perfectionist Toastmasters, courageously push beyond our comfort zones to reach greater public speaking heights? Here are three tips to help you bravely embrace all the opportunities Toastmasters has to offer.

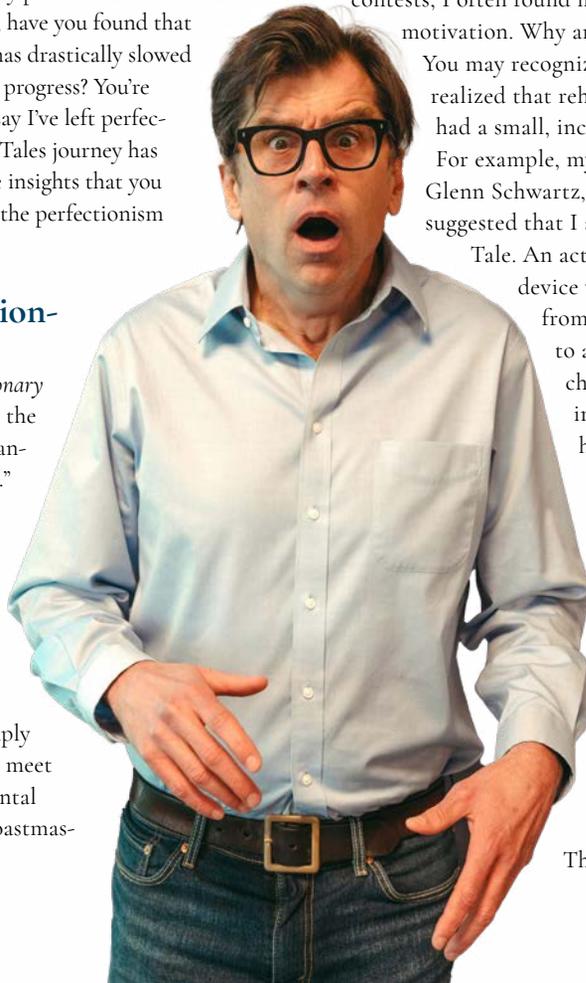
Tip #1: Do The Next Thing.

As I revised and rehearsed my Tall Tales speech between the club, Area, Division, and District contests, I often found myself struggling with motivation. Why am I doing all this work?

You may recognize this inner struggle. I realized that rehearsing came easier if I had a small, incremental task to focus on. For example, my Toastmasters mentor, Glenn Schwartz, a speaker and author, suggested that I add “act outs” to my Tall

Tale. An act-out is a stand-up comedy device where the comedian shifts from simply narrating a story to actually acting out the characters. Focusing on incremental tasks like this helped me get my practice reps in (and the act-outs killed, by the way!).

Many folks try to use motivational self-talk to encourage themselves to start a task. However, a 2006 Duke University study found that objectives were much more likely to be achieved when initiated by action rather than thinking. Thinking your way into



If you find yourself stuck on your next Pathways project or contest speech, consider if perfectionism may be your hidden obstacle.

action is unreliable, but simply taking a small action works better.

Taking that next, tiny action literally gets you “out of your head.” Focusing on a present task can lead to reduced activity in the brain regions of the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, where your inner critic and fear center reside. This activity-reducing mechanism has been termed transient hypofrontality. Related to the “flow state” of elite athletes, focusing on the next, tiny action has been shown to lead to less anxiety around uncertainty and more innovative solutions to problems.

Try it!

Take another look at that project in your Pathways path that you’ve been avoiding. Can you set a timer for 10 minutes and start an outline, ask someone for help, or get up and do 10 minutes of rehearsal? If it’s time to begin your High Performance Leadership project, can you take 10 minutes to brainstorm possible candidates for your guidance committee? Just take that first, tiny step.

Tip #2: Do It Poorly.

After I took home the certificate for winning the West Hollywood Toastmasters club’s Tall Tales Speech Contest, John Brainard, the Club President at the time, suggested that I reach out to nearby clubs for opportunities to practice for the Area contest. Great advice! However, as I lined up practice speaking slots at District 1 clubs, including Talk Nation, Cedars-Sinai MCs Club, and San Vicente Toastmasters, I really had to let myself off the perfectionism hook. At each club, I would receive valuable and occasionally painful feedback, as well as those infamous Ah-Counter reports. At one club, the Ah-Counter would ring an actual bell every time they heard a filler word during my speech. I really had to let go of my perfectionism during that session! Remember, great things don’t happen all at once on the first try. In fact, expecting to be perfect immediately is a foolproof recipe for discouragement. Mistakes are a self-correcting process. To eventually do something better, you have to do it poorly first.

As a Toastmaster, think of every speech not as a finished product, but as a valuable test, where you can glean priceless feedback about how to continue improving. After all, public speaking is a lifetime pursuit!

Try it!

Next time you’re called to the front of your club to respond extemporaneously to a Table Topics® question, challenge yourself with a public speaking tactic you’ve never tried before. Tell a joke. Ask the audience a question. Maybe even try a meaningful three-second pause. After your brave foray into imperfection, be sure to get feedback from your mentor or other trusted members of your club. You may be pleasantly surprised at the response.

Tip #3: Make It Easy.

As I worked on my Tall Tales speech, making time to practice became a struggle. I became an expert at finding absolutely anything else to do in my apartment besides practice. Luckily, I realized that my brief commute was the perfect time to run through my speech. My drive was quiet, focused, and I couldn’t possibly scroll through social media. Once I had strung together a few consecutive days of running my speech in the car, I didn’t want to stop the streak.

You may have heard about the “don’t break

the chain” habit-forming technique attributed to American actor and comedian Jerry Seinfeld, alluding to how he built a habit of writing every day. Seinfeld allegedly would hang a monthly calendar on his wall, marking an X on each day that he wrote a funny line. After a streak of a few days, it became incredibly important to not break the chain, and voila, habit attained! Although Seinfeld’s since disavowed coming up with this technique, I can vouch for its efficacy!

Try it!

Try the “don’t break the chain” technique for one week on your next Pathways project. Commit to just 10 minutes a day. Perhaps take a breather from work in the middle of your day and set a 10-minute timer. You may be surprised at how that 10 minutes can turn into 20 once you find yourself in a rhythm.

Embrace Your Imperfection!

If you find yourself stuck on your next Pathways project or contest speech, consider if perfectionism may be your hidden obstacle. Refocusing on doing the next thing, allowing yourself to do it poorly, and using a habit-forming technique to make it easy will help you take action and move toward your next Toastmasters goal. Remember, great public speaking isn’t a destination. With Toastmasters, great public speaking is a lifelong journey!

Don Colliver is a keynote speaker, corporate trainer, and bestselling author living in the San Francisco Bay area of California. He recently released the book *Wink: Transforming Public Speaking with Clown Presence*. Reach him at doncolliver.com.





Meet the Winners of the 2024 **World Championship of Public Speaking**

3 women shared impactful experiences in their lives.

By Stephanie Darling

The 2024 World Championship of Public Speaking® capped off Toastmasters’ 100th anniversary celebration in August with some memory-making milestones of its own.

For the second consecutive year, and the third time in the organization’s history, three women earned all three of the WCPS trophies. They were among eight contestants in the final round of the contest, which begins at the club level with 30,000 speakers vying to advance to the international stage (semifinals and finals) at convention. This year, all competitors attended the Anaheim, California, event in person.

Luisa Montalvo, a Texas retiree (District 55), won first place with her speech “37 Strangers,” a riveting tale of a near-death experience. She is the first Hispanic to win the competition; she placed second overall in the 2019 contest.

Hannah Cheng, from Taiwan (District 67), won second place with “Are You Ready?” a humorous and forthright tale about forging past self-doubts. Californian Angeli Raven Fitch (District 4) placed third with “Replaced by Sophia,” an uplifting lesson about the human voice in a world beset by artificial intelligence.

Here’s a look at the three winners, whose performances captivated their fellow Toastmasters around the world.

Luisa Montalvo

Luisa Montalvo speaks with relatively few words—and the ones she chooses are usually punchy, poignant, and powerful, delivered in her distinctive voice. She agrees with someone who once told her, “You don’t talk like everyone else.”

“I don’t know how to speak any other way,” Montalvo says of her speech style, which blends an understated, conversational tone with personal life lessons, humor, and subtle yet impactful props. She loves to speak and compete—a passion that earned her the 2024 title.

Montalvo found her affinity for the stage as a 12-year-old, accompanying her mother when she spoke to large meetings of sales representatives for the Avon cosmetics

Luisa Montalvo agrees with someone who once told her, “You don’t talk like everyone else.”

company. Young Luisa began to share product testimonials with audiences and came to think nothing of speaking to a group of 200 people.

“I just thought everyone did that,” Montalvo laughs. “I thought it was normal.” As a result, she’s never feared public speaking.

When she discovered Toastmasters in the 1990s, as a member of a corporate club, it provided the perfect setting to hone her skills. That club disbanded but Montalvo re-connected with Toastmasters 11 years ago, when she went to the library looking for interesting activities to pursue in retirement and saw a sign inviting people to a Toastmasters meeting, and so she went.

Montalvo’s winning speech, “37 Strangers,” drew on her near-death experience in a car accident two years ago that left her in a wheelchair, with limited mobility. She opened her speech forcefully with a single word—“Clear!”—the unmistakable command medical professionals give when preparing to use the defibrillation paddles on an unresponsive patient—which Montalvo was for six minutes. (“Best sleep ever!” she told the audience.) The 37 emergency and medical workers who came to the accident site saved her life, Montalvo said.

“They didn’t know anything about me—only that they cared and were there to save me. If 37 people can come together and put all this energy into me, can you imagine what all of us could accomplish together? All it takes is treating each other with dignity and worth,” she said.

But she couldn’t resist a funny comment about the number 37. After the accident “I received 37 invoices from 37 different places,” she laughed.

Montalvo notes that she always writes from her life in her speeches. She regularly writes down or records memorable experiences or thoughts and uses those to shape stories. The first result is usually a 15-minute piece that she gradually whittles down with relentless editing. Every word, gesture, or prop must be essential.

Since Montalvo almost always slips humor into her speeches, she paces herself to allow two minutes for audience laughter. Their

response forms a bell curve, she notes. “You have to wait for the audience response to fall off before you continue.”

Her props often speak as loud as her words. In the 2024 semifinals, she used drumsticks to demonstrate the drama of time ticking away,

and in the finals, got everyone’s attention with defibrillator paddles.

Props can amplify the message, sights, and sound of a speech when used with purpose, she says.

“The smaller the props are, the better, as long as they’re not drawing attention away from the story.” In 2019, her props included a tire iron, rosary, and beanie in a story about racism.

Recent tough times, including the death of her mother, as well as recovering from her accident, have made Montalvo more sensitive



Luisa Montalvo, first-place winner

than ever to life and compassion. A major plan for another of her passions—rescuing unwanted dogs—is next up on her bucket list. It’s what she was doing when the accident occurred, and she is in the process of establishing a free canine spay and neuter clinic in South Texas.

However, for now, the thrill of winning the WCPS has motivated her to yet another goal. “You don’t know what [winning] means to me. I’ll be back next year and I’ll be walking!”

Hannah Cheng

Hannah Cheng, a legal counsel and member of Chungli Toastmasters Club in Taiwan, asked a universal question in her speech, “Are You Ready?”

It was a question she had asked herself many times when faced with choices and opportunities. As a young woman, she wanted to move

“When I first joined [Toastmasters], I made a list of my life events and stories and ‘fear to start’ was the topic I felt most emotional about.”

– HANNAH CHENG, SECOND-PLACE WINNER

from her native Hong Kong to live abroad but her self-doubts and others’ opinions kept her stalled—until a former boss convinced her that simply starting on something you want to do is the decision that matters most. Cheng took his advice and moved to Taiwan.

With the encouragement of a former Toast-

masters Club President she met at a café—a side story that drew a huge laugh from the audience—Cheng joined Toastmasters nearly two years ago. Self-doubt followed her.

“When I first joined the club, I made a list of my life events and stories,” she says. “And ‘fear to start’ was the topic I felt most emotional about.”



Pictured left to right: Angeli Raven Fitch, third-place winner; Luisa Montalvo, first-place winner; and Hannah Cheng, second-place winner



Luisa Montalvo



Hannah Cheng



Angeli Raven Fitch

Her internal voices repeatedly told her she wasn't ready. "Admitting my moments of weakness publicly made me feel very vulnerable."

However, once club members heard her impressive speeches, they recognized her talents and stepped in to help. The club and District 67 helped Cheng find a coach and arranged for her to practice before a variety of groups. Other members coordinated various details so Cheng could focus on the 2024 contest. All of them gave "very constructive feedback," she adds.

The message of her speech was simple: It's likely you'll never be ready for something you want to do. "Just start. You'll find a way," she advises.

Still, Cheng was stressed and anxious in the month before the competition. After all, she had little experience in Toastmasters, let alone an international speaking competition. She was more surprised than anyone as she advanced through quarterfinals, semifinals, and at last, to the World Championship stage. She received dozens upon dozens of comments from grateful listeners who were also pushing aside doubts and finding a way to move ahead, just as Cheng was doing.

Aaron Beverly, the 2019 WCPS winner, convinced Cheng that her accomplishments were not due to luck, as she'd feared.

"I thought it was just luck but Aaron told me this: 'You have to be skilled before you can be lucky. So, if you think you're lucky, it's because you're skilled.'"

It was a lesson she took to heart. "I believe many people have felt like a fraud at some point, so be kind to yourself. Give credit to yourself for your wins."

Angeli Raven Fitch

In her finals speech, "Replaced by Sophia," Angeli Raven Fitch shared a disconcerting

"I wanted to bring awareness [in my speech] to why the human voice can never be replaced."

- ANGELI RAVEN FITCH, THIRD-PLACE WINNER

brush with artificial intelligence (AI) that ultimately rewarded her with renewed personal confidence and belief in the richness of real-life human voices and connections. She set the tone by opening her speech with "Fellow human beings ..."

Fitch, a member of eCommunicators in San Bruno, California, is a lawyer, children's book author, and popular voice actor. She joined the club in 2023 to "find a community of like-minded people and a playground for having fun while learning to tell stories." She chose her speech topic after hearing 1995 World Champion Mark Brown narrate a trailer for the 2024 convention.

Brown's delivery "made me want to talk about my work as a voice actor and what impact AI was having on the human voice," Fitch says. She believed her story would bring a unique perspective to Toastmasters, who have believed for 100 years in authentic, face-to-face communication.

"Toastmasters is a leadership program which relies on the human voice to convey messages to the world, so how will Toastmasters be prepared for AI voices taking over? I wanted to bring awareness to why the human voice can never be replaced," she explains.

Fitch was six years into a job she loved as the "voice" of a global healthcare organization, whose mission was to save lives, Fitch says. "I

got to communicate those messages daily. It was my dream job."

After a workday Fitch believed had been exceptionally successful, she learned she was being replaced by "Sophia," an AI-generated voice.

She was devastated. After a few stressful months spent cursing Sophia, Fitch realized she needed a healthy dose of positivity. She attended a friend's writing group and had an immediate soul-healing reaction to real people telling real stories during the meeting.

"I could *feel* the humanity as they told stories," Fitch says. "I left that meeting with a renewed sense of purpose."

Ironically, a month later, her former boss called and admitted that Sophia hadn't worked out.

"I was fired and re-hired for being human," Fitch laughs.

Fitch is not anti-technology. She continues to study and understand AI's skyrocketing influence on modern communication. Yet she believes people will still be using their voices 100 years from now: "I believe humanity and technology can co-exist. But nothing can replace the power of the human voice. It's the heart that beats beneath your words."

Stephanie Darling is a former senior editor and now freelance contributor to the *Toastmaster magazine*.

Conversation, Connection, and Chuckles

International Convention is a time for more than just learning and inspiration.

Every year, the Toastmasters International Convention offers a wealth of top-notch events—the stunning Opening Ceremonies, the engaging keynote speaker, the education sessions, the inspirational Golden Gavel Award recipient, and of course, the ever-popular speech contests.

But it's often the fun, the new friends, and the sense of community that linger long after the curtain falls and the venue empties. There is the conversation in the hallway, the chat with a seatmate before a presentation, the connection made during a networking lunch, and the chance to meet people from around the world.

It's hard to describe that excitement and energy, and sometimes pictures communicate better than words. See how members showed their Toastmasters spirit at the 2024 International Convention in Anaheim, California.

And a few more ...



Past International Presidents Dilip Abayasekara (2005–2006), Ted Corcoran (2003–2004), and Pat Johnson (2010–2011) share a laugh during their panel session.



Members show off their native attire and their enthusiasm for Toastmasters at the Global Celebration Reception.



Golden Gavel recipient Lisa Sun (on the right) chats with members after her presentation.



Past International Presidents Mohammed Murad (2014–2015), Balraj Arunasalam (2017–2018), Johnny Uy (2006–2007), and Deepak Menon (2019–2020)



Past International Director Michael Osur with member Jan Vecchio (left) and Past International Director Gloria Shishido (right).



Speech Contest

WINNING SECRETS

Get ready to become the best contestant you can be.

By Dilip R. Abayasekara, DTM, AS, PIP

Some people may be surprised to learn that a decade before serving as the 2005–2006 Toastmasters International President, I spent five years competing in the International Speech Contest. I gained invaluable experience and insights from these competitions, which resulted in five District-level titles, two regional titles, two appearances at the World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS), and a second-place win at the 1992 WCPS.

In 1994, I stopped competing and entered the leadership track, which I have never left. But a new joy I gained was coaching and mentoring aspiring contestants. I've had the pleasure of coaching and mentoring members at all levels of the International Speech Contest, as well as Accredited Speaker candidates.

The skills and insights you gain from [speech contests](#) are invaluable, and I encourage everyone to consider competing at some point. Over the years, I've prepared what I consider to be my “secrets” to winning at the International Speech Contest.

Study Other Speakers

Before deciding on your topic or writing your possible World Championship speech, I recommend learning from champion speakers. My role models were the individuals who had achieved my goal—the [World Champions](#) themselves. If this is your goal as well, study the recordings of previous champions, particularly the top three winners in the past three years, although you can learn from the WCPS speeches of any period.

Notice their speech topics, content, delivery, language, use of stories, pictures, props, use of space and stage, body language, engagement with the audience, and other ways that they convey their message, connect with the audience, and create a memorable experience.

Choose an Engaging Topic

You'll want to find a topic that is important to you and the audience, and one that cre-

ates value for the audience. Think of it as a three-component Venn diagram involving you, the audience, and the value of the topic to the audience. When all three are strong, you have a WCPS-worthy topic.

My experience and observations are that Toastmasters audiences want to be inspired, motivated, entertained, and touched in the heart and mind. For Toastmasters speech contests, my advice is keep it simple, keep it clear, and make it meaningful.

Understand the Judge's Guide

Judges are the most important subset of your audience—they choose the best speaker and will be looking for reasons to take points off to find the first-, second-, and third-place winners.

Study the [International Speech Contest Judge's Guide and Ballot](#).

Notice that 40% of points are for content,

40% for speech development, and 20% for language. As you develop your speech, consider how it might be measured against this guide. Where might you be penalized? What must you do to maximize the points for each section?

Develop Your Speech

There is an old piece of advice to speakers: "Don't try to impress, just express." In other words, keep it simple, and above all, be very clear about what you are saying.

One way to ensure clarity and focus is to write out a phrase or sentence that captures the central idea of your speech. This is the essence of your message. For example, the central idea of my 1992 WCPS speech was "Love makes the connection among human beings." From that, I chose the speech title: "Love Makes the Connection." The body of your speech should clarify and illuminate the central idea.



Develop your speech in a way that will not only keep it simple and clear but also makes your message *relevant* to the audience and *engages* them. Three ways to do this are storytelling, appropriate humor, and rhetoric. Personal stories are the most effective way to make your point, establish your authenticity, and engage the emotions of your audience. Effective humor and jokes connect your audience to you, making them relate to your message. Finally, don't forget rhetorical tools, such as repetition, parallel structure, triads, similes, metaphors, rhymes, and quotations. Judiciously choose what works best for you.

To Memorize or Not?

There are different schools of thought on whether or not contestants should [memorize their speech](#). One problem with memorizing is that it can end up sounding canned or mechanical. There's also the risk that if you forget one of the sentences, your mind might go blank. On the other hand, if you don't memorize, but instead have a general idea of what you want to convey, you risk rambling, or going too long and fumbling for words.

Given the strict time limits, my opinion is that

every word counts, and therefore every word and every pause need to be known by memory. My approach includes 1) memorize a paragraph at a time, adding a previously memorized paragraph to a new paragraph, and 2) continually repeat certain words and phrases to drive the words into memory, while making them sound natural.

Get Your Timing Down

The International Speech Contest rules require that a speech not be less than 4 minutes 30 seconds and no longer than 7 minutes 30 seconds. Within that time frame, you must fit in an opening, body, and close. How do you ensure you meet those requirements? My preference is to practice the speech out loud, time it, adjust, and do it over again and again.

Note in your speech text where the 5-, 6-, and 7- minute times are reached. Those are the places where you expect to see the green, yellow, and red lights. It will take many rehearsals to get this down right. Then, at the actual contest, pay attention to when the lights come on. If the green light comes on where you expect it, you know you are doing fine. If it comes on too early, then you may have to shorten the speech by dropping a line or two. If it comes on later than you expect, you have plenty of time to complete the speech within the time limit.

Rehearse and Get Feedback

Once you feel good about the draft of your speech, invite feedback from different audiences. After I won my club contest, the members became incredibly useful in helping me further refine and polish my speech. When I needed to prepare for regional contests (semifinals), I reached out to other clubs in my District and in nearby Districts who kindly allowed me to rehearse my speech and gave me feedback.

Of course, the challenge then becomes sifting through the feedback and discerning what will improve the speech. It helps to know yourself, know the audience, and clearly know the central idea. Receive all feedback with gratitude, listen carefully, and search for gems of insights that can move your speech to a higher level. Speech improvement is not a solo job. Don't shy away from evaluations. Seek them, learn from them, and be grateful for them.



2019 World Champion Aaron Beverly with the author, Dilip Abayasekara, Beverly's mentor



Kaishika Rodrigo, a 2016 finalist at the World Championship of Public Speaking, with Abayasekara, her mentor

My 1992 WCPS speech went through 18 revisions and 360 rehearsals, yet I think I was able to deliver it as if it were the first time I was giving it. The system works!

Have the Right Attitude

Competition can limit growth if you feel that anything less than getting first place means you've lost. In fact, contestants who have the mindset that they are only competing with themselves come out as winners, because every contest becomes a learning experience. This attitude allows you to let go of feeling like you "have" to win, and instead enjoy the opportunity to deliver a message of value to the audience. This attitude can be difficult to cultivate because it goes counter to many people's idea of winning. So how does one claim it?

Here are some understandings that have helped me:

1. In this world, there will always be speakers who are better than you are, as well as those who are not as skilled.
2. Your task is to keep improving as a speaker and strive to give a better speech on the day of the competition than you have ever done before.
3. If you win the contest, wonderful! Enjoy the feeling and show gratitude to those who helped you.
4. If you do not place in the contest, reflect on what you might need to learn to become better and who might be able to help you.

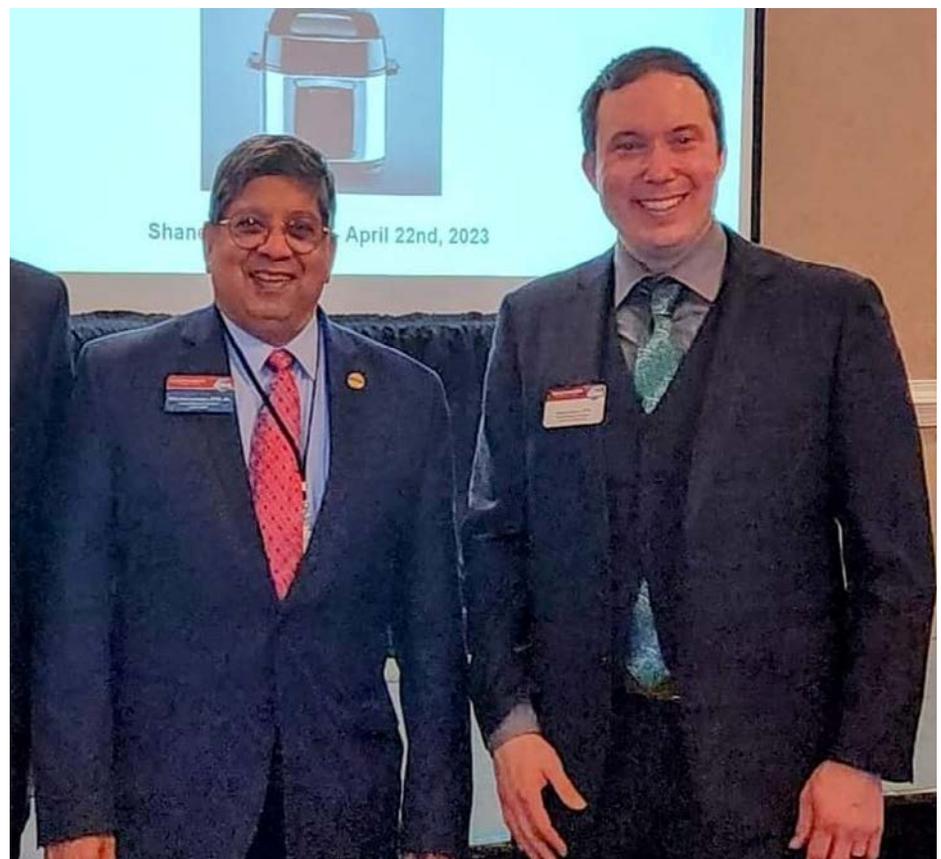
5. Learn new skills to help you with your speeches. Most helpful to me are meditation, visualization, and neurolinguistic programming. All these helped me to become a better person as well as a better speaker.

6. I knew that I had "let go" when I found myself enjoying the competition experience without feeling that I had to win first place.

One of the great learning experiences that Toastmasters offers is speech competition. I urge you to take advantage of it. It will cause you to stretch, discover new possibilities, and make you a better communicator and leader. What I have dubbed "secrets" are not really secrets, but realizations that have worked for me and my mentees many times. Not only that but they have helped change my life for the better. I hope you will find them helpful for your Toastmasters journey also.

Speak on!

Dilip R. Abayasekara, DTM, AS, PIP, is a Past International President of Toastmasters, and a two-time finalist at the World Championship of Public Speaking, receiving second place at the 1992 WCPS. He earned Toastmasters Accredited Speaker designation in 1996 and ran a professional speaking and speech coaching business for 22 years, served as a pastor, and is now retired.



Abayasekara with mentee Shane Cohen, a two-time finalist at the District 38 International Speech Contest

CONSIDERING

Kindness

How being thoughtful can benefit yourself and others.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

In some ways, you might say kindness is in fashion. We can snack on a Be-Kind energy bar while wearing a T-shirt that bears the same message and listening to a kindness podcast created by a kindness organization. Still, when we are cut off in traffic, embarrassed at work, or criticized by others, kindness appears to be in short supply.

This should come as no surprise. We live in such challenging times that it's sometimes hard to think of anyone but ourselves and our own needs. For that reason, it's important to remember there are many ways and reasons to practice kindness. Not only can it make us happier and healthier, but it can also make others kinder to us, to themselves, and to the planet.

What Is Kindness?

Put simply, kindness means being friendly, generous, and considerate, without expecting anything in return. Sabine Hellepart, a Vienna, Austria-based life coach, breaks it down into several categories: (1) being present, (2) seeing other people as they are, (3) trying to understand an individual's needs and background, and (4) listening closely.

"Perhaps the most powerful act of kindness," she says, "is that when everything is rushed and decided in a matter of seconds, we simply take time for another person."

Giving to others is a powerful aspect of kindness. Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, who grew up in New York and now lives in Israel, is a case in point. When he was young, he says, he was a man of ideology, and he admired people who were clever. When he grew older, he began to favor humanity over ideology, to admire those who were kind.

"Years ago," says Schlesinger, "I was driving my young kids somewhere

"Perhaps the most powerful act of kindness is that when everything is rushed and decided in a matter of seconds, we simply take time for another person."

- SABINE HELLEPART

when I stopped for a hitchhiker." The man said his son was in an accident and was being operated on, and that all his money had been stolen. In sympathy, Schlesinger drove him where he needed to go and gave him more money than he had ever given anyone in his life.

"It turned out," he says, "that he was a con man. But you know what? I'd do the same thing again. Because the next time someone says they're in trouble, they might really need my help."

Benefits of Kindness

Schlesinger may have been conned, but he still came out ahead. That's because a growing body of research supports the old adage that it's better to give than to receive. For example, kindness has been proven to promote serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin—brain chemicals that combat depression. In fact, according to a recent study in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, kindness trumps cognitive behavioral therapy when it comes to reducing depression and anxiety. Acts of kindness also promote



the body's production of substance P, a neurotransmitter crucial to pain reduction. It lowers blood pressure, as well as the stress hormone cortisol. It also boosts the immune system, and in turn slows aging.

What's more, kindness breeds kindness. It benefits relationships, so when you make someone else feel good, they are more likely to be kind to you and to others, which can start a chain reaction. Think about it: Your single act of kindness may help change the course of history. It's that important.

Practicing Kindness

Hellepart sees kindness as an attitude that recognizes human dignity, rather than a strategy that is turned on or off as needed. Nevertheless, she says, it must be learned and rehearsed in order to become natural.

Here are 10 ways to get started.

1. Be kind to your family. Kindness begins at home, says Schlesinger, and being kind to and in front of children fosters kindness in them. Being kind is a sign of strength, according to Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe, a Toronto-based psychology instructor and author. It's loaning someone your own strength and support, and you have to be strong to do that.
2. Make a call or send a text to a friend or relative who is lonely or needs comfort.
3. Be kind at work by offering to get a co-worker a cup of coffee or inviting a new employee out to lunch.
4. Offer a favor, like walking a neighbor's dog.
5. Do those things you learned as a child, like showing gratitude and taking turns.
6. Write a note of appreciation to a different person every day.
7. Show interest in others. Ask questions. Listen to others in order to understand them, not to fix them or tell your own stories.
8. Teach a skill to a peer.

9. Be kind to strangers by volunteering in the community, picking up a piece of trash in a public place, smiling at someone, yielding the right of way, or giving up your seat on a bus.
10. Practice and encourage authenticity. Be genuine and sincere in your communications with people.

Be Kind in Your Club

Toastmasters have all sorts of ways to practice kindness, from saying hello and goodbye to fellow members at meetings, to mentoring and introducing yourself to new people, and offering words of encouragement to those who feel they're not making progress.

Helping fellow members who are suffering is also a gift of kindness. In 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck Tokyo, triggering a tsunami that destroyed much of the east coast of the country. Toastmasters in Japan were among the many people affected. Members in the vicinity and around the world sent them messages of support and even gifts of clothing and food.

Writing on the District 76 (Japan) website, then-District Governor Seiko Matsumoto, DTM, referenced the acts of kindness, including "an Area Governor and a member making efforts to confirm [the] safety of members in the disaster-stricken areas and sending information about them; [and] members who are offering helping hands to the suffering members."

"Yes. We are Toastmasters," she added. "Helping each other' is our spirit."

Kindness as a Habit

Forming a habit of being kind is an easy way to ensure you are being considerate to others and to yourself. To develop such a habit, Jeff Hasenfratz, an executive leadership coach based in Shanghai, recommends trying a "noticing" practice.

"Notice those times during the day when you're kind to someone," he says. "Also notice the times when you

Your single act of kindness may help change the course of history.

aren't as kind. Twice a day, take a few minutes to write down whom you were kind to and why, and whom you were not so kind to and why."

After two weeks, notice if certain patterns emerge in how you offer, or don't offer, kind words or actions, he says. If you discover a habit, mix things up.

As an example, Hasenfratz says, if you notice that you don't tend to offer many kind words to certain colleagues, experiment by saying something nice to one or two of them daily, for two weeks. Notice how each of you responds. If the responses are positive, you can continue, or refine, your experiment. If they are negative, you can either stop the experiment or adjust it and try something different. This way, you will have good data on what works, what doesn't, and why.

Being Kind to Ourselves

Similar to the flight attendants' instructions for putting on your own oxygen mask before helping others, it's important to take care of yourself too. Being kind to ourselves helps us care for others. And yet, many people struggle with doing this.

"For me, empathy for others was no big thing," Hellepart says. "My challenge was practicing kindness to myself. The good thing was, I knew the elements and just had to rearrange and adapt them." To that end, Hellepart began to practice mindfulness, deep breathing, and other nurturing rituals, such as Qigong, a practice consisting of gentle exercises that promote well-being.

It's also helpful to give yourself a break, whether that means taking time for yourself or accepting your own humanity, flaws and all. Consider a vacation away from screens in order to spend time in the natural world. It's worth treating yourself in other ways too, whether it's eating chocolate, dancing, or doing something else you enjoy.

The Dalai Lama once said, "Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive." When we make kindness a priority, we all reap the rewards.

Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D., practices kindness as a storyteller, author, and teacher in Boca Raton, Florida. Visit her at carenneile.com.

Finding Speech Topics in Unusual Places

Members share the unique ways they have stumbled upon speech ideas.

By Mackenzie Eldred

Finding a topic for your upcoming speech can be a daunting task. You might have run out of ideas or want to speak about something new. Despite the challenge, speech topics can be found anywhere, with some of the best ideas coming from the most unusual places. Below, Toastmasters share the creative ways they have come across speech topics.

Mail Problems

An unexpected speech came from what most people consider trash.

My unique speech idea came when I griped about all the senior citizen junk mail I've received. It then occurred to me I had "Mail Problems." There were advertisements from a funeral home, a request to participate in an Alzheimer's disease study, and others. The sarcastic comments flowed from my mind, and it turned into a speech that has entertained over 20 clubs as I took it on the road.

The bottom line is that I found my best speech in materials usually tossed as garbage.

Ernest Raynor, DTM • Tulsa, Oklahoma



Burger Love

The most unique way I came across a speech idea was when I was picking which burger my son and I wanted to try during Burger Love. PEI Burger Love is a month-long celebration of Island Beef through one-of-a-kind culinary creations on Prince Edward Island in Canada. However, choosing a date to go eat a burger with my son proved challenging with our schedules. I soon realized I was using my negotiation skills when picking a date and time, which burger we both wanted to try, whether we would each eat a burger or split one, and who would pay. It was one of my favorite speeches to date!

Anne Doucette, DTM • Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada

The Chicken Soup of Life

It all started with a bowl of chicken soup. My sister was working from home due to COVID restrictions. One day, she seemed on the brink of exhaustion, working for extended periods without pause. Taking frequent breaks and never skipping meals was an essential component of my work strategy. I asked her to take a five-minute break and enjoy the hot soup I had prepared. However, several hours later, the soup was on the table, cold and untouched.

Several years later, my sister called and advised me to follow the Pomodoro Technique, which involves taking a five-minute break after 25 minutes of work. It was the same thing I had suggested to her years ago. So, the chicken soup became a theme for my speech, which not only introduced the idea of the Pomodoro Technique, but also suggested that advice will be heard only when the listener's heart is ready to accept it.

Sumam Joseph • Kochi, Kerala, India



Finding Speech Inspiration on the Flight Deck

Speech ideas surround us every day and everywhere! My family had the opportunity to take a direct flight from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Anchorage, Alaska, on a military KC-135 jet. The two boys pictured, Memphis Denali and Maddux Kodiak, had the trip of a lifetime. They each had the opportunity to explore and ask the crew questions while in flight. They were also invited to sit with the pilot on the flight deck once the jet was on the final approach to the runway. We then went on a sightseeing adventure throughout Alaska for 10 days in July. Photos of Alaska cannot explain the pristine, majestic, and beautiful landscape scenes, but I was able to use this trip as motivation for my speech.

Sheila Ulrich • Hartington, Nebraska



Lessons From the Attic

During a vacation to my parents' place, my son, curious about my childhood, insisted on seeing my old photos. As I flipped through the pages of dusty albums from my parent's attic, I found my school report cards with my history marks. Seeing that instantly transported me back to a particular incident as a teenager.

I was 14 and full of misplaced confidence, sauntering into a history exam with a head full of battles and dates. I was ready to ace it until I saw my friend, in a puddle of tears and panic. I fashioned chits with the important dates and information I had studied and passed them to her because, apparently, cheating was my way of showing empathy. The day the report cards were handed out, my confidence crumbled. My teacher said, "History might repeat itself, but let's not repeat this performance in exam hall." I can still hear my classmates' laughter as I tried to disappear under my desk.

As I shared this story with my son, I realized it wasn't just a tale of a schoolgirl. It was a lesson in empathy, friendship, resilience, and mental wellbeing. And just like that, I had the perfect idea and message for my next speech.

Aparna Rajan, DTM • Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Reaching the Summit

On December 23, 2023, I completed a challenging 72 kilometers (almost 45 miles) Himalayan trek, a feat that seemed unimaginable to me just a year ago. In January of that year, I had struggled to reach the summit of the Kedarkantha mountain due to poor stamina. However, I refused to let that setback define me. I embarked on a year-long journey of strength training and cardio at the gym, focusing on building my endurance and resilience.

Fast-forward to December, I became the first woman to reach the summit of the Sandakphu Phalut trek. I shared my journey with my fellow Toastmasters at the Technopark Toastmasters club, delivering a motivational speech that inspired many to begin their own training and trekking adventures.

Rajeswary Sreedevi • Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India



Reflecting on My Hair Journey

It's amazing how the best ideas come out of unexpected places. I have two kids, and I often remind my elder son, Arthav, that I am also his friend. One day as I was combing my hair, Arthav said, "If you are my friend, please do your hair as my friends do. Either cut it short or make two braids with ribbons on them." Hearing him, I reflected on my journey since childhood—how our school would make us comb two braids with ribbons, how my banking job demanded half-tied sleek hair, and now the busy schedule that requires a top quick bun. However, one style I love the most is letting my hair loose. Letting my hair down always gave me a sense of relief and freedom. These hair styles reflect my entire life journey. So, I thought why not focus my Ice Breaker speech on my hairdos.

Smriti Shrestha • Butwal Toastmasters Club, Rupandehi, Nepal

Mackenzie Eldred is editorial coordinator for the Toastmaster magazine.

OUTLINING

Your Presentations



Add an organizational tool to your speech preparation.

By Sara Karnish

You've completed your research. You have some good ideas for content and messaging. Putting it all together, however, seems overwhelming. This is where an outline comes in. A well-developed outline is a great way to organize your thoughts and stay focused. It's an anchor for your presentation.

Your outline is driven by the main idea of your speech—the one-sentence summary that encapsulates your larger message, also known as the thesis. The rest of your speech supports the main idea. That single sentence sets the tone for the entire speech and can make developing an outline much easier. If you have copious information or a variety of ideas to whittle down, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the theme or main point of my speech?
- What are the three outstanding themes/areas I discovered in my research?
- What areas are startling, surprising, or may be of greatest interest to my audience?

Your outline also serves as a visual framework for your speech and shows the relationship between your points. If your speech sounds disjointed or does not flow smoothly, go back and re-examine the order in which you're presenting your information. It may look good on paper, but sound awkward upon delivery.

Structure the Ingredients

An effective speech contains an introduction, body, and conclusion. Beyond these three broad areas, an outline is a means of organizing your content in the most impactful way. Nichola Gutgold, professor of communication arts and sciences at Pennsylvania State University, offers these suggestions to make the most of each section: "An introduction should have four ingredients: startling the audience, revealing your topic, establishing your credibility, and previewing your topic," she says. "The body can be organized in many different ways—cause and effect, problem/solution, topical. The written outline would list what your main points are." And finally, finish strong. "Go back to your introduction. If you asked a question in the intro, startle the audience so there is a sense of resolution. Wrap it up creatively."

You should leave your audience feeling satisfied, energized, and better informed at the end of your speech.

Develop a Speaking Outline

Once you have your main point and supporting information, it's a matter of putting the information in the best order to keep the audience's attention.

Gutgold suggests developing one outline with details about the speech's main points, and a second one consisting of key words rather than complete sentences. "Your speaking outline is meant to prompt," she said. "When a speaker writes full sentences in an outline, it's tempting to just read from it." Instead, populate the speaking outline with key words and phrases that can jog your memory should you lose your place or get distracted during the presentation.

Jenny Wang, a life coach based in Boca Raton, Florida, said for her, it's about not getting overwhelmed. In her earliest speeches, Wang said she scripted every word. Scripting can be an unnecessary stressor if you feel you have to learn your entire speech verbatim. There's also less spontaneity and authenticity.

Wang has since relaxed her approach. "Now, for Toastmasters, I prepare to an extent, though my insights are, 'Just speak up with some simple guidelines.'" Wang uses many of the resources provided by Toastmasters to organize her outline and complete speech, including the *Toastmaster* magazine and *The Better Speaker Series*.

Crafting a solid outline with engaging talking points provides a clear roadmap to the message you want to convey. Gutgold also stresses the importance of rehearsal. "If you practice enough times, the speaking outline will be enough. Practice is really what separates speakers who are good from those who are great," Gutgold said. "Great speakers will really engage with the material because they know it very well."

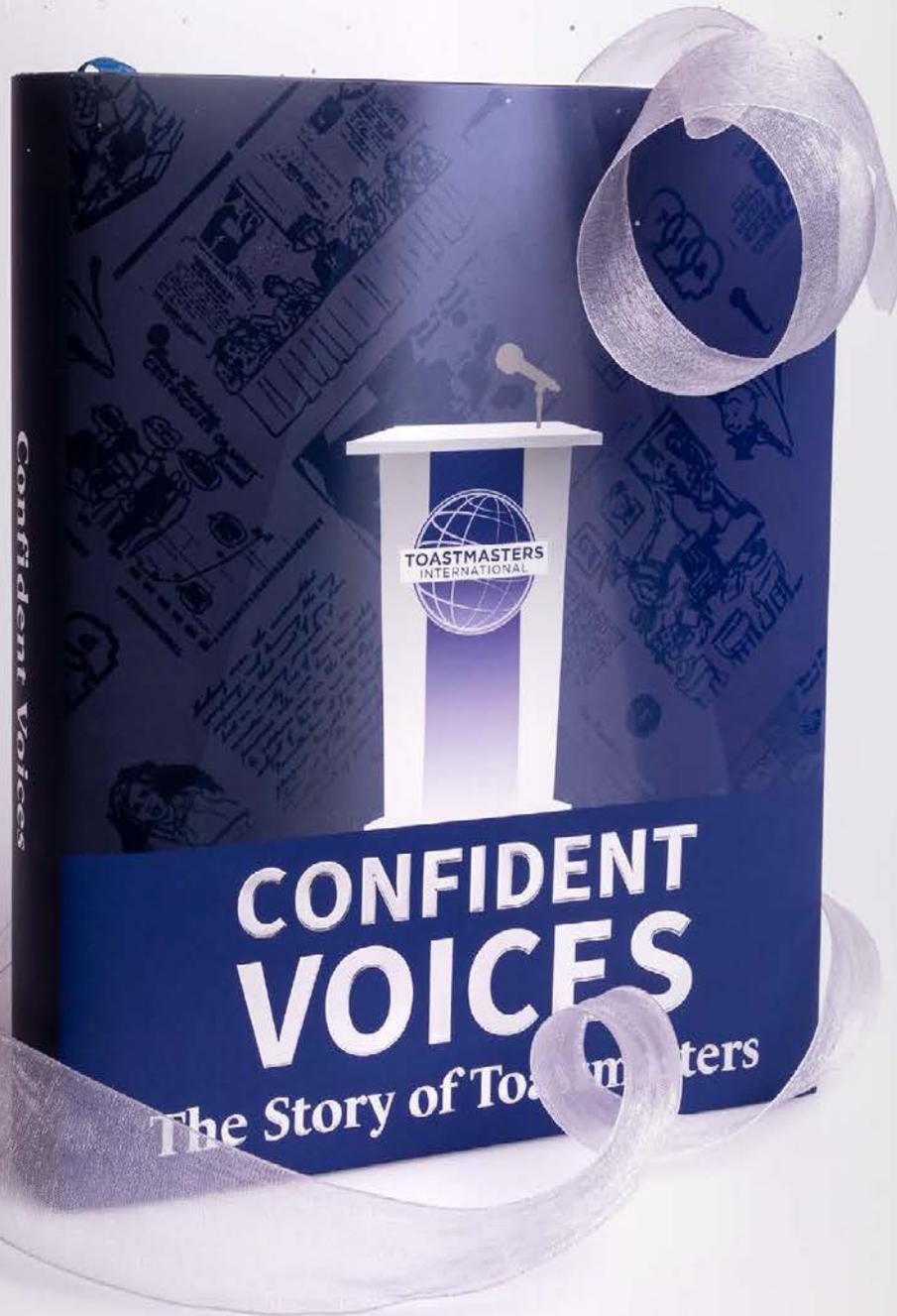
A strong speech should include a clear main topic, with supporting ideas, points, or anecdotes, delivered in a comfortable, compelling manner.

"I really do think a good outline is key," says Gutgold.

Sara Karnish is a Pennsylvania-based writer who has taught composition and public speaking at the community college level.



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Reminiscing on Past Convention Pins

These small but colorful keepsakes are an annual hit.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

In 1981, at the International Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, Toastmasters introduced a diminutive item that would become instantly popular with members: the convention pin.

Each year the small souvenir, designed at Toastmasters World Headquarters, reflects the convention's location or theme. The 1981 pin is in the shape of Arizona. (When the event was held in Phoenix again, in 2007, a cactus dominated the design.) The pin for the 1993 Toronto convention is the image of a maple leaf, a national symbol of Canada. The designs for the 1989, 1998, and 2010 mementos are accentuated by palm trees, all symbolizing the same site: Palm Desert, California.

The 2023 pin highlights the dazzling blue ocean of The Bahamas. And 2024 has been a bonus year for collectors: Along with the convention pin, displaying the words "Anaheim, California" in the middle, Toastmasters also produced a 100-year anniversary pin to mark the organization's centennial.

Even among the widely assorted convention memorabilia—keychains, clothing, buttons, bookmarks, magnets, notebooks, and the beloved convention bear—the annual pins stick out. Collecting them has become a special tradition for members, who wear them on lapels, hats, and convention lanyards, and even string them together as a large necklace.

Take a look at some of the memorable keepsakes that have commemorated the conventions through the years.



The first convention pin debuted at the 1981 International Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.



1987 Chicago



1993 Toronto



1994 Louisville



1995 San Diego



1997 New Orleans



1998 Palm Desert



2007 Phoenix



2014 Kuala Lumpur



2019 Denver



2020 Online Convention



2023 Nassau



2024 Anaheim

In honor of Toastmasters International's 100th anniversary, this is the 11th in a year-long series of articles commemorating historic milestones.

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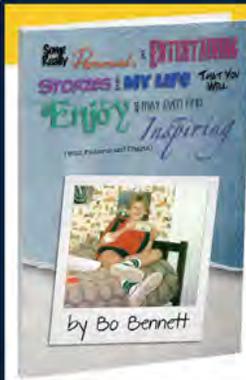
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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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 

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