

TOASTMASTER[®]

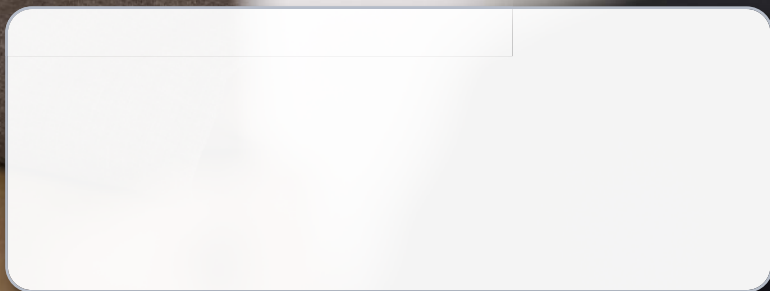
September 2010

Steps to a **Better Interview**

**Confessions
of a Public
Speaker**



**Introducing
Pat Johnson, DTM**
Toastmasters' 2010-2011
International President



ARTICLES & DEPARTMENTS

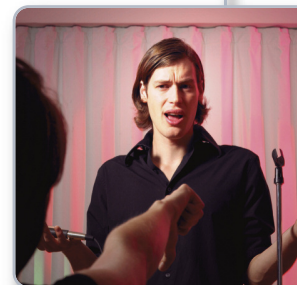
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The Toastmasters Vision:

Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

The Toastmasters Mission:

Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

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

A Whole New World

I totally disagree with the comment that “The Traveling Toastmaster” photo gallery doesn’t enhance our speaking, listening and leadership abilities (Letters, May). Whatever means we have available to publicize our international perspective (aka “thinking outside the box”), the better off we will be.

As international travelers, a number of us make a special effort to visit other Toastmasters clubs during our travels. Try visiting a Toastmasters club in the county or state next door for an eye-opening experience. You just may discover an international experience that can open up a whole new world.

Bowman Olds, ATM • SOS Toastmasters • McLean, Virginia

Travel Broadens the Toastmasters Experience

In response to the Letter to the Editor “The Traveling Toastmaster Wanders Too Far” (May), the lessons of the magazine’s Postcards page may seem a bit subliminal, but they are valuable and real. A few of the lessons I take from the page are:

- Many Toastmasters visit locations far from home.
- Toastmasters travel the world with confidence.
- Toastmasters can and often visit clubs in the places they travel to.

I have belonged to four clubs in my district, and have visited several others locally. While traveling, I’ve also visited clubs in London, England; Dublin, Ireland; and Sunshine Coast, Australia. Participating personally at clubs in these diverse locations has proved to be both fun and educationally profitable for me

and my home club, since I took ideas and clever snippets back with me.

The cross-pollination of ideas, practices and customs gained by visiting other places and clubs near and far is a great way to broaden one’s life and one’s Toastmasters experience.

Gerald Fleischmann, DTM • Orange Upon A Time • Orange, California

Picture This!

It would not have occurred to me to pack a *Toastmaster* magazine as I prepared for my first trip ever out of the country. I was traveling with a college spring break group that I was also meeting for the first time. When I ran across “The Traveling Toastmaster” on www.toastmasters.org, I thought it would make a nice icebreaker. Not only was it fun posing for the picture, with the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, in the background, it was an opportunity for me to talk about the organization and our club and to practice organizing thoughts quickly as I shared personal experiences with my new friends. “The Traveling Toastmaster” is a wonderful idea and my fellow Toastmasters loved the picture!

Karen Gilliam, CTM • Let It Flow • Cleveland, Ohio

Two Small Letters: One Big Achievement

I have just received my magazine – something I always look forward to. As I opened it, I realized that after my name, the address label now had printed two very special letters: CC. I’m so proud! I’ve never expected or really ever wanted letters after my name; however, now with Toastmasters I have made an exception.

As I have steadily worked through my *Competent Communication* manual, I have gained confidence and developed new skills. I have found my public voice and know I deserve those two letters after my name. It is with relish that I look forward to expanding on what I’ve learned so far and enhancing every facet of being a Toastmaster.

Sandra O’Hagan, CC • Clonakilty Toastmasters • County Cork, Ireland

Improving Rhetoric and Romance

The article “Talking About Love” (June) by Caren Neile, which highlighted how some Toastmasters turned their long-term relationships into love, clearly shows that involvement in Toastmasters goes beyond developing self-confidence in public speaking. Toastmasters contributes to the total development of its members, including their personal lives.

My spouse, Sylvia, and I did not meet at Toastmasters, but we were co-founders of two clubs in the Philippines. We believe that learning public speaking should be a family effort. This gives us an advantage as we continue mentoring each other even outside Toastmasters meetings.

Roland and Sylvia Inciong • IRRI club • Los Banos, Philippines

A Point on Protocol

I enjoyed Craig Harrison’s article “Avoid Clichés Like the Plague” (May) and concur with most of his reasoning. But I disagree with his statement that opening a speech with “Mr./Madam Toastmaster...” is a cliché. I believe that is a matter of protocol/etiquette to acknowledge the audience, either first off or after a pithy opening. After all, what is a speech without an audience?

Shirley M. Carolan, ATMG • Tick Talk Toastmasters Carlsbad, California

An Indian woman in Australia tackles stand-up comedy.

You Gotta Laugh, Mate

When I grew up in India, my name was no big deal. But when I arrived in Australia, every other person would say, “Uma? Like Uma Thurman?”

Well, Uma Thurman and I do share one thing: We both have big feet. But she’s about six feet tall and I’m five-foot three. When I take off my shoes, I’m half naked.

I shared this experience when I began performing stand-up comedy earlier this year. After one of my shows, an audience member came up to me and said, “An Indian woman doing stand-up comedy? That’s rare.” “You’re so brave,” someone else said – and I wasn’t sure if that was a compliment.

I love laughing and making people laugh. My Toastmasters mentor encouraged me to give stand-up a try. It’s daunting to go onstage and perform comedy: While many of the techniques used in public speaking are the same that you use in comedy since both are performances, the difference is that in comedy you have to get frequent laughs if you want your audience to stay – and if you want to be booked for another show.

It’s a tough field but I enjoy the challenge. It’s like anything you decide to do in life: If you enjoy it and are willing to take a few knockbacks in the beginning, you will succeed.

I knew that in order to grow, I needed to take some risks. So this past February, I performed at the St Kilda Laughs Festival in Port Philip, a city in Victoria. For the fun of it, I threw in a Bollywood dance during

my comedy routine. Both were firsts for me: I’d never danced or performed comedy. But the audience loved it. Whew! What a relief.

Growing up in India, I studied in Catholic boarding schools, and some of my comedy material is inspired by those experiences. I was once selected for the role of a witch in a school production of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. (The nuns must have had something in mind for me.) Since then, I have had an avid interest in Shakespeare. Today that interest has morphed into one of my comedy shows, called “A Bollywood Shakespeare.” As an Indian woman living in Melbourne, Australia, and speaking with an Indian accent, it’s easy to make people laugh simply by being myself onstage! I also laugh at myself and don’t take myself too seriously.

One of my toughest audiences was a retirement village. I performed there – and no one laughed. I thought they were too polite to heckle me. I put my foot in it, almost literally, when I asked a lady with a walking aid if she’d like to join me in a Bollywood dance. I obviously was too intimidated by the serious faces around me to think straight.

After the performance I was chatting with the retirees. “We love your Shakespeare comedy and the Bollywood material,” one of them said. “Really?” I replied. “But how come no one laughed during the show?” “Oh, that’s just the way we are,” one older lady said. “We tend to smile inside.” Huh? I wish I had known that before the show.

I really enjoy stand-up comedy and I’m forging ahead in the field. I owe a lot to my mentors, particularly at my Toastmasters club. My mentors believed in me and gave me the courage to laugh at myself, both on stage and off. That’s the key to success in any field: Find a good mentor and follow their advice.

I now have a comedy spot on YouTube called “TheUmaHuma,” a show where I post my routines. My blog is a mix of reality and imagination called The Surreal Diary of an Indian Woman. A short piece I wrote is a typical example:

“Open up or we shoot,” the bandits shouted.

I huddled behind the flimsy school door along with the other young kids between 5 and 7. I was 5 at the time and at a Catholic boarding school in Central India, in one of the poorest states. Bandits used to rove the poverty-stricken town and the thick forests surrounding it, looking for food.

We survived some days on donations of milk powder from the USA, and the bandits would gladly exchange gunpowder for milk powder.

This is just one more surreal experience from my life that provides great material for my comedy. Like my Aussie friends say: “Whatever the situation, you gotta laugh, mate.”

Uma Thakar, CC, is a member of the Tuesday Chatters Toastmasters Club in Melbourne, Australia. She can be reached at uma.thakar@gmail.com.

Former Intel techie flourishes as a funnyman with profanity-free act.

Cleaning Up in the Comedy Business

Dan Nainan once heard that if you do what you fear, the death of fear is certain. So Nainan, who had a fear of heights, went out and bungee-jumped. Then, to overcome his trepidation of being underwater, he went scuba diving.

How did he conquer his fear of public speaking? He took a comedy class.

Though Nainan originally felt “hideously terrified” about performing in front of an audience, he stumbled onto his calling as a professional comedian in a serendipitous turn of events. He was working for Intel Corp., when the company’s events planner saw a tape of his first comedy performance. Subsequently, Intel asked Nainan to speak at a dinner for 250 people.

“That went well so they requested I perform in front of 2,500 people at a sales convention,” he recalls. “During the show, which included my impersonating [former U.S. president] Bill Clinton, my left leg shook uncontrollably from nerves, but the crowd’s reaction was amazing. It was eight o’clock in the morning and they were dying of laughter. After the show, several people asked if I was a professional comedian.”

That was 1999. By 2001 Nainan had left Intel to pursue comedy full time. Today, he travels the globe as a professional entertainer, speaking to a variety of audiences. Nainan’s brand of humor is clean and designed for universal appeal. He’s also an actor, having landed a small role in the popular TV series *Avatar: The*

Last Airbender and a spot in a U.S. commercial for Apple Inc. (where he’s swathed in bubble wrap!).

Nainan, a member of Toastmasters 90210 in Beverly Hills, California, joined Toastmasters four years ago to polish his presentation skills. He didn’t want to use profanity in his act, which made Toastmasters the perfect venue in which to practice. A chance meeting with U.S. comedian Jerry Seinfeld deepened Nainan’s resolve to stick with clean humor:

“I met Seinfeld, who is one of my favorite comedians, at a club one night when he performed. We chatted for a few minutes and he told me that if you work clean, you can work just about anywhere, and I’ve definitely found that to be true.”

Working Diverse Gigs

Nainan performs at all kinds of events, from corporate functions and conventions to charity galas and “Sweet 16” parties. He’s also performed for well-known people such as Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Dr. Sanjay Gupta.

Nainan says good comedy explores the personal, and touches on the everyday aspects of life. In his act, he often jokes playfully about his Japanese mother and Indian father. Here’s a snippet from a performance in front of 4,000 people:

One day I was driving in the car with my family, and we passed cows grazing in a field. My father said [Dan uses an Indian accent], “Graze.’ There’s a word that can have a lot of meanings.

For example, cows can graze.” I said, “You can be grazed by a bullet.” And then my mom says [Dan adopts a Japanese accent], “Or it’s a kind of a donut!”

“Dan’s material resonates with everyone and he never uses profanity as a crutch,” says fellow comedian and actor Paul Singh, a Toastmaster and president of the PowerToasters club in Washington, D.C. “A lot of television comedians are such potty mouths that every other word is bleeped out. But Dan really knows how to write a joke and deliver it without offending anyone.”

Friend and former roommate Nykki Hardin echoes those sentiments, praising Nainan as a comic who’s not only very funny but who refrains from sexist and racist comments. In other words, he doesn’t try to create an ugly, exaggerated persona to get laughs. “I love that his jokes reflect what is actually happening in the world,” says Hardin.

Revenge of a Nerd

Given his current success, it seems logical to assume that Nainan was born funny. “People think I was the class clown, but that’s actually the furthest thing from the truth,” he says. “I was a computer nerd – bespectacled, skinny, unathletic, hopelessly shy and withdrawn – and I got bullied a lot. Back then, the concept of speaking in front of people would have seemed impossible.”



Dan Nainan

“If the members of your audience all have children, for example, think of funny, everyday things that happen when you’re a child or a parent,” he says. “Likewise, if you’re speaking to college students, talk about issues they can relate to such as dorm-room life and pulling all-nighters to study. The greatest comedy comes from extraordinary twists on the ordinary.”

Nainan also suggests associating with more advanced presenters and speakers from whom you can learn. “For two years, I toured with comedian Russell Peters,” he says. “It was a fantastic experience, and I learned quite a bit. There is no better way to learn about comedy than to hang out with someone who is at a higher level. Such an individual can suggest jokes and give you tips

The only inkling Nainan had during high school that he might be hiding a funny streak was when he occasionally blurted something out that made the whole class laugh. He also enjoyed making prank calls, especially using a Japanese accent.

Is Nainan funny in real life now? “Definitely,” says Singh. “Dan has the gift of audio – hearing sounds that normal people can’t hear – and then re-creating them. He is especially good at impersonations. It’s not uncommon for me to have two or three voice mails from him imitating me or someone famous.”

“Because he has the ability to do many voices, when he makes a prank phone call he always gets me. One time he impersonated a phone operator asking if I would accept a collect call from Dan Nainan.”

Though it may seem like a daunting task to make audiences laugh, injecting humor into speeches and presentations is actually easier than many people think, says Nainan. “You don’t have to be a professional comedian to use humor,” he says.

“The greatest comedy comes from extraordinary twists on the ordinary.”

Dan Nainan


“You already have the necessary tools – especially if you’re involved in Toastmasters.”

Eliciting laughter is as simple as taking good notes, he adds: “Good humor doesn’t come from spending hours writing a speech the night before. It comes from observing what happens to you over the course of days and weeks and recording it. You should be constantly looking for occurrences in your own life that are funny, because good comedic writers base their routines on the little things that happen to them.”

Connect to the Crowd

To choose the best material for a stand-up comedy show, Nainan points to the age-old rule of knowing your audience and considering the type of life they lead.

that you might not otherwise have thought about.”

Perhaps most important of all, test your material. “Good comedians are constantly trying out their material on audiences, which is the only way you can tell if it is truly funny,” Nainan says. “Humor can be used in just about any type of speech, and it’s often really appreciated. Toastmasters clubs give you an opportunity to try your speeches and presentations out on a regular basis, and that’s priceless.” For more information about Dan Nainan, visit www.danielnainan.com. 

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



Meet Toastmasters' 2010-2011 International President

Pat

Newly elected
International
President Pat
Johnson brings to her
position many skills
to help her guide the
Toastmasters organization
to new heights. She is a
seasoned executive who has
been a leader in corporate,
government, not-for-profit
and self-employed business
worlds – and she is only
the fifth woman to ever
serve as Toastmasters
International President.

“I am a better community member, parent, employee, leader, friend and manager because of what I have learned in Toastmasters.”

Johnson, DTMI

A resident of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, Johnson offers the organization more than 25 years of experience in working with policy, career development and strategic planning. She has international experience as a speaker and trainer and is skilled in conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation. In addition, her work experience includes organizational development and delivery and evaluation of programs in adult education. Johnson credits Toastmasters with helping her learn how to support others and become a cheerleader for their projects. She adds, “I am a better community member, parent, employee, leader, friend and manager because of what I have learned in Toastmasters.”

When did you join Toastmasters?

My original membership certificate says April 6, 1983. And it is hanging on the wall of my home office – signed by the club president. It’s interesting to think back. I actually joined Toastmasters when Eddie Dunn was International President and I still vividly remember some of his Viewpoint articles. It was a life-changing year for me!

Did you have a specific goal that drove you to join?

No – I didn’t have a specific goal. I lived in a rural community on the Canadian prairies, and I was terrified that my brain was turning to mush. I got involved in a course titled “Practical Politics” where we studied the various levels of Canadian government. During the program, we visited our nation’s capital and I was asked to introduce a senator to our small group.

Toastmasters: Achieving Greatness Together

I was so terrified over that whole incident that somebody suggested I investigate Toastmasters. I had never heard of it. I went searching and the following spring joined the local club in Swan River, Manitoba. I did not join to become a better speaker but to overcome my total lack of confidence. That is what got me there and what has kept me there.

The hardest meeting I ever went to was that first one. Just walking in the door was frightening. I probably never would have gone in, except it was in the basement of the church I attended and I convinced myself that I knew how to open the door and walk down the steps. At the bottom of those steps were friendly faces greeting me. I felt a sense of relief.

We know that Toastmasters is your avocation, but what is your day job?

I love my paid work. I’m an Assistant Director for Business Education at the British Columbia Pension Corporation in Victoria, British Columbia. We are a corporation that is, interestingly, run by a number of boards. And we administer pension funds for a number of sectors. I work with a great team of curriculum

designers who develop training for the employees of the corporation as well as our members and employers outside of the organization.

We develop workshops and seminars, as well as all the handbooks and material that support the clients' learning. We develop e-learning materials for the employers who actually administer the pension plans in their workplaces. I also get to work with presenters within the corporation. It's a fascinating day-to-day panorama of work that I get to do. I also have the good fortune of being able to do some classroom training as well as some facilitation work. There is a great deal of challenge and variety in my role – which I love!

“I felt such a sense of achievement – a small group of Toastmasters supporting one another to be the best we can be. That felt like ‘greatness.’”

How do you balance your job with your responsibilities as an international leader of our organization?

I do Toastmasters every day. I find that most of my Toastmaster duties are easy to fit in around other daily activities. I belong to a couple of fabulous clubs and the people there inspire and invigorate me. It's fun and I love to learn. The other part of the equation is, I don't sleep much!

Who are your role models?

Several of my role models in Toastmasters are past International Presidents. I served on the Board with a number of Presidents who had very diverse styles. One President could take a very long, convoluted discussion and summarize it in two or three sentences. He could be very clear and concise. I looked at that and thought: What a fabulous skill to have – that mental ability and that connection with the message to be able to be so clear and concise. Another President was different in that he very much led and spoke from his heart. That's a worthy ability to have – to be vulnerable, to open up as a leader and let go of any need to be right all the time. I aspire to have that empathy with the audience and connect with each of our members, to let my “humanness” show.

And of course, I admire the women who have gone before me – I'm the fifth woman to serve in 86 years in this organization, and the first Canadian woman to hold this office. I bow down to these women. I know them, love them and have great respect for what they have accomplished.

How has Toastmasters helped you achieve your personal and professional goals?

I used to be more of a cerebral speaker; I would write everything out and speak from my head. And then a very good Toastmasters friend challenged me to speak from my heart, which felt very personal for me. I now can feel the difference, and that has been a great learning process.

Professionally, I really discovered who I was in Toastmasters. It happened through people saying, “Oh, you did a great job with that,” and giving me more and more responsibilities and encouragement. Fellow members could see things in me that I

couldn't see in myself. They figuratively held up a mirror, which I am ever-grateful for. As a result, I started doing training in Toastmasters. The next thing I knew, people were saying to me, “You always do this in Toastmasters, and you do a great job. You should get paid for this.” I eventually got enough confidence to get some education and build a career as a trainer. I then trained as a facilitator, which led to management jobs where I started building other skills. So my career really is built on Toastmasters skills.

Tell us about your favorite speaking memory.

I have many wonderful speaking memories, but the most vivid is delivering the invocation at the Opening Ceremonies for the International Convention a few years ago. I was a second-year international director. I can still feel myself walking across the stage. It was an opportunity to say something I felt very strongly about; to call attention to the importance of us all coming together, and what we were doing together – it was very powerful for me. It was also a real honor to be given that liberty and trust, to set the tone of the Opening Ceremony.

How did you select the international theme for 2010-2011, “Toastmasters: Achieving Greatness Together”?

“Achieving” opens the international theme best because it is an active form of the verb, and it confirms what

we are doing every day. We are achieving and learning in Toastmasters.

“Greatness” can be defined in many ways. It could be when you take your skills as a communicator, as a leader, to a higher level. It might mean becoming a greater parent, spouse, employee or employer – or simply giving more service as a better community member. And it is ongoing. Greatness this year is different for each of us from what it will be next year as we continue to learn and grow.

“Together” will forever be tied to the first part of the Toastmasters Promise: “Attend club meetings regularly.” We find ourselves achieving greatness in that supportive environment, where our fellow Toastmasters pick us up, dust us off and stand us up in front of the lectern again. They say, “Now, try again.” Or, “Here, see if it will work better this way.” And I think that the togetherness in Toastmasters is what makes it magical. Otherwise, we would be standing in our living rooms, in front of a mirror, practicing and going nowhere quickly. The fact that we meet, support and grow together is what makes Toastmasters work.

Give us an example of when you were able to work with others to achieve greatness.

I was asked to speak at an event in Vancouver, and I was just blocked. I was really, really busy at work and I felt that I had no creative time. I was starting to panic. I thought, “Oh, my goodness! I have to speak in a couple weeks. And I still have no idea what to speak about.” I went to my Thursday morning club, Rise and Shine, and asked Val and Caroline for help. They looked at me and said, “What do you need help on?” I said, “I’m stuck! I can’t decide what I want to talk about...” Val said, “Come over to my home on Friday night and Carolyn and I will brainstorm ideas with you.” Friday night, I arrived at Val’s. Caroline was there. The three of us sat and filled pages of ideas and talked and laughed. I went home and easily wrote the speech. It was so much more fun than suffering alone. And I felt such a sense of achievement – a small group of Toastmasters supporting one another to be the best we can be. That felt like “greatness.”

How do you hope members, clubs and districts will fulfill the international theme?

I hope that people look at where they are and acknowledge their personal brand of greatness. And if they’re



“Professionally, I really discovered who I was in Toastmasters... Fellow members could see things in me that I couldn’t see in myself.”

not able to do that, they can acknowledge the greatness in somebody else and say, “You’re great at this.” Don’t be afraid to let somebody know that they are great at something or that they have great potential. Don’t do a whitewash. Don’t insult the person by saying, “Oh that was fabulous. There’s no way you can improve.” Care enough to express your opinion. Be bold enough to form an opinion. Support one another by seeing the greatness in them and giving them a reputation to live up to by challenging their status quo.

I also hope each member will do their very best to build strong clubs and ensure that their clubs introduce the whole Toastmasters program to their members, not just the communication portion but also the leadership portion of the program. Strong clubs will build strong members and in turn, strong districts.

If you had a message for every Toastmaster, what would it be?

We’re a learning organization. Never forget that you are here to learn. And that you can become whatever you

imagine yourself to be. Take advantage of your club environment where people can help you actually see who and what you can be. I am always amazed at how supportive our club members are.

The other thing is to repeat your CCs and your CLs. When you are working through advanced manuals, always have a CC manual running parallel. This way, if you get bogged down in your Advanced manual or there isn't sufficient time on the program for your longer speeches, you are able to do a manual speech in your *Competent Communication* manual. It will amaze you how quickly you complete another review of the basics of communication. It also lets you be a role model for newer members.

What caused you to seek the International President office?

It was never my goal to become International President. I've arrived at this point in my leadership learning as a result of a lot of supportive people around me who believed and encouraged me to take one more step –

to take one more step in service within Toastmasters. Now, as I step up to this role, representing this organization, I feel very humble and honored, as well as a great sense of responsibility. And I am ready to learn.

What do you hope to achieve during your term in office?

I hope that next August I can sit down and say that I did my very best every day and that I honored every Toastmasters member – that I took the time and caring to see the greatness in each one of our members. And that, given the tasks and responsibilities of the position, I leave the organization in a better place than when I started my term. I am not able to define today what "better place" will mean in a year's time. Perhaps it will be that more people have come to our program than ever before. Perhaps more people have achieved their goals than ever before. But my fervent hope is that more people will have achieved their own personal brand of greatness together with other Toastmasters. And that they will go forward in their lives as more effective leaders. ■

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A Question of Manners

† To thank or not to thank – that is the question. When you are finished giving a speech, should you say “thank you” to your audience?

Proper etiquette plays a big part in Toastmasters meetings, and the “Do you thank the audience?” question lies at the heart of good “Toastmanners.” The issue sparks spirited debate in the Toastmasters world, as shown by a discussion earlier this year among the Official Toastmasters International Members Group on LinkedIn.

Some members said that when you finish a speech with the words “thank you,” your conclusion lacks creativity; end it with more dramatic impact, they urged. “Picture leaving your audience with a ‘Big Bang’ [ending] – a story or thought that will leave them wanting more,” said Sarah Hilton, a member of two clubs in London, Ontario, Canada. “‘Thank you’ does not create this experience for your audience.”

But others argued that a thank you at the end is like an unwritten social contract between speaker and audience. “I have tried the most thunderous, rousing endings in the world, and the audience will not clap until I say, ‘Thank you.’... that is their cue to clap,” notes Sue Gaulke, a member of the Hood River club in Hood River, Oregon.

Other members said each situation needs to be judged on its own. For example, you might say “thank you” if you’re speaking at a fund raiser but not if you’re giving a speech to inform or convince.

As an etiquette professional, I side with those in the pro-thank you camp who advocate thanking one’s audience every time. I believe

gratitude on the part of the speaker should be clearly conveyed.

A Little Background...

I first wrote about this subject in the August 2007 issue of the *Toastmaster* magazine. (That “My Turn” article was referenced in the LinkedIn discussion.) My position is that audience members give speakers something of great value that deserves a thank you: They give their precious time and (presumably) their full attention. Those two things alone allow you to do what you came to the lectern to do – present material of importance to them.

I once heard Bill Clinton, the former U.S. president, give a speech in Vancouver, Canada, and at the end of the speech he took the time to

always say thank you (after a very long pause) with the sincerest and truest way you can.”

In recent years, Toastmasters International’s official stance on the “thank you” issue has shifted a bit. The old *Communication and Leadership Program* manual (now, called the *Competent Communication* manual) used to say this about speech conclusions:

Don’t end by saying “Thank you.” The audience should thank you for the information you’ve shared. Instead, just close with your prepared ending, nod at the Toastmaster of the meeting, and say, “Mr. (or Madam) Toastmaster” – then enjoy the applause!

The current version of the manual is more flexible on the matter, stating: “Some speakers

“Gratitude and good manners belong wherever people gather.”

thank everybody, right down to the lighting technicians. I found this impressive – it demonstrated thoughtfulness and impeccable manners.

However, it’s also true that concluding your speech with a polite “thank you” simply doesn’t produce a Big Bang dramatic ending. If you have not conveyed your gratitude somewhere during the speech (and I don’t condone starting off with a thank you), I suggest ending the speech with that Big Bang, taking a pause, and then ending your time on the podium with a sincere thank you to the audience. As Croix Sather, a member of several clubs in Connecticut, said in the LinkedIn discussion: “If you have to choose between saying thank you or not,

say ‘thank you’ at the very end to signal to the audience that they are finished, but this is not necessary.”

Three years after I first wrote about the issue, my conclusion remains the same: Gratitude and good manners belong wherever people gather, and should especially be on display when you’re on the podium. Isn’t life better for everyone when we grab more – not fewer – opportunities to thank those who give us their valuable time and attention? †

Margaret Page, DTM, is a member of Sunshine Toastmasters in Sechelt, Canada, and a Vancouver-based etiquette and protocol consultant. Reach her at www.etiquettepage.com.

Not All Ideas Are Created Equal

Peggy Noonan, one of President Ronald Reagan's speechwriters, advocates in her book *On Speaking Well* that every speech should be built around a policy. "Trying to write a great speech without having a great policy to work with, to assert and argue for, would be like trying to write a great play about nothing," she notes.

For those of us who are crafting speeches that aren't primarily political in nature, I suggest substituting the word "idea" for "policy." A great speech is great because it advances a great idea.

A speech or a presentation should be built around one – and only one – idea. If you have more than one idea, good for you. Save the second or third or fourth idea for other speeches. Choose one idea, instead, and focus on making it as clear and compelling as possible.

The challenge, of course, is to be sure it's a good idea – one that provides clarity and meaning, one that is both intellectually and emotionally engaging. You can express just such an idea. Here are some questions to get you started:

Is It Clear?

Clarity isn't everything, of course. (For those who have nothing to say, clarity is a liability.) You can be clear and offend people, bore them, maybe even galvanize their opposition. But if you're not clear, if people don't understand what you're talking about, there's no point for you to go on. It's better

to risk having your idea rejected outright than to have it met with a collective "huh?"

Dale Carnegie once wrote, "An all too common reason people fail to be intelligible is this: The thing they wish to express is not clear even to themselves." So the first thing to do is be clear to yourself. Start by stating your idea in a short sentence using simple, everyday words.

In his early military career U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower wrote speeches for General Douglas MacArthur. Eisenhower believed the central idea of a speech should be so clear that it could be written on the inside of a matchbook cover. Since matchbook covers are a rare commodity these days, you might try instead to write your idea on the flipside of a business card. This is good practice in keeping your message brief and to the point.

When asked the secret of his mesmerizing speeches, the Roman orator Cato said, "Find the message first and the words will follow." Start with the message – your idea – and build on it.

Fighting clutter, which is the natural enemy of clarity, is like

emptying your e-mail inbox: You're never finished. You have to be vigilant and aggressive, deleting all the fluff and filler words, jargon and corporate catchphrases. *Synergistic, out of the box, at the end of the day, best of breed, customer-centric, ROI* – add your favorite (actually, least favorite) junk word or phrase here – are a speaker's version of spam.

What Mark Twain wrote more than 150 years ago applies equally well today: "I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English – it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in."

First, be clear in your own mind. Then eliminate the clutter. Work not to sound impressive, but to make your idea understood.

Is It Coherent?

A study conducted by the Global Information Industry Center at the University of Southern California, San Diego, concluded, "In 2008, Americans consumed information for about 1.3 trillion hours, an average of almost 12 hours per day. Consumption totaled 3.6 zettabytes and 10,845 trillion words, corresponding to 100,500 words and 34 gigabytes for an average person on an average day."

It's paradoxical that we need more information – what exactly is a zettabyte and how big is it compared to a gigabyte? – to understand



a report that basically confirms what we already know: *We're drowning in information.*

For the most part, audiences don't need more information. Okay, they may need a little more information. But what they really want is a way of understanding the information they already have access to. What does it all mean? What can they do with it? What should they do with it?

That's what an idea is for. An idea organizes, ties together and explains the significance of information that people already know or that you're presenting. And that's why an idea has to be coherent, meaning "sticking together; forming a united or orderly whole."

Project 2, "Organize Your Speech," from the *Competent Communication* manual states, "Good speech organization is essential if your audience is to follow and understand your presentation. You must take the time to put your ideas together in an orderly fashion." In other words, you have to be coherent.

An incoherent idea isn't necessarily wrong. It's just disordered and disorderly, more like a mob of information than a working alliance.

Is It Supported By The Evidence?

In its stripped-down, "write-it-on-a-business-card" format, an idea is in essence an assertion, which the dictionary defines as "a claim about the truth that is unsupported by evidence."

Go on the Internet or tune into a radio or TV talk show and you'll find all sorts of assertions. The difficult part, of course, is to back up your assertion, giving it credibility, providing some proof.

Project 7 in the *Competent Communication* manual says it this way: "Your speech will be more effective if you can support your main points with statistics, testimony, stories, anecdotes, examples, visual aids and facts."

The amount and type of evidence you should set forth depends on your idea and on the audience you're addressing. If you're staking out a controversial position, for example, you'll need to provide ample evidence and cite sources that are credible to your audience. Technical audiences expect "Just the facts, ma'am," and they want lots of them. People attending a motivational seminar will be happier with

far fewer facts, but they'll want stories and anecdotes.

The Internet is a great resource when you're looking for facts, stories and authorities to support your ideas. But beware. Just because something is stated on a Web page somewhere, even if it's repeated on innumerable Web pages, doesn't mean it's true. If the audience doubts the evidence you cite, they'll discount your idea.

Is It Interesting?

A boring idea is a bad idea or, at least, a badly articulated idea. The best way to make an idea interesting is to be interested in it yourself. Does the idea fascinate you? Does it rouse your curiosity? Does it rile you up and make you want to share it with people? If the answer is no, if the idea bores you, give it no more thought. And don't – please don't – give a speech about it.

The next best way to ensure an idea's interest is to make it new. An idea that simply confirms what people already know may be comforting, but it's rarely stimulating. You don't have to make some groundbreaking discovery, but you do have to come up with something fresh. Is your idea new to the audience? Can you give it a new twist or a new application? Can you articulate or illustrate it in a new way?

Roger Ailes, media consultant and author of *You Are the Message*, writes, "No audience (no matter how small or large) will forgive you if you're boring." So be interested yourself, and give your idea a fresh spin.

Chris Witt, a former Toastmaster from San Diego, California, is an executive speech coach and the author of *Real Leaders Don't Do PowerPoint*. You can reach him at chris@wittcom.com or read his blog at www.lifeafterpowerpoint.com.

By Scott Berkun

In giving hundreds of lectures over the years, and reading books about other speakers who have done many more, it's become clear to me that everyone has things go wrong. All public speaking is a kind of performance, and no matter how well you've prepared your material, you must expect there will be unique challenges every time you speak. The best attitude is to go in prepared for the most common challenges. To help, here's my list of situations that I know speakers fear, with advice on how to prepare and respond:

Tips from the trenches on what to do when things go wrong.

Confessions

You're being heckled

Hecklers are rare. When it happens, the audience is as frustrated with them as you are. Use this to your advantage. If you take a heckler on directly you'll look mean, but if you get the audience on your side, things end quickly. Hecklers are people who either: wish they were on stage, are drunk or think they are helping you by contributing.

How to prevent:

- Set the rules for people to interact with you. If you want questions held until the end, say so. Providing your e-mail address early gives everyone a way to contact you without taking the floor.

How to respond:

- Ask the audience to hold their comments until the end. Done politely and calmly, this often works. It keeps you in control. Even if someone makes a joke at your expense, don't turn it into an argument; politely ask the person to wait until the end to comment.
- If you are confident you can dispatch a heckler with a joke or funny comment, do it – but be careful. It's safer to defuse them by saying, "That's interesting" – to acknowledge they were heard – and continuing with your point. This gives them some respect, since you're acknowledging their voice, but you keep control.

of a Public

- If someone is truly disruptive, ask the host of the event to help. They invited you, and they should take responsibility.

Everyone in the room hates you

There are days when the vibe in the room is all wrong, and it feels like they either hate you or just want you to shut up. Speaking in foreign countries or at corporations that have just announced major layoffs (but no one has told you this) can feel this way. Or sometimes, you actually did something stupid that they rightfully hate you for.

How to prevent:

- Your host is your guide. They should tell you if there is something you need to know, like recent pay cuts



Speaker

or other bad news. If you're paranoid, you can ask, "Is there anything that's happened recently I should know about?"

- Arrive early. If you are early you can introduce yourself to people who will be in your audience, giving you a sense for the larger group.

How to respond:

- Sometimes you have to go into robotic mode, and give your presentation as if you are speaking to a crowd you think likes you. If they hate you they hate you, but don't fall into the trap of trying to change your presentation on the fly out of fear that they don't like you.
- Cut material to get to your Q&A quickly. If you have optional stories, drop them. The sooner you get to

Q&A the faster you can diagnose what's going on. And at worst, the sooner your talk will be over.

There is a rambling question that makes no sense and takes three minutes to ask

A good warning sign is when a question has a 60-second preamble. Whoever is asking a question this long hasn't thought hard enough yet to even form a question.

How to respond:

- Ask a clarifying question: "Do you mean X or Y?" Interrupt the person if necessary. If they seem lost, ask them to focus their question while you answer the next question. Then go back to them later. This is pushy, but if you do it with charm the audience appreciates it.
- Realize the audience hates these people. They didn't come to the session to hear someone's rambling, poorly formed, pseudo-question. You are the only person who can do anything to stop the rambling.
- If you do cut them off, remind them of your e-mail address, and mention longer questions are fine, just not in real time.

Everyone is staring at their laptops

Sometimes people are just taking notes or sharing what you say with other people online, which is good for you, but they might also be playing solitaire. People in the audience should be free to choose how they want to listen. But you are also free to influence them in that choice.

How to prevent:

- Sometimes I say this: “Here’s a deal. I’d like your undivided attention for five minutes. If after five minutes you’re bored, you are free to do something else. In fact, I won’t mind if you get up and leave after five minutes. But for the first 300 seconds give me your undivided attention.” Most people close their laptops. At that point, I hit them with an irresistible hook in my opening.

How to respond:

- There isn’t much you can do. Focus on the people who are fully engaged and in the room. Ignore the rest. It’s their loss.
- Ask the host to monitor Twitter, or the event chat room, and use her as a way to get the best questions and comments from the back channel into your presentation.

“Set the rules for people to interact with you. If you want questions held until the end, say so.”

You are asked an impossible question

There is nothing wrong with a tough question you can’t answer. There is no law that says you as the speaker must know everything.

How to prevent:

- The only way to prevent it is to have a talk so boring, or so obscure, that tough questions are impossible, since the audience doesn’t know what your point was. Don’t do this.

How to respond:

- Learn to say three words: “I don’t know.” They are easy to say.
- Write down the question, or ask someone to e-mail it to you, and promise you’ll respond.
- Offer the question to the audience. Maybe you’re not the only one who can’t answer the question. If no one in the audience knows, they seem at least as

clueless as you. And if there is an answer, you’ve at least helped the person who asked the tough question to get an answer, even if it’s not yours.

The microphone breaks

Often microphones only partially break. They have feedback, or flutter in and out. This is distracting for an audience and they will blame you for it. If after a couple of minutes the problem doesn’t resolve itself, assume the microphone is broken.

How to prevent:

- Pray to the gods of AV equipment.
- Demand a sound check before your talk.
- Ask the AV people where there are sound problems in the room.

How to respond:

- Confirm with the audience they are hearing the same problems you are. Sometimes the problems are only heard at the front of the stage.
- Get the tech crew involved. This is why they are paid. As embarrassing as it is for you, if you get them involved the audience will know it’s not entirely your fault.
- In moderately sized rooms, 100 people or less, the acoustics are often good enough for people to hear you if you project well. Step forward and you might be able to get started while the tech crew fixes things.

Your laptop explodes

At every conference there is always at least one person who has technical problems with their computers. Some events force you to use their podium computers to help minimize problems, but with video codecs and font issues, this sometimes makes it worse. Macs and PCs have problems and every projector and video system has charming idiosyncrasies that the tech people who manage them will absolutely deny.

How to prevent:

- Use your own gear.
- PC laptops are more popular and I’m convinced have fewer issues with projector compatibility. Problem is, they’re PCs.
- Demand a video check before your talk.

How to respond:

- The big question is when to abandon your laptop. Ten minutes is the cutoff point. If after 10 minutes you’re still not sure how to fix it, I’d go with Plan B.
- Plan B: Know your main points. Be able to write them down as a short bulleted list. Do a shorter, less formal version of your talk. Do not constantly

say “If I had my slides” or “In my real presentation...” The audience doesn’t care about what they might have seen.

- Have a printout of your slides with you. Worst case, you can use this as your notes.

Running out of time

This happens much more often than speakers ending their presentations early. Since most people practice to finish exactly on time, with little buffer, it’s not a surprise.

How to prevent:

- If you build your presentation right, there should be a steady rhythm throughout the talk that informs you about pace every step of the way. This prevents discovering you have one minute left to cover half of your talk.
- Practice each speech to use less time than you are given.
- Always plan to have at least 10 to 20 percent of your time slot for Q&A. If you run over you can eat some of that Q&A time.

How to respond:

- If you can’t get through the material, put the material aside and focus on your audience. If there are three

sections left and only time for one, let the audience vote on which one it should be.

You left your slide deck at home

How to prevent:

- Put your slides in three places: on a flash drive you bring, on your own laptop and on a Web site you can access from any Web browser. Redundancy wins.

What to do if your situation is not here

Well, my friend, there is only one fail-safe maneuver. You must pay attention to what happens so you can tell your friends about it later. True disasters always make for great tales. 📌

Scott Berkun is a freelance writer, author of three books and public speaker for Fortune 500 companies and universities on topics related to creativity and management. This article was excerpted from his book *Confessions of a Public Speaker*. Learn more about Scott at www.scottberkun.com.

Wish You Were FUNNIER?

Dear Fellow Toastmaster:

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

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

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

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

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

Stage time,

Darren LaCroix
2001 World Champion of Public Speaking

**P.S. Don't take my word for it...
see what my graduates say!**
Go to: www.GetMoreLaughsByNextWeek.com



Get Darren's secrets now: www.GetMoreLaughsByNextWeek.com or call (888) 528-4451



Tossing my hat into the ring – Cirque style!

By John Spaith, ACG, ALB

Walking a High Wire

I joined Toastmasters to master the art of giving slightly less boring speeches at work. Who knew those same skills would come in handy at Cirque du Soleil, the world-famous circus-arts production?

In addition to its high-wire acts and contortionists, the Cirque troupe gets unsuspecting audience members into the act. Like me. I was recently dragged up on stage by Christian, a French magician/pickpocket. It was just the two of us, with me serving as his sole assistant. And by sole assistant, I mean sole *victim*.

One word came to me during this episode: “Toastmasters.” Not “Toastmasters has prepared me for formidable public-speaking challenges like this.” No, it was more like, “I talk a lot about how I’m in Toastmasters and if I screw up, we’ll all look bad.”

Why did Christian choose me of all people? Possibly because I was

wearing a tie, a comical prop that was used against me. Or perhaps my griping about the price of concessions demanded reprisal. The most obvious reason is that I’m such a handsome guy. This is more obvious to me than to others.

Joking aside, my performance, were it not for Toastmasters, would have been a nightmare. Here are some things that helped.

Is this a Trap?

Once Christian had me on stage, he said in his thick French accent, “Please stand here on ze trap-door.” Yes, there was a trapdoor.

I dislike trapdoors – who doesn't? Even worse is that I'm from Ohio. Ohio is flat and Ohioans tend to dislike hills, slopes and quick changes in altitude.

My head was spinning and I was close to panic. But I said firmly to myself, "Christian is a professional. He doesn't want me to fail." I realized (correctly) that Christian was not going to make the floor fall out from under me. Even though we had just met, I trusted that this weird French guy wanted me to be safe and have some fun, too.

I learned this ability to trust from my good-natured Toastmasters chums. We want to make each other look good and feel good. In our parlance, Christian was Toastmaster of the day and I was Speaker No. 1. I have yet to see the Toastmaster pull a trapdoor on Speaker No. 1.

Audiences Want You to Succeed

The lights were burning bright on the Cirque du Soleil stage, but the audience – 30 rows deep and surrounding the stage on three sides – was covered in darkness. I could just barely see the front row and after that it was black. It was surreal and a little disturbing.

Before I joined Toastmasters I worried incessantly about how I was received. My reactions to this kind of scenario would have been: "Is my tie on straight? Are people laughing *with* Christian as he makes the yellow ball come from my ears – or *at* me?" Not being able to see faces would have put me into hysterics.

I've learned that audiences – both inside and outside Toastmasters – want you to succeed. Most people are basically good and are not entertained by watching someone fail. If they aren't rooting for you, it's only because they're too busy worrying about their kids or about traffic in the parking lot.

Ironically, messing up in Toastmasters (I'm good at that) and

seeing audiences be supportive or, at worst, apathetic, was a huge confidence builder for me.

Go With The Flow

People ask if I was warned prior to being dragged on stage. No, Christian gave no meeting agenda. One minute I was comfortably in my seat, a minute later I was standing on a trapdoor, a minute later I

Since it was pitch black, it felt as if I was stepping off a cliff. This setup was not designed by an Ohioan. I was disoriented. I thought I was hundreds of feet from where I really was.

One of the ushers grabbed me and tried to lead me to my seat. I refused to budge, whispering that I was in the wrong section. She insisted my seat was just up the aisle.

"I've learned that audiences – both inside and outside Toastmasters – want you to succeed."

had a yellow ball pulled from my ear, a minute later Christian stole my watch, tickets and wallet, and a minute later I was staggering off the stage.

An episode of the 1980s sitcom *The Cosby Show* provides guidance for these out-of-control situations. One day Bill Cosby's TV wife and friends were speaking Spanish at hundreds of words per minute. Bill's character did not speak the language and was obviously clueless as to what was happening. Finally, he smiled and said, "I just listen for my name."

Sometimes things happen too quickly and you're clueless. Relaxing, reacting as best as possible, and going with the flow may be all you can do. Like the Cosby character, smile and listen for your name.

Hey, I'm Only Human

Tal Ben-Shahar, a Harvard University psychology professor, says we need to give ourselves "permission to be human." We're going to make mistakes. When we do, we need to move on. I got a chance to practice this at Cirque too.

Christian finally led me offstage, to steep steps out to the audience.

A wave of dizziness hit. I worried that the audience was about to start laughing at me. The usher yanked on me and I yanked back.

To summarize my performance: I didn't trust the pro, I didn't trust the audience and I didn't go with the flow. So much for following my own advice!

My natural inclination would be to beat myself up over this, especially since I knew better on all counts. But – permission to be human – I figure I had reached my stimulation and heights limit for the day and it was okay that I wasn't perfect. I got back to my seat safely and started breathing again.

What I Learned From Mentoring

I learned a lot as I earned my Competent Toastmaster designation (called a Competent Communicator award nowadays). I learned as much or more serving as a mentor to new members.

I got over most of my stage fright after just a few speeches; many Toastmasters are not so lucky. As I've worked with newer members on their fears, it forced me to think

(Continued on page 23)

Brave Toastmasters share their speaking calamities.

Their Most Embarrassing Moments

Whether it happened before joining Toastmasters or during a club contest, a bad speaking moment has affected all of us. Perhaps an incident left you feeling humiliated, and you avoided public speaking for years as a result. Or maybe it was something you could laugh at later that day. Eight Toastmasters from the LinkedIn Members' group take the opportunity to remind us how brave we are when we stand up and speak:

A common fear is that *the fear will win*. Paula Foster of Chiltern Speakers, in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England, describes a pre-Toastmasters time when she lost the battle:

"I was a student in community college, and my guidance counselor somehow coerced me into entering a speech contest. Speaking was not something I enjoyed, but buoyed by his seeming confidence, I proceeded. Even in our practice sessions my stomach was tied in knots and I never felt comfortable.

The day of the competition arrived and I was confronted by my other competitors, who included students who had been involved with that contest organization for years, including the current and past state presidents. I felt overwhelmed. We had five minutes to speak – I took maybe two minutes. And then we had a Q&A session with the judges. I felt the blood drain from my body and I proceeded to faint."

Often, our memory can be our worst enemy. Allan Rees-Bevan of the Magnificent Mosman club in Sydney, Australia, describes his personal memory-related disaster:

"I took a break from Toastmasters for four years after moving to Australia from London. Late last year, I was doing some work in London and went to visit my old club where I had been president and still knew a lot of friends. Much was made of the visiting 'past president' and I was given a Table Topic later on in the meeting.

Well, I completely blanked and became a nervous wreck. It was horrific! When I eventually stumbled back to my seat, all embarrassed, my good friend leaned across to me and whispered, 'We need to get you back in Toastmasters!' Needless to say, I rejoined as soon as I returned to Sydney, and got back into the swing of things. What did I learn? Public speaking is not like riding a bicycle. You need constant practice to stay confident."

We might suffer through those speech experiences when we forget more than that next line. Carolina Moore of the VYP Strip View Speakers in Las Vegas, Nevada, shares her worst-nightmare moment:

"I have never been called shy. That is why, in 8th grade, I was selected to give a speech at the Junior High Assembly in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week. The

day came, and at the assembly, my advisor sought me out. He asked, 'Are you ready?' Suddenly, it came to me... I was supposed to give a speech! I had completely forgotten, and had no notes, no ideas... and no time to come up with something. Only minutes later, I was called up to the lectern. I got up on my very shaky tip-toes, and said into the microphone, 'Uh.... (always a great way to start a speech). This is Teacher Appreciation Week, so be sure to appreciate your teachers. Thank you.' That mortifying lesson in preparation stays with me to this day!"

Upon seeing the competition, a speaker can panic and – even though he has practiced extensively – take a wild spontaneous leap only to discover a terrifying abyss. Glynn Germany, of Albuquerque Toastmasters club in Albuquerque, New Mexico, found this out the hard way:

"In high school, I was scheduled to speak at a band banquet. After the speaker before me stole the show with a heartfelt, emotional tribute to our band director, I panicked, thinking my prepared speech would never stand up to comparison. So I ad-libbed. In the process, I somehow managed to suggest the band director's children were illegitimate! I'll never forget the look of pure venom his wife shot at me."



Pratfall Makes Her Point

Then, there are the times of pure physical comedy. Who doesn't love a little clothing-related slapstick in their speech? Better yet, who owes Table Topics a debt of *off-the-cuff* gratitude? That would be Cyndi Wilson of the Midtown club in Basking Ranch, New Jersey:

"I was giving a speech to my club. I tend to lean toward the dramatic, and I was using the entire the speaking area. I got my foot tangled in my pants leg and – boom! – down I went. I heard this loud gasp as I was lying on the floor asking myself, 'How do I recover from this?' I had been talking about how children try to get their way,


so I lifted my feet into the air and starting kicking as if I were having a temper tantrum. I eventually got up and continued my speech! Only one person knew that I actually fell; all of the other attendees thought it was part of the speech!"

For some, timing is everything. It certainly is to Ron Parpart, of Collins Club in Melbourne, Florida, whose introduction set off a frantic scramble to be inspiring:

"When I was lt. governor marketing, my district governor walked up to me before the district executive council meeting and said that our inspirational speaker had to cancel, then asked

if I could give the inspirational opening. 'Of course,' I replied. She then walked to the lectern, banged the gavel, opened the meeting, and introduced me for the inspirational moment. Time elapsed: about five seconds! Now that's Table Topics! The best part was, I performed an impromptu inspirational message and no one knew the difference!"

Despite all the risks, most Toastmasters will agree that it's still better to speak than remain silent out of fear. Laura Fritz of Sudbury Raytheon club in Sudbury, Massachusetts, can vouch for that:

"I have been called a 'shy extravert' because I like talking to small groups of people I know. Once a month, my boss used to call a staff meeting of the whole company – more than 50 people. One person had to give a report from my group. My co-worker would give a report full of wrong information that would often land me in trouble. However, I felt that any trouble I was getting into was better than having to speak. Thanks to Toastmasters, I can now speak out. I have a voice." 

Beth Black is an associate editor of the *Toastmaster* magazine. Reach her at bbblack@toastmasters.org.

Walking a High Wire

(Continued from page 21)

about this problem and talk a lot about solutions.


My Cirque du Soleil experience was far outside my comfort zone. I would not have naturally conquered my fear, even with seven years of Toastmasters experience. I had to consciously attack it. While I was

onstage, I quite literally was thinking about the things I've written in this article, including watching a *Cosby Show* re-run. I could not have come up with these ideas on the fly. They came back to me quickly and under pressure because I had given others the same advice so many times.

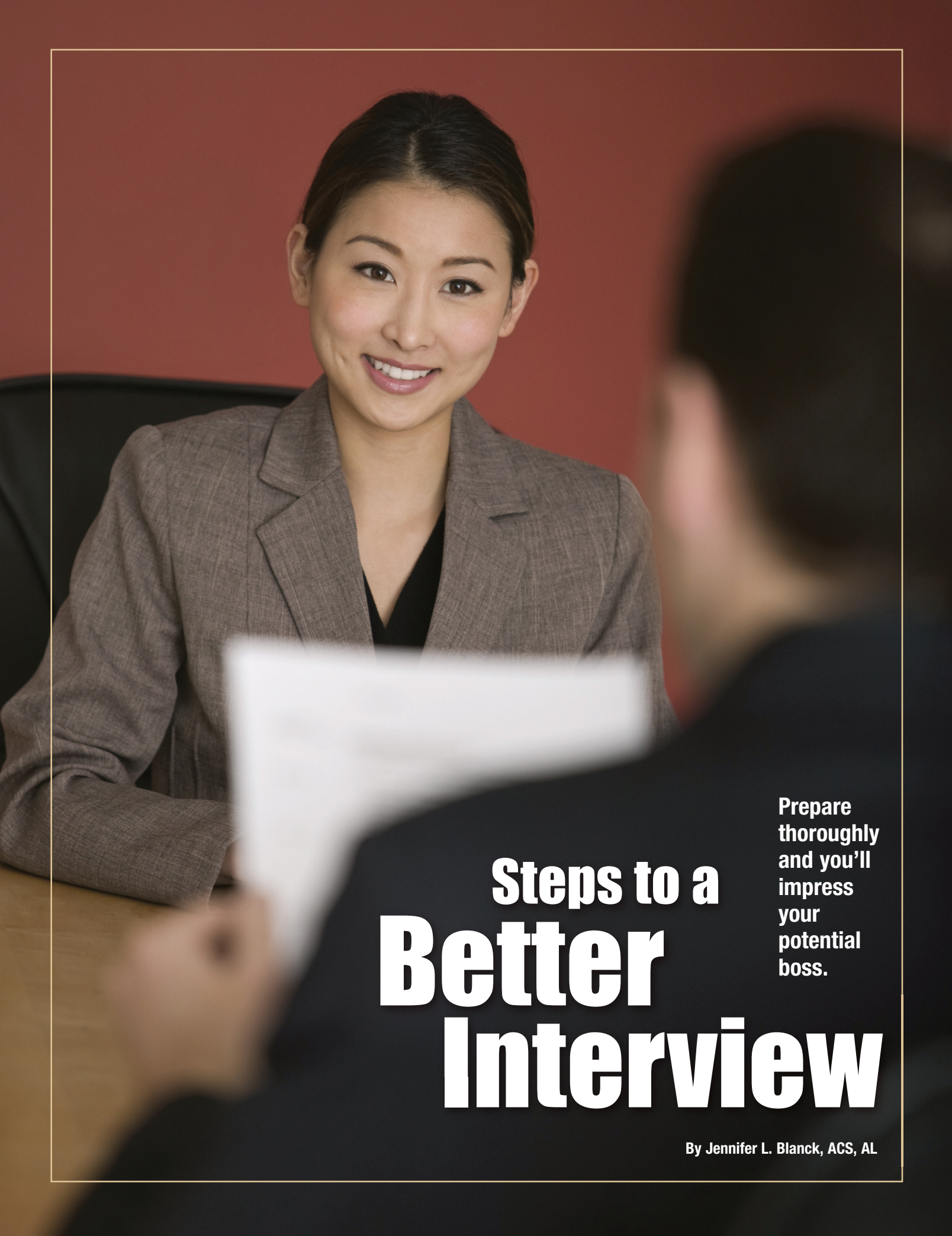
To quote one of Christian's countrymen, Joseph Joubert: "To teach is to learn twice."

Practice Pays Off

Toastmasters works. Only through practice and helping others could I go this far outside my comfort zone.

But if there's one takeaway, it's this: Don't wear a tie, criticize the concessions prices or be overly handsome at Cirque de Soleil unless you want to be dragged into the show. 

John Spaih, ACG,ALB, is a member of the Redmond 2828 club in Redmond, Washington.



Steps to a **Better Interview**

Prepare
thoroughly
and you'll
impress
your
potential
boss.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, ACS, AL

Today, being pretty good at interviewing for a job isn't good enough. You may have suffered through numerous interviews – each time knowing that you're one of hundreds of candidates for a single position. You may have searched for information on how to make yourself stand above the crowd.

That's a good start, but the real key to success lies in four steps you can take before your next interview. These steps will help you answer the tough questions better, decrease your nerves and increase your chances of getting the right job for you.

These steps aren't revolutionary; however, most people skip at least one, if not more. By completing all four, you will be on your way to giving your strongest interview ever.

Step 1: Know Yourself

Sound simple? It might appear easy, but this first step involves critical reflection and self-awareness. It will help you with every aspect of the job search, not just interview preparation. It's a step that ideally should be taken long before you ever apply for a job. And it's probably the step that most people skip.

Knowing yourself starts with understanding your values and priorities. Your values can be lofty – *I want to make a difference* – or very practical – *I want a short commute*. They can include an interest in developing specific skills, making more money, being entrepreneurial or working on a particular issue. Once you've identified your values, then you need to prioritize them. What is the most important, related to your job, and what can you incorporate into your life outside of work.

After values and priorities, you'll want to consider strengths and interests. Jan Fiscoeder, who leads Career Services at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, Germany, says, "You should consider your own strengths and weaknesses and how to present them. The crucial point in conveying your weaknesses is to present them as challenges or dynamic strengths. For example, if one has a problem in delegating work to team members, it is good to mention that one knows about this problem and that one has developed an open communication strategy to meet this individual challenge. This, in turn,

makes you come across as open to learning and as a thought-through personality."

Remember, just because you're good at something, doesn't mean you have to like it or want to make it your career. Make a list in each category: priorities, values, interests and strengths. Then, when you have considered all of these areas, focus on what is relevant to your job search and, more specifically, your upcoming interview.

Using your four lists, you will be able to develop questions for your interviewer. Questions demonstrate your knowledge of the organization, that you're seriously interested in the position, that you have taken initiative and that you understand how you could fit in the organization. As you develop your questions, show your knowledge of the organization or industry, when possible.

This is also a time to prepare concrete examples or anecdotes that demonstrate your relevant strengths, your key skills that are needed in the particular industry, and any special abilities and experiences that the organization is seeking in candidates.

Paul Binkley, career development services director for the Trachtenberg School at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., says, "Too many people don't know their own résumé. This may seem obvious, but many people don't think they need to review what they included in their application. Remembering what you put on your résumé will help you remember multiple examples to use. It is bad form to use the same example to answer more than one question, and even worse to say, 'I can't come up with any examples for that.'"

This preparation is especially helpful for a behavioral-based interview, where the interviewer looks at past performance in similar situations as the most accurate predictor of future performance.

You also want to think about your salary requirements. What do you want, and what do you need? You also need to research the field and learn what is realistic to

Sample Interview Questions to Practice

General

- Tell me about yourself.
- Where do you see yourself in five years? .. in 10 years?
- What would your proudest accomplishment be if you came to work here?

Personality/Character Traits

- What do you see as your greatest strength? .. your greatest weakness?
- What kind of leader are you?
- Do you mind being the bearer of bad news? At our organization you have to say “no” a lot.

Sample Behavioral

- Tell me about a time that a project you were managing experienced problems, and how you dealt with the challenges.
- Tell me about a time you had to manage a diverse work group.
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made. How long did it take to make the decision? Why did the decision create unhappiness? How do you think you handled it?

For People With Experience

- How has your approach to your job changed in the last year?
- How have you changed your management style? ... in the past five years?
- What would make you accept a counteroffer from your organization?

Wrap-Up

- Do you have any questions for me?
- Is there anything else you would like to talk about?
- Why should I hire you?

Helpful Web Site Links for Interview Preparation

Case-Based Interviews

- McKinsey & Company – Online case-study tips and practice scenario
<http://www.mckinsey.com/careers>
(How to do well in the interview)
- AT&T – Consulting Case Book and Tips for Interviewing
http://www.atkearney.com/images/global/pdf/interview_casebook_S.pdf

General Company Information

- Bloomberg – Online Magazine
<http://www.bloomberg.com>
- Fortune – Online Magazine
<http://www.fortune.com>
- Hoover’s Online – The Business Network
<http://www.hoovers.com>



expect in terms of compensation. By thinking about and researching the compensation possibilities ahead of time, you will be much more prepared to handle any surprise salary questions in an interview.

Fischoeder notes, "Once you know your values, you are also in a much better position to present your value in terms of salary expectations." Remember, you want to avoid discussions related to salary until you have an offer; this is when you have the most negotiating power.

Step 2: Know the Organization and the Job

After establishing a foundation of knowing what you want and what you have to offer, it's time to learn more about where you're potentially going. Of course, you should have conducted extensive research into the job and the organization before you submitted an application. Now it's time to revisit that research.

Even if you examined it before, it's time to dig in and study all that the organization's Web site has to offer. In addition to the obvious sections, review recent press releases, any executive summaries, what other jobs are offered and even the obscure pages. Leave no link unchecked. Know the organization's mission, vision, history, accomplishments and current projects.

Review any other information you can find about the organization. Search online for similar organizations, such as their competitors. Talk to people at the organization or in the field. Informational interviews can garner great insights. The more you know, the better answers you can provide at the interview.

Next, revisit the job description. Make sure you remember exactly which job you're interviewing for. But don't just read the announcement, study it. Underline the knowledge areas and experiences required and requested. Match those with the anecdotes you've already thought of and think of new ones: Have two to three anecdotes for each skill or experience sought.

Katharine S. Brooks, liberal arts career services director at the University of Texas at Austin, recommends, "When you read the job description, note the characteristics or skills the employer is seeking and then match yourself to them. Be ready to tell stories that illustrate your skills – don't just tell an employer that, 'yes, I am a hard worker.' Instead, explain how you're a hard worker, as in, 'I noticed that your job description mentioned the hard work involved in this position. You might be interested to know that last year I worked on three projects simultaneously while also...' – any story that illustrates how/why you have the skills or knowledge the employer is seeking."

At this point, you should develop additional questions. Beyond the regular questions you have during

interviewing, what do you want or need to know about this position or organization? Write the questions down, and take them with you to the interview. An interview can be stressful, so don't assume you'll remember all the questions you have.

In the corner of the page in small print, make a concise list of the key items about yourself you want to cover in an interview. You can refer to this throughout the interview to ensure you've covered all that you have to offer.

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Step 3: Practice

Now it's time to practice. Run through typical interview questions, including the ones offered in the sidebar to this article. Just like Table Topics, make sure you answer questions thoroughly but concisely. Focus especially on any questions you know are personally challenging. You can anticipate questions related to the skills and experiences outlined in the job description.

Research and try the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) or CCAR (Context, Challenge, Action, Result) techniques, especially for behavioral-based questions. You can find sample interviews using these techniques online. Practicing with questions from different interview systems can help you add more clarity and depth to your answers.

As you practice interview situations, always answer in the most relevant way. (And, of course, do this in the real interview as well.) Don't share a fact, such as where you grew up, unless it matters. Brooks notes, "It's great to know your strengths generally, but you need to articulate them in a manner that speaks to the position and the organization. Bringing up strengths that aren't needed for the position will indicate that you haven't done the research and don't understand the position."

If you can, demonstrate knowledge of the organization by paralleling what you've done and inserting examples of projects, approaches or techniques similar to what the organization is doing. Be concrete, positive and natu-

“Note the characteristics or skills the employer is seeking and then match yourself to them. Be ready to tell stories that illustrate your skills.”

rally enthusiastic. Don't be afraid to take a moment to think about an answer. And don't forget to smile.

It's also important to practice out loud. Catherine Stace, career advisor at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, says, "If you are a student, visit your career center for a mock interview. If you are not a student, there are many community organizations that offer interview skills workshops and practice sessions. If all else fails, ask a friend to find you someone you don't know to conduct a mock interview."

Of course, your club meeting is also a perfect place to practice. Arrange a Table Topics session dedicated to interview questions or videotape yourself practicing with fellow Toastmasters. Regardless of how you practice, it's

important to vocalize your answers. Don't memorize answers word for word – you don't want to sound like a robot. Instead, work to reach a comfort level with the potential questions, skills and experiences involved in the position. You might be asked a tough question – one you never anticipated – but your research and practice will make it easier to handle.

Step 4: Make the Right Impression

Now that you thoroughly know yourself, the position and organization, and you've practiced articulating what you have to offer as well as how it relates to the opening, you're ready to showcase that in your best light.

That means you must dress the part. Stace says, "Where I often see students fall short is in understanding the importance of first impressions. Choose your clothes wisely. Take some time to prepare, and try on your clothes well beforehand and leave enough time to fix any problems that might arise. Keep jewelry to a minimum and, as quite a few workplaces have perfume/cologne bans, avoid putting on scents."

Unless you are told differently, you should dress in standard business attire. Most often, this means a suit. Look polished in other ways, including your hair, shoes, jewelry, make-up and other potential accessories. Take a briefcase, professional bag or some type of portfolio. You should have extra copies of your résumé, especially if you've revised it. You could also consider bringing

references or samples of your past work. And don't forget your list of questions for the interviewer, with the list of items you want to cover about yourself.

Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. Any earlier and it will be an imposition. You can arrive earlier to the general area, as long as you don't go into the office. Arriving extra

early can help you regain composure if you've had a stressful day or travel experience. Visit a nearby restroom to put that final polish on your appearance and recheck your portfolio items.

Now you're ready for the interview. Take the time to go through each of these four steps for every interview, and you will find yourself consistently giving your best interview ever!

Jennifer L. Blanck, ACS, AL, is assistant dean of career and alumni services for the Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She is the founder and current Vice President Education of the Georgetown Toastmasters club.

Turning to tea for Table Topics inspiration.

An Honest-To-Goodness Tale

My story begins with bottles of ice cold Honest Tea. I love this product, particularly one of its unique features – the wonderful quotations that are strategically printed underneath the bottle caps. West Creek Toastmasters in Richmond, Virginia, is my home club, and I've incorporated those bottle-cap quotes into various aspects of our club meetings to inspire my fellow members.

The quotations served me particularly well during a memorable Table Topics session last year. As the Topicsmaster that day, I presented each participant with a bottle cap and challenged them to give a Table Topics speech related to the quotation listed in the cap.

Here are some of the quotes inspiring Table Topics that day: *“As I grow to understand life less and less, I learn to love it more and more”* (Jules Renard); *“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it”* (Confucius); *“The bad news is, there is no key to the universe; the good news is, it was never locked”* (Swami Beyondananda).

I sweetened the proposition by offering a bottle of Tea – which was sitting on the lectern at the front of the room – to the Table Topics winner.

Five volunteers stepped forward and each of them delivered fantastic impromptu speeches. They were energized by these pithy pieces of wisdom! I can't say I was surprised by the members' enthusiastic responses: Toastmasters provides an environment that puts people at ease and makes them

feel comfortable in stepping forward to try something new and challenging.

After the vote was held, two members tied for first place. Since I certainly couldn't make them share a bottle of tea, a blind drawing allowed for one happy recipient.

But wait, there's more to the story. I wrote to the Honest Tea company about the Table Topics success and the educational value of Toastmasters. The company was impressed. I was chosen as its August 2009 Consumer of the Month, and the Honest Tea e-newsletter featured a short article saluting West Creek Toastmasters and explaining how I had used the bottle-cap quotations for Table Topics. Great publicity for Toastmasters!

In addition, I was sent a case of bottled tea to share with my club. I chose mixed organic – to reflect the diversity of our membership. I then took the idea even further, and as a result Honest Tea became a sponsor of our District 66 Fall Conference, taking out a full-page ad in the conference program – “Honest Tea Supports Toastmasters Everywhere!” – and donating a bottle of tea to each of the 250-plus participants.

Make the Most of Table Topics

I point out this whole experience to encourage Toastmasters everywhere to make the most of their Table Topics sessions. Through Table Topics practice, we learn to think and speak on our feet – skills that are so important in real-world situations.

Use your imagination during Table Topics. Be resourceful, have fun and take chances. I challenge members to be creative with the Topicsmaster role, and to be open to ideas that may lead them to new leadership experiences and interactions.

Using bottle-cap quotes to boost Table Topics increased my own confidence about being creative. Some of these classic phrases particularly resonated for me. This is one: *“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear”* (Ambrose Redmoon). Many people, including myself, joined Toastmasters to overcome a fear of public speaking, but after learning skills to help us conquer that fear, we've found that a passion for using these newfound skills leads us toward the “something else” that is “more important than fear.”

My favorite Tea quote? *“The person who knows how to laugh at himself will never cease to be amused.”* These words are attributed to actress Shirley MacLaine, and I find them quite fitting. As Toastmasters, we are serious about becoming better speakers and leaders, but there is always laughter at our club meetings as well. We enjoy each other and what we do. And we help each other grow, both as speakers and people. ☐

Steve Johnson, CC, CL, is a member of two clubs in Richmond, Virginia: West Creek Toastmasters and Chesterfield Toastmasters. He can be reached at Stephen.C.Johnson@Comcast.net.



In the Digital Age,
thumbs do all the talking.

M4C@*\$? Gr8t! (Sent by TXT)

☺ Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the first class on Texting As A Second Language. My name is Billy Babcock and I'll be your instructor. You've probably noticed I'm a lot younger than you. You all appear to be in your 40s and 50s and, in case you're wondering, I'm 7½. If you think that's a little young to be teaching an adult education course, please consider my qualifications. Since the age of 4, I've texted one million four hundred and eighty-seven thousand times, consistently exceeding the limits on my plan and costing my parents \$450,000 in overcharges. Using the T9Word system, I can compose a 140-character text message in less than a minute and send it to my entire address book of 1,217 contacts, thus achieving in 90 seconds what it takes the U.S. Postal Service seven days to accomplish. I can even play a video game with both hands on the controller and still text with my toes. Any questions? Good, let's begin.

I understand that many of you are taking this class to keep up with your children, because you're afraid your native language is becoming *their* second language and you don't want to lose touch with them entirely. I know you're bemoaning the degradation of the spoken word and the loss of interpersonal communications, but look at it from their point of view: Why take the time and energy to speak to somebody face to face and say, "Meet for coffee at Starbucks? Looking forward to it. Talk to you later. Have a good one,"

when you can get whip out your cell phone, type "M4C@*\$? LFTI. TLK2UL8R. HAG1," hit "send," and be done with it?

It's even more convenient for conversations you don't want to have at all. Like if you're breaking up with somebody. You can waste your breath on all the blah-blah-blah about how "It isn't you, it's me," and "I just need some space," and "I'm not ready to make a commitment." Or you can just text **::poof::** and say, "I'm gone."

I see a hand raised. How do I know about breaking up and commitment when I'm only 7½? It's the Digital Age, sir. Seven and a half is the new 40.

Keep Those Thumbs in Shape

I always like to start my classes with some thumb exercises. Real, professional texting is done using the thumbs at speeds faster than thumbs were designed to move, so we need a little conditioning to avoid serious injury. You'd be amazed at the number of things you can't do without your thumbs. Like hitchhiking, for instance. And let's remind ourselves that we should never text while driving. Nobody likes to receive a message from you that says, **J2LYK abt to get in MVA BB4N** ("Just to let you know, about to get in motor vehicle accident, bye-bye for now").

As you can see, all your cell phones are hooked up to the projector so I can see how you're doing on-screen. Mr. Mulloy, why don't you go first. Type a simple message like "How are you" using the ABC

system. OK, as we can see, Mr. Mulloy has typed **lo*cvbsptlqrwc***. Was there a problem, Mr. Mulloy? What's that? You have fat thumbs and you can't hit one key at a time? Let's try your index finger. Okay, now Mr. Mulloy has typed **Hmmow**. No, Mr. Mulloy, you have to pause briefly between each letter and wait for the cursor to move. Try again.

And while Mr. Mulloy is doing that, let's review some other points. As a rule, texting is best done when you're supposed to be doing something else, like your job. Most companies have blocked Internet access to YouTube, Facebook and all the other Web sites that used to provide such welcome sabbaticals from work. But you can always text – at your desk, in a meeting, during an interminable PowerPoint presentation ... even in the bathroom. In fact, research shows as many as 79 percent of texters do so in a bathroom stall. But be careful. This is the same percentage that has to replace their cell phones because they dropped them in the toilet.

How are we doing, Mr. Mulloy? Let's see. **How are you?** Great! Now send it to one of your children and see if she replies. She has? Let's see it up on the screen: **Gimme \$50**. No, Mr. Mulloy, there is no text shorthand for **Get a job, you ungrateful little wretch**. Just type **lol** and she'll know what you mean. **T**

John Cadley is an advertising copywriter in Syracuse, New York. Reach him at jjcadley@mower.com.

A honeymoon to remember.

A Toast to Toastmasters!



† On November 10, 2008, I was a rookie Toastmaster when I said, “I do.” I knew I had married a travel bug, but little did I realize how that – and my Toastmasters experience – would affect our honeymoon. For more than a year we saved, planned and booked planes, trains and automobiles. Our honeymoon trip around the world included 50 days, 16 countries, two *Toastmaster* magazines and one backpack each. My Toastmasters experience has felt a lot like our honeymoon adventure – a whirlwind of exploration and excitement.

Our trip circumnavigated the globe from West to East. We enjoyed touring parts of the United States, Europe, Egypt, Thailand and the Philippines. While traveling, I was intrigued by the way people communicated in different countries. My Toastmasters training taught me valuable observation skills. Communication took on a whole new meaning as we crossed time zones and language barriers. Toastmasters gave me the confidence to approach strangers throughout the journey. Interacting with people reminded me of the fears I faced when I first joined. It was a lot like standing up and performing a speech in front of an audience of strangers. Everyday experiences like buying food, find-

ing accommodations or asking for simple directions were challenging.

Egypt left a lasting impression on me. I could only imagine what the great leaders of ancient Egypt were like: What kinds of lessons could I learn from them? How could I turn all this great information into compelling speeches? Our tour guide, Mohammed, compared living in Egypt with living in “Alice in Wonderland” – because so many things were out of the ordinary. The antiquities and pyramids were amazing; yet we also saw poverty, hardship and overcrowding.

One evening we ventured out to the Khan el-Khalili, the local bazaar, to experience Egyptian-style shopping. Stores consisted of small rooms covered floor to ceiling in merchandise. The shops went on for blocks through winding alleyways. Each step we took forward, several people invited us to stop and look. They had no fear or hesitation to speak. It became clear they depended on their communication skills to make a sale, and maybe even to survive. I wish I’d had that confidence when I gave my Ice Breaker speech!

From Egypt we darted over to Thailand and trekked deep into the jungle. Our biggest challenge was Montezuma’s revenge as we hiked for three days in blistering heat and heavy rain. We slept in bamboo huts, rode elephants and rafted down the Ping River. Thailand showed me modesty and simplicity at its best. From there it was off to Bantayan Island, Philippines, where we were introduced to some of the

most genuinely friendly people I have ever met.

In Europe I learned about the history of great civilizations, world wars and tragic history, as well as fabulous cuisine and culture. The one place I will never forget is the Ice Hotel in Northern Sweden. Communication in Europe was easy for us, since most people we met spoke English. Sweden was no exception, even as we flew 200 kilometers into the Arctic Circle to Jukkasjärvi. We spent the night in sub-zero temperatures at the Ice Hotel. We had meals on ice plates and drank from ice glasses. We spent hours exploring ice sculpture rooms and playing in this arctic wonderland. It was the perfect setting for a priceless photograph, and a chance to fulfill another part of my Toastmasters journey. I sat down on the ice-lounger and raised a glass of champagne and gave a toast:

“To Toastmasters – what a difference you have made.”

By the end, part of me was happy to be back in Canada; another part of me couldn’t believe it flew by so fast. We saw so much, and yet so little. It was a trip I will never forget. We didn’t have much room in our backpacks for souvenirs, but the best one arrived later, anyway: my photo in the July *Toastmaster* magazine! 📷

Victor Juorio, CC, CL, is a member of the Telecommunicators Toastmasters club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Reach him at vic.juorio@gmail.com.