

TOASTMASTER®

March 2011



**Communicate
to Solve
Conflicts**

**What's In
a Name?**

Does your
Toastmasters
club name make
you smile?

**What Makes An
Exceptional
Team?**

Great groups
embrace
differences.

VIEWPOINT



Coming Soon: A Consistent Toastmasters Brand

"You now have to decide what 'image' you want for your brand. Image means personality. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the market place."

— David Ogilvy,
renowned 20th century advertising executive

I see something... something I recognize. This familiar sign tells me that I can order a personalized mocha latte or Americano. It also informs me of the quality I can expect to receive. All this knowledge rushes into my awareness as a result of seeing simple green letters on a storefront in Malaysia, Japan, South Africa, Canada, Portugal, Mexico, New Zealand or Chile. Starbucks' brand works.

KFC is another strong brand that is recognizable worldwide for its fried chicken and "Original Recipe," which hasn't changed in more than 50 years. In the automotive world, people recognize the Mercedes Benz symbol, a three-spoke emblem within a circle, as the standard in quality, safety and luxury. These three examples illustrate to me the power of branding.

While a logo allows us to visually recognize a company or its products, its brand is something greater. A brand is the personality (or "image," as Mr. Ogilvy so aptly put it) behind the product, service or company. In each example above, we recognize each company because it has consistently delivered on its promise, and our experiences with them are consistently positive.

Executed correctly, a strong brand is instantly recognizable and consumers know what its products are, as well as the quality and service to expect, because the brand reflects the same set of values regardless of whether it is in Malaysia, Japan, South Africa, Canada, Portugal, Mexico, New Zealand or Chile. And all this information is wrapped up in a single word, a few letters or a symbol.

Is Toastmasters International recognizable to our potential customers around the world? Can we be found easily by the searching public? Does the perception of our brand accurately represent our learning program? I'm not certain that it does. However, I am certain that members of the general public find it confusing when they search for the Toastmasters program and find clubs with an inconsistent look and feel. We do not advertise the same product around the world, despite the fact that we all follow the same program. We use different colors and different images, sometimes even different logos, to advertise our programs.

Despite the confusion that exists today, I am excited as I look to the future of Toastmasters International and our strategic initiative to create a consistent look and feel for our organization worldwide. It will soon be a brand that is recognized in countries around the world by the color, the content and the symbol used to advertise what we stand for. We need to decide, as David Ogilvy suggested, what image we want for our brand and make an all-inclusive commitment to it.

Pat Johnson, DTM
International President

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What's In a Name

Does the name of your company, product or Toastmasters club make you smile or scratch your head?

By Craig Harrison, DTM

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A Toastmaster's Promise

As a member of Toastmasters International and my club, I promise...

- To attend club meetings regularly;
- To prepare all of my speech and leadership projects to the best of my ability, basing them on projects in the *Competent Communication* manual, *Advanced Communication* manuals or *Competent Leadership* manual;
- To prepare for and fulfill meeting assignments;
- To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations;
- To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow;
- To serve my club as an officer when called upon to do so;
- To treat my fellow club members and our guests with respect and courtesy;
- To bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits Toastmasters membership offers;
- To adhere to the guidelines and rules for all Toastmasters educational and recognition programs;
- To maintain honest and highly ethical standards during the conduct of all Toastmasters activities.



LETTERS

Do you have something to say? Write it in 200 words or less, sign it with your name, address and club affiliation and send it to letters@toastmasters.org.

Building a Balance

Toastmasters International President Pat Johnson's November Viewpoint column, "Which Are You?" and the accompanying poem, resonated strongly with me.

I would add that it is important not only to identify the "wreckers" and "builders" within one's club, but to also recognize that each of us has the power to be both a wrecker and a builder. This column reminds me that Toastmasters is all about building leadership skills through listening, as well as speaking.

So every time I am too impressed with the sound of my own voice or the soundness of my own ideas, I will endeavor to take a step back and ask myself this question: Am I denying others the opportunity to express themselves, and by doing so, am I denying everyone – including myself – access to other viewpoints? Indeed, am I becoming a wrecker by not giving everyone around me the opportunity to help build?

Matthew J. Goldberg, ACB, CL • Voorhees Toastmasters club
Voorhees, New Jersey

Regaining the Gift of Gab

My mum said I was always a blabbermouth. I've never had any fear of facing an audience and always was the type to volunteer to speak whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Then, one day, I was delivering a presentation to 30 new employees who had joined our company. I started with the usual opening... then suddenly something kicked in, and I completely froze. I couldn't say a word. It was the most embarrassing situation of my life.

That experience devastated my confidence. From that moment, I avoided public speaking at all costs. More than one year later, I found out about Toastmasters.

Through my journey in the organization, I was able not only to go back

to being my real self – the one I had been up until that bad speaking experience – but to also further develop my communication and leadership skills in a way that I never would have thought possible.

I'm very glad to be a permanent member now. Toastmasters' wonderful and friendly environment is great for anybody.

Roberto Logica • Talk Club @ Letterkenny • Letterkenny,
County Donegal, Ireland

To Participate is to Win

Sitting with a cup of coffee one morning, I randomly turned to page 16 of the *Toastmaster* magazine's November issue. The article there by Edna Talboy, "The Reluctant Competitor," was an engaging story that showed the importance of participating in speech contests.

Ms. Talboy's article highlights the hidden potential of each of us. Sometimes we just need a kick-start. Success will come with the opportune push of good luck fueled by your ability to shine. Now I am motivated to win the upcoming contest in my club.

I am sincerely thankful to Toastmasters International for publishing the magazine and to members for writing articles of considerable value.

Vinay Jain • East Delhi Toastmasters • New Delhi, India

An Eye-Opening Odyssey

Even though I witnessed wonderful changes in my husband Frank as a result of being a Toastmaster, it took me more than a year and a half to follow him and become a member. Now it is two and a half years since I joined and my life has changed drastically. Last month I had the opportunity to travel literally halfway around the world from Canada to Indonesia on a mission trip – and one of my roles was public speaking. Amazing!

I'd like to thank Toastmasters everywhere – all the wonderful people I have met, and continue

to meet, on this marvelous self-improvement journey.

Gail Gustin, ACS, ALB • Lambton Toastmasters • Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

Speakers Shine a Light on Free Speech

I was struck by the similar themes in two articles in your December issue: "A Pioneer in Pakistan" (by Julie Bawden Davis), which profiled a Pakistani member, and "Small Steps, Great Changes" (by Maria Tomescu), which chronicled the journey of the first Toastmasters club in Romania. Both stories deal with the importance of free speech and equal opportunities, which we in the United States tend to take for granted. In many countries today, both men and women are still denied the freedom to speak and to express their true talents, as these articles clearly describe.

It's important to shine a light on places like Pakistan and Romania, so that the Toastmasters program can teach people there to find their voices. Thank you for featuring these members. The courage to change is part of Toastmasters' core values, and the members featured in these articles really live those values. I am proud to belong to the Toastmasters family with them.

Marilyn E. Jess, DTM • Last Word Toastmasters
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Hurray for Highlighting Toastmasters in Public Service

Hearty congratulations to the *Toastmaster* for its December issue emphasizing what Toastmasters has done for public servants and what public service has in turn done for our nation. I thought you would never get around to it. The articles I refer to are: "Hawaii Governor Touts Toastmasters" by Jason Garrett, "Politicians Tap into Their Club Experience" by Paul Serman, and "Levity on Capitol Hill" by Christine Clapp.

Bill D. Burlison, ACS • High-Noon Toastmasters
Cape Girardeau, Missouri

**In praise of poise,
professionalism and panache.**

Two Decades of Transformation

When I tell people I have been a Toastmaster for 21 years, I receive the most amusing responses. “*Still* in Toastmasters? Aren’t you done yet?”

I happily reply, “It’s like playing the piano. You have to keep practicing.” I then seize the opportunity to invite the person to my next club meeting. To be perfectly candid, when I joined Toastmasters my initial goal was to simply stand up and say my name in public without getting sweaty palms. I have stayed for 21 years – and will probably remain a member for the rest of my life – because I received much more than I bargained for: invaluable personal growth.

I have learned poise, professionalism and panache at the podium. I continue to experience satisfaction in sharing these benefits with others. I continue to find fulfillment from the camaraderie of a positive, supportive learning environment.

All my life, I had yearned to be proficient at public speaking, dating back to my school years. In junior high, I had to give a campaign speech in front of the school when I ran for Student Council. I felt nervous and sick to my stomach. My voice was drowned out by the sound of my knocking knees and chattering teeth. Though I only faced one competitor, I did not win.

Then came university. As a member of the Business Students’ Association at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, my job was to march from class to class to announce upcoming faculty events. I could barely

plow through the announcements without a flushed face, garbled words and indescribable fear prancing through my mind.

A Sign of Hope

Just as I was about to give up on ever feeling comfortable speaking in front of others, a flicker of hope arrived. In 1989, while working at Canadian Utilities (CU), I noticed a sign on a bulletin board that advertised a Toastmasters demonstration meeting. I thought to myself, I would love to attend – but no thanks. Been there, done that. I’ve tried public speaking before and just can’t seem to get past my nervousness.

Thankfully, a colleague convinced me to give it a try, and I ended up joining the club that very same day. Week after week I returned, watching with curiosity as Ice Breaker after Ice Breaker was presented.

I was the last club member who hadn’t given their Ice Breaker. You can run but you can’t hide, so eventually I had to do it. What an amazing feeling it was to gaze on that sea of encouraging faces. Afterward, I received a burst of constructive feedback – “Speak louder; project your voice; quit crossing and uncrossing your ankles; stop fiddling with your pen; leave your pen at the table.”


Over the years I grew with my Toastmasters family. And 21 years later, I am still a member of the same club – CU at Noon, in Edmonton. That shaky-kneed,

tongue-tied girl can now address an audience with confidence and ease. The one thing I had feared for so long – public speaking – I now love. Thank you, Toastmasters!

I have achieved my Distinguished Toastmaster designation; won speech contests all the way up to the district level; held club, area and division officer positions; given poetry readings and led public-speaking workshops in both Canada and the United States. When I am in front of an audience, I act like I own the room – and I do!

The ability to communicate effectively is crucial to everything we do in life. To succeed in almost any undertaking, we need to express ourselves clearly, crisply and with confidence. Again, thank you Toastmasters.

To connect with people, we also need to deeply listen to and understand what they are saying – not just the words, but the emotions and the message. Through speech evaluations in Toastmasters, we develop those skills, valuable life skills for building rich, rewarding relationships.

I am truly grateful to have seen that sign on the bulletin board in 1989. Being in Toastmasters has made a dramatic difference in my life. 

Joy Lardner, DTM, is a charter member of the CU at Noon Toastmasters in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In 2003, she published her first book of poetry, titled *Quietly Knowing, Warmth for the Soul*. Joy can be reached at joy.lardner@gmail.com.

Businessman improves speech patterns and adapts regional dialect.

Lawrence Cole: Accentuating the Positive

When Lawrence Cole II was an area governor and working on his DTM in the mid-2000s, he made a startling discovery. “As I looked through the DTM requirements and saw the youth programs offered, it all came back to me,” he says. “I realized that I’d participated in a Youth Leadership program when I was in sixth grade. I’d forgotten all about it until then.”

Cole grew up in Florida and, prior to joining Toastmasters, struggled with a strong Southern accent. “Florida is much more Southern than most might think,” says the marketing consultant and entrepreneur who owns a firm in Los Angeles. “My Southern accent made me memorable and added character to my talks, but I had a great deal of trouble with mumbling and broken English, which is com-

After becoming a Toastmaster in 2000, Cole received valuable advice. “I soon learned that if you have an accent, it’s important to practice slowing down your speech and enunciating,” he says. “A fellow Toastmaster taught me to read slowly right before going to bed and over-enunciate every syllable, which trained my mouth and tongue to fully make the shape of each word, and made me aware of the sounds coming out of my mouth. Doing this exercise right before retiring for the night embedded the changes in my subconscious, and that also improved my speaking.”

Cole found additional help with accent reduction by speaking as often as possible. “You’ve got to have your stage time,” he says. “Public speaking immensely improved my speaking.”

Cole has done such a good job of containing his accent that many who know him have not been conscious of it when he speaks. “The only times I’ve noticed an accent with Lawrence have been when we’ve spoken in conversation, and even then it hasn’t been distracting,” says District 1 Governor Giovanna Dottore, DTM, who has worked with Cole on several occasions. “Lawrence is a dynamic, engaging speaker who is clear, concise and comes across as commanding, yet genuine,” says Dottore, a member of the Mattel Toastmasters in El Segundo, California.

“Speaking is your best sales tool. It puts pressure on you to be clear and refined with your message.”

Cole, a member of the Singles by the Sea club in Los Angeles, California, may not have remembered being in the Youth Leadership program until a few years ago, but he does credit his past and present Toastmasters experience with shaping the speaker and business person he’s become. “When I was 12, I saw the leadership program as another irritating activity my mom wanted me to do when I’d much rather ride my bike or play video games,” he recalls. “Now, though, I’m grateful, because I think the program had a positive effect on me and helped me develop valuable speaking and leadership skills.”

mon for many with Southern dialects. It made me sound less educated than I was. I could have gotten along with the accent, but it would have held me back, and I wouldn’t have become as successful as I am.”

Seeking Strategies

In his early 20s, Cole looked to Toastmasters for help with his accent. “I realized that speech patterns are very difficult to change on your own, because you often don’t even know they exist,” he says. “It takes an objective ear to truly point out the disconnect between how you think you sound and how you actually sound.”

“My Southern accent made me memorable and added character to my talks, but I had a great deal of trouble with mumbling and broken English. ”

Accentuating Leadership Skills

In addition to seeking out Toastmasters for accent reduction, Cole joined the organization to improve his leadership and business skills. “When I went to my first meeting [the Pasadena Community Toastmasters] back in 2000, I was just 22 years old,” he says. “What I found was a magical ensemble of amazing speakers and leaders who immediately pushed me to improve my speaking and leadership skills. They didn’t allow anyone to be a wallflower – you were made to participate. After just six months of membership, I became vice president of education and that provided invaluable leadership training.”

Antonio Goodwin is a life coach based in South Pasadena who has worked with Cole over the years. “In terms of leadership, Lawrence does remarkably well,” says Goodwin. “He is able to rally support around a particular idea and explain the vision to a group so they understand it, then systematically lead the group to accomplish the task.”

Today Cole runs Xtreme Marketing Done for You, a company that provides Internet marketing services to business owners. He often gives presentations and speaks on topics related to self-promotion. “The area I specialize in is ‘attraction marketing,’ which is how to put celebrity in your brand by taking advantage of trends in marketing. Doing so creates customers who buy from you repeatedly because they trust you,” he says.

Kimberly Rhodes, who also works in the marketing industry, met Cole in Toastmasters when he joined 10 years ago.

“I watched Lawrence develop from a young man acting as an area governor to the CEO of his own company,” says the former member. “He has a great ability to get people to work together. I think this stems from the fact that he’s so well-rounded.

On the one hand, he’s analytical and confident, and on the other he is compassionate and humble.”

Cole encourages every small-business owner to join Toastmasters. “I have three main tips for entrepreneurs to make their business the best it can be, and they can be discovered in Toastmasters,” he says. “First, I suggest that every business person speak on his or her topic, because speaking is your best sales tool. It puts pressure on you to be clear and refined with your message. Second, I suggest that people take advantage of every possible leadership opportunity, and Toastmasters offers plenty in a positive environment where you learn how to deal with different types of personalities. Best of all, you’re leading a volunteer workforce, which really hones your leadership skills.

“Third, I suggest that everyone in business have a book about his or her topic. You can compile informa-



Lawrence Cole

tion from your speeches and have a writer put it into book format. A book is important because it allows you to put your own spin on a topic and makes you stand out.”

Remembering himself as a young club member and sixth-grade youth leadership participant, Cole occasionally speaks to college students, motivating them to take control of their futures.

“I talk to young people about the importance of choosing their lives as opposed to letting someone dictate how they live or just allowing things to happen,” he says. “We should all live the life that we choose – and Toastmasters helps us do just that.”

Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California and a longtime contributor to the *Toastmaster*. You can reach her at Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com.

What Makes an *Exceptional* Team?

Great groups embrace differences.

Most of us can probably search our past and quickly identify a team experience that stands apart from the rest. Whether it was in the workplace, in a Toastmasters club, on a performing-arts stage or on an athletic field, we remember the team fondly for its diverse set of individuals who just seemed to click, who consistently met or exceeded its performance goals or rarely got bogged down in interpersonal squabbles.

Conversely, we can likely point to a group experience where recurring conflict or poor communication regularly undermined productivity or performance, one that suffered from “me first” thinking and questionable leadership.

Research has shown that high-performing teams display characteristics that are vital to their success – qualities that distinguish them from less productive groups. These characteristics include sharing accountability for team results, embracing differences among members, putting the right people in the right roles and openly addressing issues of conflict so they can be resolved in a healthy manner.

Over the years, many management consultants and organizational psychologists have pondered the question, *What factors separate extraordinary teams from their mediocre or otherwise forgettable counterparts?* Few, however, have explored it with as much depth or rigor as consultants Geoffrey Bellman and Kathleen Ryan. Their findings hold lessons for anyone seeking to create a more effective and cohesive Toastmasters team or speaking experience.

In their groundbreaking research and 2009 book, *Extraordinary Groups: How Ordinary Teams Achieve*

Amazing Results (www.extraordinarygroups.com), Bellman and Ryan spent three years studying more than 60 self-declared “great” groups ranging in size from two to 20 members. Their aim was to discover what factors made these teams exceptional. The two consultants interviewed insurance executives, project designers, financial strategists, community-service workers and river rafters, to name a few, who were part of for-profit, volunteer and virtual work groups.

Bellman says the field study identified eight indicators linked to “extraordinary” performance. (For a full list of the indicators, see the accompanying article on page 11, “8 Traits of Extraordinary Work Groups.”) Among the defining traits of these top groups were **Shared Leadership** and **Embracing Differences**. Reflecting the first quality, leadership in these groups comes from many directions, Bellman says, not just from a leader-by-title. Designated leaders “see to it that the group is always led, but don’t feel the need to lead all of the time,” Bellman says, and are secure enough to let others share the spotlight. By taking a minimalist approach, these leaders create room for other team members to



step in and grow, building a sense of shared accountability for results among all members of the group.

What did this shared leadership look like in practice? Members of these exemplary groups frequently volunteered to lead projects, research a pressing issue or bring draft proposals to the group; willingly offered their content expertise; asked critical questions to help focus a group; and when group discussion became contentious, often invited the group to talk about the dynamics of the conflict.

Extraordinary groups also embraced their differences, be they distinctions of culture, working style, communication preferences or age. Bellman says team members were usually intrigued by such diversity of information, perspectives and backgrounds. Rather than using these differences to separate them, they capitalized on their strengths. “Respect for differences enables people to bring their true selves to the group,” Bellman says, and

from that freedom often emerges creative alternatives to problems, enhanced innovation and productivity.

Don't Avoid Conflict

Some level of disagreement, misunderstanding or frustration will occur on any team, even the most extraordinary ones. Messy group interaction and conflict were common in the groups he studied, Bellman says. Yet rather than seek to avoid conflict or sweep it under the rug, high-performing teams appeared to embrace it openly, believing the quicker they addressed problems, the less corrosive they would be to group productivity, morale and results. Indeed, they seemed to take to heart the quote from well-known mediator Ron Kraybill, “*No meaningful change takes place in the absence of conflict.*”

“Those who seemed best at dealing with conflict didn't feel like they had to play nice and cover it up,

but rather they took time to openly explore polarities in team member positions, and in that gap sought to find creative alternatives that incorporated ideas from both sides,” Bellman says.

Tammy Lenski, an organizational-conflict management expert and mediator, says problems that commonly emerge on teams over issues, such as managing big workloads or ambiguous expectations, don’t evaporate because the teams choose to ignore them. “They usually reappear later, often at inopportune times,” she says.

Lenski stresses that *how* the conflict is addressed is often more important than *what* the conflict is about. The healthiest teams she knows don’t assume conflict is a sign of something being fundamentally wrong, but rather see it as a natural part of working with teammates who have diverse personalities, backgrounds or belief systems. “Teams that can robustly debate, but do so in

of our time trying to understand the root cause of problems, and 80 percent trying to fix them.”

The fix-it mentality comes from wanting to avoid the “groan zone,” a term coined by Sam Kaner, an expert on consensus decision-making. “It’s that messy place in conflict where people are complaining and no one knows what’s going to happen yet,” Lenski says, “and it usually feels frustrating, hopeless and confusing as you are hashing things out.” But hurrying through the zone is a mistake, she says, because that is where the real learning and understanding comes from amid conflicts. Tanya Maslach is the president of Elevati, Inc., a San Diego, California-based consulting firm that helps leaders build stronger relationships with multi-cultural and multi-generational teams. She says the most effective leaders view conflict like scientists – with an inquisitive mindset rather than a fix-it approach. By asking a repeated series

of “why” questions, leaders can find long-term solutions to recurring conflict rather than short-term fixes, while at the same time sending a powerful message to team members: that the leaders care

enough to invest time to uncover the truth.

For example, a manager might hear grumblings that one team member, John, isn’t holding his own weight and is a “slacker.” John is charged with missing deadlines, showing up unprepared for some meetings and not responding promptly to e-mail. With a little investigation and questioning, the leader might find that John isn’t lacking work ethic or commitment, but rather has had so much added to his work plate that he doesn’t know what to focus on first – the new project he was given last week or the others he’s been working on for a month. His manager needs to help him prioritize his work.

“The smart leader doesn’t get in the middle, and asks, ‘What is the data or observable behavior that shows this claim to be true?’” Maslach says. “And if they are forced to confront someone, their initial approach isn’t to scold or accuse before all the facts are in, but to drill down to find out first-hand why something might be happening, and ask those ‘why’ questions.”

“If people join your bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get 10 miles down the road and you need to change direction?”

— Jim Collins

a way that doesn’t damage relationships, usually make better decisions, are more creative and lose less time to unhealthy conflict,” she notes.

Patrick Lencioni, author of the book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, believes that many work groups are dysfunctional simply because they are made up of human beings, with all their varied frailties and interests. The best leaders manage their teams by always taking that humanity into account.

“When you put [individuals] together and leave them to their own desires, even the most well-intentioned people will often deviate toward dysfunctional, unproductive behavior,” Lencioni says. “And because most leaders and managers are not schooled in the art of building teams, small problems are left untreated and can spiral further into ugliness or politics.”

When Conflict Resolution Isn’t Working

Lenski says poor conflict resolution has several causes. Here are three of the main culprits:

1 Moving too quickly to “fix-it” mode. Lenski, who is based in New Hampshire, jokes that in American culture, there is a 20/80 rule rather than an 80/20 rule regarding conflict resolution: “We spend just 20 percent

2 People aren’t solving the same problem. Say there’s a conflict and you have a difficult encounter with a peer or co-worker you think has been too direct or harsh in addressing the problem. They, in turn, might

8 Traits of

Extraordinary Work Groups

In their three-year field study of extraordinary work groups across many disciplines, consultants Geoffrey Bellman and Kathleen Ryan found these eight performance indicators that defined group practices:

- **Compelling purpose:** We are inspired and stretched in making this group's work our top priority.
- **Shared Leadership:** We readily step forward to lead by demonstrating our mutual responsibility for moving our group toward success.
- **Just enough structure:** We create the minimal structure (systems, plans, roles and tasks) necessary to move our work forward.
- **Full engagement:** We dive into our work with focus, enthusiasm and passion.
- **Embracing differences:** We value the creative alternatives that result from engaging differing points of view.
- **Unexpected learning:** We are excited by what we learn here and how it applies to other work, other groups and our lives outside of work.
- **Strengthened relationships:** Our work leads us to greater trust, interdependence and friendship.
- **Great results:** We work toward and highly value the tangible and intangible outcomes of our work together.

perceive you as a conflict-avoider, someone too fearful to confront problems head-on.

"Regardless of the content of the conflict, what the two team members are really arguing about is the diagnosis they have done of each other's personalities or work styles," Lenski says. Both also are liable to disagree with the labels placed on them.

In essence, they are trying to solve separate problems – the conflict itself and their co-worker's contradictory approach to resolving it. "Those two aren't magically going to become different people overnight, so they need to learn to embrace their differences, capitalize on the strengths of each approach, and work together for the common good," Lenski says.

3 Staying in the conversation too long. Most of us don't know when to disengage from escalating conflict and step back to get perspective. The problem is particularly acute when communicating via e-mail or text message. "When one or both people are hot under the collar, unhappy or anxious, they aren't bringing their best selves to the table," Lenski says, "yet most of us will stay

engaged and plow through that conversation until we are proven 'right,'" rather than taking a break and coming back to the interaction more level-headed.

But it's not just taking a break – it's how you spend that "time out" that makes all the difference. Research shows it takes at least 30 minutes to have "the emotional hijacking brought back to a baseline calm after reaching a boiling point," Lenski says. Going for a walk, run or a short drive usually won't do the trick, because your mind simply replays the conflict over and over again. Instead, Lenski says, you must fully engage your brain in another task, such as doing a crossword puzzle or editing a presentation or document.

Pick the Right People

Creating highly successful teams of any stripe starts far upstream, by putting the right people in the right roles. As any hiring manager knows, an ounce of selection is worth a pound of training. Consultant Jim Collins explored this concept in his groundbreaking book, *Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make the*

(Continued on page 19)

What Makes An Exceptional Team?

(Continued from page 11)


Leap...and Others Don't. In his research, Collins found something surprising: The first step that most leaders took in transforming their companies from good to great wasn't setting a new direction, vision or strategy. In other words, they didn't focus first on where to drive the bus, then on getting the right people to transport it there. Instead they *first* got the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus, and *then* figured out where to drive it.

The lesson for those seeking to create great work groups: If you begin with "who" instead of "what," you can more easily adapt to a changing world or shifting business strategies, Collins believes. "If people join your bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get 10 miles down the road and you need to change direction?"

The best people can adapt to almost any strategic goal or mission, and they don't need to be tightly managed or consistently cajoled. Perhaps guided or led,

Collins says, but not micro-managed. "They will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and to be part of something great."

In the end, extraordinary groups become that way by accepting their human flaws, embracing their differences and understanding there are few things in life as rewarding as joining forces with others in pursuit of a common goal. Sometimes our lesser instincts threaten to derail a positive group dynamic, but with effort and awareness, we can get past that and thrive. As teamwork expert Lencioni put it:

"Successful teamwork is not about mastering subtle, sophisticated theories, but rather about embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence," he says. "Ironically, teams succeed because they are exceedingly human. By acknowledging the imperfections of their humanity, members of functional teams overcome the natural tendencies that make good teamwork so elusive." 

Dave Zielinski is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster*.

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SpeakersTrainingCamp

How the Toastmasters program makes learning leadership exciting.

By Dee Dees, DTM, PID

Congratulations! You're a Leader!

Communication and leadership: Those two words are the guiding force behind Toastmasters International. Yet most members generally focus on the communication aspect, while the leadership benefits often go unnoticed.

This is understandable; most people join Toastmasters to become better speakers. The leadership skills we develop during our membership seem a byproduct of the overall program. For example, we're scheduled to be Toastmaster of the meeting and suddenly, we're up in front of the group, introducing people, leading the applause, monitoring the time: We're leaders!

After a while, we find ourselves being elected to a club office and more skills come our way. As club president, we can add our own touch to make our club even better, bigger and more fun.

Some people take to leadership like a cat to a warm windowsill. Others reluctantly take on an officer role to fulfill a requirement. Even those hesitant officers, however, usually start to enjoy the role once they see how they can positively impact their club and, in turn, the personal growth of their fellow members. But getting to that point can seem overwhelming to those who are trying a club officer role for the first time. How does a new officer arrive at that happy state of accomplishment? Good news! It's not as hard as it might seem.

Be Creative and Everyone Wins

No matter how an officer begins his or her term, one thing is certain:

The excited, creative, forward-thinking officer will help develop a thriving club, recognized for its quality and high-energy meetings. It will be a win-win-win situation: The club will continue to grow and achieve Distinguished status, the members will benefit from a well-run meeting and achieve their own goals, and the officers will improve their own leadership and team-building skills.

I've seen positive changes take place in my own club and can attribute many of them to two recent club officers. In the two years they served together, they made an enormous impact. Emi Bauer and Liz Shaw (both newly minted DTMs, by the way) worked well together, and along with their team of officers, developed some new, never-before-tried-in-our-club ideas. They also revived programs that had been unsuccessfully attempted in the past – and made them work.

Bauer and Shaw took turns serving as president for a year and vice president education (VPE) for another year. They implemented programs such as these:

- **A monthly orientation class** for members and guests, which included a packet for new members. The orientation had been tried once or twice before, but was never handled with regularity. However, once it was automatically scheduled for the last meeting of every month, we started seeing more guests become club members among the guests who had attended the class. In addition, new

members understood more about the educational awards, as well as the scope of the Toastmasters organization outside the club.

- **A mentoring program**, in which mentors were assigned right away to new members, informed of their mentee's scheduled Toastmasters activities, and encouraged to contact them and offer assistance with speeches and meeting roles.

- **A monthly new member induction**, made festive with the addition of light refreshments. This, too, had been done sporadically, but now that it was regularly scheduled, it was easy to know who had been inducted. New members were now presented with a certificate and a copy of the Toastmasters Promise card, and their mentor stood with them during the induction.

- **Optional social events** held after the club meetings at a local fast-food restaurant, so members could get to know one another on a more personal level. This helped newer members feel like a part of the group much sooner than they would have by simply attending the weekly meetings, where we have to rush to leave when the meeting ends.

- **A defined method for tracking member progress** toward the various educational awards. This way, members scheduled the functions



District 79 LGET Khalid Al Qoud, District 71 Governor Teresa Dukes and District 13 LGET Stephanie Scott participate in district leader training at the 2010 International Convention.

or speeches necessary to reach their particular goals. The process helped the club reach its Distinguished Club Program goals, but more importantly, it helped each member reach their individual goals and be recognized for such accomplishments.

“When you know who is close to achieving the different educational awards, it makes club success planning easy, and in order to know who is close, you must track progress,” says Bauer. She also helped members plan ahead by creating an “In Line to Speak” feature on the club agenda, so members could see at which meeting they were scheduled to give a speech.

■ **A systematic way to make a big deal of every achievement** helped them discover the joys of celebrating their fellow members’ accomplishments. “People who are recognized for what they do will do more,” Liz Shaw says. “As everyone does their part, the DCP goals will be met.” When the club thrives and the members do well, it’s a powerful creative stimulant for club leaders.

In fact, this is one of the most popular and successful tactics that club presidents and VPEs employ throughout Toastmasters. The Dobson Ranch club in Mesa, Arizona, also believes recognition is impor-

tant. They even re-award plaques, trophies or other honors earned outside the club, such as district awards.

■ **Set the tone.** “If the president has a *laissez-faire* approach to running the club, that kind of energy is communicated to the members,” Shaw notes. “But if the president communicates commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism, that is what the members will respond to.”

“If officers are enthusiastic and excited about meetings, they bring the fun with them,” Shaw says. “Members sense that and respond in kind. Pretty soon everyone comes expecting to have fun and their own energy fulfills their expectations.”

Enjoying the benefits of the leadership experience

Not all of these programs were easy to incorporate, and not all became permanent club routines. Sometimes a club simply needs to overcome resistance to change. But leadership can be about taking risks and thinking outside the box – merely trying something new helps build excitement. As Bauer points out, “When you simply follow in your predecessor’s steps, are you really experiencing and learning as much as you could be? An important aspect of innovation is to try new things and not be afraid to fail.”

While they believe that Toastmasters club officer training is impor-

tant, they also say that sharing ideas with other club officers – and visiting other clubs – provides invaluable learning and the brilliant spark of new ideas. All clubs are not the same, so one-size-fits-all training doesn’t always help. Talking with members from similar clubs, whether in size or geographic location, can provide solutions to unique situations that may not be covered strictly in training. However, training events often provide a good opportunity to network, where you can meet other club officers and trade ideas. The best part about doing this at a training event is that you can run ideas past more experienced district leaders and learn how to best implement those gems discovered in networking.

As a final note on becoming an effective and comfortable leader, Bauer is also convinced that everyone – not just new members – should have a mentor. “Every leader should have at least one mentor,” she notes. “And the higher you go in leadership, the more mentors you should have.” With ideas to try and mentors to guide a new officer, anyone can shake off those fears and jump in to club leadership!

Dee Dees, DTM, is a 30-year member of the Gilbert Toastmasters club in Gilbert, Arizona, and served on the Toastmasters International Board of Directors from 1994 to 1996. She is a Personal Historian and the author of two books on life-writing. Reach Dee at deedees@lifestorylady.com.



By Earl D. Kersting, DTM

Earning Toastmasters' top award is easy – if you stick with a plan.

A Two-Year Path to DTM

In November 2008, I observed my first Toastmasters meeting as a guest. In October 2010, at the District 43 Conference, I received my DTM – the much-coveted Distinguished Toastmaster award. Total time from prospect to DTM? Twenty-three months.

Do I say this because I am bragging? I am very proud of my accomplishment, but no, I do not want to brag; I want to stress the importance of a basic tenet that many Toastmasters overlook. Earning your DTM comes down to three simple steps: Read the manuals. Make a plan. Work your plan.

1, 2 and 3 – it is as simple as that.

But why, you may ask yourself, would I want to become a DTM? It seems like a lot of work when you simply want to become more comfortable speaking in front of an audience..

Like anything worth doing, what you get out of Toastmasters is proportionate to what you put into it. In earning my DTM, I never imagined the many benefits awaiting me, the skills I'd hone and the friends I'd make along the journey. I learned to improve my communication and presentation skills, but I also gained so much more.

Read the Manuals

When you joined Toastmasters, you received, among other materials, two manuals: *Competent Communication (CC)* and *Competent Leadership (CL)*. I have noticed a pattern: My fellow Toastmasters tend to pick up and start using the *CC* manual, and lay the *CL* manual aside. It happens for several reasons. Some members think, "I really joined Toastmasters to improve my communication skills. I do not need to work on my leadership skills." I have also met members who simply do not understand how the *Competent Leadership* manual works. They see the Project

Completion Record on page 6 of the manual, see more than 40 tasks listed – 45 to be exact – and put the manual aside in favor of the CC manual, with its 10 projects. If you were to simply read the CL manual, you would discover several things. Of the 45 tasks listed, you need to complete only 21 or 22, depending on which combination you pursue. You would also discover that the tasks are, for the most part, roles you already perform during the course of a typical club meeting, such as speaker, speech evaluator, timer, grammarian and so forth. In fact, of the 10 projects, eight can be completed by serving in typical weekly club meeting roles.

To learn about the requirements for each available educational award, visit the Educational Program section on the Toastmasters Web site, at www.toastmasters.org/membereducation. The information will guide you on your path to Distinguished Toastmaster. This leads to the next step: Make a Plan.

Make a Plan

Every journey requires a plan. Whether it is a trip to the store or a journey to earn DTM, you cannot reach a destination unless you know where it is you wish to go and by what route. Map your route to the DTM award by using the Educational Program section on the Web site. It lists the requirements for earning all educational awards, including DTM. Here's a helpful hint: The best 50 cents I have ever spent was to purchase the *Toastmasters Member Achievement Record* (Item 1328 on the online store).

This booklet records your progress toward each award in the communication and leadership tracks, and it is the road map to your final destination.

Work Your Plan

No worthwhile achievement comes by accident. You must take initiative to bring your plan to fruition. That includes making and taking opportunities by looking at your overall plan and fitting in key requirements wherever and whenever you have the chance.

For example, one requirement to earn the Advanced Leader Silver



“The best 50 cents I have ever spent was to purchase the *Toastmasters Member Achievement Record*.”

(Item 1328 on the online store)


(ALS) award – the highest leadership level before DTM – is to complete a High Performance Leadership (HPL) project. Does that mean you cannot begin an HPL project until you have earned the CL and Advanced Leader Bronze (ALB) awards? No. By looking at the entire road map to DTM, and realizing the HPL project was a destination through which I had to pass on my journey, I began my first HPL before I had ever earned my CL award. In fact, I began my first HPL within two months of becoming a Toastmaster.

Another requirement to earn ALS is to serve successfully as a club sponsor, mentor or coach. Again, this was a task I began within months of becoming a Toastmaster. Know what is required along every step of your journey to DTM so that when an opportunity arises, you can take advantage of the chance to complete another requirement of your plan.

Why Do It?

But why did I do it all? Was it just to wear the gold DTM name tag or the DTM medallion? Was it just so I could brag that I was a DTM? No, it was because the more I got involved, and the more I gave, the more I got in return. I've met new friends and I've developed deeper relationships with those friends I already had. As a club officer, my fellow club members showed me that I could provide the Toastmasters experience to others while improving my own leadership skills. As a mentor, I learned how rewarding it could be to guide a new member on their own Toastmasters journey. As a club sponsor, I discov-

ered the immense fulfillment of bringing the Toastmasters experience to a group who otherwise would have no club. And as a division governor, I was able to help my area governors become better leaders.

With each new role I undertook, as I helped others grow and develop, I was growing and developing myself – in ways I had never imagined when I was deciding whether or not to become a Toastmaster. The path to DTM is a journey all Toastmasters should pursue, and it does not need to be daunting if you follow three basic steps: Read the manuals. Make a plan. Work your plan. 

Earl D. Kersting, DTM, is a senior manager of division sales support for the Kroger Co. in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is a member of the company's corporate club: Kroger Food For Thought Toastmasters. Reach him at Earl.Kersting@Kroger.com.

Communicate to Solve

Conflicts

Don't let tension take over your team.

By Linda E. Allen, CC

Breathe deeply.” That’s what Lynn Baker advises when you find yourself in a tense situation or one mired in conflict. Too simple an answer? “Not so,” he says. Baker is a Toastmaster and an adjunct professor at the University of Oklahoma, where he teaches conflict management. Practicing this two-word mantra calms the body and puts you in control of your emotions and responses. Taking a deep breath is a personal strategy that can help you defuse a hot situation.

How to manage conflict and use it as a springboard to move forward are challenges in today’s workplace. Not surprisingly, the key to tackling these challenges is effective communication. Many companies have found that effective communication reduces disagreements and promotes a harmonious environment where employees are excited to work. It also encourages productivity, creativity and responsibility.

The definition of conflict varies from person to person and ranges from minor disagreements, antagonism and incompatibility to hostility, heated arguments, bullying and even violence. A simple difference in opinion can escalate to include individuals who originally had no interest in the issue.

Tensions between people are inevitable, says Wendy Kaufman, CEO of Balancing Life’s Issues, Inc., in Ossining, New York. “We need to learn to embrace conflict and be less fearful about it,” she says. “When we remember that we can learn from conflict, it becomes less threatening.”

Kaufman says training on conflict management and resolution has increased in the past few years. “Astute business owners realize it’s in their best interest to teach employees how to deal with conflict,” she says. Having employees learn how to resolve workplace disagreements is important because the stakes are high. Unresolved conflict affects the financial bottom line of a company, contributing to low morale, reduced productivity and distractions from job responsibilities.

Be Proactive

It’s wise to identify early signs of disagreement and to take steps to resolve them before they escalate. Kaufman suggests having a set of ground rules in place and a proactive strategy to deal with concerns before they polarize people into opposing sides. Ignoring conflict and hoping it blows over seldom works.

Baker, the University of Oklahoma professor, is a member of the PROS (Polishing and Refining Our Skills) Toastmasters club in Oklahoma City. He suggests having a team meeting to discuss what specific values the team wants to live by and what the prevailing norms should be: collaboration, respect, listening, empathy or other values. Once you agree on a set of values, then discuss how to implement them.

A good first step in preventing conflict is the popular advice given by Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: “Seek first to understand and then to be understood.” And understanding, notes Covey, requires effective communication skills – especially listening.

Effective listening means giving your full attention to your conversation partner or to the speaker, and is not limited to conflict situations. It’s a sincere form of communication that shows respect, which in turn enhances friendships and cements family relationships.

Here are a few listening tips:



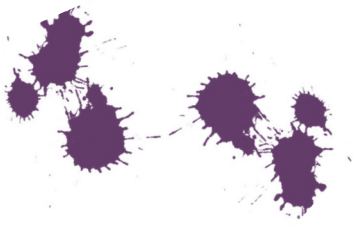
- Remove or move away from distractions such as your computer, phone or TV. Allow the person to talk without being interrupted. With a group of people, be sure to give each person a chance to speak. Use a timer or clock to ensure each person is given the same amount of time.
- Pay attention to what the person is saying instead of mentally rehearsing your next comment. Use responses that acknowledge you are listening, keep them noncommittal and encourage the speaker to share his or her thoughts and opinions.
- Ask open-ended questions to clarify any unclear points and repeat or paraphrase what you believe you heard the other person say. This helps prevent misunderstandings and miscommunication. You may want to take notes, which shows your concern and interest and keeps a record of the meeting.
- Be aware of your body language and that of the speaker. Positive body language can help calm tense situations. Maintain good eye contact and use gestures such as leaning forward and nodding your head to encourage the speaker.

One of my former bosses was a master at listening. At the first sign of tension, or if employees were beginning to grumble and take sides on an issue, he would invite each employee to go on a “walk and talk” with him through the office building. On this casual stroll, he listened carefully and asked questions that encour-

“When we remember that we can learn from conflict, it becomes less threatening.”

aged each employee to share his opinions, ideas and answers. He used input from these “walk and talks” to develop a solution. By demonstrating respect and value for each employee in the decision-making process, he made us all feel invested in the solution and in the future of the company.

Conflict often brings out the drama and emotion in our words. Someone who is upset and controlled by emotions may be unable to communicate his feelings and ideas and may distort what he hears. Author and communication



consultant Sam Horn suggests strategies to use when communicating about tough issues. Her book, *Tongue-Fu!*[®]: *How to Deflect, Disarm, and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict*, offers constructive word choices for sensitive situations. She describes “tongue-fu” as a mental martial art where the speaker chooses to stay kind even if others are inconsiderate and rude. It’s a way to disarm with charm.

Choose Your Words Carefully

Horn says your choice of words can either calm or incite the situation. She suggests avoiding extreme words like *always*, *never*, *everyone* and *no one*. Instead, substitute *sometimes* and *some people*, which are more accurate. She also suggests “tongue-glue” – not a product, but a practice of thinking before you speak, to avoid regretting your words later.

The blame game can also escalate conflict. Name-calling, accusations, bringing up past injustices and wrongs, and of course offensive language, are off limits, as are ridicule, criticism and put-downs. Stay clear of any conversation that includes yelling, name-calling or threats.

“Ultimately, managing conflict means managing *yourself* – your emotions, words and actions.”

When you have to present or defend your side of an issue, organize your thoughts. That’s when taking a deep breath will give you a moment to clear your mind, calm your emotions and choose your words. This is another way your Toastmasters training will benefit you: Before beginning, make sure you have the attention of your audience, whether it’s one or 100 people. Establish eye contact, and wait until your audience is focused before beginning. In a one-to-one conversation, say the person’s name to start and focus the conversation.

Have a purpose for your comments. Make a list of points you want to cover and refer to the list if the conversation strays from the topic.

Keep your comments positive. Use indirect statements instead of confrontation. Use “I” statements like, *It seems to me*, *I understand*, *I perceive*, *My impression is...* These deal more honestly with your reaction to the situation.


So what do you do when prevention and listening skills don’t work? Allow the person to vent, which helps release some of his pent-up energy and emotion. Telling a person to “calm down” often aggravates and escalates the conflict. Instead, after she has finished her rant, calmly repeat the message with words like, *If I understand you correctly...* If you have a satisfactory solution, offer it; if not, ask the person what solution she would suggest. If you agree on a solution, follow through to implement it.

Take Time to Cool Off

Another suggestion is to put time and distance between you and the conflict when things become heated – 24 hours is a good amount of time. This allows all parties an opportunity to cool off. Then come back and readdress the issue. Involve an uninvolved party, if necessary, to help mediate and monitor the conversation.

The perception and expectation of Toastmasters is that with our communication skills, we can easily calm tempers and negotiate peace from the uncooperative. The reality is that we also face conflict and communication challenges, even in Toastmasters meetings.

Baker recalls a situation when members of the PROS club were planning a presentation on parliamentary procedures to help other clubs. How to give the topic pizzazz and make it interesting became a challenge to the group. One member began to react testily to suggestions and to take them as personal criticism. Baker suggested not making any changes to the presentation unless the person felt comfortable with them. When the member realized his input was valued, the tone of the meeting changed, and the PROS members were able to put together a popular program that they often present to other clubs and organizations.

Ultimately, managing conflict means managing *yourself* – your emotions, words and actions. Simple techniques like deep breathing, attentive listening and considering word choices can defuse a hot situation and help you and others move forward to resolution. 

Linda E. Allen, CC, is a member of the Pacesetters Toastmasters in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She is a writer, speaker and trainer specializing in cultural awareness, professional and personal development, and leadership. Reach her at lindaeallen@sbcglobal.net.



Enliven your speech with a sentence that stands out.

By Howard Scott, CC

Crafting a Quotable Line

“I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.” — Winston Churchill



“In the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.” — John F. Kennedy

Why are these statements memorable? It's not because they are uttered by famous people – the same people said much in the same speeches that we *don't* recall. Rather, it is because these sentences are bold enunciations of powerful sentiments. Furthermore, they are crisp, vivid encapsulations of the speech's main point. Finally, they were uttered with great presence, which made them history.

Most of us are not Churchills or Kennedys, but we still can deliver a phrase or sentence in our speeches that embodies the topic and enlivens

the speech. In a talk I gave on the estate tax, I said – referring to inheritance – “If you did a good job as a parent, your kids don't need it. If you didn't, they don't deserve it.” With pauses before and after the statement, and with a bit of a histrionic delivery, I had the audience in the palm of my hand. At that instant, it was obvious the speech would be a success.

Jerry Brightman, a frequent keynote speaker and president of The Leadership Group, a consulting and training company in South Hadley, Massachusetts, says, “In all my talks, I try for one stirring

sentence where I grab [the audience]. It's what I call my 'aha' moment.”

Unfortunately, these quotations don't just pop into your head. You have to work at them. The three parts of quote creation are:

- Crystallizing the talk's main idea
- Polishing the phrasing
- Perfecting the delivery

1 Crystallizing the idea. Write down the nub of your speech in one sentence (i.e., the concept statement). This exercise gets you to focus on the talk's meaning and

enables you to search for a pithier, more dramatic, more concise way of stating it. Of course, the memorable phrase does not have to rephrase the speech's essence, but it will be more forceful if it does. Regardless, writing down the nub helps you focus on the possibilities. Someone preparing a speech about the flat tax might arrive at this concept statement: "The flat tax is simple, but it isn't fair because it overburdens the poor and underburdens the rich."

2 Polish the phrasing. Now your job is to get the words just right. Eliminate the unessential and make it concise. Choose words that reverberate and images that are vivid. Language guides help, but you need to spark your imagination to create something memorable. In the flat-tax speech, one take on the concept statement is: "The flat tax treats us all as the same, yet we are not all the same." But that's not quite strong enough for a stand-out phrase. How about: "The flat tax oversimplifies all our assumptions about economics." Cutting to the essence, we get: "The flat tax oversimplifies." Now we have a quotable sentence. The four strong words convey what is truly wrong with the flat tax. In this manner, keep reworking your concept statement until you've created a gem.

Let's say someone is giving a speech about being unemployed. The concept statement might be: "The year on the dole was a painful experience because I only knew my work." But "because I only knew my work" is rather ordinary phrasing. Can you make the phrase more poetic? How about: "Because I defined myself by what I did, not who I am." This statement offers concision. One can hear the emphasis on "did" and "am." Since we are lengthening the phrase, perhaps we can shorten the begin-

ning to simply the word "unemployment" rather than "the year on the dole." Now we have: "Unemployment was painful because I defined myself by what I did, not who I am."

Sometimes cutting up the sentence works. In a talk on beekeeping, the speaker's concept statement is: "Honey is local, because the bees travel three miles in all directions sucking nectar from the plants." The most important word is "local," yet it is not explained until the end.

Perhaps reversing the order of the sentence would be more effective. But since the second part of the sentence is rather mundane, making two sentences might be even better. The first sentence could be: "To make honey, the bees travel three miles in all directions, sucking nectar from the plants." The second sentence becomes the memorable quotation: "Thus, honey is truly local." See how one sentence feeds into the other.

"I really try to come up with a tight, short, key sentence," says Christy Donovan, a member of the Upper Cape Toastmasters in Falmouth, Massachusetts. "Fewer words make greater impact."

Another technique is to relate your concept statement to a line from a song, a common catchphrase or a TV show. When you do this, the audience will be familiar with the phrasing. Say a speaker gives a talk on listening to the radio. The concept statement might be, "One of the few things that's free in life is radio." How can we embolden these sentiments? How about: "Radio is a freebie 24 hours a day." Even better: "There is no free lunch, but there is free radio."

Even humorous talks can have a quotable line. For example, consider the potential for funny phrases if you gave a talk on raising chickens: "As a chicken farmer, you never wonder which comes first." "Chickens – you can eat 'em or you can love 'em." In


a humorous talk on obituaries, offer this up: "If you don't have a good obituary, how do you know you're dead?" A little silly, a little farfetched, but it gets the audience's attention.

Still another approach is to re-read the speech until you discover the most memorable line. David Kellogg, a member of the Bristol Speaker Toastmasters in East Syracuse, New York, says, "I look over my talk and try to emphasize one key sentence."

3 Perfecting the delivery. In his only trip to the United States, Oscar Wilde remarked to a customs agent, "I have nothing to declare but my genius." If he had spoken in a soft monotone, that utterance would not be in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* today. So your delivery must be carefully orchestrated. Take a deep breath and pause before uttering your stirring words. Deliver the line, and then pause afterward. This sets off the statement, giving the audience time to appreciate your meaning.

Move to a different spot on the stage. This will help you own the space. Emphasize key words. Make your face as expressive as possible. Gesture to reinforce the statement.

If the talk warrants, repeat the quotable statement, perhaps right after the first utterance, for extra emphasis. In the unemployment speech, a strong ending might be: "I urge you all: Begin to redefine yourself as who you are, not what you do." This repetition augments the power of the phrase.

Creating a quotable sound bite is hard work. But you will be rewarded by seeing how much one sentence can improve your speech. Indeed, some will call you eloquent. 

Howard Scott, CC is a member of the South Shore Soliloquy Toastmasters in Kingston, Massachusetts. Reach him at dancinghill@gmail.com.

Taking Toastmasters training on the trail and turning travails into a book.

It's More Than a Speech

Toastmasters isn't just about speeches, it's about personal development. Club meetings are where we can practice and triumph, receive feedback and learn. The challenge, then, is to take what we've gained and use it effectively beyond the walls of the club meeting. And while I'd proudly taken much of what I learned on new adventures, it wasn't until I faced the biggest challenge of my life that I realized there was much more – and that I would someday carry that lesson close to my heart.

I had a grandiose dream of hiking the entire 2,176-mile (3,500 km) Appalachian Trail from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mount Katahdin in Maine all in one year. However, as fortune would have it, I only hiked 622 miles (1,001 km) when I realized that I was having heart problems. I returned home and underwent a six-artery heart bypass operation.

The next 300 days were spent recovering from the surgery. In hiker parlance, any day not spent hiking is a “zero day,” or one with zero miles. After 300 zero days, I returned to the trail to finish the hike. Little did I know where my Toastmasters skills would take me.

The White Mountains

At the Gale Head hiker hut, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, I was offered room and board in trade for a spontaneous speech about my hike from Georgia and my experiences as a “thru-hiker.”

Most hikers would rather freeze to death – outdoors at night – than

speak in front of an audience. As a Toastmaster, I was excited about the prospect until the hut manager added, “Oh, by the way, almost all of the guests tonight are from Quebec, Canada, and I'm not certain if they all speak English.” I began thinking that maybe freezing to death wasn't such a terrible option. Thanks to my practice with Table Topics, within minutes I was able to organize the speech's structure to my satisfaction.

While I was outlining the bullet points that I planned to address, the hiking guests arrived — approximately 50 in all. It became evident immediately that these folks were in a party mood and knew each other well. Some were speaking English, some French. I went over to one couple who seemed fluent in both and explained my dilemma. I was told not to worry, that everyone was comfortable with English and that if a problem arose, they would interpret for me. They also cautioned that their group tended to have a short attention span – in other words, they bored easily.

My Toastmasters experience taught me a basic premise: *Know your audience*. This was a “high energy” audience, needing a high-energy and entertaining presentation. I was beginning to understand George Bernard Shaw's famous comment: “Dying is easy, comedy is hard.”

After the evening meal, the hut manager calmed the mayhem and started the evening's program by introducing me. In proper Toastmasters tradition, I greeted my audience. Next, I knew I had to connect

with them and create some common bond, an important public speaking technique. We were all hikers – that was obvious – but since my wife, Jane, is of French Canadian extraction (her native tongue is French), I proudly announced that I was married to a French Canadian. There was applause, hooting and hollering – we now had a connection.

I explained to them how Jane is a prankster and worked hard to prepare me for the hike. I went on to describe the numerous pranks she pulled on me. My audience loved it, and I could see they were allied with her in the conspiracy against me. They were engaged!

I continued with descriptions of animal encounters on the trail, weather difficulties and the beauty of the trail itself, painting a picture with my words. The manager had hoped I could speak for at least half an hour; at one hour we went to questions and answers and finally it was lights out.

You Should Write a Book

Thanks to my Table Topics training, the presentation was a success. Practically everyone who attended came up to me, later, to thank me and tell me how much they enjoyed it. They were amazed that someone could undergo heart surgery and then continue on a long hike. Most suggested that I should write a book about my experiences.

A few days later, with some modifications to suit another audience, I gave the same presentation at the Lake of the Clouds Hut on Mount Washington, in New Hampshire.

I never expected to be giving even one speech when I set out on my hike, but here I was doing a repeat performance! Again, many audience members approached me afterward and suggested I write a book.

This helped me realize that – for all Toastmasters – our club speeches could be an inspiration for magazine articles, blogs, a video or even books. Don't let your speech material languish at the end of the club meeting; you just might have another audience waiting to hear your message. Had I never been a Toastmaster, I might never have written my book, *Three Hundred Zeroes*.

Nothing Succeeds Like Success

The members of my club, Positively Speaking Toastmasters in Sarasota, Florida, have been proving the Sir Arthur Helps quote: "Nothing succeeds like success." One member, Tracey Parnell, has built her entire business around her Toastmasters experience. It began gradually with her speeches about being a "Canadian Snowbird" (Canadians who spend their winters keeping warm in Florida), and expanded into TV and radio interviews. Tracey sensed a need for educating visitors on how to best acclimate to their new environment, and she wrote a book, *The 40 Year Old Snowbird*. The book is an outgrowth of those early speeches, and she now uses it as the content for a seminar series she runs.

My wife, Jane V. Blanchard, joined our club to develop her talents as a public speaker. She worked tirelessly and it paid big dividends. She landed a weekly hour-long radio show called *Women Matters* on WSLR in Sarasota, launching a successful public speaking career. She is invited to speak at public events on topics ranging from feminism to human trafficking.

Those of us familiar with her Toastmasters speeches recognize many of the topics and issues she addressed in her club presentations and realize how much they have grown and

developed. Those same basic speeches also appeared in her many blogs and Web sites – all as a result of her earlier speechmaking at Toastmasters.

Sometimes creations come about as a collaborative effort on the part of several members. One of our members, Robert Lovejoy, is a professional artist who created a painting based on a statement from fellow club member Diana Friedman. Diana had said, "When people marry young, like two young trees planted too closely, oftentimes one will overshadow the other and stunt its growth. But a good marriage is when both members grow equally." She painted an image with words that Robert just had to paint on canvas. His work, "An Equal Marriage," was a direct result of their Toastmasters creative thinking.

Keep Records


A few guidelines for taking speeches to the next level:

- **Keep accurate notes.** Even if you give a speech without notes, jot down a record of the talking points for future reference. Time has a way of erasing one's memory and those notes can prove invaluable later. Since most Toastmasters speeches are time-limited, you might not have sufficient time to develop the points that you'd like to make, but later, a blog, magazine article or book may

give you the opportunity to carry those points through.

- **Record your speeches.** This includes Table Topics speeches. I put a small portable voice recorder in my pocket when I go up to speak, and the audience isn't even aware that I'm recording my speech.
- **Take notes on speeches other members make.** Something may capture your interest or you may want to collaborate with that member later. Be careful not to plagiarize others' work, but you can find new ideas from their presentations.

Harness that Passion

You can see how I learned that Toastmasters payoffs are not only in club practice for public speaking. This organization is about personal development, leadership and growth. The speeches are merely the clay; what we sculpt can be magnificent. Your speech today might even be tomorrow's book. I learned to listen to Chef Emeril Lagasse's provocative question: "If you don't follow your dream, who will?" 

Dennis R. Blanchard, ACS, is a member of Positively Speaking Toastmasters in Sarasota, Florida. He is the author of *Three Hundred Zeroes: Lessons of the Heart on the Appalachian Trail*. He can be reached at www.threehundredzeroes.com.



Dennis Blanchard speaks to a group of fellow hikers at the Gale Head hiker hut, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.



Does the name of your company, product or Toastmasters club make you smile or scratch your head?

What's In a Name?

By Craig Harrison, DTM

What's in a name? It depends on whom you ask. William Shakespeare famously believed such distinctions were unimportant – “that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Yet in today's competitive marketplace, your club or your company name can be a gateway to success or a passage to sameness – an entry to excellence or a portal to the pedestrian.

A name should make you smile instead of scratch your head,” says Toastmaster Alexandra Watkins, founder of the San Francisco naming company Eat My Words.

Many Toastmasters clubs do a terrific job of picking their names, selecting smart and creative monikers. Here are a few standouts from around the globe:

- At the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., members from two clubs are proud of the *Stately Speakers* and *Talking Heads of State*.
- In Midrand, South Africa, Bytes Systems Integration's club is known as *Byte Your Tongue*.

- Dole Fresh Vegetables in Monterey, California, hosts *Lettuce Speak*.
- Beirut Arab University in Tripoli, Lebanon, has a club called *Loudspeakers*.

Watkins is an expert on the naming of companies, products, services and even Toastmasters clubs. She has named, or renamed, everything from robots to restaurants to rock concerts. As part of her process to assess the effectiveness of particular labels, Watkins has created two tests: one to help identify monikers that make you smile and another to know which ones make you scratch your head in puzzlement.

The tests offer instructive lessons on the art of naming:

SMILE if your name has these five winning qualities:

Simple – has a no-brainer concept

Meaningful – customers “get it”

Imagery – is visually evocative

Legs – lends itself to wordplay

Emotional – makes a connection

SCRATCH the name off the list if it commits any of these seven sins:

Spelling-challenged – isn’t spelled exactly how it sounds

Copycat – similar to competitors’ names

Random – it’s disconnected from the brand

Annoying – hidden meaning, forced

Tame – is flat, descriptive, uninspired

Curse of knowledge – only insiders get it

Hard to pronounce – is not obvious or accessible

The Importance of Names

Names help us rapidly identify a company or product, service or entity. Some are self-explanatory, others are funny, memorable, descriptive or cryptic – or some combination of these qualities. For Toastmasters, it’s important to note that the same applies to club names.

The best names are catchy. They remain in our memory when we seek to retrieve them. If a name is snappy, evocative, memorable or emotionally alluring, strangers are drawn in. If a name is bland or boring, confusing or contradictory, then people will ignore it, react negatively or otherwise continue in search of a name they can connect with.

Does Your Club’s Name Stand Out?

Your club name can help prospects identify where or when it meets, who it is designed for, who it’s affiliated with and even something about its personality. A creative, catchy name will help your club garner more interest. Whether it employs a play on words, is alliterative, clever, fun to utter or otherwise playful, make it resonate with people who hear or read it.

Leverage Your Location

Many clubs reference their surroundings in creating clever names. Such place-based names amuse potential guests and make members proud of their cities!

- In Green Bay, Wisconsin (home of the Green Bay Packers professional football team), you can visit the *Green Bay Yackers*.
- In an England town called Sandwich, you have the *Toasted Sandwich* club.
- In Manila, Philippines, members meeting at the U.S. Embassy are *Diplomatically Speaking*.

- Meeting at Beverly Hills High School in Beverly Hills, California, Toastmasters members bring the famous TV series to life with *Toastmasters 90210*.

Keeping Good Company

Many corporate club names reference the company, organization or type of work:

- At the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, art enthusiasts discuss their passion at *Toastmodernists*.
- At UPS in Mahwah, New Jersey, members belong to *Speak-UPS*.
- At Genpact Deli IT Park in New Delhi, India, members belong to *GenOrators Toastmasters*.
- Employees of Abbott Diabetes Care in Alameda, California, recently formed *Sweet Talkers*.
- At Federal Express in Kansas City, Missouri, members enjoy *Federal Expressions*.
- Members from the Chicago Housing Authority belong to *Speakers of the House*.
- MillerCoors Corporate in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, enjoys *Toast on Tap*.
- U.S. correctional facilities have *Thee Convictions* (California), *Correctly Speaking* (Indiana), *Distinguished Gentlemen* (Louisiana) and *LibORATORS* (Nebraska).

“Is it time to update or tweak your club’s name?”

Many church-housed clubs have distinctive names:

- *Faithfully Speaking* at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada
- *Speak the Truth* at the Unity Southeast Church in Kansas City, Missouri
- *Testifying Toastmasters* at Hanover Church of the Nazarene in Mechanicsville, Virginia

Alliteration’s Allure

Club names using alliteration are often more memorable, and fun to say, too. For example:

- The *Sultans of Speech* rule in Bangalore, India.
- *Vocal Vegans* meet in Las Vegas, Nevada, at lunchtime!
- The *Liverpool Linguists* meet in Liverpool, New York.
- *Motor Mouths* of Toyota Motor Sales gather in Torrance, California.

Speaking of alliterative club names, Canada is crowded with them:

- *Envision Enunciators* enjoy the limelight in Langley, British Columbia.
- *District Dialoguers* discuss it all at District Hall in Vancouver.
- *Burnaby Blabbers* blurt it out in nearby Burnaby.
- *Tireless Talkers* converse at Calgary's transit building.
- *Frantastic Filibusters* find fun at Fransen Engineering in Richmond, British Columbia.

Showcase What's Special

Is yours a specialty club? Does it have a singular focus? If so, its name should reflect its uniqueness.

- *Point of Order* fits the bill for a Parliamentary club in San Carlos, California.
- *The Trill of the Quill* is a club for writers in Vancouver, Washington.
- *We Are Republicans* says it plainly in Naperville, Illinois.

Humor clubs are popular in the U.S.: *Laughlovers*, *Laughmasters* and *Humor Masters* in California; *Humor Home* and *The Comedy Shack* in Florida; *The Humor* and *Drama* club in Cambridge, Massachusetts; *Humorous Toastmasters* in New York, New York; *Laughing Matters* in Austin, Texas; and *Seriously Funny* in Bellevue, Washington.

“If a name is bland or boring, confusing or contradictory, then people will ignore it, react negatively or otherwise continue in search of a name they can connect with.”

- *Tales & Tellers* is a storytelling club in Danville, California.
- Many clubs cater to the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) community and allied groups: the *Speak Out!* club in Long Beach, California; *Rainbow Toastmasters* in San Francisco, California; *Speak Up and About* in Minneapolis, Minnesota; *Rainbow Toastmasters* in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; *Pride Toastmasters* in New York, New York; and *Hear Me Out* in Mission Hills, Kansas.

The many bilingual clubs around the world include: *Shanghai Humor Bilingual Toastmasters* and *1st Bilingual Zhangjiang*, both in Shanghai, China; *Inspiration Bilingue* in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada; *Filipino Toastmasters Club* in Manama, Bahrain; and *Los Bilingues* in Tualatin, Oregon.

- Love blooms in some clubs: *Twice as Nice* is a club for couples in Chicago, Illinois. *Heart2Heart* focuses on singles and relationships in the San Francisco Bay Area, as does *Bachelors/Bachelorettes* in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Humor Helps

A name that's humorous is far more inviting for guests harboring fear of speaking in front of strangers. It relaxes them as they consider whether or not to visit. Bayer Animal Health in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, named its club *Sit, Stay, Speak*.

- *Irrationally Motivated* is an advanced Toastmasters club in Taipei, Taiwan.
- *Flying Toasters* soars at the Panasonic Avionics Corporation in Lake Forest, California.
- *The Court of Blarney* club meets at the police building in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada.
- *Sony Saystation* is for Sony employees who design the company's PlayStation.
- *Money Talks* clubs can be found at numerous banks and also at the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco.
- *Electric Toasters* meets at the utility company Pacific Gas and Electric, also in San Francisco.
 - *It's Toastmasters Y'all* in Richmond Hill, Georgia.

Rooted in Success: The Magnificent Seven

Of course, you can never go wrong harkening back to your roots. Seven clubs worldwide reference the founder of Toastmasters International, Ralph C.

Smedley, in their name, a surefire recipe for success!

- *Avanzados Ralph Smedley de Guadalajara* in Guadalajara, Mexico
- *Smedley Chapter One* club of Tustin, California
- *Smedley Club* in Sri Lanka
- *Smedley Hometown Memorial Club* in Waverly, Illinois
- *Smedley Speakers Society* in Bangalore, India
- *Smedley's Speakers Advanced Club* in Staten Island, New York
- *The Ralph Smedley Club* in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

Play the Name Game To Win

Take a good look at your club name. Does it still work? Many clubs retain names from former locations where they gathered, even though such sites are no longer rep-

representative of the neighborhood or city they meet in now. How confusing for all. Other clubs may be carrying outdated names reflective of their original focus. Is it time to update or tweak your club's name?


Some minor duties and expenses are required when altering a club name. First, such a change needs a two-thirds favorable vote of the active membership present and voting at the club meeting. A quorum of the active membership is required to conduct club business. After the favorable two-thirds vote of the active membership, a club officer must make the club-name change on the Toastmasters Web site at www.toastmasters.org. Simply log in to the Members page, then click on the **Club Central** link and find your club's name and number. Then find the option titled **Change My Club's Bylaws** and enter your club's new name there. U.S. clubs also will need to report the name change to their local IRS office. The club can then opt to buy a new banner displaying the new name from the Toastmasters online store.

If a new name brings in new members who are a good fit, isn't it worth a little effort?

Name That Club

Alexandra Watkins reminds us that even if we keep the initials of a club name, we can assign them new meaning. Her secret wish: to update the initials of her home club in San Francisco, SF Toastmasters, to mean Seriously Fun Toastmasters!

And here's a special offer from her: She will brainstorm with any current or newly forming club at no cost to generate a list of possible club names. Contact her through www.EatMyWords.com with the word "Toastmasters club name" in the subject line.

What's in a name? Gold! Let your name put smiles on the faces of your guests – and new members onto your club rolls. 

Craig Harrison, DTM, is a professional speaker, past district governor and member of several clubs, including Oakland 88 Toastmasters. He is the founder of Expressions Of Excellence in Berkeley, California. Contact him via www.expressionsofexcellence.com/toastmasters/.

Wish You Were FUNNIER?

Dear Fellow Toastmaster:

Do you wish you were **funnier**? Do you believe that "funny people" **think differently**?

The truth is... funny people *do* think differently. Truer still; **you will never be funnier unless you change the way you think**. That is exactly what *Get More Laughs By Next Week™* will do for you. I Darrentee it.

Would a **step-by-step** process for getting laughs be helpful?

I never got laughs. I was quiet and shy and had severe stage fright. It was quite an epiphany for me when I discovered the simple exercises comedians use to develop material. A whole new world opened up for me when I was shown that humor was a *learned skill*, as opposed to a trait one must be born with.

Naturally, I did things the hard way, so it took me years of struggle and tens of thousands of dollars to uncover the steps that would take me from bumbling amateur to sought-after professional. This is a *proven* system. I've been teaching this process for more than ten years.

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Learning from my Toastmasters lessons through the years.

By Bani Arora, ACG, ALB

The Never-Ending Journey

The Toastmasters program came to me by osmosis. When my husband and son joined a local Toastmasters club and Youth Leadership program, respectively, I found myself listening – during our family dinner-table discussions – to their comments about building communication and leadership skills. They talked about improving vocal variety, body language and gestures in project speeches. While serving their food, I soon noticed that our spontaneous chatting about daily events had transformed into well-organized communication, just like Table Topics.

Becoming a Toastmaster

Gradually, my grudge against their evening club meetings faded, and I began to soak up the information my husband and son brought home. Instead of nagging, I provided constructive evaluations! My work as a teacher – I had been a university professor – convinced me that I was an experienced and practiced speaker, but with the energy permeating these dinnertime Table Talks, it dawned on me that I should join Toastmasters too. *This was the beginning of an awakening: Formal education may end, but learning never ends.*

I eventually joined the Town and Gown Toastmasters at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The club meets Wednesdays at 7:15 in the morning. It took me six months just to convince myself that I could make it to the club's early-morning sessions before starting my work day. But leaving home on Wednesday mornings, I started looking forward to the fully charged meetings in the university's majestic Johnston Hall. Then arriving at work 15 minutes earlier than my regular time – following a stimulating Toastmasters session – helped

me start the day in a more refreshed and cheerful mood. *This was the beginning of exhilaration: Passion for work may end, but passion for learning never ends.*

Succeeding as a Toastmaster

Teamwork is the most important lesson I've learned in Toastmasters. It works! In the past couple of years, our club's list of accomplishments has blossomed – from members excelling at the area, division and district-level contests to achieving the President's Distinguished Club award. Every member seems committed to helping the Town and Gown Toastmasters while in the pursuit of individual goals, and our motto reflects that: **T**ogether **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore (TEAM).

We created the club Web site, welcomed five new members (and earned credit for the Beat the Clock membership-building award), organized two speech marathons (under the VPE's leadership) to help members catch up on their project goals, designed an orientation booklet to help new members start their training, launched a brochure to familiarize first-time guests with club procedures and kept an inventory of club resources. All of these projects were examples of our club working together. *This was the beginning of realization: Individual goals may reach an end, but learning as a team never ends.*

Helping Others in Toastmasters

I passed another milestone in my learning curve when I was assigned to mentor a struggling club as a requirement to earn the Advanced Leader Silver award.

Like some other mentors, I tried too hard to get the struggling club to do things successful clubs were doing. In hindsight, I realize that I

missed seeing what *this* club was doing. For example, the meeting time was in the middle of the day, from noon to 12:40 p.m. Leaving in the middle of the day was something I had not experienced in any other club. It occurred to me that attending meetings regularly required a significant level of commitment, determination and organization from every member.

Over the ensuing months as a club mentor, I learned many lessons in true leadership. Others needed a model to emulate, but for me, it was a huge challenge to effectively demonstrate the various roles that people fill in a regular session. Even showing how to stay within time limits was an issue. I went through many days of frustration when one step forward seemed to bring two steps back. I felt that I let myself down.

These initial hiccups made me understand that change is a slow and natural process that brings sweeter rewards when given its own time and space. Recently, one member who had been in the club for a couple of years finally stood up and delivered his Ice Breaker. It was a moment of elation not only for him but for everyone in the group! *This was the beginning of self-actualization: My journey to achieving awards in Toastmasters may end, but the journey of learning through Toastmasters will never end.*

Leaving a Toastmasters Legacy

Some time back, I was struck with a chronic illness that can be controlled but not cured. Along with a string of X-rays and blood work, a sense of finality crept into my heart. It felt as though a curtain had been drawn on many activities that I loved.

We went on vacation to Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and my husband and I took a walk along a

lake at one of the resorts. He asked, "What legacy would you like to leave behind you?" What a Toastmasters-style question from my Toastmaster husband! Again, it seemed like Table Topics. I was reminded of an e-mail that we had received from Neha, our 20-year-old niece in India. About three years earlier, I had sent her a copy of the *Toastmaster* magazine and she expressed interest in joining a club. However, it didn't work out. In this recent e-mail, she mentioned again coming across the magazine I had sent her.

I Googled Toastmasters' Web site again to find a club near my place, and this time I wasn't disappointed, as I found a club in Dwarka [in New Delhi]. I was happy and I decided to go there. The meeting day arrived.... And I must say it was an awesome experience. I thanked myself for traveling all the way there. There were around 35-40 members in the club: students, professionals and retired people. I interacted with them and got to learn so many new things in a single meeting. I have attended two more meetings and am looking forward to joining the club soon."

This gave me the answer to my husband's Table Topics question about the legacy I would like to leave. I promised him and myself, "It is the legacy of *living* Toastmasters – supporting lifelong learning across countries and continents. That is what I would like to leave behind me!" 📧

Bani Arora, ACG, ALB, is a member of Town and Gown Toastmasters in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. She is the owner and operator of the Oxford Learning Center in Guelph. Reach her at nbarora@yahoo.ca.



When words take on a life of their own.

What's that Buzzing I Hear?

It used to be that “At the end of the day” meant just that: “At the end of the day we’ll have cocktails on the veranda.” A specific time on a specific day. Now it means... what? You’re always hearing business people say, “At the end of the day we have to increase billings by 20 percent.” Gee, that doesn’t give you much time, especially if the guy says it at 4 p.m. You’ve got an hour. But he doesn’t mean today, or tomorrow, or any specific day. Just some indeterminate time in the future. How’s that for a business plan?

I feel like asking: “What if we raise billings by 20 percent and it’s only 9 in the morning. Does that mean we get to go home for the rest of the day?”

Alas, it’s become a buzzword, a phrase with no definite meaning used to make the speaker and his message sound far more important than either of them really is. I sit in meetings where people talk about consumer “touch points” and “pain points” and I want to say, “Well, if you keep poking people in the same spot it’s gonna hurt. What do you expect?” But that’s not what they mean. Just like “drilling down” doesn’t mean *drilling* and “baking in” doesn’t mean *baking*. Drilling down is supposed to mean *digging deeper into a subject*, although just as often it seems to mean *the whole thing is full of holes*. And baking in means including something: “Let’s make sure the brand voice is baked in.” Do I smell something burning?

Then there’s this business of “going forward.” Hardly a day goes by when some business school bloviator with a Blackberry implanted in his forehead isn’t telling me what we need to do “going forward.” If I asked where forward is he couldn’t tell me, but by gosh we’re going there. And he’s going to lead us because he’s a “thought leader.” You know, like Einstein, Freud and Darwin. Well, maybe not exactly like them. He’s not actually going to do any painstaking research or original thinking that changes the way we think about the world. He’s going to read the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Harvard Business Review* and the super-secret investor tip sheet he subscribes to for \$2,000 a year from a man in Santa Fe known only as The Owl – so he can find out what *other* thought leaders think. Then he’s going to get up in a meeting, peer over the top of his glasses and intone: “Research shows that the closer people live to a store, the more likely they are to shop there.”

Wow.

He knows all this because he’s an expert in metrics – impossibly complicated formulas that make it impossible to understand how an impossible goal has somehow been reached through tactics that are impossible to measure, allowing him to earn an impossibly gargantuan bonus for “achieving the impossible.”

Whenever I tried to talk to this guy he never had time. Then a colleague suggested I give him the “elevator

speech.” Seemed a little odd. The last time I heard someone give a speech in an elevator there were mental-health professionals waiting for him when the doors opened. But I thought I’d give it a shot.

So I waited for him to get on an elevator and gave him a speech. He didn’t like that. He said he used his elevator time to text and read e-mail. Apparently, I misunderstood. An elevator speech doesn’t really happen on an elevator. It’s business code for *keep it short*: You should *imagine* you’re on an elevator with an important person and you have to get his attention before he reaches his floor. I’m not so sure about that. Have you ever been in an elevator with an important person? They look at everyone surrounding them like they’re trapped in a cattle car. If you tried to talk to them they would probably get off before they reached their floor just to get rid of you.

It’s all a big disconnect for me – which is another buzzword. A “disconnect” is when something doesn’t make sense but it’s nobody’s fault. Maybe we didn’t have enough bandwidth, or we suffered a paradigm shift, or we didn’t leverage the right synergies, or our solutions weren’t scalable, or we needed to employ more sustainable solutions. But Joe or Maria or Frank or Patty? How could it be their fault? They just work here. ■

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