

# THE TOASTMASTER

November 1990



COMMITTING COMEDY





## No Profit Grows Where No Pleasure Is Taken

— *Shakespeare*

"Bartender, gimme a 'Lite,' is a well-known advertising slogan in the United States for a low-calorie beer. The advertising medium continually bombards us with ads of this nature, extolling the value of "light" products in our lives; light in calories, light in fat, light in cholesterol. From light beer to light margarine, everything is designed to keep us hale, hearty and healthy. Unfortunately, there is one light item on this list that receives far too little attention: the light touch of humor as a simple medication that relaxes, motivates and revives our spirits. It is the tonic that makes our lives enjoyable and gives us strength to meet the challenges that step before us. Physicians tell us that it is also a prescription for helping our circulatory system and improving our health.

To this, many people respond: "I'm not funny! I could never tell jokes." However, humor is not always a funny story with a punch line; humor comes in many forms, including anecdotes, witty retorts and even gentle teasing among friends at a Toastmasters meeting.

We expect our club meetings to be enjoyable. The easiest way to meet that expectation is to provide exciting and interesting programs. A key ingredient in that program is timely injection of humor. This often overlooked, simple, essential ingredient helps people feel good and makes them eager to return for more. Adding humor to our speech, Table Topic, evaluation or any other communication, within or outside the club meeting, is as easy as following these guidelines from the basic Communication and Leadership Manual:

- 1) **Be in earnest.** Take humor seriously enough to try it. Practice, experiment and above all, believe in yourself and what you're doing.
- 2) **Analyze your audience.** Know the tastes and interests of your audience. What works well at the office isn't always suitable at church or a Toastmasters meeting.
- 3) **Show what you mean.** Body language and facial expressions can mean the difference between polite snickers and loud, rolling guffaws.
- 4) **Vocal variety.** The "you had to be there" syndrome often is the result of incorrect inflection, timing or delivery.

Communication is considered to be approximately seven percent words, 38 percent voice tones and 55 percent body language. These figures show how you can be funny without using words. The Communication and Leadership projects for effective humor are great tools for "working on our wit." Remember that the mutually supportive environment of your club is the best place in which to practice and test your humor.

Humor has many advantages. Best of all, it helps us feel good. All we need to do is turn on the "lite!"

**A. EDWARD BICK, DTM**  
International President

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## BEGINNER TAKES NOTE

The article "Remedy for a Failing Memory" by Lin Gensing in the July issue seems as if it were solely written for me. I always use notes because I panic without them. I would love to do without them, but I am afraid. Your article gave me hope that I will be able to do without notes someday. Thank you, Ms. Gensing.

Also, the article "Are You on the Right Track?" by Frank Storey gave me a very good path to follow. Both of these stories are excellent for beginners like myself.

Juanita F. Martin  
Richland Club 2500-58  
Columbia, South Carolina

## SAUDI TOASTMASTERS WANT VISITORS

I am a Saudi citizen who lives in Yanbu, one of the major industrial cities in Saudi Arabia. We have had our own small Toastmasters club for the last three years and it's going okay, but we're hoping for more progress. I welcome Toastmasters from other clubs to visit our club in Saudi Arabia, or provide us with ideas and information about club events.

I enjoy reading the fine articles in *The Toastmaster* magazine and I find it educational and fun. It would be nice if you could write more about overseas clubs in the magazine.

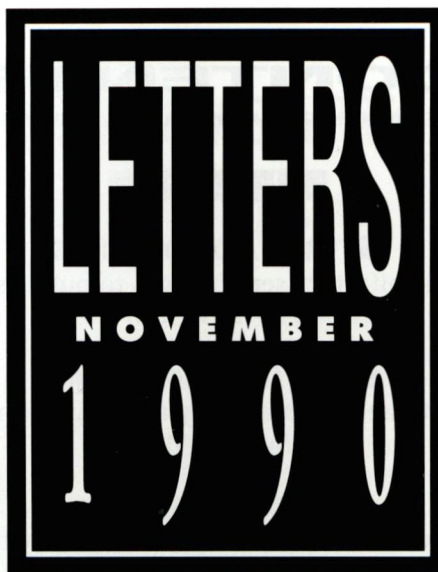
Keep up the good work and the excellent articles!

Abdul Aziz Ahmadi  
Red Sea Club 5518-U  
Yanbu Al-Sinaiyah, Saudi Arabia

**Editor's Note:** *We'd love to have more articles about overseas clubs. The trouble is, we hardly receive any! The magazine's content is a reflection of material submitted by members and freelance writers. So, for articles about clubs in foreign countries, we need Toastmasters in those clubs to send us some information.*

## AVOID POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS

I was shocked and saddened by "Secrets of the Great Communicator" in your



August issue. Politics, as a major arena for public speaking, has a place in Toastmasters, but political endorsements do not. I felt the authors went beyond describing a politician's skills (a legitimate topic) to produce an article that was fawning and tasteless in tone and dishonest in content. The title, "Secrets of the Great Communicator," let's remember, was an invention of Reagan's public relations team. Particularly grotesque was Mr. Green's apparent attempt to credit Reagan with the growth in Toastmasters over the past decade.

As a club officer, I often have to convince newcomers that Toastmasters International has no real political agenda; when a piece like this appears in your major publication, I feel betrayed.

Alan Badger  
CTB/McGraw Hill Club 4547-4  
Monterey, California

## TERMS OF GENDER

A response to Bonnie Telfer's letter, "Chairmen' Inaccurate" (August 1990), is mandatory.

Sorry, Ms. Telfer, but your criticism of "Territorial Council Chairmen" was inaccurate. Try reading any dictionary. You will learn that a chairman is one who presides. The person can be male or female. Furthermore, wouldn't you prefer the term "chairperdaughter" to chairperson?

Daniel A. Papcke  
West Side Club 2606-10  
Cleveland, Ohio

## INTERNATIONAL ANGLE

Thank you for the article in the June issue titled "Not Everyone Was Born Speaking English." Within the next few years my husband and I are planning on taking the family overseas to live and work.

I welcome all of these international articles which I believe will help me prepare for every aspect of living there. At this point we only know we will be in either Europe or Southeast Asia, so as you can see, articles from everywhere are helpful to me. It's also fun thinking about which Toastmasters club I will be able to join when we know our final destination.

Alice M. Lad, CTM  
Toast of Meridian Club 3354-11  
Indianapolis, Indiana

**Editor's Note:** *Locating Toastmasters clubs when you visit other cities, states and countries is easy: just call or write to World Headquarters and we'll tell you the meeting locations and times of local clubs.*

## PROFESSIONALISM PREFERRED

On several occasions you have published letters and articles that have politely, tactfully and sensitively rebuked the behavior of fellow Toastmasters without using personal or club names.

This professional approach, I was disappointed to note, was not chosen by author Ron Merkin in his June article, "Not Everyone Was Born Speaking English." Not satisfied with the fact that someone, rightly or wrongly, had felt insulted or humiliated, he perpetuated and publicized the embarrassment by putting the episodes into print with pinpointing details.

Can we replace this tabloid, sensationalist style of writing with a more professional approach? If contributors find it difficult to be tactful, surely we should be able to expect the editor to show some sensitivity.

Polotniuk Toastmasters International Club  
Zug 7332-U  
Zug, Switzerland



# MUCH ADO ABOUT NOSING

## HOW THE OLFACTORY SENSE RELATES TO PUBLIC SPEAKING.

By Teri-E Belf

AS TOASTMASTERS, WE DEVOTE most of our attention to the auditory and visual channels of our brain's sensory apparatus. Our evaluations highlight elements such as vocal variety, eye contact, posture, gestures, body movement and speech organization. But our sense of smell is overlooked.

Toastmasters have been operating as if "no nose is a good nose." Since smell is my strongest sense, I decided to follow my nose and explore the relevance of the olfactory sense to the speaking profession. What started out as a humorous research escapade has produced some interesting findings. After reading this article you will no longer dismiss the function of your snout as insignificant to your public speaking performance. Consider the following facts:

- Our sense of smell is the oldest and most sensitive of the five senses. It is 10,000 times more sensitive than our sense of taste, which is the second strongest sense.
- Our olfactory sense is unique in that there is no interpretation required before smells are processed by our emotions. Some basic brain physiology may help here. Our sensory data (sight, sound, taste and touch) travels from its source to the neocortex of the brain where it is interpreted in light of earlier experiences and the physical context. The data then passes through the limbic system, also known as our emotional filter. The limbic system must be activated to bring forth long-term memory.

But olfactory data bypasses the neocortex and goes directly to the limbic system, affecting the emotions. In short: the fastest way to access long-term memories is through smells.

- Research has shown that when peppermint odors are periodically introduced into a ventilation system, employees become more alert and productivity increases.
- The field of aroma therapy is rapidly gaining acceptance in psychology as an effective way for patients to recall events from early childhood.

So what does this have to do with speaking ability? Remember that communication, including giving speeches, is a two-way street. Your speech is only effective if it is understood and retained by your audience. So, if you want the audience to remember more of what you say, use their sense of smell to your advantage. The following tips cannot be found in your Toastmasters manual — yet:

Consider how certain scents might complement your speech and introduce them in the environment in which you will be speaking. There are a number of options:

- Buy sprays in popular scents — fir, baby powder, cinnamon, leather, rain showers and baked bread.
- Bring a bouquet of fresh flowers.
- Light incense before anyone arrives.
- Put your clothes in a cedar chest and

take them out right before your speech.

- Open up some potpourri, or use car or room deodorizer.

Carefully select a suitable fragrance: Take into account your mood, the audience, the setting and the topic. For example, you would not want to elicit memories of baked bread if you're giving a speech about the national economy, unless you intend to connect the decline of tradition with the Democratic party. Likewise, you would not want your audience in the midst of lilacs, gladioli or gardenias when listening to a serious speech about the effects of alcoholism on the brain, unless you are setting the stage for a eulogy.

Refer to scents, fragrances and odors to amplify your personal stories. State the specific smells attached to objects, environments and people you mention. Use facial expressions that reflect the enjoyment or repulsion you experienced from the scent. This will help make your message more real.

Be sensitive to particular smells that may bring negative memories or other distracting thoughts. It may be a good idea to stay away from rose, cut grass or ragweed scents since they are directly connected with common sneezing allergies. Also, if possible, steer clear of smoke odors since they distract the increasing numbers of nonsmokers. Citronella candles work wonders to counteract the smell of smoke.

Know your audience. Certain scents may violate cultural norms, or be considered sacred. You don't want people to think your speech reeked!

Consider using perfumed handouts: just be careful which fragrances you choose.

Note if any words, pictures or symbols might conjure up specific smells to the viewers when you use viewgraphs, slides or flip charts for visuals. Try them out by asking friends or colleagues what smells they imagine. Then decide if your speech is strengthened by these smells.

Now you can understand why I make "much ado about nosing." So get ready for the sweet smell of success as you introduce the olfactory sense into your speeches. ●

*Teri-E Belf is director of Success Unlimited Associates in Annandale, Virginia.*



# THE ART OF STORYTELLING

These techniques can make any aspiring orator seem witty.

By Larry Wilde



Illustration by Jeff Koegel

**A BUNCH OF CONS AT SAN QUENTIN MET EVERY NIGHT AFTER DINNER.**

**ONE PRISONER STOOD UP AND SHOUTED, "72!" EVERYBODY LAUGHED. ANOTHER INMATE GOT TO HIS FEET AND CALLED OUT, "56!" ALL THE MEN GUFFAWED. A THIRD CONVICT BROUGHT DOWN THE HOUSE JUST BY ANNOUNCING, "86!"**

**BARNEY HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED AT THE BIG HOUSE AND ASKED LOUIE, A LIFER, "WHAT'S GOING ON?"**

**"WE'RE TELLING JOKES!" HE REPLIED. "BUT INSTEAD OF TELLING A YARN ALL THE BOYS KNOW, WE JUST YELL OUT A NUMBER FROM OUR JOKE BOOKS. SAVES A LOT OF TIME."**

**ANXIOUS TO GET IN GOOD WITH THE GUYS, BARNEY STOOD UP AND SHOUTED, "23!" THERE WAS DEAD SILENCE. THEN HE CALLED OUT, "44!" NOTHING HAPPENED. AGAIN HE TRIED, "17!" SILENCE.**

**HE TOOK LOUIE ASIDE AND ASKED, "HOW COME THEY DIDN'T LAUGH?"**

**"WELL, KID," SAID THE CON, "YOUR STORIES ARE ALL RIGHT, BUT YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO TELL A JOKE."**

Telling funny stories is one of the most difficult platform skills to master.

Good storytellers are rare. The best of jokes can be ruined by poor delivery, wordiness and lack of preparation.

It need not be that way. Adding humor to a speech by incorporating a funny story or amusing anecdote is easy with the proper tools.

Following are six techniques that can help any aspiring orator seem witty:

## **MEMORIZE THE EXACT PUNCH LINE**

The punch line, the most important part of the story, ties the story together and evokes laughter.

Nothing is more frustrating than to hear someone tell a joke, only to end it with, "Oh, I forgot the punch line." You can change the rest of the story and adapt it to fit different occasions or circumstances, but you must not change the punch line.

If you've memorized the exact punch line, no matter how poorly you relate the initial parts of the joke, you will have the security of knowing you can deliver the punch line correctly. So, when you read or hear a joke that you'd like to repeat, learn the punch line first.

One of my show business friends loves hearing as well as telling the latest jokes. When I tell him a story he laughs at it, but while he's laughing he repeats the punch line. He'll finish laughing, then say the punch line again. Then he says, "That's funny!" and repeats the punch line a third time. It took me some time to figure out why he kept repeating the punch line of the story: He was adding a new story to his collection.

After you've said the punch line out loud three times, repeat it thrice more. Do it while taking a shower or bath. As you drive to work, deliver it three times again.

You have by now repeated the punch line of the story about 10 times and it's stamped indelibly in your memory. At this point you can proceed to learn the set-up, the other salient points of the story that are essential for the punch line to work.

Don't spoil your chance to earn a laugh by hesitating, stumbling, recalling or apologizing. Get the punch line down letter perfect.



## SHORTEN STORIES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

The size of the laugh you get is inversely proportional to the number of words used to reach the punch line. Thus, the fewer the words the bigger the laughs.

Great storytellers spin yarns without using one unnecessary word. They know the inviolate rule: most stories depend on exact wording to be funny.

The ability to edit one's words carefully is the mark of a true professional.

Jack Benny, on the importance of editing, once said: "Most comedians give me credit for being not the best comedian in show business, but the best editor, which is as important as being a comedian. There is nothing as important as editing."

Most storytellers take too long to reach the point or punch line. Make it short and sweet — no story ever got funnier by getting longer.

## IT'S YOUR FAULT IF THEY DON'T LAUGH

Did you memorize the exact punch line? Did you tell the story in the fewest words possible? So why didn't they laugh?

Maybe you told the wrong joke at the wrong time.

It's critical to get the right kind of laugh. You don't want a shock laugh, which usually follows an off-color story. An embarrassed giggle almost always comes from telling a tasteless joke. You must learn to judge your listeners.

Using dirty words for shock value is ill-advised in most circumstances. A good storyteller will never resort to vulgarity.

Finding the right jokes and telling them at the right time and place can

only be learned by trial and error. Keep experimenting until you find what works.

## NEVER LAUGH AT YOUR OWN JOKES

That's like applauding for yourself. It indicates that you are insecure about the material and you are trying to help it along.

However, if you've diligently rehearsed the story, if you are satisfied that you're telling it the best way possible and your audience still doesn't laugh — get rid of it.

It's time to try something else. The fun of storytelling is searching for material that will serve you best when you need it. Then let the audience enjoy your selection.

Remember: the audience is the best judge of funny material — not you.

## PERSONALIZE YOUR STORIES

Your material will evoke louder and longer laughter if it has a ring of truth to it. Your listeners want to believe you.

It doesn't have to be true — only believable. Few amusing incidents are told exactly the way they happened. They are embellished and exaggerated for comedic purposes. But the more personal the story sounds the more your listeners will get caught up in what you say. Following are some examples of how to place yourself in a story:

- "This morning my wife told me about..."
- "Let me tell you what happened to me last week as I returned from..."
- "You won't believe what I saw today at the supermarket..."

- "My uncle was on a cruise ship and he told me about this couple who..."

## REHEARSE THE STORY

You can't get an accurate reading of an audience response unless you present the material smoothly. With practice you can avoid the embarrassment of not remembering the punch line or the howls of disappointment when you've left out the salient points of a story.

### Some tips:

- Repeat the story aloud until you can tell it without the slightest mistake.
- If you are really serious about perfecting your delivery, tell the story to a tape recorder. Listen to it objectively.
- Are your stories told with the fewest words possible? Edit out unnecessary, flowery sentences. Keep only the main points.
- Tell the joke to your mother-in-law, your uncle, the butcher and the mailman. Dial the operator and tell it to her — tell it to anybody who'll listen.

These techniques may not nurture comic genius, but they will help polish and perfect storytelling skills. Good storytellers are good because they've mastered these elementary skills. When basic techniques become second nature, positive results automatically follow. ●

*Larry Wilde has written 43 books on humor and speaks nationwide to corporations and associations on the value of laughter. This article is an excerpt from Library of Laughter, available from Toastmasters International.*

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*The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.—Mark Twain*





# COMMITTING COMEDY

## How to Tickle Your Audience's FunnyBone.

By Stephanie Landers

TO GET TO CARNEGIE HALL, THE OLD SAW GOES, YOU'VE GOT TO PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. EVERYONE KNOWS THIS APPLIES TO MUSICAL ABILITY, BUT TO BEING FUNNY? SURPRISINGLY, THE ANSWER IS YES!

AFTER I WON THE REGIONAL HUMOROUS SPEECH CONTEST LAST YEAR, I WAS APPROACHED BY MANY FELLOW TOASTMASTERS. "I WISH I COULD GIVE A HUMOROUS SPEECH," THEY WOULD WISTFULLY SIGH. WHEN I ASKED WHAT WAS STOPPING THEM, THE ANSWER WAS ALWAYS: "OH, I'M NOT FUNNY." SOME EVEN SOUNDED PROUD OF THIS!

EVERYONE — YES, EVEN YOU — HAS A FUNNY BONE. YOU JUST HAVE TO DISCOVER IT. FOLLOWING ARE SOME STEPS TO HELP YOU REACH YOUR HUMOROUS POTENTIAL:

### WHAT, ME FUNNY?

*Two little old ladies sat on a bench talking. One said to the other, "Did you see what happened in China?"*

*The other said, "I never see anything — I live in the back."*

Most humor is unintentional; people are constantly saying and doing funny things. And the first step to becoming funnier is to notice the humorous things that happen everywhere, all the time. Here are some ways to begin "thinking funny":

**Listen for colorful dialogue in everyday conversation.** People are at their funniest when they don't mean to be. That's why I always carry a notebook for the purpose of capturing these priceless gems. For instance, my husband is prone to malapropisms such as, "Don't throw Band-Aids at the situation," and my favorite, "You have a mind like a trap door."

**Recall colorful characters you have known.** Even if they frustrated you, your encounters with them can make for colorful material.

**Go to a place you visit often and investigate it with "fresh eyes."** Pretend you've never been there before. What do you notice about the post office? The grocery store? The gas station? You can build an entire routine with little details people generally overlook.

**Glance through a phone book.** The white pages are full of funny names, and the yellow pages contain bizarre

services with even stranger descriptions.

**Recall your own experiences and look for humorous potential.** Especially in situations that didn't seem funny at the time. Remember the time you waited in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles? Were served by a rude waiter? Were audited? You'd be amazed at how willing audiences are to laugh at someone else's misfortunes.

### PICK YOUR TOPIC

*A man named Fred wanted to win the lottery, so he went to church and prayed: "Oh Lord, I've been a good man. All I want is to win the lottery."*

*Nothing happened that week. He went back to church and asked, "Lord, it's such a small thing to you, can't you just once let me win the lottery?"*

*Still nothing happened. Finally, he went to church and demanded, "Lord, why won't you let me win the lottery?"*

*From above a voice boomed, "Meet me halfway, Fred. Buy a ticket!"*

You know you want to give a humorous speech, and you're looking for hilarious material. A good start, but you can't go any further until you pick a topic. Choose something that offers a wealth of material; the more familiar, the better. The following steps will help you mold an idea into a humorous speech:

Continued on page 10







1) **Do you have a topic?** Quick; before you do anything else, sit down and write everything you can possibly think of on that subject. Everything — even if it doesn't seem related. Not only will this grease the gears of creativity, it will also provide material that may not have been tapped otherwise.

2) **Edit what you've written** and pick out the funniest premises.

3) **Assemble these premises in a logical order** and pay extra attention to smooth transitions.

For example, when I wrote my last speech, "Secrets to a Good Marriage," I wanted to talk about how married couples handle delicate situations, such as flirting at parties. Using the process described above, I put several anecdotes about parties into a logical sequence. The final version covered preparation for a party (my husband takes six seconds to get ready, compared to my two hours), what happened at the party (a Sweet Young Thing laughed at everything he said), and the way my husband gloated in the car afterward (he sang "Smooth Operator" as he drove). Once I established a general direction, it was easy to write the rest of the speech.

#### **ESTABLISH THE TONE BEFORE YOU HONE**

*While out riding, a cowboy came across an Indian listening very carefully with his ear to the ground.*

*"Covered wagon...two horses...family of three on board...little girl in back...blue eyes and braids," said the Indian.*

*"That's amazing!" said the cowboy, "You can tell all that just by listening to the ground?"*

*"No," replied the Indian. "Ran me over an hour ago."*

In humorous speaking, it's especially important for your intentions to be clear. Now that you have the structure of your speech, the next step is to establish a tone that's uniquely yours. Is it light-hearted? Sarcastic? Deadpan (pretending to be serious to achieve the opposite effect)? Decide on the effect you want, and hone your material accordingly.

Some suggestions on how to hone your material for maximum L.P.M.s (laughs per minute):

● **Tell them a story.** When possible, put your speech in narrative form. I call this the "Once Upon a Time Principle":

it's innate in people to enjoy a tall tale.

● **Paint a funny picture.** Let your audience use their imagination and they'll love you for it. Vivid imagery (the stranger the better) will make it easier for them to discover the humor in your speech.

● **Avoid "see and say."** Restating the obvious doesn't allow the audience to use their imagination. For example, don't just point to a bank ATM card and say, "This is my ATM card and I love it." Think of something creative: "Having this ATM card is better than being in a relationship. With my ATM card, I can get validated 24 hours a day, I always know what my limit is, and if anyone else messes with it, I'm not responsible for the damages."

● **The premise is not the punch line.** It's tempting to use certain foolproof

—————  
**YOU'D BE AMAZED  
AT HOW WILLING  
AUDIENCES ARE TO  
LAUGH AT SOMEONE  
ELSE'S MISFORTUNES**  
—————

premises, such as Jim and Tammy Bakker, to bageasy laughs. However, your speech should aim to make the premise funny in an unexpected way. So experiment: have Jim and Tammy host a game show, run a savings and loan, or be the first couple on Mars. Think of the premise as a starting point, not the finish line.

● **Keep the set-ups short.** A funny thing happened on the way to the punch line: the audience got bored. The fewer words used, the stronger the laugh.

● **Word play, yes — puns, no.** Puns elicit groans, not laughs. Worse, puns are like nuns: they never travel alone. Your audience will brace for the next one, instead of letting themselves laugh — and the last thing you want is a braced audience. Instead, use word play that will make them think they're clever for getting the joke. Bumper stickers often make great examples: "I don't drink anymore. I don't drink any less, either;" "I'm looking for Mr. Right, but will settle for Mr. Right Now"; and so on.

● **Heed the Rule of Threes.** We've all heard jokes that start like this: "There were these three clergymen in a boat: a

priest, a minister and a rabbi..." The first example sets up a premise, the second validates it and the third contradicts it in an unforeseen (and with luck, humorous) way. Besides, people have short attention spans and three items are about all they can retain.

● **End with a punch.** The last word in a punch line is the *punch word*, it should have the most impact. Choose your punch word carefully. Aim for harsher sounds like "p" and "k." Use "peanut" instead of "almond," for instance, or "kayak" instead of "row boat."

#### **HERE'S THE PITCH!**

You've written your speech. Can your delivery make it funnier? Your jokes can be even better by paying extra attention to the following three areas:

1) **Timing** — The most important factor in comedy. Your routine has its own unique rhythm, so tape yourself giving the speech and listen for rhythm alone. You will begin to notice awkward pauses, lengthy explanations and other details that get in the way of smooth delivery.

Also, wait for laughs. Many fledgling comics are in such a rush to get through their routines that they actually "step" on laughs — the audience stops laughing to hear the next joke. Deliver the punch line, then pause for the effect. If people laugh, enjoy it — you earned it.

2) **Face and body expressions.** Use your hands and stance to illustrate your point. Roll your eyes, scowl, grin — a little "mugging" goes a long way. Also, raise your eyebrows just before the punch line to cue your audience to laugh.

3) **Voice.** Your voice should reflect your attitude, whether it's sarcastic, confused or outraged. It also helps to know that people find lower voices more soothing to listen to. Keep your voice well-modulated until you get to the end of a sentence — a slight raise in pitch alerts the audience to the impending punch line.

The best way to make your humorous speech a success is to enjoy yourself on-stage. Have fun, and it's almost guaranteed that your audience will, too. And isn't that the point? ●

*Stephanie Landers is a San Jose writer and humor consultant. A member of Adelante Club 5232-4, she won the Region II Humorous Speech Contest in 1989.*



# JOKE YOUR WAY TO THE TOP

Ten tips for taking home a trophy for your humorous speech.



Illustration by Johnee Bee

"SO LET'S HEAR THIS STAND-UP COMEDY ROUTINE OF YOURS!" IT WAS A COUPLE DAYS AFTER A REGION I HUMOROUS SPEECH CONTEST, AND MY NON-TOASTMASTER FRIENDS WANTED TO KNOW JUST WHAT IT WAS THAT HAD MADE EVERYONE LAUGH. I TRIED TO EXPLAIN: "YOU SEE, EVEN THOUGH IT'S FUNNY, IT STILL HAS TO BE A SPEECH. WE DON'T JUST GET UP THERE AND TELL JOKES. THERE HAS TO BE SOME SORT OF CONTINUITY."

By Barry Evans

"But you won! You must have given them some good one-liners!"

But I hadn't. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that one-liners and what most Toastmasters call "humorous speeches" just aren't the same. So here's a look at what differentiates the two — my "rules for humorous speeches":

1) **You're still giving a speech.** That means an opening, a middle and a close are necessary. You also need a theme. The old, "Tell them where you're going; take them there; and tell them where you've been," still applies.

Gestures and vocal variety are important, but you'll need a consistent topic around which to weave your humor. Jokes are great fun — in the bar afterward. But they usually won't win contests.

2) **Keep your humor simple.** Play to the lowest common denominator. Don't assume everybody's humor is as subtle or dry as your own.

I once had a hilarious opening line in a speech, and I expected an immediate roar of laughter. But all I got were a couple of sympathetic snorts from the back of the room. I still think the joke was the height of mirth, but now I keep it to myself.

3) **Know your audience.** Be aware of the sensitivities of your listeners, and delete anything that may portray you as uncaring or judgmental. What would get a lot of laughs at a nightclub would bomb in front of Toastmasters.

At a recent district humor contest, three contestants coincidentally told tales about cats. The problem was that the audience was full of cat lovers, some of whom were obviously offended when one speaker after another poked fun at their favorite pets. The laughter was sporadic and awkward, and none of the "cat" speakers won.

The same goes for sexism and racism. A local audience who knows and trusts you might like a "Take my wife — please!" type of joke. But away from home, listeners who don't know you will frown on sexist or racist humor.

4) **Keep it clean.** It's sometimes tempting to slip in a little double entendre, a slightly off-color (but hilarious) line or a gentle reference to bodily



**WHAT WOULD GET A LOT  
OF LAUGHS AT A NIGHTCLUB  
WOULD BOMB IN FRONT OF  
TOASTMASTERS.**

functions. And sometimes you can get away with it in your own club — everyone knows you there and they all enjoy sharing a forbidden laugh.

But do the same thing in front of an audience of strangers, and you could be in big trouble — they don't know you and may not trust you with off-color material, however much your friends enjoyed it. It's not worth the risk.

**5) Give them permission.** I once lost a speech contest because I wasn't sensitive to my audience. It's a terrible thing to ride roughshod over 300 people who are just starting to laugh at something you've said — but that's what I did. I didn't give them time to laugh.

Somehow, audience members need permission to enjoy themselves, and I prevented that by cutting them off. Remember, your listeners want to laugh — that's why they are there. It's your job to facilitate that.

**6) Give yourself time.** Joe Boyd, winner of the 1984 International Speech Contest, says he nearly went overtime in the regional competition, even though he'd rehearsed many times. Why? Because to his surprise, the audience found one of his lines so hilarious they just laughed and laughed — so long that he had to cut them off to stay within time. Four more seconds and he'd have been disqualified.

The message: Allow extra time in any speech (humorous or otherwise) where there is danger of laughter forcing you to exceed your time limit.

**7) Break up the humor.** It's more

effective to provide humor in steady doses, rather than in one big bowlful. A series of small humorous items punctuated throughout your speech will be more effective than spending several minutes working up to one big laugh. That means try to create a laugh early — within the first 30 seconds — and regular opportunities for laughter thereafter.

This doesn't mean you have to come up with a dozen or more hilarious lines for a seven-minute speech; the laughter will build upon itself. And once the audience is tuned in to your style of humor, the smallest phrase or gesture will probably be enough to keep the chuckles rolling.

**8) Keep it fresh.** The best humor sounds spontaneous, and that can be difficult when you've been rehearsing for several weeks. One effective solution involves dealing with each anecdote or portion of your speech as complete in itself, and practicing only one part at a time. By doing that, and by limiting the number of times you rehearse the complete speech, you're able to experience a sense of discovery when you enter a competition.

**9) Personalize it.** You are your own best source of material. Some of the best humorous speeches are those based on real incidents in your life, where you highlight the funny, the outrageous or the self-deprecatory and simply tell the story with enthusiasm. The secret of such speeches is that the audience identifies with the speaker, and feels that they are participating in the story.

Many people find humorous speeches the toughest manual assignments, even those with high self-confidence in giving other manual speeches. The key is to trust your own humor.

Everyone is funny and has a tale to tell — but we all have our own personal brand of humor. Whether yours is deadpan, self-mocking, frenetic, whimsical, dry or downright cynical, work with your own individual style and don't force yourself into another role.

**10) Have fun!** This oh-so-obvious advice is easily forgotten in competitions where the stakes are high and only one contestant goes to the next round. By competing in a spirit of friendly and relaxed rivalry, not only will you have a lot of fun — whatever the outcome — but your relaxed attitude will convey itself to your audience, and your speech will be the better for it.

So start thinking now about your next humorous speech...it's one of the best reasons to be a Toastmaster. ●

*Barry Evans, a civil engineer and member of Bellingham Club 60-2 in Bellingham, Washington, won the Region I Humorous Speech Contest in 1985.*



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# THE 'NEVERS' OF PODIUM HUMOR

## THE WORST SIN: LAUGHING AT YOUR OWN JOKES.

By Dr. Richard T. Roney

"Johnny, what's wrong with this audience?" asked the novice standup comedian. It was his first appearance on the "Tonight Show." Watching him on TV, I wanted to scream, "Don't criticize me because your material isn't funny!" Those that spice up speeches are wise. But if your first attempts at humor flop, don't act like the amateur mentioned above.

Here are a few more "nevers" of podium humor:

1) **Never apologize.** The novice raconteur may accidentally present a funny line or story that works. If she does, she must not apologize by saying things like "Pardon the pun," "No pun intended" (sure it was), or "I don't usually tell jokes, but here is one I heard..."

If you're new at telling jokes or using humor, your audience will soon find out. Don't apologize and give yourself away as an amateur.

2) **Never explain it.** Don't you hate when someone tells a joke that isn't funny? To make things worse, they ask, "Get it? Did you get it?" Sure we did. It wasn't funny.

Usually, when an audience doesn't laugh it's because the material wasn't funny, not because they didn't understand it. When you explain it with statements such as "I'll explain that one later" (which assumes we didn't get it), or "You had to be there" (I wasn't, so why do this to me?), you destroy it and insult the audience's intelligence. Quickly move

away from the bad joke.

3) **Never repeat a joke.** If a speech is informal, someone may arrive late. A listener could yell out, "Joe, you've got to hear the story about her little boy. Tell us again." Don't do it! Often, after I speak, there's a brief social period. Someone will grab a latecomer and say, "Dr. Roney, tell this man that story about when you killed the duck." Give in and you'll have a small group hearing the story for the second time. Everyone will know the punch line except the stranger who came late (and who didn't ask to be put in this situation). After the story, the stranger feels peer pressure to laugh as everyone stares at him. Don't give in, just say, "I never repeat stories."

4) **Never brag.** That is, never state how funny you're going to be. If a speaker

says that a story will really make me laugh, I make it a point not to laugh. That's human nature. Never say:

- "I use a lot of humor in my talks. I hope you people enjoy laughing" (nauseating).

- "I'm really pretty funny once I get warmed up."

- "Last time I told that, everyone laughed so hard" (a cheap punch, meaning we aren't as good an audience).

- "You'll love this story. You'll die laughing. I did" (you're dying now, buddy).

So never announce your humor. Catch people with their guards down.

5) **Never footnote.** Never tell an audience that a humorous event didn't really happen. They'll know it, so don't insult them.

6) **Never use a member of the audience as the butt of a joke.**

7) **Never worry about the occasion.** Some people believe that some situations are too serious or unsuitable for humor. I've used humor at funerals, in patriotic speeches, speeches to honor POW/MIA Day, and in Veteran Memorial speeches. I've used it following religious songs and the National Anthem. Any occasion has room for humor, provided it's used properly.

The best way to improve humor is to practice. In each speech, risk a little more. Keeping the above "nevers" in mind will benefit you and your audience. ●

*Dr. Richard T. Roney, a former Toastmaster, is in charge of chaplain services at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Marion, Illinois.*

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Let's look at techniques and examples of how to freshen up old jokes. Of course, jokes may seem less funny in cold print than when spoken with proper inflection, gestures and timing. Suppose you want some humor for your speech about virtue. Go to a joke book, look under "virtue" and you may find this entry: "The husband who won't chase after women is too faithful, too moral — and too old." To adapt this joke, you might "dress it up with new clothes" and say:

"Virtuous acts don't always result from worthy motives. Occasionally, people do good things for dubious reasons. The other day a man overheard his wife and mother-in-law talking about his many business trips. The mother wondered why her daughter didn't worry about her husband going off unchaperoned to swanky resort hotels with a lot of gorgeous, unattached professional women around.

"Me worry?" asked the wife. "Why, he'd never cheat on me. He's too faithful, too moral and too old."

The adaptation of this gag from the joke book includes both a "build-in" and a "build-up." You achieve the build-in by linking the theme of the joke with the theme of your speech

JOEY ADAMS, IN HIS BOOK, *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HUMOR*, WRITES, "THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN OLD JOKE — IF YOU DRESS IT UP WITH NEW CLOTHES." MANY HUMORISTS AGREE. DR. HERB TRUE, AUTHOR OF *HUMOR POWER*, ADVISES: "RECYCLE OLD STORIES FOR NEW IMPACT BY TELLING THEM YOUR OWN INDIVIDUAL WAY."

HUMOR MATERIAL IS EVERYWHERE — IN OUR DAILY LIFE EXPERIENCES AS WELL AS IN MASS MEDIA: NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, MOVIES, BOOKS, SPEECHES — NOT TO MENTION RADIO AND TELEVISION. ONE OF THE BEST SOURCES IS THE MULTITUDE OF JOKE BOOKS, WHICH CONTAIN HUNDREDS, EVEN THOUSANDS OF JOKES, ANECDOTES AND STORIES. MOST JOKE BOOKS ARE INDEXED FOR QUICK REFERENCE OR ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY BY SUBJECT.



**FRESHEN OLD JOKES**

By Thomas Montalbo, DTM

PULL THOSE OLD JOKES OUT OF THE CLOSET AND REFASHION THEM TO SUIT YOUR OWN STYLE.

WITH NEW STYLE  
 CUFFED JOKES



— virtue — using two transitional sentences about “virtuous acts” and “good things.” The build-up adds details that flesh out the bare bones joke and lead in to the punch line.

The build-up makes the story more believable and sets the audience up for the twist at the end. You lead the audience on to expect the wife to do nothing but praise her husband for his virtue. By using the phrases “too faithful” and “too moral” you have the audience thinking her husband too fine and noble to cheat on her.

But in the last phrase you surprise the audience by having the wife throw in the brickbat “too old.” That collapses the build-up and breaks it into laughter.

As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, “Humor overthrows

anniversary. I like anniversaries. The trouble is, I often forget them. That happened again just two days ago. As I was leaving home to go to work, my wife hugged me, kissed me and said, ‘Do you know what day this is?’ I didn’t know, as usual, so I pretended not to hear.

“On the way to work, hard as I tried, I still couldn’t remember what day it was. But I didn’t want to disappoint my wife. After all, anniversaries are days when you can be sentimental. So on the road I stopped to buy a box of candy.

“At lunchtime, I still didn’t know what the occasion was. I worried that a box of candy wouldn’t be enough to save the day. So I shopped for another gift and bought a necklace.

“When it was time to go home, I remembered my wife likes flowers. So I

At other times a joke undergoes such alterations that the details and punch line are entirely changed. Here’s an entry from a joke book:

“A nervous passenger on an elevator asked the operator, ‘What would happen if the cable broke? Would we go up or down?’

The operator replied, ‘That, madam, depends on the life you’ve led.’”

Compare that joke with this similar story by Brenda W. Simonson from *Quote* magazine:

“A traveler visited an old Greek monastery perched high on a steep mountain. The only access to the monastery was a rope basket.

The traveler got into the basket, and just as he was about to be hauled up the sheer cliff wall, he noticed that the rope

**“HUMOR OVERTHROWS LOGICAL EXPECTATIONS, AND THEREIN LIES ITS APPEAL.”**

**ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER**

logical expectations, and therein lies its appeal.”

**PERSONALIZE IT**

Incidentally, that same old joke could be used as a quick one-liner with new impact if you personalize it this way:

“My wife doesn’t worry about me when I’m away on business trips — she knows I’m too faithful, too moral and too old.” Personalizing is also useful in longer adaptations. Take this old joke:

(Mrs. Jones) — “Does your husband remember your wedding anniversary?”

(Mrs. Smith) — “No. But I remind him of it in January and June and get two anniversary gifts each year.”

You can refashion this joke by adapting it to your own personal experience; you may even end up with an entirely new joke. If you’re invited to speak at an organization’s anniversary banquet, you might use this story:

“I appreciate the invitation to speak on the special occasion of your 25th

stopped by the florist and picked up a bouquet.

“Armed with candy, necklace and roses, I arrived home and greeted my wife, ‘Darling, see what I brought you in honor of this great day!’ She looked at the gifts, threw her arms around me and said, ‘My goodness, this is wonderful. This is the happiest Groundhog Day I can remember.’”

**SHORTEN TO SWEETEN**

Some bare bone jokes need elaboration to keep listeners’ attention at maximum until the punch line. Likewise, some stories should be edited to prevent the audience’s attention from wandering.

Art Linkletter once said, “Short jokes strengthen your speech. Long jokes may destroy your speech.” He’s right. Too much extraneous information makes the story drag and turns listeners off. So, just as you can embellish basic jokes, you can shorten a story and still retain the same punch line.

attached to the basket was frayed. He nervously asked the monk with him how often the rope was replaced.

‘Every time it breaks,’ the monk answered.”

Note the new build-up and altered punch line in the second story. This illustrates how well a joke book can function as a thought starter to lead you into something original.

**TWAIN’S TECHNIQUES**

Mark Twain was a master of updating, localizing, personalizing and dramatizing humorous stories. He used each of these techniques in the following story from his speech, “Advice to Youth”:

“Never handle firearms carelessly. The sorrow and suffering that have been caused through the innocent but heedless handling of firearms by the young!

“Only four days ago — right in the next farmhouse to the one where I’m spending the summer — a grandmother, old, gray and sweet, was sitting at her

*Continued on page 21*



# DESCRIPTIVE HUMOR IS NO JOKE

**GOOD SPEECHES, LIKE GOOD SOCKS,  
DEPEND ON THE YARN.**

*By Doc Blakeley, Ph.D.*



Illustration by Jeff Koegel

“HE HAD A SHINE ON HIS SHOES THAT LOOKED LIKE HE HAD WORKED ON IT FOR TWO WEEKS WITH A BISCUIT.”

“OUR BASKETBALL TEAM IS SO FAST IT COULD STEAL CHICKENS FOR A LIVING.”

THESE ARE EXAMPLES OF DESCRIPTIVE HUMOR, A TECHNIQUE OFTEN OVERLOOKED BY EVEN THE MOST SEASONED SPEAKERS. NEXT TIME YOU PREPARE A SPEECH, CONSIDER ADDING SOME DESCRIPTIVE PHRASES WITH A HUMOROUS SLANT. YOU MAY BE SURPRISED AT THE LAUGHTER A CLEVERLY WORDED PHRASE WILL GENERATE.



For instance, in a television interview with a prominent national politician, the reporter asked the senator why another senator appeared to be so effective and powerful. His response was a classic in descriptive humor: "Because the moment you sit down with Senator Gramm, you are painfully aware that he is smarter than you are, better prepared than you are, and meaner than a junkyard dog." That powerful phrase sets into motion many images in the mind of a listener. It is not a joke and yet it is funny. But not only is it funny — it is profound.

Mark Twain once wrote, "Money, power, persuasion, supplication, persecution — only laughter can blow (these things) to rags and atoms at a single blast. Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand."

Laughter is created with methods other than just the old standard joke. Too few speakers realize this.

I'm talking about adding something to old jokes that gives the audience even more of an excuse to laugh and enjoy themselves. For example, take the case of Lee, the creative meeting planner who asked me to do something special at an annual employee recognition dinner. Lee told me he wanted to "pull something" on Bill, one of the vice-presidents. "Bill," he said, "is famous for writing short notes to everyone in the company."

Lee said he'd like to present Bill with a giant pad at the meeting. "You figure out how to make it funny," he told me.

Doesn't sound like the making of anything real humorous, does it? But believe me, it was.

To add Lee's idea, something had to be clarified: Was virtually everyone in the room familiar with Bill's habit of writing notes? Lee assured me, "Oh, yeah. Everybody, and I mean everybody, gets a lot of notes from Bill."

Now that I knew the inside joke would be readily caught by the audience, I proceeded with a "set-up." I asked Lee for the exact size of the note pad to be presented. "Huge," he said. It would measure four feet by six feet and would have the company logo at the top, an exact replica of Bill's personal note pad. The next step was to coordinate things so that the surprise element was not lost. Descriptive humor was about to take its toll. Here was the set-up: "All of you were

described to me as superstars of selling. Describe what first pops into your mind when I say the name Bart Starr."

The audience caught it quickly and yelled back, "Football." I said, "Great. Describe what comes to your mind when you hear the name Kareem AbdulJabbar."

"Basketball," they yelled. "Now, let's get a little tougher," I said. "How about Pele?" This was a sharp crowd. "Soccer," they yelled proudly. "Now for the really tough one. What comes to mind when I say the name of your vice-president, Bill Watkins?"

"Monster," someone yelled teasingly. The crowd roared. I added, "Who said miniature golf? Get that person's name." Another great roar.

"Bill, would you please come up here?" I asked. In less than a heartbeat (another descriptive term), Bill and Lee were at my side. Bill never did question why Lee was also standing next to me.

I continued, "Bill, on behalf of the

you were just a foil in the hands of the clever meeting planner. In any case, it is a win-win situation.

You may have noticed that this kind of humor doesn't rely on the standard joke format. It has a life all its own. Properly mixed with the other ingredients of a speech, it adds just the right spice to make a palatable evening.

One more example to illustrate the use of descriptive humor: My friend and colleague, Eileen McDargh, uses humor to add levity to some of her training programs. Although she is quite capable of using the standard forms of humor, I was most impressed with her ability to use the descriptive type. Imagine the "first person" retelling of the following scenario in a playful way and you'll get the picture:

Eileen was invited to address a corporation in a, for her, unfamiliar part of town. Racing over to the address she had been given, clutching her hand-out ma-

## **LAUGHTER IS CREATED WITH METHODS OTHER THAN JUST THE OLD STANDARD JOKE. TOO FEW SPEAKERS REALIZE THIS.**

management and sales force, we would like to recognize you with a gift that typifies your own special talent." Lee then striped away the brown wrapper to reveal the giant note pad, which he then handed to Bill without a word. We both backed away and left Bill standing there with a silly grin on his face, a huge note pad in his hands, and an audience that was hysterical with laughter.

Bill was quick, too. When he could finally be heard, he replied, "I'm speechless. I'll send you all a note," and went back to his seat.

When I returned to the stage, I got another great laugh with this descriptive phrase: "That's one of the greatest laughs I've ever received from an audience...and I don't even know what I said." This latter remark is always a good follow-up to inside humor because it makes the audience feel superior to you. They actually believe for a split-second that you stumbled onto this idea by accident or

materials and other equipment, she discovered where she was to meet: an Italian bar! She thought there must be some mistake. But sure enough, the meeting planner for this corporate group was waiting for her just inside the door. It was so dark she could only see the dance floor that was lit by flashing laser beams. The strains of "Oh, Solo Mio" were blaring over the sound system. She was told to speak from the dance floor. Her eyes adjusted to the dark and she made her way through the crowd. She bumped into a full suit of armor that held a sword in one hand and a Christmas wreath in the other. Further along, she spotted a religious statue holding a Cinco de Mayo flag.

The music stopped and someone introduced her. From the dance floor, she said, "This just won't do. I can't see anything. Would you please turn on the lights?" They turned on the lights and she took a good look around, "Would



# "AGAINST THE ASSAULT OF LAUGHTER, NOTHING CAN STAND."

you please turn the lights back off?" There's more, but you can imagine the scene.

Eileen continues to describe this unusual experience in her training programs, much to the delight of her audiences. It has become part of her routine. Of all the things she does, the descriptive account of this real-life humorous event gets by far the most uncontrollable laughter. This is truth. This is descriptive humor at its best.

About two years after this incident occurred, Eileen was relating the experience to an audience. She had just about

reached the conclusion and the crowd could tell that she was winding down from the routine. A voice from the audience yelled out, "Don't forget to tell them about the tap dancers." She replied, "Oh my gosh, that's right. I had forgotten there was a tap dance studio overhead and they were rehearsing while all of this was going on. But I've never told that part of the story. How can you know that?" The man replied, "Because I'm the president of that company you spoke to." The crowd roared. They thought he made it up, but it turned out to be true.

Next time you start preparing your own presentation and want to add a little humor, don't forget to review your own experiences and exercise your own descriptive powers. Believe me, it'll make you nine feet tall and bulletproof. ●

*Doc Blakely, Ph.D., was the keynote speaker at Toastmaster's 1989 International Convention. He is author of Wit and Pungent Humor, Push Button Wit, Keep 'Em Laughin' and a newly released six-tape album, The Ten Second Executive Humorist. These can all be ordered from World Headquarters.*

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THAN FUNNY LINES.

By Gene Perret

*"It's like the lazy preacher who used to read very long sermons: when asked how so lazy a man used to write such long sermons, one of his deacons said, 'Oh, he gets to writing and is too lazy to stop.'"*

— Abraham Lincoln

This may sound unorthodox coming from a comedy writer, and my colleagues in the Writers Guild may never forgive me for saying it, but there's more to being a humorist than having funny material — much more.

The material is indeed a part of being a humorist, but it is only a part. Two other considerations enter into it: the performer's delivery and characterization.

I mention the story about the lazy preacher because it is supposedly one that Abraham Lincoln used while a lawyer trying a case. Lincoln was a great storyteller. Keith Jennison, in his book, *The Humorous Mr. Lincoln*, writes: "In his youth, Lincoln told jokes because they came naturally to him. When he practiced law, he employed them as tools of the trade; and when he entered politics,

he wielded them as a weapon for satire and ridicule. In his early presidency, they provided a roundabout way of saying no, and later, as the responsibilities of the office became almost unendurable, they provided therapy to lessen the tensions in himself and those around him."

Yet, when I read collections of Lincoln's anecdotes, very few strike me as funny. A century ago, they may have gotten him elected president, but today, in my opinion, they wouldn't get him a spot on "The Gong Show."

But then, I never heard Lincoln tell his stories. His manner, voice inflection and gestures probably gave his stories more power. In 1860, *Harper's Weekly* wrote this of Lincoln:

"His manner before a popular assembly is as he pleases to make it either superlatively ludicrous or very impres-

sive. He employs but little gesticulation, but when he desires to make a point, produces a shrug of his shoulders, an elevation of his eyebrows, a depression of his mouth and a general malformation of countenance so comically awkward that it never fails to bring down the house."

We see the same phenomenon today. Actor Bill Cosby has an expressive voice and eloquent gestures and facial expressions that make his funny material much funnier. Likewise, Lincoln's tales were funnier delivered by him than they are in written form.

Humorists must bring some artistry to their material. When I was a kid, scout leaders admonished us to "leave your campsite cleaner than you found it." Likewise, humorists have to make each of their stories funnier than its original version. That means that I, as a humorist, have to gather material — good material — and then make it better. I must polish my story delivery by using the correct words, voice inflections and gestures. The material is the music and I'm the musician. I have to play that music like a virtuoso. All of us who use humor in our presentations owe that dedication to the material.

The performer must also develop a stage persona. Characterization not only helps the delivery of humor, but makes it more effective. It helps you determine what kind of humor to select.

There is a comedy sequence that is often singled out as the longest laugh in radio history. The star of the radio show is heard walking along the streets. Then we hear a second set of footsteps and a sinister voice saying: "I got a gun, Mister. Your money or your life."

Then we hear silence. The silence generates audience laughter.

When the laughter dies down, the mugger repeats his threat: "Your money or your life." The star says, "I'm thinking it over."

The audience reaction was laughter — long, loud laughter. Why? Because the star was Jack Benny. Over the years, Benny developed his comedy persona as the stingiest, cheapest man in the world. That's what made the line so hilarious.

Imagine that same exchange with Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante, Johnny Carson, Jay Leno or Carol Burnett as the



main character. It's no longer as funny, because stinginess wasn't their characterization.

As a humorist, you have to develop a style, a modus operandi, a characterization. The humor you use has to complement that style.

Another facet of character building is that it helps you select your humorous material. Too many young comedy performers simply gather funny material and expect it to generate a funny act. It doesn't. The act must have a cohesiveness, a point of view. The audience must know who they're listening to.

A collection of a few Bob Hope lines, some bon mots from Joan Rivers, added to a few choice remarks by Woody Allen, thrown in with a couple of Myron Cohen anecdotes and some observations from Bill Cosby, doesn't make a funny routine. It confuses an audience.

To use humor effectively, you will need some good material. However, it must reflect your point of view, your style. Naturally, that presupposes that you have already developed a comedy

style. It would probably be more accurate to say that you "discovered" what style of comedy you already use.

Then you must deliver that material with all the artistry you can muster. You must analyze the material, find out why it's funny and what makes it funny. You must tell that story the best way you can tell it. Practice, rehearse, polish and fine-tune it until the material rolls off your tongue almost on its own accord.

Will that generate powerful, impressive humor? A political opponent once said of Lincoln's humor:

"Every one of his stories seems like a whack upon my back ... Nothing else — not any of his arguments or any of his replies to my questions — disturbs me. But when he begins his storytelling, I feel that I am to be overmatched."

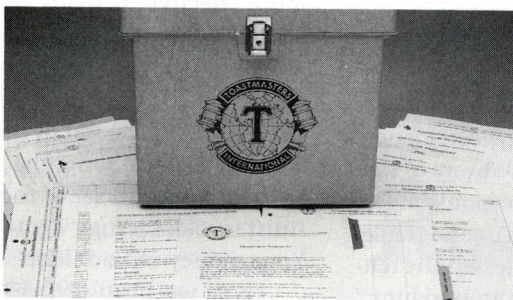
That's power. ●

*Gene Perret is a comedy writer for such performers as Bob Hope, Phyllis Diller and Carol Burnett. His latest book, Using Humor for Effective Business Speaking, was recently published by Sterling Publishing Company in New York.*

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Continued from page 15

work, when her young grandson crept in and got down an old, battered, rusty gun which had not been touched for many years and was supposedly not loaded. He pointed it at her, laughing and threatening to shoot.

"In her fright she ran screaming and pleading toward the door on the other side of the room; but as she passed him he placed the gun almost against her very breast and pulled the trigger! He had supposed it was not loaded. And he was right — it wasn't."

Note how Twain updates, localizes and personalizes the story by saying the incident happened "only four days ago, right in the next farmhouse," thus placing himself at the scene.

Telling the story in a dramatic style with vivid language, he creates suspense by twice mentioning that the gun supposedly was not loaded. He drew word-pictures of the grandson pointing the gun at his grandmother as she ran for her life.

Also note Twain's use of the Rule of Threes in describing the grandmother as "old, gray and sweet" and the gun as "old, battered and rusty."

The punch line is such a sudden reversal of what Twain's audience is led to expect by his suspenseful build-up that it causes laughter.

As Max Eastman explains in his book *The Enjoyment of Laughter*, "A joke is not a thing but a process, a trick you play on the listener's mind. You start him off toward a plausible goal, and then by a sudden twist you land him nowhere at all — or just where he didn't expect to go."

Mark Twain made his story sound true, even if it wasn't. Whether true or fictitious, if the story fits your speech and makes your point with laughter, use it. Remember the proverb, "Many a true word is spoken in jest."

### ROGER'S RAMBLINGS

Another master of localizing and personalizing humorous stories was Will Rogers. Here are excerpts from his speech delivered at a convention of the Corset Manufacturers of America:

"The same problem confronts Corset Builders that does the people that run the subways in New York City. They

both have to get so many pounds of human flesh into a given radius.

"The subway does it by having strong men push and shove until they can close the door with only the last man's foot out. But the Corset Carpenters arrive at the same thing by a series of strings..."

Rogers followed this with a personalized anecdote: "Of course, the fear of every fleshy lady is the broken corset string. I sat next to a catastrophe of this nature once. We didn't know it at first — the deluge seemed so gradual — till finally, myself and the gentlemen opposite her were gradually pushed off our chairs..."

Note that Rogers localized his talk by describing what was happening in New York City, where he was speaking. He was specific in identifying by name real organizations, places and products.

He also compared the audience to the people who operated the local subways. And he related an anecdote based on his experience with a lady who wore his listeners' product, thus personalizing his speech to both his audience and the occasion.

Using such localizing and personalizing early in his speech, Will Rogers quickly established a harmonious relationship with his listeners. As Bob Hope says, "Humor is the welcome mat between a speaker and his audience. A short joke, a quick laugh breaks the ice between you and that sea of strangers. When they laugh they're immediately on your side."

Personalizing, localizing, dramatizing, updating, switching and the Rule of Threes, as we have seen, are some of the techniques you can use to dress up old jokes with new style. Just as a suit of clothes must fit the wearer, so must humor be tailored for your speech.

Customizing your stories makes your talks more effective. American actor George Jessel was right when he observed that "good speeches, like good socks, depend on the yarn." ●

*Thomas Montalbo, DTM, a member of Sparkling Toastmasters Club 3602-47 in St. Petersburg, Florida, has received a Presidential Citation for his articles in The Toastmaster. He is author of The Power of Eloquence, a book on public speaking available from Toastmasters International.*

## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

By Thomas Montalbo, DTM

You can create short jokes by "switching." This technique requires giving a new twist to famous sayings or proverbs and even well-known expressions or clichés.

Switching the cliché, "Choose the lesser of two evils," a voter in the 1986 U.S. gubernatorial campaign commented, "This is a contest between the evil of two lessers."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder" can be turned upside down by saying "Absence make the heart go wander."

Ben Franklin's "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise" was switched by humorist James Thurber to "Early to rise and early to bed makes a man healthy, wealthy and dead."

"An ill wind that blows no man good," was turned around by musician Sammy Kaye to "The oboe is an ill wind that no one blows good."

"Old soldiers never die; they just fade away" can be easily twisted by changing the occupation in the first part and switching to something incongruous or unexpected in the second part:

"Old bankers never die; they just lose interest;"

"Old mail carriers never die; they just lose their zip;"

"Old judges never die; they just lose their appeal;"

"Old college deans never die; they just lose their faculties;"

"Old humorists never die; they just gag a little."

Some examples of switching by transposing or substituting a word: "thought for food;" "a trade of tricks;" "forward to basics;" "faith, hope and clarity."

In summary, just remember this contorted Norwegian proverb: "He who lasts — laughs."



# CONFESIONS OF AN INFORMATION JUNKIE

ALTHOUGH A RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF TRIVIA MAY PAY OFF AT TABLE TOPICS TIME, IT CAN HAVE NEGATIVE SIDE EFFECTS.

By John Cadley



DID YOU KNOW THAT ALGAE HAVE EYES? I DO. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY SEE AND I DON'T REALLY CARE. I HAVE NO REAL INTEREST IN ALGAE ANYWAY. I ONLY KNOW THAT THEY HAVE EYES BECAUSE I READ IT IN THE SCIENCE SECTION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES. I READ EVERYTHING IN THAT SECTION, EVEN THOUGH I UNDERSTAND ABOUT HALF OF IT. BUT THEN I READ THE FINANCIAL SECTION OF THE TIMES, TOO, AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND MUCH OF THAT, EITHER.

Why do I read about topics I don't understand and have no real interest in? I'm a junkie, that's why — not for drugs, but for information. I suffer from a gripping compulsion to read anything and everything that crosses my line of sight. Only one category of information is excluded from this literary gluttony: that which could be of any practical value to me. I'll spend hours — nay, days — reading things that affect me not in the least. Yet when it comes to something that may actually improve my ability to function as a productive member of society, I pass it over like a bowl of cold oatmeal.

This leads to some interesting incongruities. For instance, I'm about as likely to engage another human being in physical combat as you are, and yet I devour *Soldier of Fortune* magazine whenever I happen to come across it. On the other hand, the operator's manual to my car (which, if I took the time to read it, would undoubtedly make me a more informed, efficient and safe driver), lies entombed in its original plastic bag, deep in the bowels of my glove compartment. Hence, while I am utterly incapable of changing my windshield wipers, I'm well aware of the three most popular techniques for strangling a sentry with unwaxed dental floss.

It's an awkward position to be in, but then you're dealing with a man who has no shame. Just the other day I paid someone \$75 to relight the pilot on my water heater. It took him less than a minute. As I paid my money he accepted it sheepishly and said, "You know, you can do this yourself. It tells you how right in the trouble-shooting section of the owner's manual."

"I'm sure it does," I replied, dismissing him with a wave of my hand as I continued reading an article about irrigation problems in Sudan.

My obsession has cost more than money. I had a girlfriend once who came to me in tears because her cat had just died. As she sat there sobbing, she looked into my eyes for sympathy and support. Instead, she caught me reading the care instructions on her gloves. I haven't seen her since.

Am I proud of this? Of course not. Can I stop? Not likely. For, you see, as great as is my shame, my fear is greater: a haunting, bone-chilling dread that I'm going to...*miss something*. Every book title, every magazine article, every newspaper story beckons to me like the Sirens in *Ulysses*: "Read me," they seem to call, "and thou shalt have knowledge and wisdom like unto Bill Moyers and William F. Buckley Jr."

I simply can't resist. And believe me, I've tried. My most recent attempt came at two in the morning. I was lying in bed, eyes burning like coals, knowing I had to get up in five hours, and yet I persisted in reading a piece about a man in Arkansas who plays the guitar with his toes. I thought "This is ridiculous!" and threw



the magazine down. I made a pact with myself then and there that I would stop ruining my health and social life for the sake of useless information.

It was a moment of great catharsis. I felt lighter, relieved, and I soon was sound asleep. But in my slumber I had a horrifying nightmare. I dreamed I was on "Nightline" and Ted Koppel was asking me questions about pressing issues of the day — the budget deficit, the greenhouse effect, Johnny Carson's alimony payments. To every question all I could do was blurt out, "Gee, Mr. Koppel, I don't know." At the end of the program Ted Koppel turned to the camera and sniffed, "We're sorry, ladies and gentlemen, we thought Mr. Cadley was well-informed but it seems he's...missed something." I awoke in a cold sweat, rushed downstairs, and read *The Story of Civilization* until dawn.

Another time I made a reading list. I thought if I couldn't quit cold turkey I could at least impose enough self-discipline so that I wasn't reading seven books and four magazines at once. I told myself that come hell or high water, I would not read another piece of printed matter until I had read every book on the list — in the order listed.

Hell and high water came very soon after. It was in a drugstore. I'd stopped to buy some Sucrets, and on my way out I noticed a copy of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* on the paperback rack. It was a book I'd always wanted to read. But it was not on The List. I stood there in a paroxysm of indecision, with the following debate raging within:

"Look! *In Cold Blood* for only 99 cents."

"Forget it. It's not on The List."

"I know, but it's supposed to be a great book."

"Better than *A Tale of Two Cities*? That's your first book on The List."

"I know, but this is about cold-blooded killers."

"So is *A Tale of Two Cities*."

"Yeah, but this was a breakthrough in literary technique, part of the 'new journalism,' a premier example of nonfiction written like a novel. I need to know about this."

"Why?"

"Because it's there."

"Skip it. It'll just depress you."

"Yeah, but it really happened. It might

have some deep insights into the human condition that helps in my quest for perfect wisdom and understanding."

"So will *A Tale of Two Cities*."

"Will you knock it off with *A Tale of Two Cities*? I'll read the stupid thing. I just want to read this one first — as a warm-up."

"Have you no self control? Can't you stick to one simple resolution?"

"Okay, so I'm not perfect. Stop being such a tyrant. Besides, it's only 99 cents."

"If you put that book down and walk out the door right now, in 10 minutes you'll forget about it."

Here my internal debate stopped. I knew I was right. If I could just put the

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**EVERY BOOK TITLE,  
EVERY MAGAZINE  
ARTICLE, EVERY  
NEWSPAPER STORY  
BECKONS TO ME LIKE  
THE SIRENS  
IN ULYSSES.**

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book back and make it out the door, my desire would recede with my physical distance from the bookrack. Only something happens to an information junkie when he gets a new book in hand. The stiff, crisp spine...the smooth, glossy surface...the promise of new information — all work to tempt him like the most insidious drug, promising that "just one more time" won't make any difference.

And so I stood there, frozen between "no" and "just one more time." Guess who won? I paid my 99 cents, left the store, and went home to read the book.

I should have listened to my disciplined self because I was right. Not only did *In Cold Blood* depress me; it scared me to the point of hyperventilation. I couldn't possibly face anything as imposing as *A Tale of Two Cities* after that. I had to soothe my nerves first, which I did by going on a binge of *People* magazine, *TV Guide* celebrity profiles, *Newsweek* movie reviews, and an embar-

rassingly large number of Ann Landers columns.

And The List? It's in the glove compartment of my car, right next to the operator's manual.

So, you see, it's useless. I don't even try any more. The most I can do is offer advice to those similarly afflicted. You, for instance — the person reading this article. Do you know how to change your windshield wipers? Can you light the pilot on your water heater? If you can't, why are you frittering away your time reading this piece of useless information?

It could be that you, too, are an information junkie. Do you, for instance, get light-headed when passing a rack of paperbacks? Do you find yourself growing slightly amorous in the presence of magazine subscription blanks? When in a library, do you catch yourself subconsciously planning a schedule for reading most books in it? (Be particularly concerned if you include the Reference and Periodical sections.) When going to the bathroom do you feel morally obligated to read the patent numbers on the plumbing fixtures? Do you dream about books with titles such as *Everything One Human Being Could Possibly Know*?

If you have any or all of these symptoms, don't bother to see a doctor. Medicine or therapy can't help you. Besides, you'll probably get hooked on *Bible Stories for Children* in the waiting room.

The sad truth is, there's no known cure. The most you can do is try to keep it under control. Horse blinders, for instance — try wearing them when you're passing by newsstands and paperback racks. I've used them occasionally with mixed results. You may also try spending more time with people who don't know anything. Then you won't feel such an overwhelming desire to be a know-it-all. Or you can do what I've done recently. I've written to the local police, stating that if I try to leave the library with more than three books at a time, the librarian has full permission to disable me by whatever means she deems appropriate.

Of course, she has to catch me first. ●

*John Cadley is an advertising copywriter with Eric Mower and Associates in Syracuse, New York. He has written a short play and humorous articles for many magazines.*



# USE YOUR WIT AT WORK

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE  
A COMEDIAN TO EVOKE SOME CORPORATE GIGGLING.**

*By Michael Iapoco*

Illustration by Johnee Bee

MANY YEARS AGO, I STOOD IN THE BACK OF A SAN FRANCISCO COMEDY CLUB AND WATCHED WITH PAIN AS A YOUNG LOCAL COMIC WENT DOWN IN FLAMES. THE AUDIENCE HAD FIDGETED QUIETLY FOR THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF HIS ACT, BUT EVIDENTLY FELT THAT HE NEEDED SOME HELP FOR THE REST OF THE WAY. SO THEY WERE NOT SHY ABOUT OFFERING A FEW PENETRATING (AND VERY LOUD) OBSERVATIONS, SUCH AS:



"When does the comedian come on?"  
"What is this, a dramatic reading?"  
"You stink — get off the stage!"

A man standing next to me at the bar best summed up the mood of the crowd when he grumbled, "I paid eight bucks to get in here! When is this jerk gonna be funny?"

But that's show business. When people pay good money to see someone who's supposed to be funny, they expect a few

laughs in return. In the business world, however, it's an entirely different story. And that's why I'm always amazed when otherwise confident, powerful speakers often are hesitant to slip in a light touch that could make their message easier to understand, make their audience more willing to listen, and generally enhance their overall image. Their most common reason?

"I'm just not a comedian."

Of course you're not! The fact that



you're not perceived as a comedian gives you a big advantage over the professional comic when you use humor in business presentations. The audience's expectations work in your favor.

Consider the typical business speaking situation. People attend this sales meeting or training seminar because they need the information you have to offer (or because their boss told them to come). Their expectations are much lower than they are for the comedian: they expect you to deliver a basically serious message. They're not demanding entertainment — in fact, they probably just hope to wake up refreshed when it's over! If you choose to attempt a bit of humor, the audience usually is so relieved (if not grateful) that they're very willing to give you a chuckle just because you made the effort.

And a chuckle is all you need. Some speakers, comparing themselves to professional comics, think that if a joke doesn't get a huge laugh, it failed. Wrong. For a comedian, laughs are the *goal*. For the business speaker, they're merely means to an end. Your real purpose for using humor is to put your audience at ease, create rapport, and get your serious message across more effectively. If you happen to get a big laugh, great — but that's not your ultimate purpose in a business situation.

The fact that you're not a professional comedian, however, doesn't mean that you can't borrow a few techniques from them. Here are a few tricks of the trade that will help anyone to use humor effectively in any type of situation:

#### **TIMING**

"Timing is not so much knowing when to speak, but knowing when to pause," said Jack Benny. Benny, of course, was a master of the art, as are other old-timers like Bob Hope and George Burns. The next time you see one of them on TV, notice how the laughs come not only from what they say and how they say it, but also from those moments when they say nothing at all.

While it takes years to perfect one's timing, the mechanics of it are fairly simple: pause before the punch line and wait for the laugh afterward. You need only pause for a second or two. That's enough to provide the audience with a

subtle cue to get ready to laugh. It gives them time to visualize the verbal picture you've created, or simply to grasp the situation you've set up. And most jokes have the pause built in.

For example, one former client of mine faced a hostile group of reporters with this opening line: "Ladies and gentlemen of the press, I have considerable respect for your tolerance in inviting me to address you (pause)...and for my courage in accepting." When the punch line is at the end — where it always should be, with no extra words after it — it's easy to find the natural place to pause.

And by the way, it's called punch line for good reason: When you deliver it, don't say it in the same tone of voice as your set-up. Lean into it and punch it out — or at least change your tone enough to distinguish these crucial words from the rest of the joke. Think of the punch line as almost a separate part of the joke, and rehearse saying it louder and clearer. It's discouraging to have half the audience laughing and the other half turning around asking their neighbor "What did he just say?" If the audience doesn't quite catch what you said, the joke was wasted.

After delivering your punch line, you face a true test of courage: you must wait for the laugh before continuing. The natural instinct is to rush ahead to the next thing you're going to say. Unfortunately, this often causes the speaker to "step on" the laugh and diffuse the effect of the joke. Give the audience time to respond — and be aware that not everyone will start and finish laughing at exactly the same moment.

This is especially true with a very large audience. In a big room the laughter will always come in stages. First you'll get the people sitting right in front, along with a scattered quick witted few from the rest of the room. A fraction of a second later most of the rest of the audience will join in. Finally, you'll hear from the remainder — people who took longer to get the joke and those who are only laughing because everyone else is. They're all

worth waiting for, even though those few seconds may seem like an eternity.

If you study professional comics, you'll see that they all have little trademark quirks they employ after a punch line to cue the audience to laugh. George Burns will take a puff on his cigar. Rodney Dangerfield will tug nervously at his collar. Joan Rivers will nod vigorously. Johnny Carson will simply stare straight at the audience. These gestures all announce that, "You've just heard a joke and it's okay to laugh now."

Don't attempt to fill the void by laughing at your own joke. If no one else is laughing, it sounds downright pathetic. And even if the audience does laugh, it's poor form to join in. It's much more

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TO RESPOND -- AND BE  
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SAME MOMENT.**

---

effective to act mildly surprised and let them feel like they discovered a joke you didn't quite realize was so funny. Audiences will like you better when they can in some subtle way feel superior.

#### **BUT WHAT IF THEY DON'T LAUGH?**

So what should you do if a joke falls completely flat? Nothing! Just move on to your next point. A non-comedian has a much better chance of pretending it never happened than of "saving" a bad joke with a follow-up comment like "What is this, an audience or an oil painting?" or "These are jokes, feel free to laugh." These kinds of comments will only serve to call attention to the fact that your joke bombed. Leave the "savers" for the pros. They work for Johnny Carson on "The Tonight Show" because he is Johnny Carson and the audience expects it from him.

Of course, if you've just spent five



minutes building up to the punch line of a long and winding joke, it's a little hard to pretend it didn't happen. This is why the beginning joke teller should stick to one-liners. It's an old axiom in comedy that the longer the joke takes to tell, the funnier it will have to be.

When you take up several minutes of the audience's time, they expect a big payoff. A one-liner that misses can easily be glossed over, but when a story dies there's a silence that cries out to be filled and generally it's filled with the speaker's embarrassment. So if at all possible, keep it short!

And whatever happens, don't bail out and eliminate subsequent jokes if the first joke doesn't work. It only takes one good laugh to turn an audience around and get them with you for the rest of the way. I've seen and experienced this many times. Very often the audience may not get the idea that they are supposed to

laugh after only one joke — especially in a situation where they don't expect humor. They may not believe their ears after the first one, but after two or three they'll usually catch on and start to have fun. So after a dud, hang in there and get 'em on the next one!

#### **HOW TO ACT SPONTANEOUS, EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT**

Audiences show a greater appreciation for humor that seems impromptu. That's why the most effective way to deliver a joke is to make it appear spontaneous. It's particularly helpful when you're faced with a "cold" audience. The key to loosening up an unresponsive group is to gain their respect, and a sharp ad lib can often do it best.

I'll be the first to admit this sounds much easier than it is. But while a few people are naturally witty ad-libbers, anyone can learn to appear spontaneous — and it works as well as the real thing.

A good example of this is the first time I ever performed in a comedy club. I was having a hard enough time getting laughs — I wasn't getting any at all, only stony silence — when things went from bad to horrible. A sloppy drunk began to heckle me, repeating things I'd say and mulling them over to himself very loudly. As I contemplated wrapping the microphone around my neck, I remembered the single "heckler response line" I had memorized for occasions like this. I stopped mumbling my jokes and shouted out: "Look, I've only got five minutes here to make an ass of myself..but you've got the rest of your life!"

The crowd burst into laughter and applause...and all of a sudden they were on my side. I did a little more of my act and finally got a few laughs on some of my mediocre jokes. My seemingly spontaneous remark had saved me from total disaster.

## **ADD A LITTLE HUMOR**

**By Bob SeEVERS, ATM**

**Nearly every speech can be improved by a sprinkling of humor. But coming up with something funny is easier said than done.**

**If you carry a small notebook in your pocket or purse, you can jot down any funny material you hear, read or see. Then, when you need some funny material, just check your notes. You can even switch stories around to fit your situation. Change locales, names, occupations or whatever is necessary.**

**If you are quoting something, give credit. You can do this in a subtle manner, such as saying "I agree with Bob Hope when he says..." or "One day Lucy said to Charlie Brown..." Not only is giving credit proper, it enhances your material.**

**There is a story about a gentleman at a dinner party. A woman sitting opposite him said at one point, "Sir, if I were married to you, I'd give you poison." The gentleman replied, "If I were married to you, I'd take it." This story assumes significance when we learn that the gentleman was Winston Churchill. By giving attribution, your stories have more impact, but the audience still laughs at *your* speech.**

**How you tell a joke is crucial to its success. Be sure you know it well and bring in the punch line at just the right place. A story should have only one focal point that you build toward. If you take too long on the buildup, the audience will tire of waiting for the punch. Create just enough buildup and then drop the punch line.**

**Give no hint of what the punch line will be or when it's coming. In some stories, let them see what's coming way down the line but keep them guessing as to how and when you'll get there.**

**All humor must have contrast. The comic team of Laurel and Hardy was a thin man and a fat man — they had a foundation to build on.**

**For a humorous speech contest, use all your own material. One excellent approach is to create a completely ridiculous situation and present it in a serious manner. In my first humorous speech contest, I spoke about the "Hippopotamus who fell in love with me." I heard one speech about "head transplants." Another time, a contestant pretended to have a mild nervous breakdown. His subject: "How to be calm while giving a speech." Note the contrasts.**

**Everything you learn makes you a better speaker, and the better you get, the more fun you'll have.**

*Bob SeEVERS, ATM, is retired from his career as artist with the Art Department at IBM in New York.*



Even if you're lucky enough to never face that kind of situation, the point should be well taken: it pays to prepare.

There are several little tricks that professionals use to make a comment seem spontaneous. For example, look for opportunities to make reference to your physical surroundings, such as the size, decor or temperature of the room. Comment on a previous speaker, or on his or her introduction of you. It can be a simple matter of visiting the location at which you're going to be speaking, or finding out who's scheduled to speak before you on the program, or who will introduce you and what that person will say. When you have this kind of information in advance, it's easy to prepare an ad lib that will convince any audience that you thought of it right then.

Of course, if you are a natural wit you may be able to pull this off with only last-minute preparation. President John F. Kennedy was known to listen carefully to those speaking before him and scribble down notes on certain things that they said. He would then come up with appropriate and funny remarks that, when it was his turn to speak, easily charmed the audience. Try it — you may surprise yourself. Remember, an ad lib always impresses listeners more than an obviously "prepared" joke, so it doesn't have to be quite as funny to get a good reaction.

The most dramatic way to impress an audience with your spontaneous wit is to have comments ready for unusual circumstances. Anyone who speaks on a regular basis knows that things never go just as planned. The lights can go out, a slide projector can jam, a lectern can topple over. Don't ignore obvious distractions like these. When something interrupts your presentation, it's up to you to regain the audience's attention and put them at ease.

A comedian friend of mine took a brilliant approach to this problem. He made a list of everything he could think of that might create a distraction while he was on stage: mikes going dead, glasses breaking, people talking loudly, even traffic noise from the street outside. He then sat down and wrote a "spontaneous" comment for each situation. By preparing this way, he was always able to turn potentially disastrous situations to

his advantage.

You can easily do the same. To start you off, here are a few situations that might occur and some comments that might be appropriate. And remember: if you're not comfortable with these, practically anything you say will get a laugh when you appear to be ad libbing.

● **When you lose your place or pause too long:**

"I just wanted to wait a moment in case some of you have lost your place."

"If any of you have heard me speak before, please go on to my next thought and I'll catch up."

● **When you garble a sentence:**

"Later on I'll pass out a printed translation of that sentence."

"By the way, the rest of my speech will be dubbed in English."

● **When there's microphone feedback:**

"This concludes the musical portion of the program."

"Don't be alarmed...this is only a test."

● **When lights go out or flicker:**

"I forgot to mention we have a curfew tonight."

"I told them not to ignore the final bill."

● **When lights come back on:**

"Everyone stay where you are — I'm taking another head count!"

● **When people are talking during your presentation:**

"By the way, feel free to talk among yourselves."

"Excuse me for talking while you're interrupting."

There are no laws against corporate giggling, and as far as I know, nobody has ever been indicted for trading inside jokes. So arm yourself with some humor and don't hesitate to slip in a light touch in your next business presentation. It may keep your listeners awake and even enhance your image. ●

*Michael Iapoce is a former stand-up comic and the founder of Michael Iapoce Associates, a humor consulting firm based in San Anselmo, California. He is author of A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Boardroom: Using Humor in Business Speaking (John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1988).*

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# 1989-90 BOARD REPORT

## BUILDING A BETTER ORGANIZATION



**DURING THE PAST YEAR, IT WAS CLEAR THAT TOASTMASTERS TOOK TO HEART PRESIDENT NOONAN'S THEME MESSAGE "BUILDING A BETTER YOU." NOT ONLY DID THEY WORK HARD ON ADVANCING THEIR OWN COMMUNICATION SKILLS, THEY ALSO MADE EXTRA EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CLUB AND DISTRICT OPERATIONS. TOASTMASTERS CHARTERED ALMOST 600 CLUBS, CONDUCTED BETTER MEETINGS AND RECRUITED MORE NEW MEMBERS DURING 1989-90 THAN IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**

This year also marked the organization's entry into new countries: clubs were chartered in Colombia, South America, and in Seoul, Korea, and two more clubs were chartered in the Soviet Union.

"It's been a great year," said 1989-90 International President John F. Noonan, DTM, during the Board of Directors meeting at the International Convention in Dallas, Texas. "Toastmasters International enjoyed a 4.5 percent membership growth, amounting to an all-time high of 156,178 members in 7,178 clubs in 50 countries. No longer is Toastmasters International considered one of the world's best kept secrets; indeed our organization is both known and respected in most communities."

He said the organization's recent growth and the resulting successful completion of the new World Headquarters building in Rancho Santa Margarita,

California, pay tribute to the "dedication, enthusiasm and spirit" of individual Toastmasters throughout the world.

The Board of Directors didn't just reflect on the success of the past year, they also discussed many topics to make sure the organization continues to expand into the 21st Century. The Board also made the following decisions concerning administrative and educational matters:

### **BOARD ACTION:**

- Accepted a bequest of \$10,000 from the estate of Mrs. Mabel Smith Edwards in memory of her husband, John Gregory Edwards, to be expended on youth outreach programs, such as Youth Leadership Programs by the Toastmasters of District 37.

- Adjusted the goal for the category "Club Membership at 20+" to 60 percent of the

clubs for the Distinguished Division and Area programs effective July 1, 1990.

- Reviewed concerns expressed by a district regarding rights of Toastmasters clubs in penal institutions and recognized that restricting access to Toastmasters materials is contrary to the mission and purpose of Toastmasters International.

- Considered a proposal to waive the practice that requires both district councils approve boundary changes between the affected districts and recommended no deviation from established policies.

- Approved a boundary change between Districts 33 and 52.

- Declined a request by a district to incorporate, since districts are administrative arms of Toastmasters International and are not separate entities.

- Determined that the term of office of a club or district officer ends at midnight on the last day of the defined term.

- Adopted a resolution to complete the district and club structure modifications which were adopted by the Board of Directors subject to the delegates' approval in 1988 of modifications to the District and Club Constitution. The resolution states that as of July 1, 1991, the Standard District Bylaws, as modified by the Board on Aug. 25, 1987, and on Feb. 19, 1988, shall be the bylaws of every district, and that as of Jan. 1, 1992, the Standard Bylaws for Clubs of Toastmasters International, as modified by the Board on those dates, shall be the bylaws of every club.

### **IN OTHER ACTION, THE BOARD:**

- Reviewed the progress of districts with fewer than 50 clubs and recommended that Toastmasters International continue to emphasize the benefits and advantages for districts to reach a minimum of 50 clubs.

- Recommended that the word "optional" be removed from the division level on the Toastmasters International Organization Service Chart. It was also recommended that no change be made



to the current wording of the District Constitution and Standard District By-laws, thus allowing districts to retain the choice of whether to organize areas into divisions.

- Examined the Area-Club Visit Program. Focus was upon factors that should be considered to ensure that the Area Governor's visit is a catalyst for effecting quality Club meetings. A list of ideas was provided to World Headquarters for inclusion in training, publications and support materials for district and club operations.

- Reviewed a model for a new program of District Growth Support and provided a list of recommendations for inclusion in the program. A draft of program me-

chanics will be reviewed at the February 1991 Board of Directors meeting.

- Reviewed current deadlines for submitting nominations for the Area Governor of the Year, Division Lt. Governor of the Year, and Outstanding Toastmaster of the Year awards to World Headquarters. The Board recommended that the deadline be extended to Aug. 1.

- Reviewed the continuous requirements for the ATM and DTM awards and recommended that the requirements for both awards be addressed at the February 1991 Board meeting.

- Reviewed Toastmasters International's promotional materials and recommended that they be updated.

- Approved the development of an educational program series for use during the club meetings. Anticipated availability of the program to clubs in Sept. 1991.

- Recommended discontinuing the "Get Into Action" and "Anniversary Month" Club Membership Programs, effective Dec. 31, 1990. The two programs will be replaced with a new Annual Club Membership Program beginning in 1992.

- Recommended that club officer training include emphasis on proper orientation, induction and coaching of new members. The Board recommended that clubs use the *Toastmasters and You* kit (code 1167), available from World Headquarters, to help new members. ●

## TI FINANCIAL STATEMENT 1989-90

### STATEMENT OF ASSETS—LIABILITIES OF ALL FUNDS

June 30, 1990

#### ASSETS

#### GENERAL FUND

##### UNRESTRICTED :

Cash .....	\$ 653,444
Restricted Cash .....	155,083
Accounts Receivable .....	86,115
Deposits, prepaid postage and other .....	73,199
Note receivable .....	270,000
Due from Investment Fund .....	363,761
<b>Total — Unrestricted .....</b>	<b>\$1,601,602</b>

##### RESTRICTED:

Cash .....	\$ 326,909
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$1,928,511</b>

#### INVESTMENT FUND

Marketable securities, at cost (estimated market value of \$2,460,699) .....	\$2,179,028
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#### PROPERTY FUND

Property, building and equipment, at cost:	
Land .....	\$1,246,598
Building and improvements .....	2,818,476
Furniture and equipment .....	2,015,357
<b>Total property .....</b>	<b>\$6,080,431</b>
Due from General Fund—Unrestricted .....	17
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$6,080,448</b>

### LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

##### UNRESTRICTED:

Liabilities:	
Accounts payable .....	\$ 324,456
Accrued wages .....	48,076
Advance convention deposits .....	676
Funds held for TI Regions .....	25,463
Due to Property Fund .....	17
Deferred charter fees .....	29,025
<b>Total liabilities .....</b>	<b>\$ 427,713</b>
Unrestricted—General Fund balance .....	\$1,173,889
<b>Total—Unrestricted .....</b>	<b>\$1,601,602</b>

##### RESTRICTED:

District Reserve Fund balances .....	\$ 242,024
Ralph C. Smedley Toastmasters International Memorial Fund .....	84,885
<b>Total-Restricted .....</b>	<b>\$ 326,909</b>
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$1,928,511</b>

#### INVESTMENT FUND

Due to General Fund .....	\$ 363,761
Investment Fund balance .....	1,815,267
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$2,179,028</b>

#### PROPERTY FUND

Property Funded Invested balance .....	\$6,080,431
Property Fund Reserve balance .....	17
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$6,080,448</b>

### GENERAL FUND—UNRESTRICTED STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURES FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 1990

#### INCOME:

Membership charges:	
Membership fees .....	\$2,164,292
Magazine revenue .....	484,227
New member service charges .....	734,050
<b>Total membership charges .....</b>	<b>\$3,382,569</b>
Other income:	
Charges for educational materials and supplies .....	\$1,092,114
Charter fees .....	44,625
Interest .....	68,015
Other .....	(4,320)
<b>Total other income .....</b>	<b>\$1,200,434</b>
<b>Total income .....</b>	<b>\$4,583,003</b>

#### OPERATING EXPENSES:

Executive Director's office .....	\$ 277,426
Education and club administration .....	257,959
Finance .....	945,992
District administration and programming .....	320,223
Membership and club extension .....	400,340
Publications and public relations .....	778,632
Production .....	413,254
Merchandising and policy administration .....	127,840
Educational materials and supplies .....	709,559
<b>Total operating expenses .....</b>	<b>\$4,231,225</b>

#### EXCESS OF INCOME OVER OPERATING EXPENSES:

\$ 351,778

#### OTHER EXPENDITURES:

Provision for replacements and additions to property .....	775,000
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#### EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURES

\$ (423,222)



# HALL OF FAME

## DTM

*Congratulations to these Toastmasters who have received the Distinguished Toastmaster certificate, Toastmasters International's highest recognition.*

James E. McCoy, 5849-14  
Frank Thomas Storey, 349-25  
Betty J. Fitzgerald, 5625-29  
Margaret McMillan, 3254-33  
Michael Angelo Patton, 3596-47  
Carroll W. Puckett, 5178-48  
Leonard J. Hoffman, 5665-52  
Henry M. Nixon, 5473-65  
Marilyn Johns, 2071-72  
Rufino S. Ferraris Jr., 4933-75

## ATM SILVER

*Congratulations to these Toastmasters who have received the Able Toastmaster Silver certificate of achievement.*

Alan Charles Kohls, 4619-6  
Stan Cottrell, 833-14  
Ralph M. Wise, 4986-16  
Debra G. Brown, 1234-17  
Lee Van Court, 3006-25  
Anthony U. Steiert, 5316-26  
James W. Gray, 89-33  
Donald D. Giesen, 985-39  
Russ Woods, 3928-72

## ATM BRONZE

*Congratulations to these Toastmasters who have received the Able Toastmaster Bronze certificate of achievement.*

Homer W. Watson, 4405-5

Joel R. Ferguson, 6780-7  
Ivan V. Beggs, 1690-10  
Nicholas J. Petti, 4053-10  
Carol Dean Schreiner, 1615-16  
Michael T. Wilson, 3374-33  
E. Frank Poyet, 4055-33  
Terri Ann Williams, 7634-33  
Daniel J. Wade, 2653-40  
Namon Harris Jr., 1684-43  
Joyce Moore, 3284-43  
Alan Shindler, 3962-43  
Oliver N. Skoglund, 6157-48  
Jill Rowlands, 6768-56  
Joseph F. McManus, 2500-58  
Mary A. Grindol, 1344-62  
Mary Theresa Cook, 6034-70

## ATM

*Congratulations to these Toastmasters who have received the Able Toastmaster certificate of achievement.*

Koichi Sayano, 3292-F  
Richard A. Hoslstedt, 3327-F  
Linda Lee Robinson, 638-1  
Charles Greenberg, 2189-1  
Juanita M. Skillman, 6264-1  
Darold Westbrook, 7421-1  
Linda Willoughby, 1820-3  
Gary R. Gardner, 5056-3  
Mary Elsie Robertson, 191-4  
Laura Wilkinson, 949-4  
Melissa Ann Duke, 4124-4  
Faye Jeanis, 4460-4  
David A. Stamper, 5900-4  
Michael Crew, 4152-5  
Mervyn E. Fiori, 4356-5  
Margaret M. Miller, 725-6  
Phone M. Kyi, 5298-6  
Claude E. Baskett, 751-7  
Patricia L. Sandrene, 151-10  
W. David Gantt, 266-14  
Hal Platt, 1520-14  
James R. Dawson, 1713-14  
Lisa R. Ludwig, 1713-14  
Kazzie J. Vinson, 3368-14  
William L. Adams, 6863-14  
Renee Gushen, 3531-15

Richard E. Schneider, 454-16  
Lillian M. Johnson, 1345-18  
Gary L. Bergstrand, 6066-18  
Asher F. Tunik, 6892-18  
Catherine Hockett, 1857-19  
Patti M. Wilhelmi, 4192-19  
Linda D. Pretz, 4737-19  
Thomas M. Price, 581-20  
Lydia Webster, 1303-21  
Ian W. Scargill, 1929-21  
Jane Elizabeth Powell, 1938-21  
Gunther N. Zierler, 4869-21  
Colette-Marie Collin, 6214-21  
Christine James, 6252-21  
Scott K. Paris, 7460-21  
Thomas Gaume, 1928-22  
Steven E. Brown, 2570-22  
C. Watson Waulor, 3214-22  
Rex D. Greim, 3808-22  
Mary M. Stinecipher, 696-23  
Manuel Ontiveros, 2127-23  
Paul R. Kronst, 2524-23  
H. Richard Yoshimura, 2524-23  
Patrick W. Francis, 4248-23  
Fred I. Magee, 4581-23  
Timothy Dippold, 5731-23  
Nancy S. Greene, 6220-23  
Edward J. Green, 2114-24  
Patricia Kay Hiller, 2114-24  
Harold McCurdy, 2499-24  
Renee Garrett, 2788-24  
Harold B. Wilson, 4362-24  
Gerald Buettner, 5949-24  
William G. Carpenter, 1111-25  
Philip H. Strand, 2760-25  
George Rogers Gideon, 4005-25  
Kermit Morris, 5569-25  
Stephen T. Brown, 5981-25  
John P. Ivey, 6043-25  
Margo R. Allmaras, 619-26  
Eveline Yang, 871-26  
William C. Thompson, 1445-26  
Jerald Hoesel, 4950-26  
Norman J. Chichester, 5018-26  
Clara Clark, 3179-27  
Kenneth U. Mowl, 3179-27

Arlene S. Cooper, 4390-27  
John C. Kammerer, 4691-27  
Eugene Bacon, 2268-28  
David C. Strubler, 4890-28  
Judy H. Sullivan, 226-29  
Henrietta Caranna, 1098-29  
Steven E. Sapienza, 2745-30  
Robert Moffatt, 2277-31  
Robert L. Tagen, 2277-31  
Donald H. Cox, 5525-31  
Margarete R. Campbell, 1123-32  
Woodrow E. Jones, 4958-32  
Robin Lynn Meyst, 887-33  
John P. Cushman, 1864-33  
Jim Olson, 3105-33  
Martha Jayne Ransom, 5145-33  
Ronald A. Smith, 6409-33  
Vern Kotten, 1558-35  
Richard M. Miley, 2121-35  
Douglas J. Hoylman, 4493-36  
Gloria Starks, 5898-36  
Jack Ring, 1278-37  
Jim Macahilas, 1481-39  
Nancy Barta, 5136-40  
Carolyn Vallance, 5397-42  
Mark A. Schmit, 5921-42  
R. Glenn Walker, 6374-42  
Jeanette Karrenbrock, 5440-44  
Glenn Tapley, 6954-45  
Victor Chaker, 5798-46  
James C. Edwards, 2300-47  
Sharon S. Stitely, 2508-47  
Linda S. Altendorf, 3397-47  
Marianne Donnell, 3771-47  
Kristina S. Robertson, 3963-48  
Rita Figueira, 3611-49  
Barbara Fletcher, 4624-49  
George Avakian, 2692-52  
Andrea Z. George, 3352-52  
Eileen M. Oelrich, 3479-54  
Doug Hodge, 3393-56  
Kimberly Lindenfeld, 5831-56  
Jeff Kell, 6516-56  
Arnel R. Torres, 5269-57  
William M. Burke, 2018-58  
George D. Hulsey Jr., 4111-63



Gary Mucklow, 5123-65  
G. W. Buckley, 5868-70  
Alejandro T. De La Cruz,  
1088-75  
Aida T. Valles, 4313-75  
Reynaldo Mababangloob,  
6959-75

#### NEW CLUBS

Fountain Valley Free Speakers, 7766-F  
Fountain Valley, California  
Avnet Yacht Club, 7797-3  
Chandler, Arizona  
Power Speakers, 7798-3  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Schwabmasters, 7806-4  
San Francisco, California  
Checkmasters, 7756-6  
Shoreview, Minnesota  
TC 3, 7805-6  
Bloomington, Minnesota  
Rivermasters, 7760-7  
Estacada, Oregon  
Timken Research, 7795-10  
Canton, Ohio  
Franklin, 7748-11  
Franklin, Indiana  
Jonquil, 7780-14  
Smyrna, Georgia  
Xerox Business Service  
Speakeasy, 7781-14  
Atlanta, Georgia  
Unity Speakers, 7799-14  
Chamblee, Georgia  
T-Toasters, 7804-14  
Marietta, Georgia  
Gwinnett County, 7813-14  
Lawrenceville, Georgia  
NT Communicators,  
7814-14  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
Phase II, 7810-18  
Hanover, Maryland  
Perry, 7769-19  
Perry, Iowa  
Simons, 7758-21  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada  
Raton, 7752-23  
Raton, New Mexico  
TNT, 7796-23  
El Paso, Texas  
Lunch Bunch, 7803-23  
Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Marri-A-Teers, 7788-24  
Omaha, Nebraska  
We Deliver, 7749-25

Plano, Texas  
Park Cities Soaring Eagles,  
7777-25  
Dallas, Texas  
JJMI Nooners, 7789-25  
Arlington, Texas  
Lone Star, 7787-27  
Washington, D.C.  
Island, 7754-31  
Newport, Rhode Island  
On-The-Level, 7764-32  
Bremerton, Washington  
Kaweah, 7783-33  
Visalia, California  
Friday Night Live, 7792-33  
Bakersfield, California  
Power Movers, 7751-35  
Madison, Wisconsin  
ULLICO, 7753-36  
Washington, D.C.  
PAHO/WHO, 7765-36  
Washington, D.C.  
Talkative Neighbors,  
7771-36  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
SIGAL Construction Corp.,  
7786-36  
Washington, D.C.  
Capital Centre, 7807-36  
Landover, Maryland  
IMF, 7808-36  
Washington, D.C.  
Stickly Speaking From NRH,  
7812-36  
Washington, D.C.  
Grover Industries, 7762-37  
Grover, North Carolina  
MAIN, 7793-37  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
EDS/AT&T, 7761-38  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania  
Harleysville Insurance  
Company, 7768-38  
Harleysville, Pennsylvania  
Burnt Toast, 7763-40  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
Thoroughbred, 7772-40  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Speakers' Pipeline, 7802-42  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
Chaleur, 7750-45  
Bathurst, N.B., Canada  
Les Gens de Parole, 7776-45  
Dartmouth, N.S., Canada  
Janssen Pharmaceutica,  
7801-46  
Piscataway, New Jersey  
SunBank, 7775-47

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida  
Gateway, 7791-47  
St. Petersburg, Florida  
Hui Maiele, 7759-49  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
Austintatious, 7757-56  
Austin, Texas  
Continuum, 7774-56  
Austin, Texas  
MTC/Donaldson, 7755-58  
Greenville, South Carolina  
Orangeburg Area, 7778-58  
Orangeburg, South Carolina  
LMC, 7784-58  
West Columbia,  
South Carolina  
Fluor Daniel, 7785-58  
Greenville, South Carolina  
Tamper Toastmasters,  
7800-58  
West Columbia,  
South Carolina  
South Shore, 7782-61  
St. Lambert, Quebec, Canada  
CTM+, 7773-62  
Flint, Michigan  
Nashville Triangle, 7767-63  
Nashville, Tennessee  
St. Elizabeth Speakers' Net-  
work, 7790-68  
Beaumont, Texas  
Society, 7811-71  
Dublin, Ireland  
Hutt City, 7745-72  
Lower Hutt, New Zealand  
Anglovaal, 7740-74  
Johannesburg, Republic of  
South Africa  
Standard Bank Operations,  
7746-74  
Johannesburg, Republic of  
South Africa  
UNIDATA, 7779-74  
Johannesburg, TVL, Republic  
of South Africa  
PICPA CEBU, 7770-75  
Cebu City, Philippines  
ANTS, 7794-75  
Antipolo Rizal, Philippines  
Palawan Peacock, 7809-75  
Puerto Princesa City,  
Philippines

#### ANNIVERSARIES

40 years  
Astoria, 775-7

Monument, 898-36

#### 35 years

MID, 1933-7  
Demosthenes, 972-9  
Executive Toastmasters,  
1783-25

#### 30 years

McDonnell Douglas, 2389-8  
ADA, 3143-20  
Southern Valley, 2752-33

#### 25 years

Daybreakers, 814-6  
Greater Fairmont, 2773-13  
Cookeville, 2744-63  
Dauphin, 2991-64  
Waitemata, 2017-72

#### 20 years

Kachina, 1473-3  
Panama City, 531-29  
Parklawn, 502-36  
Huber Heights, 1740-40

#### 15 years

Paris, 3230-U  
Georgia State, 3494-14  
Revenuers, 3847-43  
South Ridge, 2084-47  
Waterford, 3794-71

#### 10 years

Long Beach Remarkables,  
1307-1  
Unity Centennial, 67-2  
ESL, 4398-4  
V.A.M.C., 3334-6  
Toastmasters Oasis, 4397-12  
Firetower, 3878-17  
Glasgow, 4396-17  
Delta, 1924-21  
Overland, 1938-21  
Santa Ynez Valley, 80-33  
Rocketeers, 4399-33  
Sunrise Speakers, 1449-39  
Bennelong, 3289-70  
Toukley and District,  
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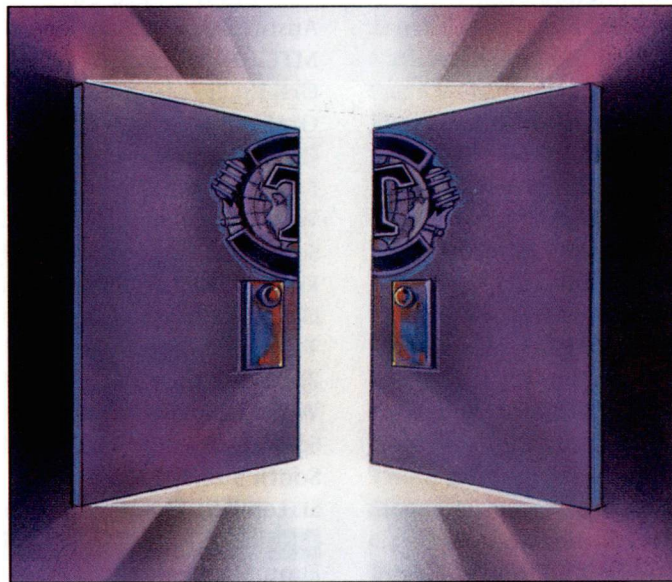
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