

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | JANUARY 2025

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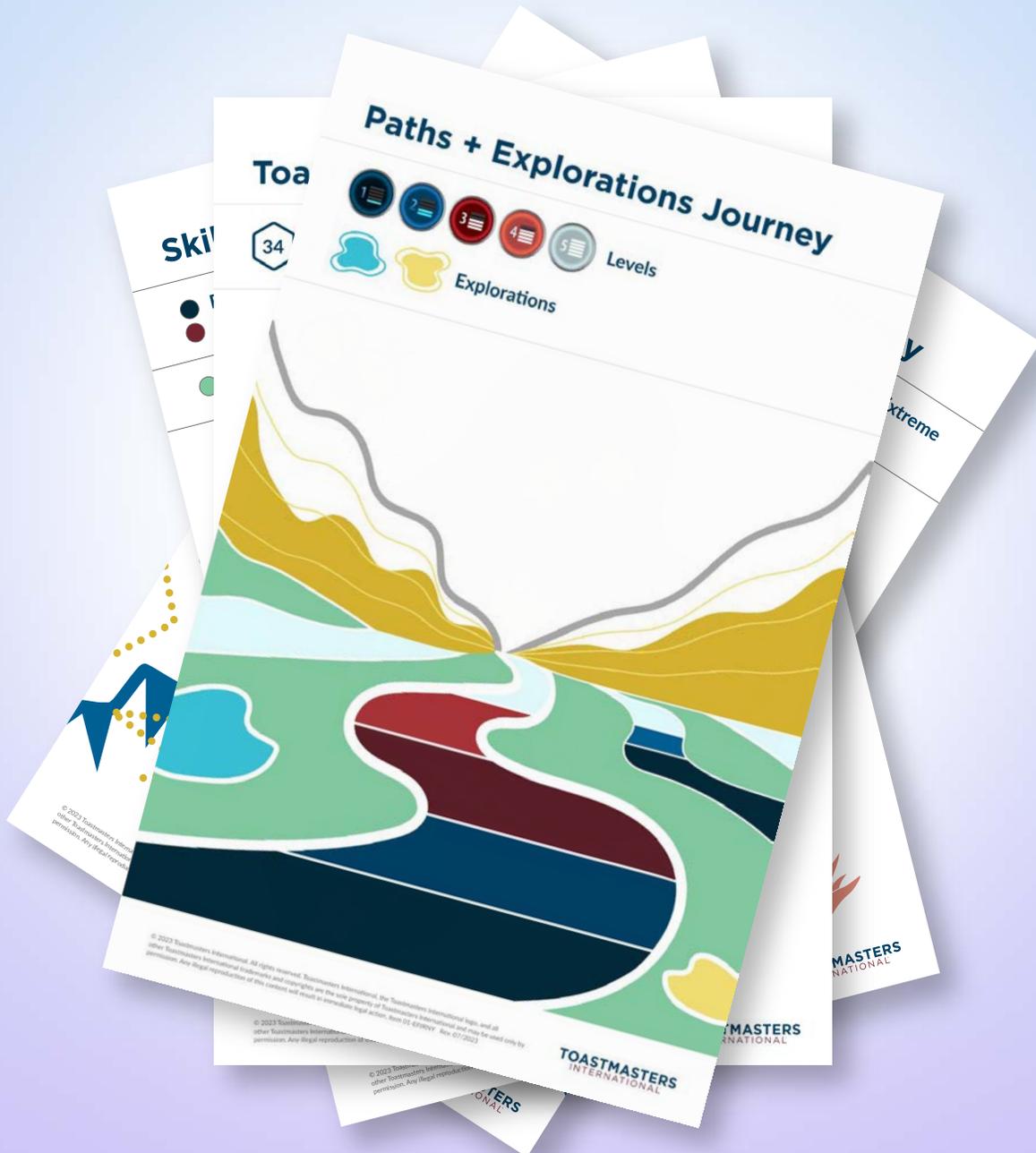
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## TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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# Use Toastmasters to Grow Your Skills and Confidence

During the recent holiday season, many of us were fortunate to reconnect with family and friends. Social interaction is vital for our mental and physical well-being, and

Toastmasters offers that same sense of community year-round. As the new year begins, whether you make resolutions or not, why not commit to actively participating in your Toastmasters club?

It's a ready-made community—an extended family—where you can thrive. By joining, you'll not only grow as an individual but also contribute to the growth of your fellow members.

I can't think of any organization other than Toastmasters whose sole objective is the overall improvement of its members. It's a unique space that provides the tools, resources, and support that any member can use to their full advantage. And beyond enabling you to gain specific skills, Toastmasters fosters something even more important—self-confidence.

Throughout life, we acquire many skills through education and work, but even with all that knowledge, we often hesitate when opportunities arise. Why? Because we lack the self-confidence to seize them. Toastmasters directly addresses this by creating an environment where individuals can grow, practice, and build confidence without fear of judgment.

In Toastmasters you can develop a wide range of skills over time that are directly appli-

cable to both personal and professional life. Whether these skills are in the area of communication, presentation, leadership, networking, or planning, they are skills we use every day.

And the byproduct of learning and honing these abilities is increased self-confidence—the kind that empowers us to step forward when opportunities arise, knowing we are prepared to give it our best.

Fear of failure is something we all experience. We often think we're not good enough,

skilled enough, or knowledgeable enough, and this fear holds us back from even trying. In my experience, it's rare to look back and regret that we tried and failed; instead, we're more likely to look back and regret the opportunities we didn't take because we were too afraid to even try. Toastmasters helps break down that barrier by preparing us to step outside our comfort zone and challenge ourselves in a supportive community.

What's special about this organization is that it equips you with the skills and confidence to thrive in all areas of your life. It's truly an investment in yourself—a way to build the confidence that will carry you forward, whatever your path may be. And that is what makes Toastmasters so uniquely valuable.

**Radhi Spear, DTM**  
International President



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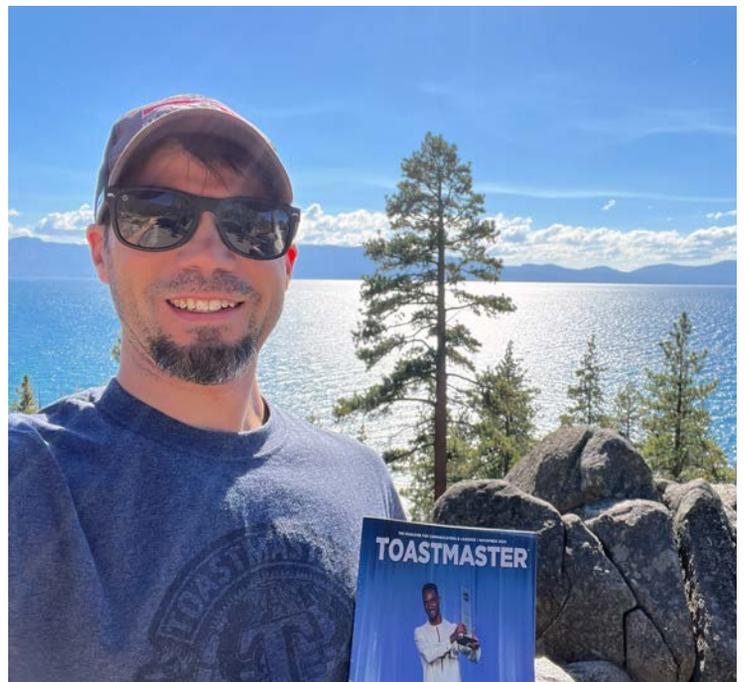


The 2023-2024 **District 82 Public Relations Team** in Sri Lanka and Immediate Past District Director Mahinda Karunakara, DTM (front center in blue shirt), of Homagama, Sri Lanka, enjoy a dinner to celebrate the past program year.

## Traveling Toastmaster



**Rowena Garcia** of Elmhurst, New York, poses with the *Toastmaster* in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Pisa, Italy.



**Andrew Black**, a team member at Toastmasters International World Headquarters in Englewood, Colorado, stops at Lake Tahoe in Nevada during his trip to the 2024 International Convention in Anaheim, California.

# Stop Talking So Much!

Why people overspeak and how to keep discussions concise.



By Joel Schwartzberg

Most of us are familiar with the term “overthinking” and its negative consequences, and one of its most detrimental consequences is over “speaking”—when a messy collection of impulsive thoughts and concerns becomes tangential ruminations, under-conceived suggestions, unnecessary cautions, and unlikely hypotheticals.

We’ve all experienced these overspeakers in the workplace, whether it’s executives who can’t help but share everything on their minds, individuals who tend to overthink catastrophic scenarios, or colleagues who believe 60 seconds left in a meeting is an appropriate time to ask a three-part question.

## Reasons for Overspeaking

Why do some people overspeak? Contrary to what you might think, it’s not just to hear themselves talk. Some of the reasons overspeakers go overboard:

- They’re holding out for a perfect resolution, due to a preconception that perfection, not progress, is the goal.
- They’re overfocused on unlikely adverse events, like an off-the-topic question, a freak weather occurrence, or an atypically hostile audience.
- They’re terrified of making a wrong judgment, so they postpone it through extended conversation.

- They over-rely on time-consuming analysis rather than acting decisively based on intuition, previous experience, or prior knowledge.
- They over-prioritize personal transparency, revealing much more than is needed to advance a project.
- They advocate for an opposing argument or unlikely consequence to provoke debate, erroneously believing that playing “devil’s advocate” is a mandatory step in decision-making.

How can you tell if you or someone else is overspeaking? It’s often prefaced by a familiar qualifier such as:

- “I may be overthinking, but ...”
- “This probably won’t happen, but ...”
- “It goes without saying that ...”
- “I know we’re out of time, but ...”

## The Perils of Speaking Too Much

Overspeaking is sometimes excused or justified as wise caution. But while caution is wise, overthinking and overcommunicating concerns can stall progress, decrease productivity, and inhibit creativity.

Just as overthinking things can have negative consequences, so too can overspeaking.

“When individuals—or entire teams—habitually overthink, it creates a bottleneck. Decision-making slows, opportunities are missed, and a culture of risk-aversion can take hold, stifling business growth,” writes executive coach and author Melody Wilding in a *Harvard Business Review* [article on overthinking](#).

“While [overanalyzing] can sometimes lead to profound insights, more often than not, it results in getting bogged down in details that might not be particularly relevant.”

## Avoiding Overspeak as a Speaker

Curbing overspeaking and its paralyzing effects requires catching yourself overthinking. Amy Morin, author of *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don’t Do*, suggests habitual overthinkers [differentiate rumination and problem-solving](#).

“Replaying conversations in your head or imagining catastrophic outcomes over and over again isn’t helpful. But solving a problem is,” Morin writes in *Psychology Today*. “Ask yourself whether your thinking is productive.”

Productive thinking and contributions are often solution-oriented, timely, relevant to the discussion at hand, and stick to likely scenarios versus hypothetical ones.

It’s also helpful to recognize the difference between a concern and a curiosity. A concern typically involves a serious consequence, but a

curiosity only involves a theoretical effect. Have you ever heard someone start a thought with “Just curious ...” that turned out to be urgent or even necessary?

## Curbing Overspeak as a Leader

Leaders—of projects or companies—have a special obligation to curb overspeaking in their teams because they have the authority and responsibility to decide when discussion-time stops and decision-time starts. They should manage input and feedback with the goal of making informed decisions, not necessarily perfect ones.

“It’s important to get everybody’s input, but it’s more important to have the courage to pick a winning idea instead of simply mashing everything together,” says Ben Guttman, marketing specialist and author of *Simply Put: Why Clear Messages Win—and How to Design Them*.

This advice doesn’t mean the leader has to take over every time a conversation takes a detour or gets lost in the weeds. Gentle ways to [steer a meeting group away from overspeaking](#) include establishing a “rabbit hole minder” at large meetings, encouraging consideration for other potential contributors, and ensuring meeting agendas are realistically filled based on the time allotted.

## Keep Large Meetings Moving

Large meetings are an especially fertile ground for overspeaking. Applying Parkinson’s Law, which states that work expands to fill the available time, overspeaking will cause discussions to take over the meeting time—whether that dialogue is beneficial or not. What should be a short 20-minute meeting can easily take an hour or more if oversharing is welcomed and allowed.

If you find yourself—or someone on your team—taking too much meeting time discussing issues and too little time determining courses of action, limit or specify the request in those interactions. For example:

- Have attendees vote on pre-determined ideas or ask for agreement on specific concepts throughout a meeting versus asking for broad, open-ended commentary.
- Schedule a reasonable time period for

“While [overanalyzing] can sometimes lead to profound insights, more often than not, it results in getting bogged down in details that might not be particularly relevant.”

—MELODY WILDING

discussion and encourage participants to stick to it.

- Seek diverse perspectives but avoid waiting for everyone to agree.
- Don’t be afraid to table or reschedule topics for a future time if the discussion begins to jeopardize a meeting’s purpose.
- If you’re a decision-maker, don’t hesitate to say, “Thank you so much. I have all the information and insight we need to make this decision.”
- Try to consolidate, triage, or narrow down the number of choices under consideration.

“Meetings and discussions without communication guardrails can get suffocated by the weight and outsized expectations of endless possibility,” says Guttman. “More often than not, limiting the time allocated to developing ideas and making decisions will yield a net benefit.”

Admittedly, the lines between speaking and overspeaking, caution and excessive worry, and even curiosity and concern can be fuzzy, but that’s okay as long as the intention to sustain progress is understood and shared.

“It’s important to remember that the goal is not to eliminate all deep thinking, but rather to prevent it from spiraling into the unproductive kind,” writes Wilding.

Using the right mindset and tactics to drive relevant discussion versus unnecessary overspeaking, you can successfully move your meetings—and efforts—from paralysis to productivity.

**Joel Schwartzberg** is a professional speaker, presentation coach, and author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team and Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on X @TheJoelTruth.



# Spreading the Word on Corporate Clubs

As an Area Director, I had the privilege of guiding and growing clubs in the workplace.

By **Tim Muhundan**

Imagine empowering your team with a transformative skill—the confidence to speak fearlessly and command any room. By establishing a corporate Toastmasters club, you can witness your team’s communication and leadership abilities skyrocket.

While serving as an Area Director in Auckland, New Zealand, during the 2023–2024 program year, I had the privilege of collaborating with multiple corporate clubs. These clubs are more than just a venue for improving public speaking skills; they are a breeding ground for leadership and a catalyst for workplace transformation.

A few club experiences stand out from my term. I had the pleasure of attending a ceremony for the Datacom Toastmasters Tahī corporate club in Auckland when it was honored with the prestigious Toastmasters Corporate Recognition Award, a testament to the technology company’s unwavering commitment to nurturing communication and leadership skills across its workforce. Datacom sponsors membership fees, provides well-equipped meeting spaces, and actively promotes participation among employees.

During my official visits to this club, I was particularly impressed by its forward-thinking approach to hybrid meetings. Members skillfully balanced the dynamics between in-person attendees and over 30 remote participants, ensuring fairness and full engagement for everyone involved. In today’s global marketplace, displaying a comfort level with both in-person and virtual communication, whether delivering presentations or conducting meetings, is critical.

My involvement with Orators of Demosthe-

nes Toastmasters Club was also deeply fulfilling. Members formed this club at the Auckland office of the global accounting firm KPMG, and I had the opportunity to observe and contribute to a well-oiled machine that seamlessly integrates Toastmasters into its corporate framework. I was grateful for the assistance of my Division Director, Joanna Perry, who helped the club run its first contest and encouraged members to push their boundaries. The enthusiasm and growth seen in club members reflect the club’s success and its profound impact on individual achievements.

In addition to my visits with established clubs, I served as the club mentor for the newly chartered Waikorero club—a corporate club sponsored by Watercare Services Limited. From the first meeting, it was clear that Watercare was poised to foster a positive and engaging environment. I worked closely with fellow club mentor Dean Ching Yee, DTM, along with the club’s founding members, to cultivate a culture that emphasizes personal growth, open communication, and mutual support. Waikorero members grew more confident and were able to share deeply personal and vulnerable stories. It can only be a good thing when people who work together learn more about each other’s lives.

At the last meeting I attended, one member’s story about losing a team member touched the audience so deeply that there was hardly a dry eye in the room. These moments of genuine connection and emotional sharing underscore why I am so passionate about Toastmasters and corporate clubs in particular. It’s about more



Tim Muhundan

than just public speaking; it’s about creating spaces where people can grow, connect, and support each other in ways that resonate deeply both personally and professionally.

Do you have 20 friends at work to help form a Toastmasters club? Here’s why your company might consider starting one:

- **Skill Development:** Through the structured Toastmasters program, employees can develop key professional skills such as public speaking, effective communication, and strategic leadership.
- **Employee Engagement and Retention:** These clubs foster a supportive community within the workplace, boosting morale and increasing employee retention.
- **Inclusive Culture:** In club meetings that can be conducted in person or virtually, employees from various parts of the organization can connect, promoting a more inclusive company culture.

Imagine the buzz as your team members deliver knockout presentations and lead meetings like seasoned pros. It’s not just about speaking better—it’s about building a supportive community right where you work.

**Tim Muhundan** is an Immediate Past Area Director in Auckland, New Zealand, Past Vice President Education for the West Harbour Toastmasters club in Auckland, and a club sponsor for [Hobsonville Toastmasters/Speechcraft Club](#), a new club in New Zealand. He is the founder of Automate.CX—a training and consulting company. You can reach him at [tim@Automate.CX](mailto:tim@Automate.CX).



## Table Topics Dilemmas—Solved!

The all-new Answer Man responds to your inquiries.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Over the past 11 years I have written articles on topics ranging from speechwriting to team building in the *Toastmaster* magazine. As a longtime member, I enjoy writing about topics that are helpful to Toastmasters, especially the newer members.

Our plan, starting with this article, is to address some of those questions. So, if you are struggling with something Toastmasters related, email your questions to [magazine@toastmasters.org](mailto:magazine@toastmasters.org). We will answer as many as we can through this new column: The Answer Man.

For now, I've chosen a couple of recent questions posted in [The Official Toastmasters International Members Group on Facebook](#), both centered on Table Topics.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** If you have a question for The Answer Man, email it to [magazine@toastmasters.org](mailto:magazine@toastmasters.org) for a chance to be featured in an upcoming column.

Questions are occasionally edited for clarity and brevity.



### What are some ways a new member can come up with Table Topics questions, particularly for a themed meeting?

—Angela Lee, DTM,  
New York City

This, obviously, is the key skill in being a Table Topicsmaster. Hopefully, you know at least something about the selected theme. If not, a search engine is your friend. This should give you more than enough information to prepare.

While some people like to write questions that require speakers to be creative, I like to give them questions that are easy to answer. I want to help them practice and improve their confidence in answering questions.

Here are some examples of questions I have asked. “Do you like the time change? Why or why not?” “Tell us about your favorite driving-in-the-snow adventure.” During a club meeting with the theme Putting Your Best Foot Forward, I asked, “How would you encourage a brand-new member of our club to put their best foot forward in their speaking projects?”

One of the benefits of these types of questions is that you get to know something about the other members, especially if you are a new member. It can help you feel more comfortable and like less of a newbie or stranger.

### Should the Table Topicsmaster call on people at random or should the Topicsmaster ask for volunteers?

—Regina Litman, DTM,  
Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

There are different approaches, and all are effective, but the one I like is “C: None of the above.”

The policy I prefer is that everyone should get a

chance to speak at every meeting. My experience is that when the Table Topicsmaster calls on people at random, they tend to call on people they want to hear speak. These are usually people who already do a good job at Table Topics and may not need the practice as much as others do.

As to volunteers—it seems that those who need the practice rarely volunteer.

The method I use is as follows: When I receive the meeting agenda, I make three columns. The first is a list of those who do not have a meeting role. The second is for those with minor roles, such as the timer, Ah-Counter, or grammarian. The third column is for those who have a major role. This includes the Toastmaster of the Day, the speakers, the General Evaluator, and the speech evaluators.

When I am the Table Topicsmaster, I call on members listed in the first column; that way, if there are any members who don't have a role, everyone gets their turn onstage. When I have finished that column, I go to the second one, thus giving those with minor roles more stage time. Finally, if there is time remaining, I tackle the third column.

As an exception to that rule, sometimes there is someone who desperately needs to improve their impromptu skills. I might ask them a question, even if they have a key role.

I hope these tips are useful, and that you'll find many more in this column as we go forward. Don't be afraid to ask your questions. If you are stumped about something, chances are, others are too.

If nothing else, look at it as asking me a Table Topics question. Just don't ask me to volunteer. 😊

**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at [billbrown-speechcoach.com](http://billbrown-speechcoach.com).

# New Accredited Speakers Exemplify Resilience

The two accomplished women persevered through previous doubts.

By Stephanie Darling



Lauren Parsons, DTM, and Maureen Zappala, DTM, earned the coveted title of Accredited Speaker (AS) at the 2024 Toastmasters International Convention in Anaheim, California, becoming the 94th and 95th candidates to achieve the designation since the AS program began in 1981.

The [AS designation](#) is given to professional speakers who combine expert knowledge in a particular subject with mastery of the spoken word.

It's the highest-earned designation recognized by Toastmasters. Applicants must pass two levels of judging, including a live convention presentation.

As unlikely as it might seem now, both Parsons and Zappala have grappled with letdowns and self-doubt during their speaking careers. Both have felt the sting of failure and the warmth of appreciative audiences. Each shared messages of resilience and self-awareness, peppered with insight and humor, in their final-round AS speeches.

## Lauren Parsons

"I want to create a positive ripple in the world," says Parsons, who joined Toastmasters in 2014 in Canberra, Australia, and is now a member of the PN Advanced Toastmasters club in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

She's an author, television host, and renowned expert and speaker (including giving a TEDx Talk) on workplace

"Fear of failure can stop you in your tracks, which is why we've got to learn to carry that fear with us and have the courage to turn up anyway."

— LAUREN PARSONS, DTM, AS

well-being. She's also been recognized as New Zealand's 2023–2024 Keynote Speaker and Educator of the Year by the Professional Speakers Association.

Parsons' "positive ripple" became a formidable wave of an AS speech, as she told the convention audience of a devastating flood that swept through their family home and Parsons' home office, and how her family gathered the resilience to "not just survive but truly thrive," a phrase she used as the title of her AS speech. Positive thoughts were unthinkable at first, as they watched muddy water flow into their home. Dealing with the lengthy list of recovery tasks was like "juggling balls that felt like boulders," Parsons said.

Yet love, gratitude, staying active, and being present—resiliency principles Parsons has shared with audiences for decades—repeatedly proved their validity as the family united to navigate the storm life had thrown their way.

"What this flood taught me is that these principles really do work, and you have to apply them, even if you don't feel like it," Parsons noted in her speech. Resiliency, she added, "doesn't come from luck. It's a skill you can learn."

"I wouldn't wish a flood on anyone, but I'm grateful for the lessons we've learned and the blessing of sticking together through all the ups and downs."

Over time, Zappala learned that her “fraud fears” were symptoms of a thought pattern held by thousands of people—impostor syndrome.

### Connecting With the Crowd

As she presented her AS speech during the Anaheim convention, Parsons’ connection with the audience was obvious; they listened intently, laughed vigorously, and eagerly joined calls for audience participation. The response delighted Parsons, who knows that “putting the audience first is everything.”

In her blog post “[The Journey to Becoming an Accredited Speaker](#),” Parsons notes that not every step in her quest to earn the AS designation was easy—or pleasant. In 2021, she made it to the second-level presentation, which was held online that year due to COVID. She didn’t receive the award. The loss hurt; however, she eventually saw the situation’s silver lining.

“Fear of failure can stop you in your tracks, which is why we’ve got to learn to carry that fear with us and have the courage to turn up anyway,” she wrote in an article in *New Zealand’s Good* magazine. “You are not your results. Whether you win or lose ... whether they say ‘yes’ or ‘not yet’ ... you are still you. You are amazing just the way you are.”

### Maureen Zappala

Zappala is a longtime professional speaker and expert on impostor syndrome. She became both because, despite her professional achievements, her inner career critic would often tell her she was a phony and not nearly as capable as those around her.

“I had to talk myself out of my own impostor syndrome, so my first audience was myself,” she laughs. It’s an unusual confession for a woman who knew from age 7 that she wanted to be an engineer and went on to a notable career as a rocket scientist.

Zappala earned a degree in mechanical engineering and began her “dream job” at 22, as a project engineer and later Facility Manager for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Propulsion System Laboratory at the Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. She loved the job but struggled with self-doubt when she compared herself to her impressive colleagues. How could she ever think of herself as a peer, or a valued contributor to the work?

Over time, Zappala learned that her “fraud fears” were symptoms of a thought pattern held by thousands of people—impostor syndrome. She wanted to break free of it and support others in making “peace with their impostor” so they could finally see the unique qualities in themselves that were already obvious to those around them.

### Speaking and Solutions

Zappala is an inaugural licensed associate with the Impostor Syndrome Institute, which bills itself as the world’s leading source of impostor syndrome solutions since 1983. Earning the AS designation has been especially gratifying, Zappala says, as it’s a rigorous program designed just for Toastmasters. She credits the organization with influencing her speaking life since she first joined in 1999.

She credits Toastmasters for helping her hone speaking skills and providing decades of evaluations, stage time, and practice before real audiences from the club level to the international stage. As a member,

she’s won well over 50 speech contests and advanced twice (2009 and 2020) to the final round of the International Speech Contest: the World Championship of Public Speaking. She has belonged to several clubs and is now a member of Henderson Toasters in Henderson, Nevada.

Zappala is known for bringing practical solutions and, often, belly-laugh humor to her speeches. Her AS speech, “Confidence is NOT Rocket Science,” was no exception, and earned her a standing ovation.

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



“I had to talk myself out of my own impostor syndrome, so my first audience was myself.”

– MAUREEN ZAPPALA, DTM, AS

# BOOSTING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Tips to recognize your self-worth and help you succeed.

By Emily Sachs, DTM



Having a high self-esteem can help many of us accomplish our biggest goals in life. Take Oscar, a small, fluffy, white Bichon Frise dog, for example. Nothing was going to stop Oscar from his goal of being free to explore the great outdoors of his Winnipeg neighborhood. Not even an invisible fence.

The grating noise and subsequent jolt from the electric collar that successfully stops most dogs from daring to cross a property line was no match for the determined dog, much to the dismay of his owner, Greg Wood, DTM, who chased after his Houdini impersonator on several occasions.

“He was willing to put up with the pain to get what he wanted. It’s the same with us moving beyond our self-limiting beliefs,” says Wood, a Toastmasters Accredited Speaker in Manitoba, Canada, and a frequent speaker on self-esteem. “We need to pass through that pain. No one’s going to get their dreams in the comfort zone.”

Oscar embodied the essence of exceptional self-esteem: The power to go beyond our limits, whether self-imposed or set by others. It is the driving force that brings most people to Toastmasters. But it is also a concept frequently conflated with confidence, another attribute of good leaders and speakers.

## Self-Esteem vs. Confidence

Although self-esteem and confidence are similar concepts, they are not interchangeable. Confi-

dence is the knowledge that we have developed the skills to successfully accomplish a task. Not enough confidence and you won’t even try; too much confidence and you risk being overconfident and aiming for goals that you aren’t ready for, Wood cautions.

On the other hand, self-esteem is the self-worth we build inside ourselves and the distance we place between us and success, Wood says. Low self-esteem manifests itself through impostor syndrome. Take public speaking, for example. You might have the experience and technical ability to appear before an audience to deftly deliver a presentation, but you don’t feel deserving of the opportunity: “I shouldn’t be here. They should have paid a professional,” our waning self-worth might declare.

This is why poor self-esteem is such a powerful barrier to believing in achieving. “You can’t meet your dream with low self-esteem,” Wood says.

## 5 Steps to Increase Your Self-Esteem

High self-esteem is directly correlated with greater personal and professional success. For many years, parents and developmental psychologists translated this into rewarding children with participation trophies and attendance ribbons. But the intended effect of increasing self-esteem was lost in the hollow recognition. Recognizing hard work and grit has a much

“You can’t meet your dream with low self-esteem.”

—GREG WOOD, DTM, AS

greater outcome with resilience and success, according to bestselling author and child psychologist Carol Dweck.

The good news is that, unlike confidence, there is no ceiling on self-esteem: Our imagination is the limit. Even better, self-esteem is the ultimate DIY project, and probably the most important home-grown produce that you will ever cultivate.

“You’ve got to do it yourself. Other people can’t build your self-esteem, and you can’t rely on what other people think of you,” Wood says.

Wood, a magician by trade, has developed a 5-step process to boost self-esteem, which combines to form the acronym “magic”:

- 1. Move beyond self-limiting beliefs and, yes, even fences.** Unleash your inner Oscar by taking small risks or by challenging yourself to do something outside of your comfort zone. Maybe it is delivering a humorous speech or serving as grammarian when English isn’t your first language.

**2. Add value to others.** Assisting others, such as serving in a leadership role in your Toastmasters club, helps other people and, in turn, builds you up. “It’s really hard to feel bad about yourself when you’re doing something good for somebody else,” Wood notes.

**3. Guard your self-talk.** If you introduce yourself to new people by admitting that you are bad at remembering names, you are speaking defeat aloud and it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, Wood says. Instead, share that you are working on getting better with names. Self-talk speaks the loudest, so make sure you are saying the best things.

**4. Identify a one-word strategy.** Motivational speaker John Maxwell suggests you start by writing down 100 positive traits about yourself, a challenging exercise that forces you to acknowledge that you bring a lot to the table. From there, Wood says to pick one of these positive attributes as your core or North Star. Wood’s is “stick-to-itiveness,” which means he perseveres no matter what.

Compare yourself to you and only you. Your journey is yours alone, so you can only measure your progress to where you were a month ago, a year ago, or more. Toastmasters is perfectly suited for this because speech evaluations and post-speech assessments help you see how far you have come.

## Improving Self-Esteem Through Toastmasters

Joining a Toastmasters club is a great way to help boost your self-esteem. From improving your presentations through evaluations and gaining experience as an officer to becoming a confident speaker and leader, Toastmasters helps members recognize their self-worth and can often lead to personal or professional success.

Rashmi Raghav, DTM, a member of Famosa Toastmasters Club in Melaka, Malaysia, is a perfect example. Raghav grew up very sheltered within her protective family in New Delhi, India, she says. Every need was met—as were all her goals, including school, career, and marriage. Yet, her childhood photos show a girl who never smiled. “I realized I [was] lacking the confidence to voice up, stand up, and speak up,” she recalls.

Raghav ended up marrying a man who was her emotional polar opposite. His fearlessness of adversity was a counterweight to her emotional calm. Then came a life-changing move across the Bay of Bengal to Malaysia.

Far from her creature comforts, in a new country with diverse cultures and languages, she felt unmoored and hesitant to make connections lest she offend others. That is until her husband introduced her to Toastmasters. She attended some meetings and excitedly volunteered to help her husband with his speeches. It sparked a desire to join a club herself, which she did in 2018.

“I was very clear with a question in my mind why I’m joining Toastmasters. I want to be the better version of myself. I want to see Rashmi as a confident public speaker,” she says now. Her vision became a reality in 2023 when she took a full-time role as a corporate trainer. She now teaches [emotional intelligence](#) to audiences from various industries.

“When I see people connect with my stories ... that brings a beautiful smile on my face,” Raghav says. “It’s increasing day by day because I’m getting connected to the people. I’m inspiring them. I’m influencing them about their hidden potential.”

## Centered on Core Values

Raghav credits her transformation to the opportunities she got through Toastmasters. For example, serving as the Public Relations Manager for District 102, she was able to double-down on her strengths and delegate her weaknesses to others. She also surrounded herself with like-minded leaders. As it turns out, leadership isn’t so challenging when it feels like an extension of family.

Ultimately, Raghav says her self-esteem soared when she became clear about her core values, or her “compass.” Family comes first, followed by honesty and integrity.

Knowing what matters most to her also improved her self-talk, which further helped to drown out negative noise about presenting her culture too much when she speaks. “Connecting with my roots gives a different kind of confidence within me,” she said. “And when I am embracing this with full confidence, it helps to build that self-esteem.”

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**Emily Sachs, DTM**, is a freelance writer in Brooklyn, New York. She currently serves as the District 119 Director and is a regular contributor to the Toastmaster magazine.



Rashmi Raghav, DTM, of Melaka, Malaysia, credits Toastmasters with boosting her self-esteem by offering her challenges as well as community.

# SET YOURSELF UP FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2025

Use these strategies to set and achieve real goals.

By Olya Amelina

Did you know that, according to commonly cited statistics, 80% of people give up on their New Year's resolutions by mid-February? And only 8% succeed in maintaining them for the entire year.

Read more if you want to be among those 8%.

But hold on—do you really need to set goals for the year ahead? Let's dig into why we humans have a deep-seated need to set goals in the first place. It's not because "everyone does it." Human beings are wired to strive, grow, and improve. This drive for betterment helped our ancestors survive millions of years ago and continues to shape us today.

It propels us to explore possibilities beyond our current realities, whether by mastering new skills to feel and function better or developing innovative solutions to improve the world. In other words, goals fill your life with purpose, whether it's self-improvement, contributing to society, or achieving something personally meaningful.

Now, you might wonder: *If goals are so important to our nature, why do we struggle so much to stick to them?* Let's tackle this one step at a time.



## Dig Deeper to Identify Your Real Goal

Have you set your goal correctly? At first glance, desires like “sleep better,” “become more efficient,” or “eat healthier” sound like solid goals. But these are often surface-level desires—they’re missing the deeper connection between who you are now and who you want to become. Without that deeper understanding, you can feel lost in the middle of your journey, unsure why you’re even doing it.

Pause for a moment and think. What’s your real goal? What’s driving your desire to change?

Here’s an example. I’m a health and performance coach, and one of my clients wanted help refining his nutrition habits. But as we explored further, we realized that his real issue wasn’t just about eating better—it was about how he felt throughout his day. He relied heavily on willpower, which drained his energy, affected his work, and left him feeling sluggish and disconnected from others.

His true goal was much deeper: to wake up energized, laser-focused, and excited about his work, ultimately bringing his company to a place where it could contribute to society. When we uncovered his real goal, everything shifted. Nutrition was just one part of the bigger picture. Once he understood the deeper “why,” he became more fired up and committed to the work.

Here’s something most people don’t realize: When you correctly identify your goal, you start seeing the big picture. You get clarity not only on what you want but also on what you need to achieve it.

## Filling Your Toolbox—What Are You Missing?

Now that you’ve identified your real goal, the next step is figuring out what tools you’re missing. Everything you’ve done up until now has gotten you to where you are. But moving forward requires something more—new skills, knowledge, and strategies. This is where curiosity comes in. Staying curious and ready to explore new ideas will open doors to more efficient solutions.

For example, another client of mine, an athlete preparing for a major event, struggled with poor recovery because he wasn’t getting

enough sleep. He was sure his routine couldn’t be optimized further. But after taking a closer look at his daily flow, we discovered he spent hours preparing meals. Once we streamlined his meal prep—by shifting it to twice a week and simplifying his food choices—he saved one to two hours a day, which he invested in better sleep.

The lesson? Sometimes, it’s not about working harder but working smarter. Stay curious, identify what’s missing, and be ready to explore new approaches.

## Confronting Fears—What’s Holding You Back?

At this point, you might start to feel a bit anxious. You’ve got your goal, you’ve identified your missing

The key to staying consistent is small actions.

tools, but then those familiar thoughts creep in: *I can’t do this, it’s too hard, or I don’t know how.*

We’ve all been there.

The trick is to name your fears. Take a moment and make a list. What’s holding you back? What are the concerns, doubts, and worries lurking beneath the surface?

As Mike Molloy, founder of M2 Performance Nutrition and a coach to CrossFit Games athletes, Olympians, and NFL players, advises:



“Identify and address any hidden competing commitments that might conflict with the goal, such as fears or subconscious beliefs that sabotage progress.”

Often, it's not that you can't do something—it's that the task is new, unfamiliar, or tied to a deeper fear. As Molloy explains, clients often overlook emotional or psychological barriers like fear of failure, which quietly drive resistance to change.

By bringing these fears to the surface, you give names to the monsters you need to fight. And once you've named them, they become a lot less scary.

## Identify Your Key Focus Areas

At this point, you should be getting excited—because now comes the part where you turn your dreams into actions. Think of two to three key areas to focus on that will help you achieve your goal.

When I decided to improve my public speaking skills, my focus areas were clear: work with a tutor to identify and tackle weaknesses, practice regularly by making videos for Instagram, attend a local Toastmasters club, and do self-work by reviewing recordings of my talks.

Your key areas will depend on your goal. For example, if your goal is to increase energy levels and improve nutrition, your focus areas might be: diversify your diet, prioritize whole foods, and eat regularly.

Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to change everything overnight. Your brain, which constantly works to conserve energy, will get overloaded. You'll feel fatigued, and motivation will drop.

So, take the next step: Break it down into small actions.

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Tracking your progress is one of the most powerful ways to stay on course. When you keep everything in your head, it's easy to lose sight of your progress, especially on bad days.

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## Start Small—The Power of Micro-actions

Right now, as you're reading this, you might feel motivated to go all in. But let me tell you—that feeling won't last every day. Life happens, challenges arise, and your enthusiasm can wane.

The key to staying consistent is small actions.

Imagine this: Each small action is like planting a seed. You might not see the results right away, but over time, these seeds grow into a thriving tree of success. Start with actions so small that it's easier to do them than to skip them. Something like doing one minute of breathwork, adding one vegetable to a meal, or going to bed five minutes earlier. These tiny actions create small wins that give you a sense of accomplishment, which in turn fuels more positive actions.

### Here's why small actions work:

- They reduce fear of failure.
- They don't require massive amounts of willpower or motivation.
- They make setbacks less dramatic, so it's easier to bounce back.

Now, take a moment to reflect. Based on your key focus areas, what's one small action you can start doing today? Something that feels manageable—not what you *should* do, but something you *can* do.

## Track Your Progress—Create a Positive Feedback Loop

Consistency is key, but how do you stay consistent on tough days? It's not just about discipline—it's about paying attention to your journey.

Tracking your progress is one of the most powerful ways to stay on course. When you keep everything in your head, it's easy to lose sight of your progress, especially on bad days. But when you track your actions, you can look back and see how far you've come.

How should you track your progress? Keep it simple. Use whatever format works for you, whether it's a digital app or an old-school notebook. Write down what you did each day, how it made you feel, and at the end of each week, reflect on what worked and why, as well as what didn't. Progress tracking keeps you grounded, reminding you that you're moving forward, even with small steps.

## Curiosity Over Motivation

Motivation comes and goes, but how you approach the journey is completely up to you. Francesco Puppi, a renowned ultra-trail runner, says, “I'm motivated by the simple accumulation of miles and hours of training, by getting better at the craft, by the perspective of freedom that having a full range of possibilities in front of me offers.”

Puppi also shared that motivation comes from the experience itself, regardless of the outcome. He noted that while many factors are beyond our control, it's our approach to the journey and what we take away from it that truly matters.

It's not just about the end goal. It's about learning, growing, and staying curious along the way. When you approach your goal with this mindset, the journey becomes a transformation in itself.

Now it's time to get started. You have the tools, exercises, and mindset to not only set goals but stick to them. As you move through the year, remember that every small step matters. Focus on the process, track your progress, and watch how your small actions ripple into big transformations.

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**Olya Amelina** is a health and performance coach who helps athletes and business professionals develop daily routines that enable them to take control of their time, maintain high energy levels, and feel good while achieving their big goals. She lives in Germany. Learn more at [LinkedIn](#).



# Your Goals Guide

Fill out this worksheet to take steps toward success.

Once you have identified your [true goal](#), outline your next steps and maintain your motivation. Use this worksheet to help you achieve your aims in 2025.

Remember, choose steps that feel manageable to maximize your motivation. Remaining curious will ensure you keep growing and learning.



## True Goal

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

## Skills or knowledge I need to acquire:

- 
- 
- 

## What is holding me back?

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- 
- 

## What are some key focus areas for my goal?

- 
- 
- 

## Micro-actions:

- 
- 
- 

## How will I track my progress?

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|  |
|--|

## What more do I want to learn to stay motivated?

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# Celebrating 100 Years of Toastmasters

Members commemorate the centennial anniversary with parties, decorations, and Dr. Ralph C. Smedley.

In October 2024, Toastmasters International celebrated its 100th anniversary. Around the world, members and clubs found unique ways to commemorate this historic milestone—from specially designed cakes and t-shirts featuring the 100-year logo to cutouts of Dr. Ralph C. Smedley and digital centennial wallpapers.

Take a look at some of the fun ways members enjoyed this festive occasion.



Toastmasters in **District 81, Division I** celebrate with members of the **Anguilla Toastmasters Club**, who traveled to Sint Maarten from The Valley, Anguilla.



**NOA Toastmasters Club** in Elst, Netherlands



**Sharla Sare, DTM**, and **Keith Kuramoto**, both of Hilo, Hawaii



**Kildare Toastmasters** in Kildare Town, Ireland



**Heartland Talk of the Town club** in Sebring, Florida



Members of **The Colombo Toastmasters Club** and the **Pinnacle Advanced Toastmasters Club**, both in Colombo, Sri Lanka, celebrate Toastmasters' anniversary with a Diwali theme.



Dr. Ralph C. Smedley—in cutout form—visits members of the **Prince Albert Toastmasters Club #1318** in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, during a visit with Area Director Linda Holmevik, DTM.



**Elizabeth Thomas**, an Area Director for District 31, takes Dr. Smedley with her to visit the **Quannapowitt Toastmasters club** in Quincy, Massachusetts.



**Papakura Toastmasters Club** in Auckland, New Zealand



**Leão Do Norte club** of Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil



**Bay Bloor Speakers club** in Toronto, Ontario, Canada



**Word Weavers Toastmasters Club #400** of Concord, California



# Cultivate

## CREATIVITY WITH CURIOSITY

The desire to learn opens up a world of possibilities.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

**H**ave you ever thought of yourself as a “creative”? When we think of creative people, most of us tend to imagine someone in the arts: a sculptor, a writer, a musician. Yet teachers, scientists—even midwives—also require creativity to do their jobs, and live their lives, as effectively as possible.

Statistics show that only about 40% of people consider themselves to be creative. This may make you wonder: Is creativity something we’re born with, or is it something we can learn? And if we can learn it, how? Believe it or not, the key to tapping into your own creativity is no big mystery. It’s simply a matter of cultivating curiosity.

## Creativity Defined

What is creativity in the first place? It can be hard to say exactly. In some ways, it is the mixture of many related factors. Just as mountains are made of rocks that are made of minerals, artistic creations and scientific innovations emerge from the skills, knowledge, and experiences that their creators have acquired throughout their lives.

Margaret A. Boden, professor of philosophy and psychology at the University of Sussex in England, says some scholars think of creativity as “novel combinations of old ideas.” Boden uses the example of Beatles legends John Lennon and Paul McCartney’s surprising use of the cello in their iconic hit “Yesterday.” Who else at the time, she wonders, would have thought to include a classical instrument in a recording of a rock ‘n’ roll ballad? A novel combination indeed.

Creativity is also useful in a wide range of activities outside the arts—from business to medicine to human relationships and beyond. It allows us to develop new solutions to old problems. It can even save us from disasters. In the 1985 American television show *MacGyver*, it was the lead character’s creative problem-solving that led him to use a simple paper clip to defuse a bomb!

## The Curiosity/Creativity Connection

A little more than 30 years ago, Julia Cameron produced a bestselling book called *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. In it she posited that to be human is to be creative, and creativity is the “natural order of life.” So how do we tap into ours? Creativity is a matter of combining existing ideas, but it also requires curiosity—that is, the strong desire to know or learn something. After all, how can we know which ideas to combine if we aren’t interested in acquiring a storehouse of knowledge in the first place?

Biologists tell us that all living creatures can exhibit a sense of curiosity, and humans are

“When I write Toastmasters speeches, I tend to look inward to my own history. That’s because I am very curious as to why I did what I did, what I learned from it, and how that can be useful to others.”

— ADELE ALEXANDRE

among the most curious. For example, Adele Alexandre, a member of The Toastmasters Club at FAU (Florida Atlantic University), enjoyed a lifelong career of midwifery, first sparked by her abundant curiosity. Since the births of her younger brother and the siblings of her friends, she yearned to know more about the process of childbirth. As a young girl, she found very few resources for acquiring the information she sought. When she was an adult, however, Alexandre found a classic text on the subject, which

she read cover to cover. She went on to train in her chosen profession, and has brought 1,300 babies into the world.

Alexandre’s curiosity came from internal motivation—she wanted to learn for learning’s sake, not simply to satisfy an external goal, such as a task she was given. Without that strong internal desire, we have a harder time being creative, because we don’t care as much about finding new ways to do things. Curiosity leads us to be open to new experiences and meet new



people, which enhances creativity, particularly when we collaborate with those we meet.

And it should come as no surprise that curiosity enhances learning, because we are inspired to seek out information. It even releases the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine, reinforcing the urge to be even more curious.

## Four Types of Curiosity

[Brittanica's Curiosity Compass](#) is a kind of test where, through answers to a series of questions, you learn about the four curiosity types: intuitive creators (artists), inquisitive creators (inventors), intuitive discoverers (explorers), and inquisitive discoverers (scientists).

If you see yourself in one of these categories, you can more easily determine the path to access your own creativity.

- **Artists** reflect on the meaning of art and human experience, engage with the work of others, imagine different ways of being, and produce art that expresses who they are and what they have imagined.
- **Inventors** envision innovations with an eye toward the future, to problem-solve, and to reproduce existing things to learn how to improve upon them.

- **Explorers** leave their comfort zones to engage with new people, places, and ideas, with the goal of understanding and connecting with others.
- **Scientists** seek to learn why things are the way they are through focused research and observation, in order to advance human skills and technologies and share their knowledge.

Where do you place yourself in this list—within one category or several? How can it help you reach your creative goals?

## How to Nurture Curiosity and Creativity

If we are all born with curiosity and creativity, the key for many of us is to revive these dormant abilities. Here are some tips for nourishing both curiosity and creativity:

At the start of Cameron's *The Artist's Way*, which is a 12-week program for enhancing creativity, she introduces two tools, the first to be done daily and the second to be done weekly.

Creativity is a matter of combining existing ideas, but it also requires curiosity—that is, the strong desire to know or learn something.

1. Every morning, fill up three pages by writing down anything that comes into your head. Cameron dubs this ritual “morning pages,” and it is an opportunity to drain your brain of whiny, negative, self-censoring thoughts. What you write may be fragmented and make little sense. There is no wrong way to write down your thoughts, as long as you do them every day. Think of them, Cameron says, as a form of meditation that will help you free your creative brain.
2. Then, once a week, block out about two hours to nourish your inner artist by going on an “artist date.” That may mean going to a museum or a play, but it could just as easily be a walk on the beach, a bowling outing—anything to feed your open-to-experience inner child. You will soon see that this step helps enhance your curiosity as well as your creativity. What is out there to do? What would you like to do? How do you go about doing it?

According to business coach and marketing expert Jason Hennessey, even CEOs must enhance their creativity in order to develop the vision they need to move their companies forward. His recommendations pertain to burnishing curiosity as well as creativity:



1. Keep stress levels down—exhaustion and burnout prevent us from thinking clearly.
2. Like Cameron, Hennessey suggests carving out time for creativity in your day or week so creative thinking can become habitual.
3. Stay focused on your creative goals—discipline yourself to stick to whatever creative endeavor you have chosen.

## Curiosity and Creativity in Your Club

What's a good source for tapping into these two qualities as a Toastmaster? You almost can't help but nurture both curiosity and creativity in Toastmasters.

"When I write Toastmasters speeches," says Alexandre, "I tend to look inward to my own history. That's because I am very curious as to why I did what I did, what I learned from it, and how that can be useful to others."

Every Ice Breaker speech introduces a new club member to curious strangers—some of whom may go on to become colleagues and friends. Every speech requires curiosity on the part of the writer, who seeks a topic, as well as the listeners, for whom it opens up a new world of skills or information.

Add to the educational sessions, the Word of the Day, contests, and conventions, and you see how Toastmasters can be a curiosity/creativity factory par excellence. One of the most creative aspects of Toastmasters is Table Topics®. I have always been curious to see how the speaker will creatively answer a question off the cuff!

Stuart Pink, the author of *Brainarium: Exercise Your Creativity*, is a member of the Achievers Toastmasters Club in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and the third-place winner in the 2012 World Championship of Public Speaking®. Pink notes that speakers always need to determine how to stand out. Like Alexandre, he recommends focusing on your own unique experiences or stories. After all, anyone can look up statistics. But

we are the world's foremost experts on only one topic: ourselves. To keep your speech interesting to yourself as well as to your audience, consider what you want to know about yourself, and what you think they will.

Pink agrees that creativity doesn't mean making things out of thin air. If you want to be original, he says, try looking at something from a different angle and seeing value in it that someone else might not see, perhaps through humor. And if you decide to be creative in your delivery, he cautions, be sure your choice is related to your speech in some way. Otherwise, it's just a gimmick, and it probably won't work.

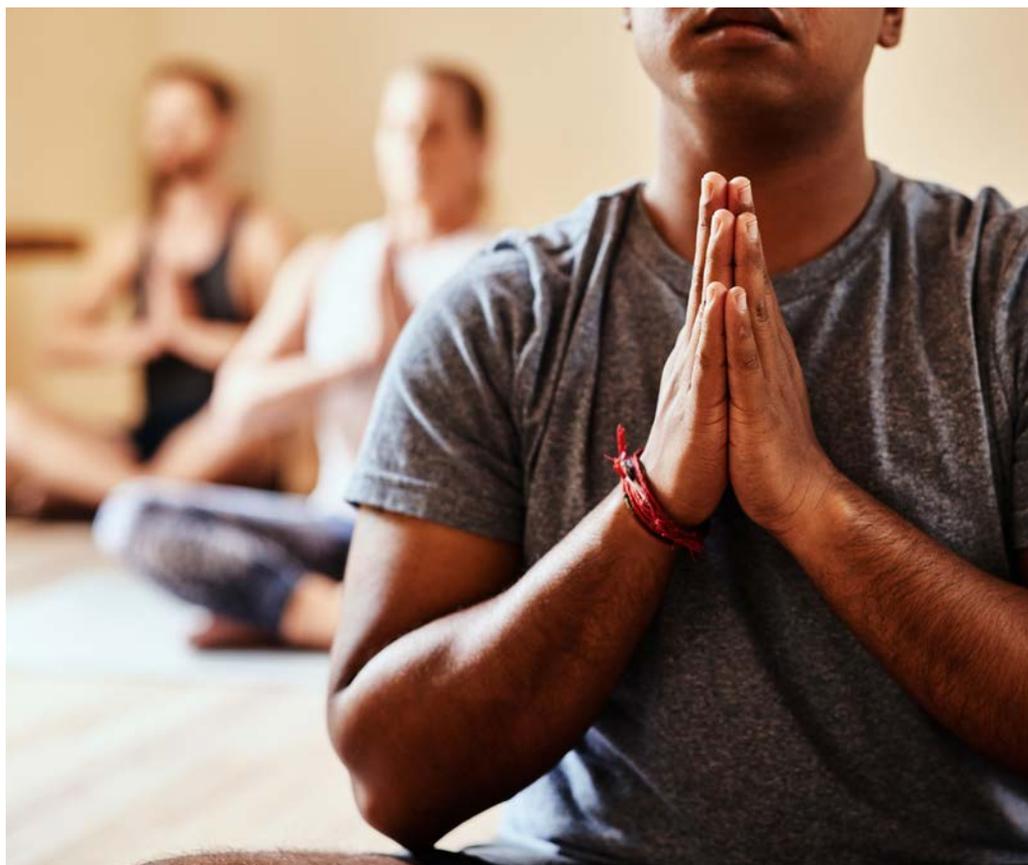
He points to the example of 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking Darren LaCroix,

who "fell" on the stage and delivered part of his winning speech from the floor. Something different, to be sure. The technique worked because it was directly related to LaCroix's topic and message.

As you see, we are all creative enough to think in unexpected ways—not simply to be different, but to be better. That's our human legacy. Aren't you curious to explore yours?

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**Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.**, has presented creatively in 14 states and eight countries, including at three Toastmasters International Conventions. Curious to learn more? You can reach her at [cneile@fau.edu](mailto:cneile@fau.edu).





## Something Old and Something New

A veteran writer debuts a column as Toastmasters turns 101.

By Paul Sterman

I have worked for the *Toastmaster* magazine a little more than 15 years. That's a pretty good chunk of time. Yet it represents about one-sixth of the magazine's colorful life—the publication debuted 92 years ago, in 1933. I'm proud to be part of this long tradition, and I have seen a parade of talented, diverse, eloquent, and inspiring Toastmasters featured on these pages.

I have written many articles about such members. I have edited even more. Now I'm trying something different: writing a column.

What to expect here? Some months, it may be an observation about public speaking or leadership, other months a discussion with someone I think is worth knowing. Whatever the topic, I'll be focusing on all things communication and leadership related, and as the name of the column says, I'll be "Speaking Out."

Of course, communication and leadership happen on the home front, too, so I may touch on that dynamic as well. As the father of a 17-year-old, I am well-versed in communication principles—listening, negotiating, conflict resolution, evaluation (where criticism is *mostly* constructive).

Persuasive speaking is a key tool in the parental arsenal. Sometimes my daughter, Hannah, is the one making the pitch—"Come on, Dad, please. The tickets don't cost that much."—and sometimes I am the one seeking to persuade. "Come on, Hannah, how about you hang out with your dear old dad tonight? We'll get pizza and watch a movie." To which the typical answer is, "Maybe. I'll see how much time I have." Or its oft-used corollary, "We'll see." Both are code for: "Not happening, Dad."

Back to the topic of Toastmasters and its rich history. What has always stood out most to me about this program is the safe space it pro-



Illustration by  
Jerry King

I'll be focusing on all things communication and leadership related, and as the name of the column says, I'll be "Speaking Out."

vides. I'm a member too. We all know how scary it feels when we first start speaking in front of an audience. We're taking a chance. We're letting ourselves be seen, literally and figuratively. We're vulnerable.

But in Toastmasters, you know that everyone in the room (be it virtual or otherwise) is on your side. Fellow members look at you, listening, smiling, wanting you to succeed. It's a safe place to share. I hope I can be the same kind of audience for Hannah, and that she, too, will be brave enough to take risks.

My connection to Toastmasters starts with something pretty cool: I grew up in Santa Ana, California, same place where Toastmasters International began, in 1924. (And yes, its birth preceded mine.) I actually remember watching my dad play handball at the Santa Ana YMCA when I was a child—the same building where Ralph C. Smedley gathered a group of men decades earlier to introduce what would become the organization we know today. So you could say Toastmasters and I have a shared history of sorts.

Last year, as Toastmasters commemorated its 100-year anniversary, I wrote history-related articles and helped produce the book *Confident Voices: The Story of Toastmasters*. (Shameless plug: Buy it to learn more!) Learning about the organization's storied history was fascinating.

More than once I found myself musing about what members were like in the early years. How did their experience compare to ours?

Did those Toastmasters, even amid the Great Depression and World War II, sit at a table sketching out notes and ideas for their next speech? Did they, too, seize up with panic when called on for Table Topics?

If you were to drop a group of Toastmasters from the 1930s into a club meeting today, my bet is they would know right where they are. Put them in a hybrid meeting and the online technology might befuddle the time travelers—somehow I see Smedley getting flustered by the mute button. But Toastmasters' past would recognize its present. Changes have been made through the years to move the organization forward, but in its purest form, the original vision remains: People practice together to improve as communicators and leaders.

So what do the next 100 years have in store for Toastmasters? Hard to know, but we start from here: January 2025. Let's launch this post-centennial adventure with passion and ambition! I'm happy to be along for the ride.

**Paul Sterman** is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*. Reach him at [pssterman@toastmasters.org](mailto:pssterman@toastmasters.org).

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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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