

# TOASTMASTER®

AUGUST 2004

The Best Lesson:

## Learning from **Mistakes**

The only bad mistakes are  
the ones we make twice.



**Say What?**  
Turn your accent  
into an asset.

**The Fine Science of  
Giving Directions**

**How Encouraging are  
Your Evaluations?**

# Always Have a Dream

It's hard to believe 12 months have passed since I wrote my first Viewpoint article as your International President. I hope you enjoyed reading them as much as I did writing them. In that first article, I said that all success starts with a dream, a vision of what we want to achieve. I said that our dreams today may not be the ones we have tomorrow, or next year, because as our self-confidence grows, so does our awareness of our potential.

Did your dreams become real in the past year, or did you at least begin to believe they could? Have your self-confidence and self esteem increased? Did you challenge yourself to do things you felt were outside your comfort zone? If you did, then you have experienced the tremendous power of Toastmasters.

And that, indeed, was my first wish upon taking this office – that all your dreams would come true. So what about my other dreams as President? Did they come true too? Well, yes they have. For the first time ever, our membership has exceeded 200,000, a number that has taken us 80 long years to achieve. How long will it be before we reach 300,000? It could be sooner than anyone imagines. My final dream of having 10,000 clubs at the end of June was also realized. These are great watersheds in our organization's history, which make me certain we are on the brink of even greater success, thanks to all your magnificent efforts.

I end my year with great memories – memories of places I visited, people I met and experiences I shared – in the USA, Canada, Germany, UK, South Africa and, of course, Ireland. My thanks to everyone for making me feel very welcome and ensuring my visits were enjoyable and successful. To my family, friends, work colleagues and our wonderful headquarters staff – thank you! I could not have done this without you.

I leave you with a final thought. Always, always, always have a dream. These beautiful words of writer Amanda Bradley say it all for me:

*Forget about the days when it's been cloudy  
But don't forget your hours in the sun...  
Forget about the times you've been defeated,  
But don't forget the victories you've won.*

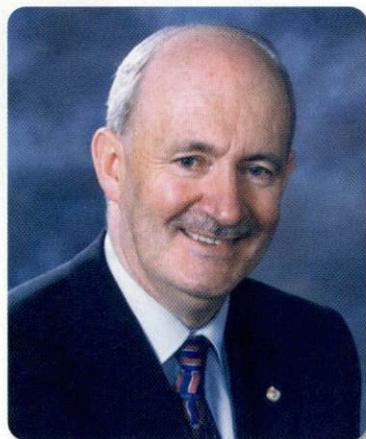
*Forget about the days when you've been lonely,  
But don't forget the friendly smiles you've seen,  
Forget about the plans that didn't seem to work out right,  
But don't forget to always have a dream.*

So dream big and dream often, and remember that Your Dreams are your Possibilities!

Finally, from me to all of you - *slan libh go leir* - which is an Irish goodbye.



Ted Corcoran, DTM  
International President



# The TOASTMASTER

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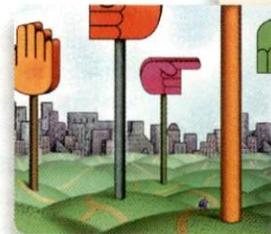


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#### The Toastmasters Vision:

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.

## Dare to Care

The April article "Care, Dare and Prepare" by Valerie Merhan was terrific. These three easy-to-remember words are great focus points for the creation and delivery of better speeches and evaluations. Each word is important, but together they are extremely powerful. The abundance of words in the English language, highlighted in Richard Lederer's article in the same issue, means everyone can be more daring by simply paying more attention to their use of language, both at and outside club meetings.

Ian Jarratt, ATM-B • DPI Club 5911 • Brisbane, QLD, Australia

## Reach for Positive Growth

The June article "Reach Out and Touch Someone" by Paula Price was needed and well done. I've found that starting a prison club is an outstanding way to introduce people to Toastmasters. The media is hungry for positive outreach stories; the publicity we've received has been staggering. Our efforts have been on every TV broadcast and on the front page of every newspaper in our area; we've also given several radio interviews.

Starting a prison club is a good way to touch people in and out of prison. For information on how to start a prison club, I can be reached at [pjagen@gt.rr.com](mailto:pjagen@gt.rr.com)

Paul Jagen, DTM • Sabine River Club 2181 • Orange, Texas

## More PowerPoint

I applaud *The Toastmaster* for the excellent articles on how to use PowerPoint (May). I have seen many presentations fail because the speaker had too much on his/her PowerPoint slides. And then there is the speaker who hands out copies of the PowerPoint slides, which adds nothing to the presentation.

However, I am surprised that Toastmasters has not embraced PowerPoint. I sincerely hope that not only will the various Success/Leadership

programs be available in a PowerPoint format, but also that Toastmasters will publish an advanced manual covering PowerPoint.

Jon S. Greene, DTM • First Nevadans Club 3799 • Sparks, Nevada

**Editor's Note:** *The district and club officer training programs are available on the TI Web site in PowerPoint.*

## The Rules Have Changed

In her article "Simple Rules for Good Business Etiquette," Aleigh Acerni's third point states: "It is impolite to ask for the card of someone higher in rank than yourself." She further states, "Wait to be introduced."

I have been in sales for over 25 years. If I had waited to be introduced to people, I would never have made my first sale. I have yet to meet anyone who has objected to me walking over, politely introducing myself and eventually exchanging business cards – all without an introduction. Perhaps this was the way business was conducted in the old days, but this is the 21st century. Things have changed.

Steve Chorny, CTM • Confidently Speaking Club 5456  
Mississauga, ON, Canada

## Mind Your Manners

I'd like to suggest that when you have guests at your club meeting, you put on your company manners!

A friend recently visited a club in the same town as mine, and has not stopped making comments about the immaturity he saw as one officer "let the president have it" over some issue they disagreed on. The content of the disagreement has not remained with him at all; he only remembers how disrespectfully they acted toward each other. He now has no interest in joining that club, even though he felt the rest of the meeting was worthwhile.

So, do as your mother told you – be on your best behavior when you have guests!

Rosemarie Eskes, DTM • TNT Club 1831 • Rochester, New York

Writer Jacqueline M. Davidson responds to a Letter to the Editor from the June magazine that says Davidson's article didn't "give credit to those who deserve the credit":

## For the Record

In 400 B.C. Hippocrates, considered the world's first physician, was one of the first, if not the first, to discuss personality based on four temperament types. The ancient philosophers divided many things into the number four, including the four seasons, the four elements, the four personality types. Since then there have been hundreds of books and articles written based on these early theories.

If every writer who wrote an article had to trace back 2,500 years of history, there would be nothing written. My article, "Develop Your Best Self," (May 2004) was an original contribution based on my experiences and observations over my nine years as a Toastmaster. Just as our computers evolved from a caveman's first wall scratching, my article is one in a series of many articles and books that have evolved from the time of Hippocrates on personality types. I stand on his shoulders and salute.

Jacqueline M. Davidson, ATM-B • Articulators Club 5414  
Marlboro, Massachusetts

## Snapshots at [jasonlove.com](http://jasonlove.com)



"Yes, I'm very punctual. I always use commas and periods."

The buzz of fulfilling a dream.

# That Was Me Up There

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING and I couldn't get to sleep. The adrenaline was fizzing and surging through my veins like sparkling champagne.

I'd done it!

I'd finally done it!

Yes! Yes! Oh Yes!

That was me up there.

That speaker – the one with the audience in the palm of his hand – was me. I can hardly believe it myself but yes, it really was me. I can't begin to tell you how great it felt.

Six years as a Toastmaster and I'd finally achieved my goal. A goal so personal that I had never told anyone about it, in case they'd push me or do a little behind-the-scenes maneuvering to help me achieve it. This was something I had to do unaided.

**"I had finally achieved my secret goal to be the**

I've enjoyed achieving other goals as a Toastmaster. Completing my Ice Breaker was thrilling; attaining my CTM and earning my ATM-B was even better. Then there was the Top 10 Newsletter award at last year's International Conference in Atlanta. Wow! The buzz from that was something I'll never forget. Yet somehow this goal was bigger than all of them; this one was life-changing.

It was only a few hours before our regular Thursday night meeting of the Ipswich Electrifiers that I read Ted Corcoran's April editorial in this magazine, urging us to have one more try at achieving our personal goals before the end of the current Toastmasters year. I thought, "Six years, and it hasn't happened yet. Sorry Ted, it looks as if

this is one goal I'm not going to achieve this year." But a few hours later, I was like a kid at Christmas, too excited to sleep.

My secret ambition has always been to be "The Hero of the Hour," the man who, when asked, "Can you give us an original 10-minute humorous speech, in half an hour?" replies "Sure, any particular subject?" Saying yes is difficult, to actually do it, almost unimaginable.

I knew it could be done, because I've seen it done. In fact a fellow member, Norman Sanders, had done just that – without the benefit of 30-minutes notice. My respect and admiration for Norman knows no bounds.

At that Thursday night meeting, I was greeted by our Toastmaster for the evening, Cathy Shelbourne. "We're a speaker short and we don't have a reserve. You don't happen to have a prepared speech in your

**'hero of the hour.'**"

pocket?" I heard myself saying, "No, but I can give you an impromptu 10-minute humorous speech, if that will do?"

This comment prompted a few moments of blind panic before my Toastmasters training kicked in. Six years of learning to think on my feet through Table Topics (triumphs and disasters alike), the feedback from evaluations, the discipline of timed and prepared speeches, plus a supportive audience of friends and fellow Toastmasters. How could I go wrong?

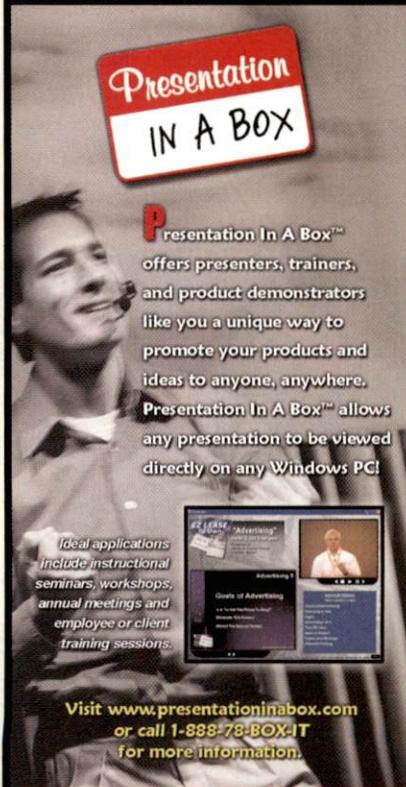
The simple answer is I didn't, because Toastmasters training really does work. I gave a polished, almost glitch-free speech. The applause, the

laughter – everything came right on cue. I had them in the palm of my hand and I knew it. I had finally achieved my secret goal to be the "hero of the hour."

What a buzz! The only trouble is, it takes so long to come down afterward that you find yourself writing articles for *The Toastmaster* magazine at three o'clock in the morning.

Just in case you're wondering, Ted, yes I have set myself another target. But I can't tell you what it is – just yet! **T**

**Jeff Short, ATM-B**, is a member of Ipswich Electrifiers Club 6459 in Ipswich, Suffolk, United Kingdom.



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# Who Wants to Be... a Toastmaster?

By Cindy Podurgal Chambers, DTM

**Kevin Olmstead won \$2.18 million on a TV game show and joined Toastmasters to learn how to handle the publicity.**

Take your typical Table Topics session. Now multiply the questions by 15, set it on a stage filled with blaring music and blinding lights, add a TV audience of several million people and the largest jackpot in television game-show history – and you've got a glimpse of what Dr. Kevin Olmstead faced as a contestant on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* in April 2001.

No wonder Olmstead, then a 42-year-old environmental engineer from Ann Arbor, Michigan, wore what he describes as a "deer-in-the-headlights" look onstage. Small surprise an Ah-counter would have needed a calculator to track his vocal pauses. The situation would have challenged the most seasoned speaker. And Olmstead was far from seasoned.

Granted, the self-proclaimed trivia buff had hosted countless quiz bowls as the coach of a college trivia team.

He had taught courses at the University of Detroit, Mercy, and the University of Michigan. He had even been a contestant on *Jeopardy!* seven years before. But now, as he faced Regis Philbin and the scrutiny of half a dozen cameras, \$2.18 million was at stake. And Olmstead was more concerned with being smart than looking smooth.

From his winning "fastest-finger" question, the Ph.D. proved to be very smart indeed, putting four novelists in their correct birth order in just 5.82 seconds. Moments later, he took his seat on stage.

Unlike some contestants, Olmstead skipped the playful banter and lengthy explanations about his choice of answers. Instead, he kept his eye on the prize – a prize that had grown exponentially, thanks to 118 straight episodes without a million-dollar winner.

He quickly won \$200. Then the buzzer sounded, the music soared, and the game was over until the next episode.

What appeared to be a four-day break between shows was actually a mere two hours. "It gave me a chance to breathe, change my shirt, have my lunch ... and lose my lunch," Olmstead jokes. Then it was time to return to New York City's ABC Studios, along with his mother, Margaret.

Back in the "hot seat," Olmstead faced a barrage of increasingly difficult questions. In the process, he



◀ Kevin Olmstead (right) shows off his jackpot in April 2001, with ABC's Regis Philbin and his mother, Margaret.

used up two lifelines; asking the audience for help on one, and using "50/50" to cut his choices in half on the other. He then phoned a friend, Minnesota archivist Eric Hillemann, to ask, "What writer collaborated with photographer Walker Evans on the 1941 book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*?" With the correct answer (James Agee), Olmstead was out of lifelines – and still had two more questions to go.

The jackpot was growing – and so, understandably, was his nervousness. By the time the bespectacled bachelor announced he would risk half a million dollars for the chance to win \$2,180,000 on one final question, the tension was palpable – and Olmstead was nearly hyperventilating.

The words flashed on the screen: "Who is credited with inventing the first mass-produced helicopter?" Olmstead quickly scanned the choices – Igor Sikorsky, Elmer Sperry, Ferdinand Von Zeppelin and Gottlieb Daimler. His expression changed from intense concentration to one of disbelief. "I know this," he said, breathing hard. "Igor Sikorsky ... final answer."

"You just won two million, one hundred and eighty thousand dollars!" shouted Regis.

Confetti rained. The audience roared. Olmstead's mouth fell open, his eyes widened, his hands fluttered to his face. Then, unsteadily, he rose and walked across the stage to embrace his beaming mother.

So what does a man do the day after becoming a multi-millionaire? Quit his job? Go on a shopping spree? Find an island paradise, and settle down to revel in a lifetime achievement? Not Olmstead. Instead, what might have been the end of the story was only the beginning. Because during the flurry of publicity that followed – including interviews on *Good Morning America*, *Live with Regis and Kelly*, *Extra* and *Inside Edition* – Olmstead was forced to watch larger-than-life replays of his

performance, over and over again. And he didn't like what he saw.

"I looked stiff. I felt stiff," he says. "I came off looking nerdy and terrified."

Back at his job as senior project engineer at Tetra Tech MPS (yes, he kept his job), the situation grew more critical. With his newfound celebrity, Olmstead was inundated with requests to speak about his experience.

"Moreover," he says, "I wanted to use my brief 'fame' to promote

### **"I wanted to use my brief 'fame' to promote the field of engineering to young people."**

the field of engineering to young people." But he knew he had to hone his communications skills in order to be effective.

Fortunately, the millionaire's luck continued.

"Soon after the publicity blitz started, I received an e-mail announcing a demonstration meeting for a new Toastmasters club within the industrial park where my company is located," he recalls. "I was already familiar with Toastmasters because my late father belonged to a club in Toledo, Ohio, in the 1950s and '60s." With the new club literally located across the street from his office, Olmstead recognized an opportunity – and seized it.

And so it was that Olmstead became a charter member of Avis Farms Club 8993, moving up through the ranks with "fastest-finger" speed. He earned his CTM in December 2002, and shortly thereafter assumed the role of club president. As president, he attended a district conference in the spring of 2003, where he was encouraged by division and district officers to become an area governor for 2003-2004.

"And that sucked me in even more," he says with a laugh.

Olmstead is currently an ATM-B and CL, and is the District 28 Division C Governor for 2004-2005. He also led his club to Distinguished status in 2003-2004. But more impor-

tant than these accomplishments is the self-confidence he has acquired along the way – confidence that has allowed him to achieve more than he ever would have thought possible.

He has given dozens of presentations on the public image of engineers and other topics at universities at home and abroad, including one at the Seoul (Korea) National University in June. He has served as a presenter at Game Show congresses in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Burbank, California. In between, he is in

great demand at professional and civic gatherings, as well as in elementary and high schools.

"The amazing thing is that I'm out there actively seeking speaking gigs – something I wouldn't have dreamed of three years ago. All because I won a bit of money on a game show, was asked to talk about it and got to see the value of Toastmasters first-hand."

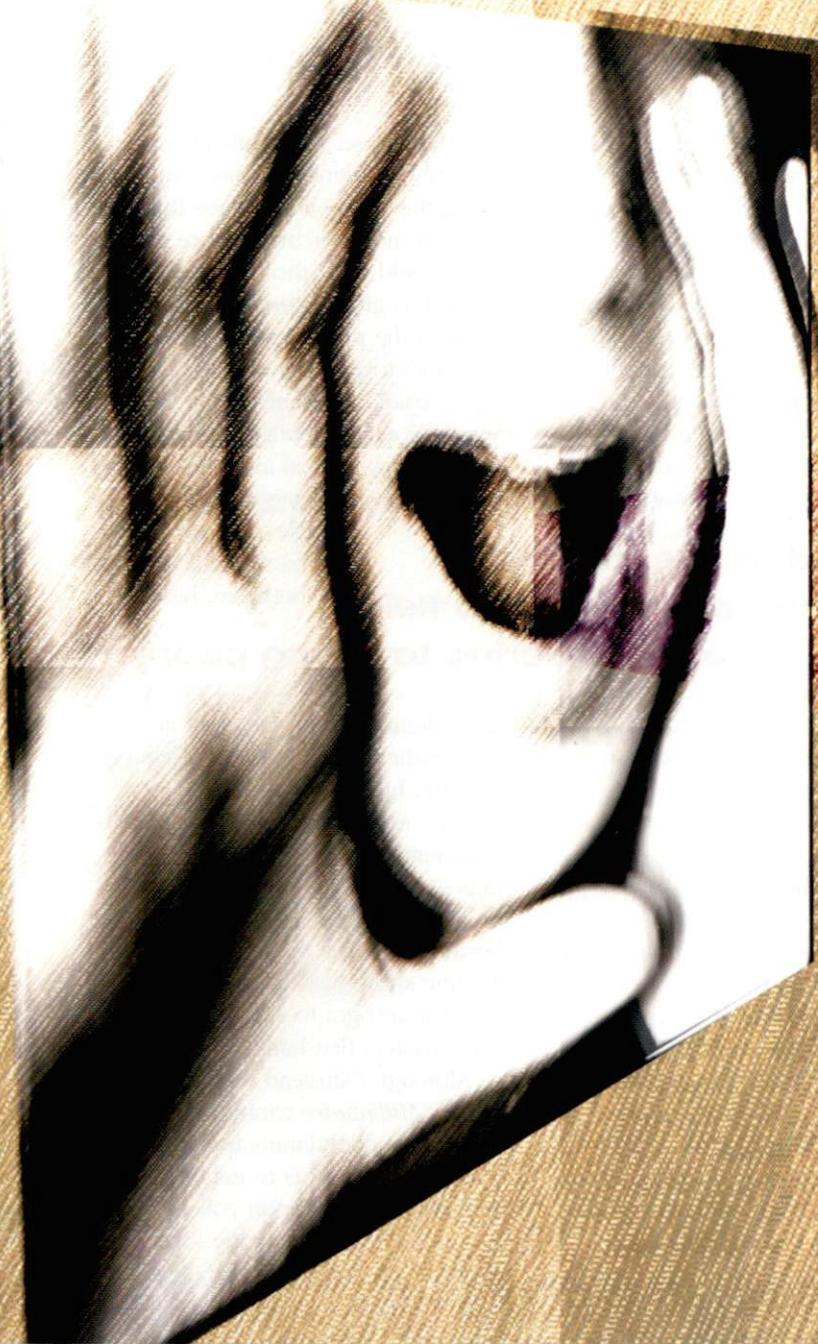
Although Olmstead was able to use his *Millionaire* winnings to buy a spacious condominium and a luxury minivan – as well as to establish endowments to support college students across the country – he believes his newfound confidence is truly invaluable. And when asked where to place the credit for his transformation, Olmstead is quick to respond.

"Toastmasters," he says with a smile. "Final answer." 

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**Cindy Chambers, DTM**, is a freelance writer and public speaker from Clarksville, Tennessee. She is a frequent contributor to this and other publications. Want to share your own success story? Reach her at [inkwell1956@aol.com](mailto:inkwell1956@aol.com).

**Editor's Note:** If you'd like to contact Kevin Olmstead, email Avis Farms club at [avis\\_farms\\_toastmasters@yahoo.com](mailto:avis_farms_toastmasters@yahoo.com).



# Say What?

Turn your accent  
into an asset.

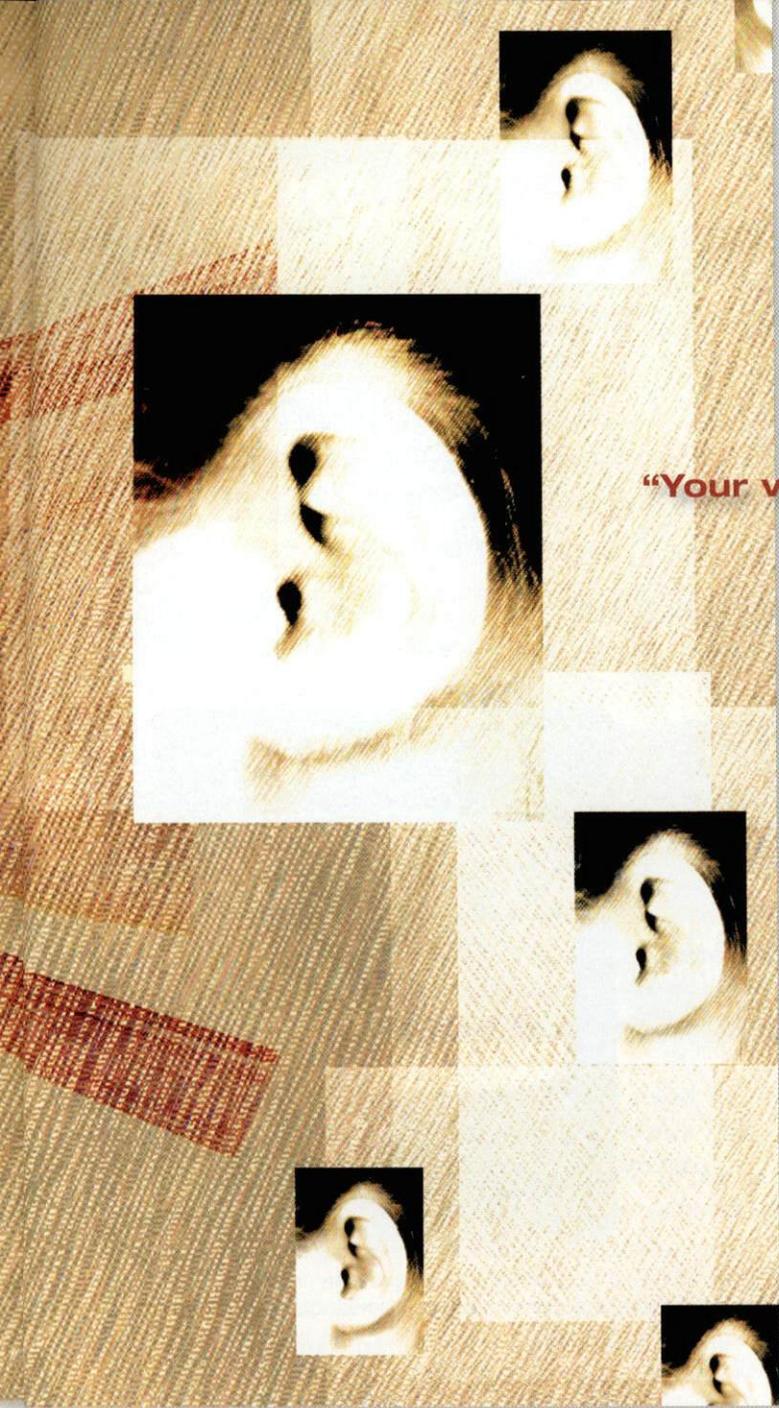
By Julie Bawden Davis

**A**lthough Tom (not his real name) was more than qualified for his job as an accountant, he found himself continually passed up for promotions. It wasn't until he left the company for another position that a former colleague told Tom the problem.

"He said my Indian accent held me back," says Tom, who has since taken accent-reduction courses, joined Toastmasters and is now a CTM. "I was difficult to understand, which explained why I wasn't where I should have been in my career. Since taking accent-reduction classes, I've advanced at work."

Lisa Mojsin, director and founder of Accurate English in Los Angeles ([www.accurateenglish.com](http://www.accurateenglish.com)), sees plenty of students like Tom. "Many people who have an accent aren't understood and are often labeled as foreign and thought to have grammar problems," she says. "The truth is they may have a strong grasp of English vocabulary and grammar, but their pronunciation isn't correct. Their accent is distracting and listeners focus on that rather than the content of their message."

Perhaps even more important than what you say is intonation, which Mojsin describes as the "music" of a language. "Each language has its own way of singing, which includes a distinct pitch and melody," she says. "Use the wrong intonation and people won't understand you, or they will misunderstand your intentions. The Indian language is very staccato; English can sound flat when spoken with



([www.vocalawareness.com](http://www.vocalawareness.com)). "Your voice is your identity, and the way you speak affects how others perceive you," he says. "It can tell people about who you are, how you feel about yourself and what you believe in. Because your voice is your identity, it's important to not be cavalier about it."

**"Your voice is your identity,  
and the way you speak affects  
how others perceive you."**

**- ARTHUR JOSEPH**

Unless you are an actor or actress who must wipe away all traces of an accent, Josef feels that eradicating an accent is often not the best course of action.

"When you deal with a person's voice, you are actually dealing with their persona," says Josef, who trained California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to soften his Austrian accent. "When I started working with Arnold, we made a deliberate choice not to change his accent because it was integral to his identity. Instead we modified and clarified his accent, strengthening the voice and affecting pitch and resonance. It's often a matter of cleaning up the accent through singing, drilling and reviewing certain words."

Study accents and you invariably touch on the human brain and its wiring. Have you ever wondered why some people lose their accent and others don't? It has to do with the formation of the brain's neural network at a young age.

"Whether you lose your accent has to do with the age at which you became exposed to the new language," says Mojsin. "Generally if you are exposed to a new language during or before puberty, you'll lose your old accent," she says.

Musically inclined individuals with a good ear often have an easier time at accent reduction. But there is no such thing as being tone deaf, says Josef. "It's simply poor pitch discrimination, and you can train your ear."

Some accents are more difficult to remove than others. "Swedish, for instance, has a lilting sound and a higher pitch, which makes it a little more complex than some other languages," says Josef.

Reducing an accent often involves using different facial muscles than a person is accustomed to. "As an example, in Spanish there are pure vowels and no diphthongs, but in English there are diphthongs and you must use your lips to speak well," says Josef.

Accent reduction is a matter of using new mouth muscles, agrees Mojsin. "You need the correct tongue position and lip movement to speak English correctly," she says. "Once we explain this to students, a light bulb goes on, and the more they practice, the more quickly they improve."

Josef, who is also a singer, uses singing extensively in therapy. "With singing, you hold notes, which intensifies

this accent. Speak English with an Iranian accent and listeners may think you're being sarcastic or angry."

Mojsin's company helps non-native English speakers communicate with confidence, clarity and accuracy. Generally she does this with one-on-one lessons focusing on reducing or neutralizing accents. As part of accent-reduction therapy, she strongly suggests that students join Toastmasters.

"Accent reduction and Toastmasters go hand-in-hand," she says. "Many people come to me with a problem [related to] speaking up at work. We work on their accent and they rehearse and practice what they've learned in Toastmasters. Initially, they are often self-conscious about their accent and hold back, but their confidence gradually increases and they speak up more."

Having control of your speech is very liberating, says voice coach Arthur Samuel Josef, author of *Vocal Power*

**“You need the correct tongue position and lip movement to speak English correctly.”**

— LISA MOJSIN

the pressure flows,” he says. “You have more time to think and coordinate, and diphthongs, vowels and consonants work differently in song. I’ve worked extensively with Pierce Brosnan, for instance, and we’ve used singing to enhance the color, range and expression of his voice.”

As in singing, Josef suggests that his students put the stress and emphasis on the beginning of words. “When you put the accent on the beginning of the word, it sounds more fluent,” he says. “I teach people how to see the punctuation in what they’re saying, which encourages them to slow down.”

Although accent reduction may be somewhat labor intensive, a clear speaking voice with an excellent vocal tone is worth the effort. “In any face-to-face spoken communication, only eight percent of the impact on the listener comes from the words that are used – 37 percent comes from the tone of the voice and the remaining 55 percent from body language,” says Josef. “Voice is power – literally and figuratively.” **T**

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## ACCENT REDUCTION TIPS

It’s possible to reduce any accent, as long as you’re motivated, says Lisa Mojsin, director and founder of Accurate English in Los Angeles. She offers the following tips for accent reduction:

- **When watching TV or listening to the radio in English, repeat the speech you hear.** Observe the mouth movements and facial expressions of native speakers and try to imitate them. Repeat what they are saying, imitating the intonation and rhythm of their speech.
- **Listen to the “music” of English.** Don’t use the music of your native language when you are speaking English. Each language has its own way of “singing.”
- **Make a list of frequently used words that are difficult for you to pronounce.** Ask a native speaker to pronounce them for you. Record these words, listen to them and practice saying them.
- **Pronounce the ending of each word.** Pay special attention to “s” and “ed” endings.
- **Record your own voice and listen for pronunciation mistakes.** Many people hate to hear the sound of their voice and avoid having to listen to themselves speaking. However, this is an important exercise because it will help you become conscious of your mistakes. (Videotaping is also helpful).
- **List high frequency vocabulary.** Make a list of work terminology that you use frequently and make sure you know how to pronounce those words. Include the pronunciation of the names of your superiors and colleagues.
- **Until you learn the correct intonation and rhythm of English, slow down your speech.** If you speak too quickly with the wrong intonation and rhythm, native speakers will have a hard time understanding you. Don’t worry about your listener getting impatient about your slow speech – it’s more important that everything you say be understood. If you slow down, the intonation matters less because people hear each word in isolation. Think about famous people and how slowly they talk. Martin Luther King, for instance, paused after beginning with “I have a dream.”
- **Use your dictionary.** Become familiar with the phonetic symbols of your dictionary and look up the correct punctuation of words that are hard for you to say.
- **Buy a book on tape.** Buy the same book in printed form. Listen to the tape and read at the same time, paying close attention to the pronunciation of words, the rhythm, and the pausing of the speaker. Then, record yourself reading some sections of the book. Compare the sound of your English with that of the speaker from the recording.
- **Read aloud in English for 15 to 20 minutes each day.** This will help you strengthen the mouth muscles you use when speaking English. Research has shown that it takes about three months of daily practice to develop strong mouth muscles for speaking a new language.
- **Be patient.** You can change the way you speak but it won’t happen overnight. People often expect instant results and give up too soon. You *can* change the way you sound if you are willing to put some effort into it.



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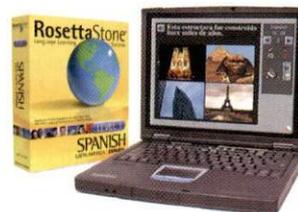
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# Handling the Heckler

By Jason Love

**Be swift, be certain,  
and above all,  
be funny.**

My kindergarten teacher had a stuffed microphone that she passed around during “share time.” Only the person holding the mike was permitted to speak. The system worked great until Jimmy Pitzer, the bully who once punched me for looking at the sky too long, chewed out the stuffing.

So began my lifelong war with hecklers. That’s what we call them in stand-up comedy, but bullies go by many names: naysayer, skeptic, mother-in-law. For the sake of argument, I’ll call them hecklers.

When you and I are holding the mike, it is *our turn*. We have something to say and the guts to say it. The audience has two choices – listen or leave. Note that these options do not include “make bombing noises during pauses.”

I asked some fellow comedians what they thought about hecklers. As you might imagine, it was tough to get a straight answer:

“Personally, I’m against them.”

“Boiled or fried?”

“I’ve got one in the trunk of my car. Let’s ask *him*.”

Which brings me to Lesson #1: Always have a snappy one-liner prepared in case you’re asked a silly question. Silly questions are, in fact, another form of heckling. “Is that the best you can do?” hollers a heckler. “No, I’m saving my good stuff for the grownups,” you reply. Even if it doesn’t shush the guy, it makes a statement to all in attendance.

It says, “Don’t mess with me; I’m a professional.”

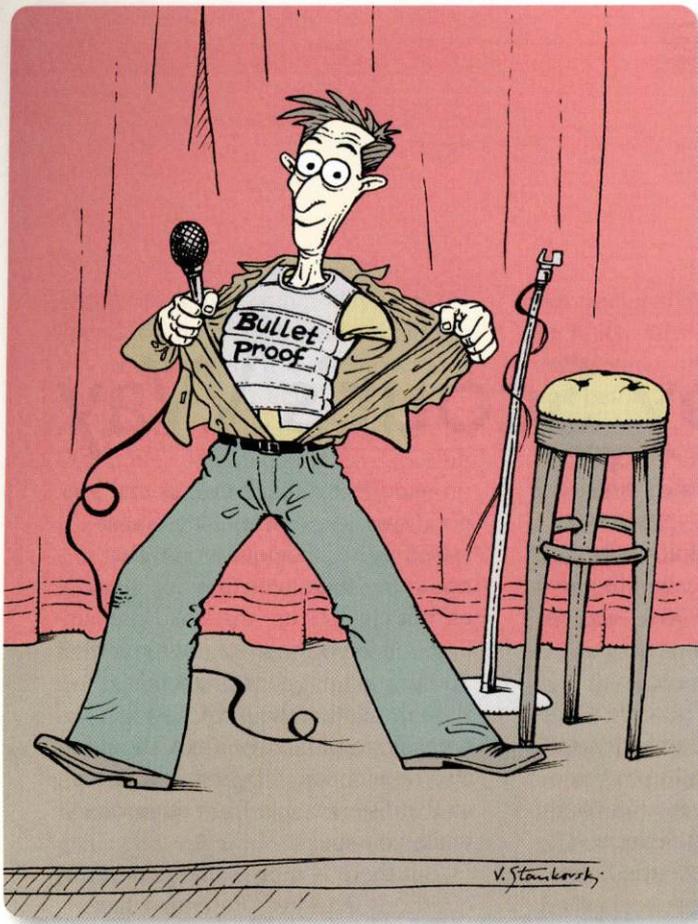
Keith Dion, owner of Hornblowers Comedy Club in Ventura, California, warns us not to sweat the heckler. Every audience has them, he says. If you’re lucky, they just sigh extra flamboyantly; if you’re not so lucky, they drink their way to swearwords. Some people aren’t officially bitter until everyone knows about it.

Keith says, “There is one thing you can count on: No matter what you say, somebody out there has a problem with it.”

Who knows why the hecklers arrive in the first place. Whatever brought the Grinch to Whoville, I suppose. They come to disagree with our politics or our clothes or the fact that we’re getting all the attention, just as their kid brother did growing up.

Fortunately, heckling is mostly confined to nightclubs. The rest of us contend with similar sabotage on a sliding scale. In formal settings, it may be as subtle as whispering or clearing the throat, or the classic folded arm stare-down.

The best way to beat the vibe is by playing to the Ideal Audience. Every time you’re on, you should speak to the same people: the people who like you! Sometimes they’re not even present, but you must see them out there hanging on your every inflection. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve performed for Crowds of Stand-up Past.



If you can't sustain the visual, build on existing support. No matter how ghastly it gets, there is always someone – many someones – who are still on board. They may be cheering only from within, but they are with you. Cater to them and they will multiply until, hallelujah, the Ideal Audience becomes a reality. Viva le positive thinking!

One night I was bombing so badly that you could hear people ask for their checks, save for a man at Table 2 who laughed at everything. I decided to do my act exclusively for this savior of mine. "But seriously, Jack..." Before long the crowd was chuckling at the spectacle, and eventually I included them again.

Veteran touring comic Chas Elstner told a racy joke that landed rather hard. As the audience squirmed, Chas giggled like a madman and said, "Do you ever get the feeling that I'd be up here doing this with or without you?" Tension burst; connection restored.

This devil-may-care attitude may not come swiftly to you, but it will

come. Before stand-up, I would get dizzy any time someone didn't worship me. Then I watched the pros, who carried themselves as if they were around only to tell a few jokes before returning to the mother ship. If someone can't take a joke... you know the rest.

### **"You'll never get anywhere if you need the entire room to like you."**

According to Keith Dion: "You'll never get anywhere if you need the entire room to like you."

Case in point. Irish comedian Ardal O'Hanlon was performing for a patchy (i.e., self-conscious) crowd. In the front row sat two executives who were not just ignoring him but having a conversation of their own.

Ardal asked, "Is there a problem, gentlemen?"

"Yeah," said one. "We don't think you're funny."

And Ardal: "That's good, because if the two of *you* found me funny, I'd quit the bloody business today."

### **Don't Get Mad; Get Funny**

Whatever your profession, the lesson holds true: "Don't get mad; get funny." Ardal's line was a masterpiece. Feeling the weight of the room, the hecklers piped down and everyone forgot about them. Had Ardal made a scene, those two would have been the only thing the audience remembered.

Of course, you have to give the heckler a chance before gunning him down. I mean, we comedians are not gangsters. Fire a warning shot. Remind them that you have the mike. In standup it might go like this: "Is this your first time heckling, sir? I know

how hard it is and don't want to throw off your timing."

Get a laugh and get back to business. If you strike too hard or fail to state why you're striking, *you* end up being the bully. Another tactic is to tap your foot like a school-teacher. When the chatter-bug catches on – and it may take a while depending on blood alcohol level – you say, "Okay, class, recess is over. Back inside."

Wayne Dyer, the "father of motivation" and a Toastmasters Golden Gavel recipient, is especially good at

deflecting bad attention. When someone tries to join his act, Wayne laughs along and then says, "Okay, I'll be doing the comedy here." His voice is kind but somehow dangerous. The disruptive audience members always seem to get it.

Another pro is Jay Leno, host of NBC's *Tonight Show*. When his audience boos a joke, Jay can just shake his finger and say, "I'll turn this car around right now..." The people forgive him, and Jay keeps on truckin'.

The fact is that people want you to succeed. Even if they're not chanting your name, everyone wants a pleasant trip. Everyone, that is, but the hecklers. They're not so happy with this whole life thing. Your job, as facilitator, is to spot the hecklers up front and protect the commonweal. If they continue to defy the Stuffed Microphone Law, you have no choice but to act. Be swift, be certain and, above all, be funny.

In the words of Keith Dion: "We all just win over the ones we can. I mean, c'mon – even Jesus didn't get *everyone*."

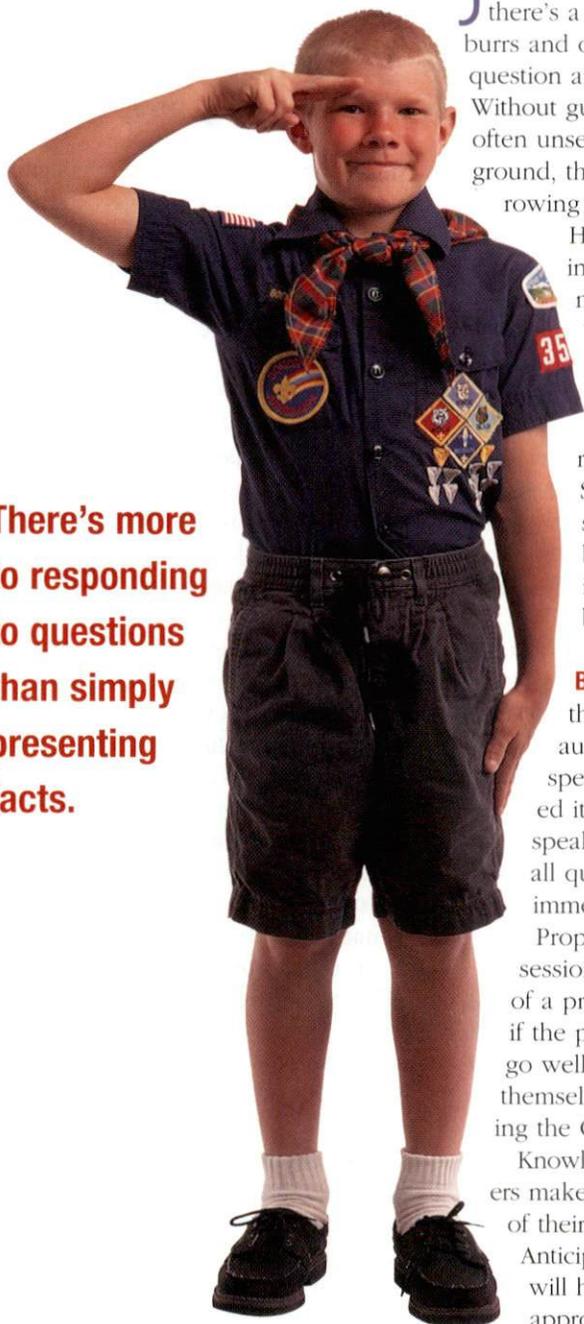
To which I say, "Amen." **T**

**Jason Love** has performed stand-up comedy throughout the U.S. and has appeared on numerous television programs as That Guy No One Remembers. You can find a healthy dose of his humor at [www.jasonlove.com](http://www.jasonlove.com).

# Q&A, the Boy Scout's Way

By Theodore Lustig, ATM-S

**There's more to responding to questions than simply presenting facts.**



Just beyond the cultivated landscape of the well-prepared speech, there's a wilderness full of thorns, burrs and other snags called the question and answer (Q&A) session. Without guidance to traverse this often unsettling and perilous ground, the Q&A can become a harrowing post-speech experience.

Help is at hand from those intrepid and versatile young men, the Boy Scouts.

Through those tried and true directions embodied in the Scout's Motto, "Be prepared," and the 12 rules that comprise the Scout's Law, they offer a set of guidelines to bring back to safer ground those in danger of losing their bearings.

**Be prepared!** Very often, the lasting impression an audience takes away from a speech is not how well-crafted it was, but rather how well speakers handled the free-for-all queries thrown at them immediately afterward.

Properly handling the Q&A session affects the total impact of a presentation. What's more, if the presentation itself did not go well, speakers can redeem themselves by skillfully conducting the Q&A.

Knowledgeable and aware speakers make the Q&A an integral part of their speech organization.

Anticipating possible questions will help the speaker determine appropriate responses. Having

on hand factual back-up material is a good way to prevent being embarrassed by surprise questions. That's not to say there won't be any surprises, but chances are that solid preparation will keep those to a minimum. The printed program or agenda should mention the Q&A and the time allotted to it. The Q&A should also be mentioned by the introducer so that listeners can form questions while you speak.

But there is more to responding to questions than just presenting facts. There's the demeanor of the speaker as well. And that's where the dozen precepts that make up the Scout's Law come in. (*Note to former Scouts: The author has changed their order.*) To maintain control over the Q&A, the speaker must be:

**Cheerful.** Don't glumly look at the Q&A as an onerous task or one to be feared. Smile as you tell the audience that you are looking forward to a fruitful exchange of ideas. See it as an opportunity to expand on your major points and to clarify any misunderstandings the audience might have.

**Brave:** If you appear self-confident when accepting questions, enthusiastic in responding to them, and passionate about your willingness to augment your speech through a meaningful dialogue, the audience will be on your side from the start.

**Reverent.** Respect the belief of others, but hold true to your beliefs. However, if you find yourself in error, admit it and apologize.

**Thrifty.** Time is a commodity. Don't spend too much of it responding to any one question. If a questioner isn't satisfied with your initial response, say that you will answer it in more detail after the session is over, but be sure you remain available. By keeping answers short, more questions can be asked and the audience feels its participation is welcome.

**Helpful.** If you think a question has not been heard by the entire audience, repeat it. Repeating the question has two functions: It assures that everyone will be able to put your response in the proper context and it gives you a few more seconds to frame your answer.

**Kind.** Don't favor those in the audience closest to the podium. Accept questions from your entire audience. Look directly at the person asking a question, but don't say "good question," as that implies some questions aren't good. Scan the entire audience when responding, coming back to the questioner at the end to see if he or she is satisfied with your response.

**Courteous.** If you think a question has already been answered, don't insult the audience by saying so. It may well be that you weren't clear in your first response, so use the opportunity to reaffirm your point, but try to slant your answer differently to avoid redundancy.

**Obedient.** Keep out of trouble by respecting your audience. Be aware that your posture and your body language can communicate your thoughts just as much as your words. While a question is being posed to you, pay attention to what is being asked. Don't distract yourself or the audience by taking a drink of water, fiddling with your notes or any other

personal activity. The best time for such activities is right after you've completed a response to a question and before the next one is asked.

**Friendly.** No matter how contentious you think they may be, most questioners are seeking information, so answer them simply and directly. Being curt in your response can antagonize them further, make a potentially bad situation worse and turn the audience against you.

**Clean.** The reality is that we live in an era of political correctness. If you use humor, make sure it will not be offensive to any member of the audience. Avoid any unseemly language and be careful to avoid sexual innuendos or ethnic, racial and gender stereotypes.

**Loyal.** If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Note the question and add that you will get an answer if the questioner will leave you his or her name and contact information. Then respond as soon as you can.

**Trustworthy.** Don't prolong the Q&A beyond the limit of audience interest. Try to sense when your audience has had enough. Tell them you are going to stop after one more question. If none is asked, use the time for a very short summary.

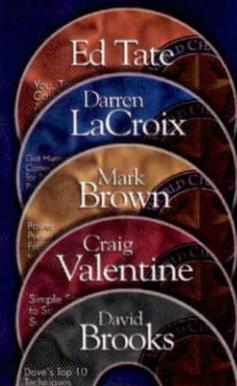
When the program is over and members of the audience rush toward you to pose more questions, rather than run away from you, you'll know you've earned your Speaker's Merit Badge. And that's the truth. Scout's honor! **T**

**Theodore Lustig, ATM-S,** is a member of Mountaineer Club 8538 in Morgantown, West Virginia.

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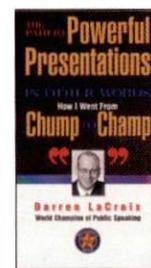
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By Jennifer Morgan

# WHERE

## Do We Go From Here?

The fine science of  
giving directions.

*"Troy, would you move that  
bird feeder over so it's  
not in the way?"*

**S**o far, on this hot Sunday afternoon, 13-year-old Troy has specialized in fetching, digging and carrying. His uncles are building a wheelchair ramp for Grandpa Johnson, and Troy is eager to help. Moving the bird feeder is the first job he's been given that allows any personal discretion. But Troy stands in front of the bright red hummingbird feeder, clearly perplexed.

We all find ourselves in positions of asking others to follow a procedure, drive somewhere or complete a project. With such a clear idea in our heads, how could anyone mess up? "Why didn't you just follow my directions?" we yell at our friends, family or subordinates. But that could be the problem! Maybe they followed our directions to a tee.

Take Troy, facing the hummingbird feeder, trying not to look foolish in front of his uncles. He has been instructed to move the feeder "over," but what does "over" mean? To Troy it means up; he looks up, but there is no place higher than the deck roof to which the feeder is already attached. Sometimes "over" means "on the other side," but why would Uncle David want the feeder hanging next to the house? Often "over" means "away" but that could be any of four directions from where Troy is standing.

■ **Use Prepositions Precisely.** Prepositions are those little words that show the relationship between things

or ideas. Often we use them vaguely, carelessly assuming our words mean the same thing to our listener as they do to us. *Over*, *by*, *of* and *to* are common prepositions with multiple uses. The *New American Webster Handy College Dictionary* provides 11 definitions for the word *over*. There are better words: *beside*, *behind*, *under*. Don't forget the phrases: *on top of*, *in front of* and *next to*. Simple and precise words lead to less confusion.

Back on Grandpa Johnson's porch, Uncle David clarifies his statement:

"Put the feeder over on the fascia board," he instructs Troy helpfully. Troy, feeling useless, doesn't know what a fascia board is and he's too embarrassed to ask.

■ **Keep it Simple.** How many times have you received directions from a friend who couldn't resist describing the Mom and Pop convenience store, the old barn and the house on the corner with the hedge shaped like a rooster?



If anecdotal additions don't help someone arrive at your destination, they should be edited out.

Remember, Troy is 13. Moving the feeder is the closest he's gotten to a construction job in his life. But Troy might be 62 and never use the term "fascia board." Beware the temptation to use words that indicate you are an elite professional. Maybe Troy needs his vocabulary expanded. How-

**"The time it takes to think through directions and communicate clearly is always time well spent."**

ever, if

Uncle David wants to use technical jargon, he should define his terms. Meanwhile, for the purpose of getting the job done, "fascia board" is simply not communicating.

This advice applies to acronyms also. The technician on the phone-in helpline asks the little old lady, "Is your OS Mac or PC?" A simple question to him sounds like ancient Greek to her.

Taking a break, Uncle Jim realizes his brother is not getting the message across to their nephew. He thinks back to when he was 13 and remembers a fine math term. "Put it on the beam parallel to the beam it's already hanging on," Jim instructs Troy.

*Parallel* is an adjective that almost everyone in middle school has heard at least once. *Adjacent*, *right angle*, *square*, *flush*, *10 o'clock* – these are also helpful terms. Troy, who is good at math, brightens up.

But as Troy starts attaching the screw into the wood, both men begin yelling, "No, not there. There. Over there! No, the other beam. On the outside!"

The problem? From where Jim and David are sitting, they can't see that there are two beams parallel to the beam the bird feeder is hanging on: the fascia board and another, closer to the porch. Poor Troy is attaching the feeder to that second beam.

■ **Stand in Their Shoes.** Before launching into a list of high-way exits, "What direction are you coming from?" is a great question to ask.

In fact, this question fits many situations. What is your listener's knowledge base? In Troy's case Jim asked himself, "What vocabulary does Troy already understand?"

When people from a variety of fields are focusing on the same problem, "Where are you coming from?" builds bridges. A social worker will have different concerns from a politician. If a doctor knows his patient is an engineer, he may explain the mechanics of a health problem.

In Jim's and David's case, the answer to Troy's misunderstanding has a physical solution. Get up, walk over and stand next to the person you are directing. Solutions may even change if you share the same perspective as your listener.

■ **Show Me!** "Rhyme me no rhymes. Show me!" Eliza Dolittle sings to Freddy in *My Fair Lady*. Her advice still holds true.

What if, at the very beginning of our example, Uncle David had touched the fascia board and said, "Move the bird feeder to this point here, Troy"? Instead we find David and Jim yelling at their blushing nephew as though he were a voice-activated robot. If they raise their voices, he will respond. Unfortunately for the uncles, Troy is a carbon-based being who needs to understand before he can complete instructions.

An interesting communication exercise for your club involves explaining how to draw a design on a piece of paper. The speaker looks at a simple design, and her job is to

explain this diagram so her listeners can draw it on their papers. Sounds easy? There is one rule: The speaker can not show the listeners her diagram. That, of course, would be the easiest thing to do; just hold the picture for everyone to see. A map, a diagram, a picture is still better than a thousand words. Unfortunately, in today's world, a lot of directions are given over the phone or by e-mail.

■ **Invite Feedback.** This communication exercise should be tried twice. On the first try listeners are not allowed to talk. Repeated experiments show that communication is always less effective when there is no feedback. In the second trial, when listeners get to ask questions, the club members will discover that their second set of diagrams are all closer to the original than their first attempts.

Blame it on machismo or youth, but Troy is too embarrassed to ask questions. How many times have you been afraid to ask for help and risk looking incompetent?

A good communicator paves the way for questions. "This is a difficult procedure, so feel free to stop me at any time and ask for clarification." "OK, now read those directions back to me, to make sure I got them right."

Saving an adolescent a moment of embarrassment seems a small problem compared with that of having a friend who drives for hours in the wrong direction, or a machine blocked up because no one understands the operating instructions. But these little moments are the building blocks for a life-long relationship. The time it takes to think through directions and communicate clearly is always time well spent.

Uncles David and Jim stand next to Troy, looking at the extra beam.

"Sorry Troy," David says. "I didn't see that beam." He leans over and pats the farthest beam. "This is the fascia board; that's where I'd like you to put it."

"Thanks, Uncle David" Troy responds, relieved. "I didn't know what a fascia board was."

"No problem kiddo." And harmony is restored on the Johnson porch construction site. **T**

**Jennifer Morgan** is an artist and freelance writer living in Northern California.

Try Word Menu and GuruNet for wordsmithing help.

## Boosting the Power of Your Word Processor

IN THE COMPETITIVE WORLD OF personal computers, software companies act like little empires, conquering related programs and gobbling up the territory they once held. Programs continually add features, causing other software that once consisted of only those features to go away.

The most commonly used office-type program, the word processor, is a case in point. Popular programs such as Microsoft Word now include a spelling and grammar checker, thesaurus, clip art, hyperlinking, page layout, envelope and label creation, mail merge and other tools that you once needed other programs for.

But niches still exist for enterprising third-party companies to provide add-ons enabling you to do useful things that Word alone can't. Two good ones released relatively recently that speechmakers can take good advantage of are Word Menu and GuruNet, both of which you can download and try out for free.

Word Menu, [www.wordmenu.com](http://www.wordmenu.com), is an idea thesaurus, similar to the older and still existing program IdeaFisher, though at \$34.95 is less expensive. The program at its essence is a database of words organized hierarchically into categories, or "menus."

The simplest way to use the program is to browse through its 76,423 words in their 984 categories (new words are periodically added through Web updates). By browsing this way you can, for instance, learn the lingo of an unfamiliar field, from banking to world dance. Terms are accompanied by short definitions. You can also use the search feature to turn the program into a reverse dictionary, letting you find the right word through other words in its definition, and a thesaurus showing you related words.

If you're not satisfied with what the program itself offers, ingeniously, it lets you right-click on a word to connect to the Web sites [Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com) or [Thesaurus.com](http://Thesaurus.com) for more definitions or synonyms. A fast Internet connection helps here.

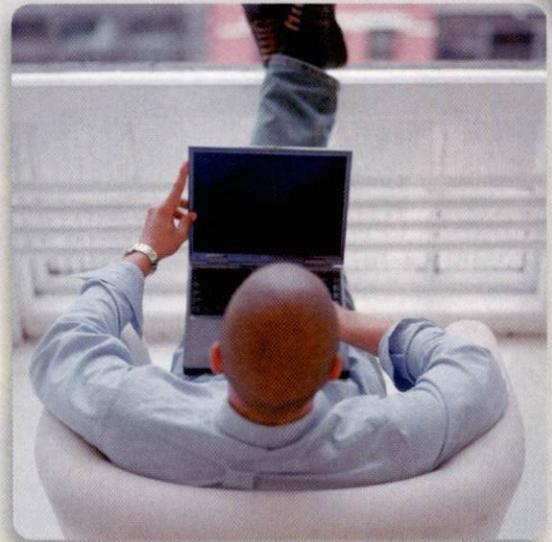
Word Menu is available for computers running Windows or Mac OS X. The initial download is about 12 megabytes, with the free trial period lasting two weeks.

GuruNet, formerly called Atomica, is another wordsmithing tool, though it more tightly integrates with both your word processor (or any other program) and the Web. Unlike Word Menu, whose content resides mostly on your hard drive, most of GuruNet's content resides on its Web site. This makes a fast Internet connection even more important.

Once you install the program, to find out more about any word on your screen in any program you're in, you just click on it while holding down the Alt key. Alternately, you can change this sequence, to Shift-Alt-click, for instance. When you call upon the program this way, you're sent to GuruNet's Web site, which first presents you with a definition of the word, more detailed than with Word Menu. If you click on the speaker icon, a man's voice pronounces the word for you through your computer's speakers.

You can access more information about the word by clicking on tabs at the top of the window. These tabs show you synonyms for the word and any special technology or military meaning it may have.

Others tabs, impressively, provide a small film clip of a woman saying the word using sign language, trans-



lations of the word in 15 languages, images relating to the word available for downloading, and news stories related to it. In all, you can access up to 150 dictionaries, glossaries and reference works about the word you're exploring.

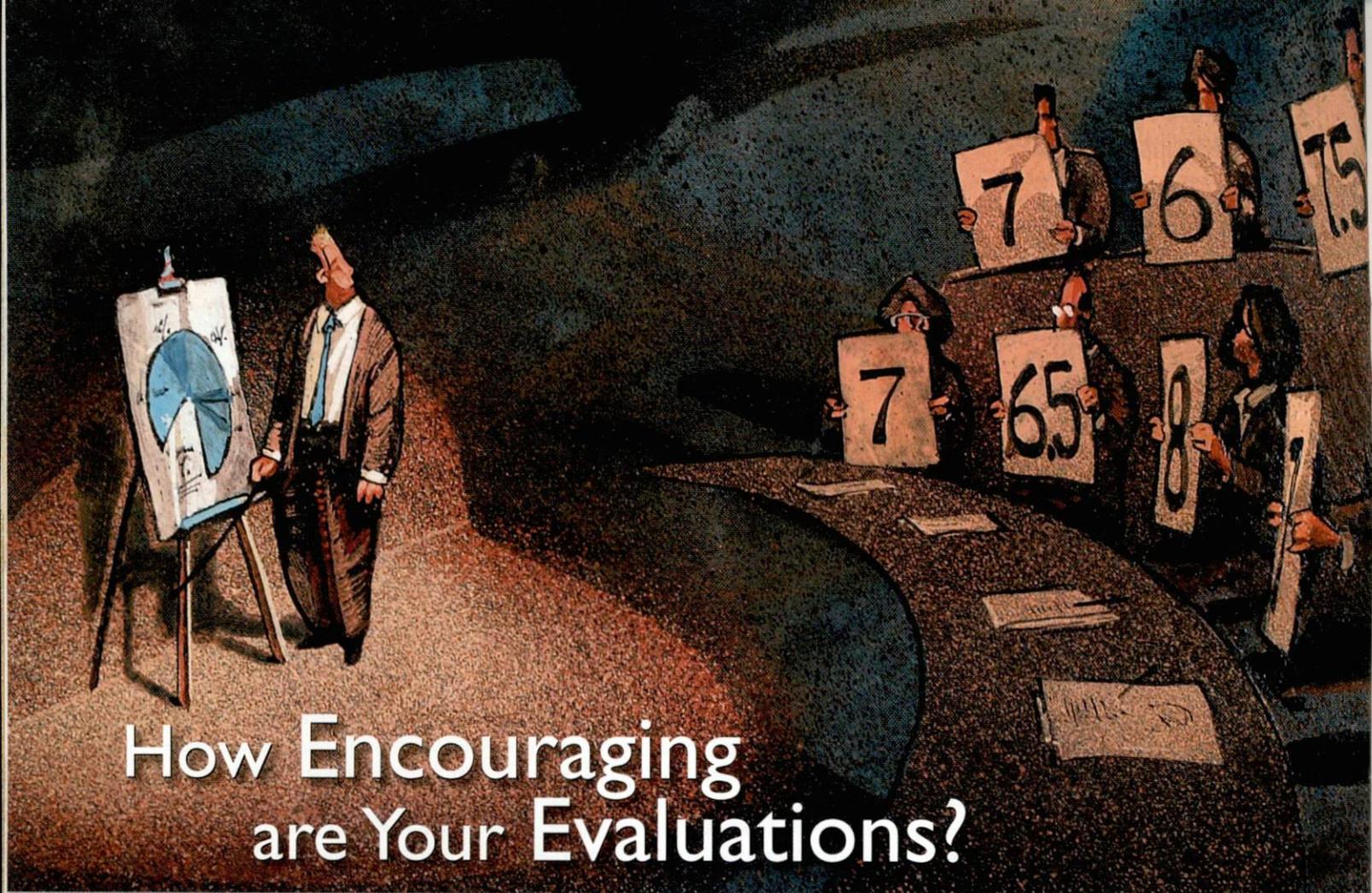
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There's nothing stopping you from using both programs simultaneously.

GuruNet is more comprehensive and complements CD-ROM or DVD-based reference works such as Encyclopedia Britannica, at [www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com), and Microsoft Encarta Reference Library, at [www.microsoft.com/encarta](http://www.microsoft.com/encarta).

It's quicker to access information with these programs than over the Web unless you have a cable, DSL or other broadband Internet connection, and even if you have one, CD-ROM or DVD-based programs generally have more multimedia features than Web reference sites. **T**

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# How Encouraging are Your Evaluations?

By Ken Feldt, ATM-B

**The speaker must  
be left with ideas –  
not scars.**

I confess. I like doing evaluations – especially if evaluating gets me a “pass” from the Table Topics session at my club’s meeting. In our club, if you have been assigned a meeting role, you are excused from participating in Table Topics. (I have even been known to volunteer for undiscovered meeting roles such as timer light checker, gavel polisher, ballot stuffer... anything to get me out of the Table Topics pool.) This aversion to Table Topics affords me the opportunity to develop my evaluation techniques as they are applied to speakers of a wide range of skills and abilities. In honing these skills, I’ve given a good deal of consideration to what constitutes a good evaluation and what role the evaluation plays in the Toastmasters educational program.

To start, remember that any speech must be evaluated on (a) *what* was delivered and (b) *how* it was delivered. Speakers try to meet these criteria by fulfilling the objectives listed in the Toastmasters basic and advanced

Communication and Leadership manuals. Content and structure (*what*) are addressed by objectives that focus on speech organization or the ability to inform, motivate and inspire.

Toastmasters are also guided through techniques that emphasize the tools of delivery (*how*), such as vocal projection, eye contact, the use of humor, movement and gestures. By focusing on each speech’s distinct objectives, the speaker moves out of a comfort zone of familiar themes and techniques and into a space where new tools enable a broader range of abilities.

A good evaluation therefore must always address the goals defined by the manual objectives. Any evaluator who ignores how well the speaker attained these speech objectives discards the specific steps the speaker should have taken to become a better presenter. Of course, the evaluator should not ignore all the other aspects of the speech. Did the main idea come across? Did the speaker leave behind

a memorable idea? Was the presentation relevant and of value to the audience? Was there some other element of the speech that was particularly effective? These are also important questions that must be answered as part of an effective evaluation.

The mechanics of how this is done is pretty much up to the individual evaluator. This is how I do it:

I sketch out three columns on a sheet: one column for aspects I liked, one for elements that need improvement, and a third for general notes

### **“Good evaluations make liberal use of that essential presentation tool: the smile.”**

that will help flesh out the evaluation body. It doesn't really matter what techniques are used, so long as the evaluation gets the main ideas across in a positive, constructive manner. Like any good presentation, the evaluation should include an opening, body and close. But early in the presentation, each evaluation should restate the speech objectives. By getting into this habit, the evaluator will always learn to keep an eye on how close the speaker is to hitting his or her skill targets.

There is also what I call the Toastocratic Oath: “Thou Shalt Do No Harm.” With all the emphasis on honesty and healthy feedback, it is important to remember that the speaker must be left with ideas, not scars. All evaluations must carry a tone of encouragement throughout. Good evaluations include a word of honest praise, emphasize improvements that are within the speaker's grasp, and make liberal use of that essential presentation tool: the smile.

Let's now consider two of the more difficult circumstances for the evaluator: dealing with the very bad speech, and dealing with the very good speech. Every now and then an evaluator is confronted with a speech that needs a good deal of work. It is important to remember that, even though the evaluator could think of three, five, even seven major areas to improve upon, the evaluation should emphasize no more than one or two

of the most critical improvements that can yield the greatest opportunity for improvement.

Using three minutes to enumerate one shortcoming after another will soon evolve into a litany that will turn off most listeners (especially the speaker). On the other hand, highlighting one or two critical elements gives the speaker a certain focus to work on for the next speech.

Evaluating the “perfect” speech poses its own challenges. While Toastmasters often recite the mantra

that “every speech can be improved,” it is often difficult to get a handle on just how the “perfect” speech, delivered by a senior speaker, can be improved through the pseudo-spontaneous comments of the evaluator. When confronted with those conditions, consider this: When stuck trying to critique a fine work of art, consider changing the frame.

This suggestion can best be illustrated by a recent circumstance at my club. A pre-CTM Toastmaster was given the opportunity to evaluate a fine speech delivered by a very accomplished member. The audience held its breath as the evaluator struggled for a few moments to deliver the “canned” evaluation that worked its way down the column of evaluation topics in the manual. Finally, the evaluator stopped, held up the manual, and said, “Look, the speaker did great in all these areas, so let's think about something else to say...” The evaluator then suggested how the speaker could better set the stage for the speech by asking questions of audience members, drawing their interest more quickly to a presentation that, by itself, was outstanding. The evaluator didn't try to change a work of art, but suggested that the speaker provide the work with a more appealing frame that quickly drew the audience's attention to the masterpiece. That evening held a lesson for all evaluators – when the speech itself seems rock solid, explore different methods of introduction, the

use of props, audience interaction, or other mechanisms that add a “frame” to an already fine work.

All speakers attempt to reach their audiences by selecting and organizing meaningful content, and then effectively delivering that content. The evaluator's role is to help the speaker in both areas by providing constructive reviews of the overall presentation, and by citing how well the speaker attained the specific goals of the speech. And like any good speech, the evaluation's effectiveness hinges on the ability to connect with the audience (especially the speaker). This connection happens through positive messaging with a purpose.

When the speaking-evaluating process works, the speaker will build on the experience and take another step toward successfully expressing important ideas with effectiveness and confidence. We are Toastmasters. It's what we do. 

**Ken Feldt, ATM-B**, is a member of West End Club 2661 in Richmond, Virginia.

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Let the audience see  
your human side.

By Fran Capo

## Speaking from the Heart

As speakers we are told to be passionate about our topics. While that's great advice, it's simply not enough. Good speakers can feign passion, but they cannot feign honesty. The audience will notice if you are not speaking from your heart.

Be honest with your audience. If something has just happened in your life – good or bad – use it. The purpose is to connect with the audience and let them see your human side.

A few years ago I was the closing speaker at an annual Girl Scout convention. As always, I was trying to juggle too many things in my life: speaking engagements, weekend stand-up gigs, working on my fourth book, being a single mom, driving my mom to work, working out at the gym and paying attention to my fiancé. It was a tight schedule but I thought I was handling it OK. Perception however, is not always reality – at least not to those around you.

I own a two-family house with my mom, and when I'm out of town, my mom watches my son. As I was leaving to give my ninth consecutive speech in a month, my mom appeared surprised. "Where are you going?"

"To do the closing speech at Nassau Coliseum."

"I don't remember you mentioning that to me," she said.

"I told you about it a week ago. You don't remember?"

"I know you work hard, but you don't seem to have much time for your family these days. Spencer misses having a day with you."

That remark stung. My mom is the most supportive mom in the world. It took a lot for her to make that comment. I had no time to get into a conversation with her about it, which added to my frustration. The remark gnawed at me the entire drive to the convention. There I was about to go onstage and tell everyone how to balance their lives and do all the things their hearts desire, and my son was missing quality time with his mom. Following your dreams should make life better, not sever relationships with loved ones.

Even though I knew I could pull off my speech and pretend everything was fine, I'd feel like a phony. I just couldn't ask people to do what I wasn't living myself.

Luckily, I had arrived 45 minutes early. I sat in the parking lot and thought about what to do. I'd be home by 11:30 p.m. at the latest. It was a Friday night, so my son didn't have to attend school the next day. I remembered that Spencer and I had passed a local 24-hour indoor tennis court the previous day, and he had mentioned he would love to play in one of those tennis bubbles at night.

I called Spencer at home and asked if he was tired. He said "no." I called the operator and got the number

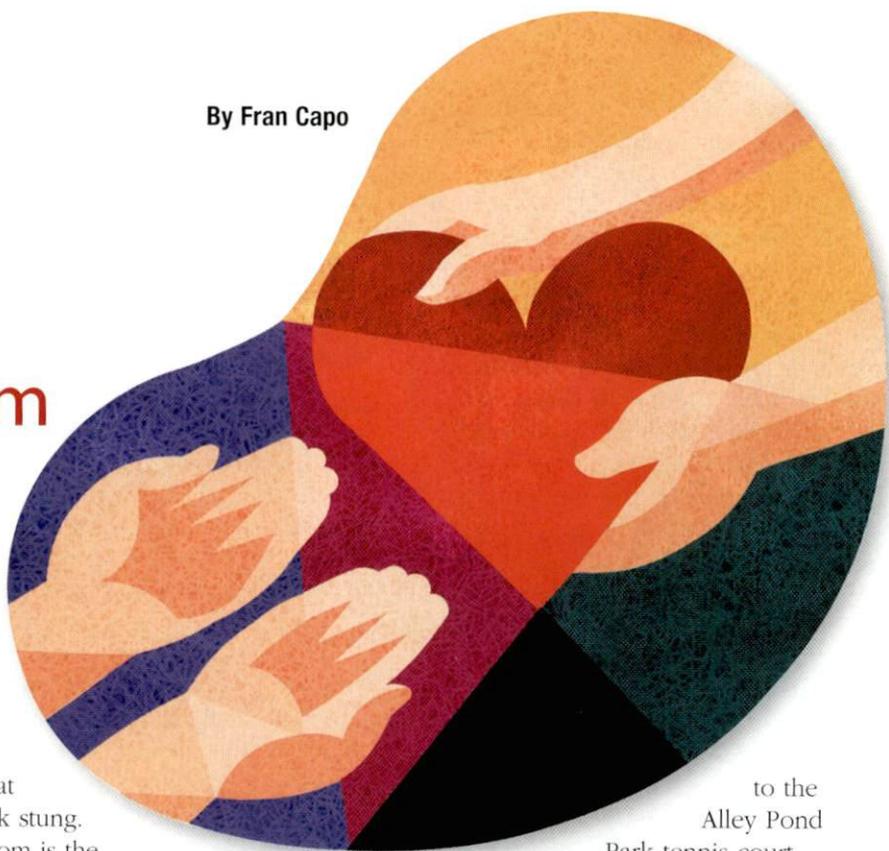
to the Alley Pond Park tennis court.

I booked a 1 a.m. court and called Spencer back. He was thrilled.

With the problem solved I went into the speech with a clear head. Of course, no one in my audience had to know what had happened. But I also knew that there were times in the audience members' lives when they, too, had the balance ball out of whack.

I opened my speech by telling the audience what my mom had socked me with, how my good old Catholic guilt kicked in, and how I knew I had to solve the problem before I spoke to them. I spoke from my gut. Heads were bobbing up and down in understanding. I got a standing ovation that night.

Flash forward two years. A woman who had heard me speak at the Girl Scouts convention was attending another speech of mine. She came up to me and said, "Played any midnight tennis lately?" I laughed. She told me she had never forgotten my speech because she saw that I was not afraid to share myself openly with the audience. I thanked her and laughed. "Hey, how could I lie to a bunch of Girl Scouts?" She laughed, "Well, I just want you to know I brought a bunch of my



friends to see you speak. I told them you were the real deal." I was touched.

Since then I've opened up to my audiences several times, either when life stuff just happens or when I've been put on the spot. Like the time in Colorado when I was asked to do a two-minute impromptu plug for my breakout session later in the day. Apparently the other speakers were prepared, but unfortunately I didn't get that little notice in my mailbox.

So I went up to the audience cold. In my best New York accent I said, "Wow, I had no clue we were going to have to do a two minute-infomercial. But luckily I happen to be the *Guinness Book of World Records* fastest-talking female, so doing things in two minutes is my specialty. Actually I could give you the whole-hour lecture in two minutes, but then I'd have nothing to say later. I'm also stand-up comic, and I do crazy adventures, like walking on hot coals and scuba diving with sharks. Now if you want to learn

how to apply these principles of 'fear nothing' to everyday life and get a few laughs in the process, drag the chairs from the other rooms and meet me down the hallway at one o'clock or whatever time my session starts. Check the brochure."

rewards are worth it. Let your audience know you have the same fears, wants and desires as they do, and share how you got through them.

Just as people like to buy from salespeople they like, people like to listen to people they can relate to.

## "The audience will notice if you are not speaking from your heart."

To my surprise they did, and at the end I got another ovation.

Now, do I always get a standing ovation? Of course not. Whenever you speak, look at something that happened to you recently. Did it make you laugh? Did it make you think? Did it change your perspective? Did it anger you, and you weren't sure why? If so, find a way to incorporate it in your speech. Chances are if you reacted to something, so did others. Actors and comics call it "being in the moment." As a speaker this is a scary thing to do, but the

If you are willing to put what makes you human on the line, you will score a home run a good percentage of the time. And if you don't, you always have another good story to tell at your next engagement. **T**

**Fran Capo** will speak at the Toastmasters International Convention in Reno on August 20. She is a stand-up comic, adventurer, motivational speaker and author of seven books. Her latest book is *Adrenaline Adventures: Dream it, Read it Do it*. Contact her at [www.francapo.com](http://www.francapo.com)

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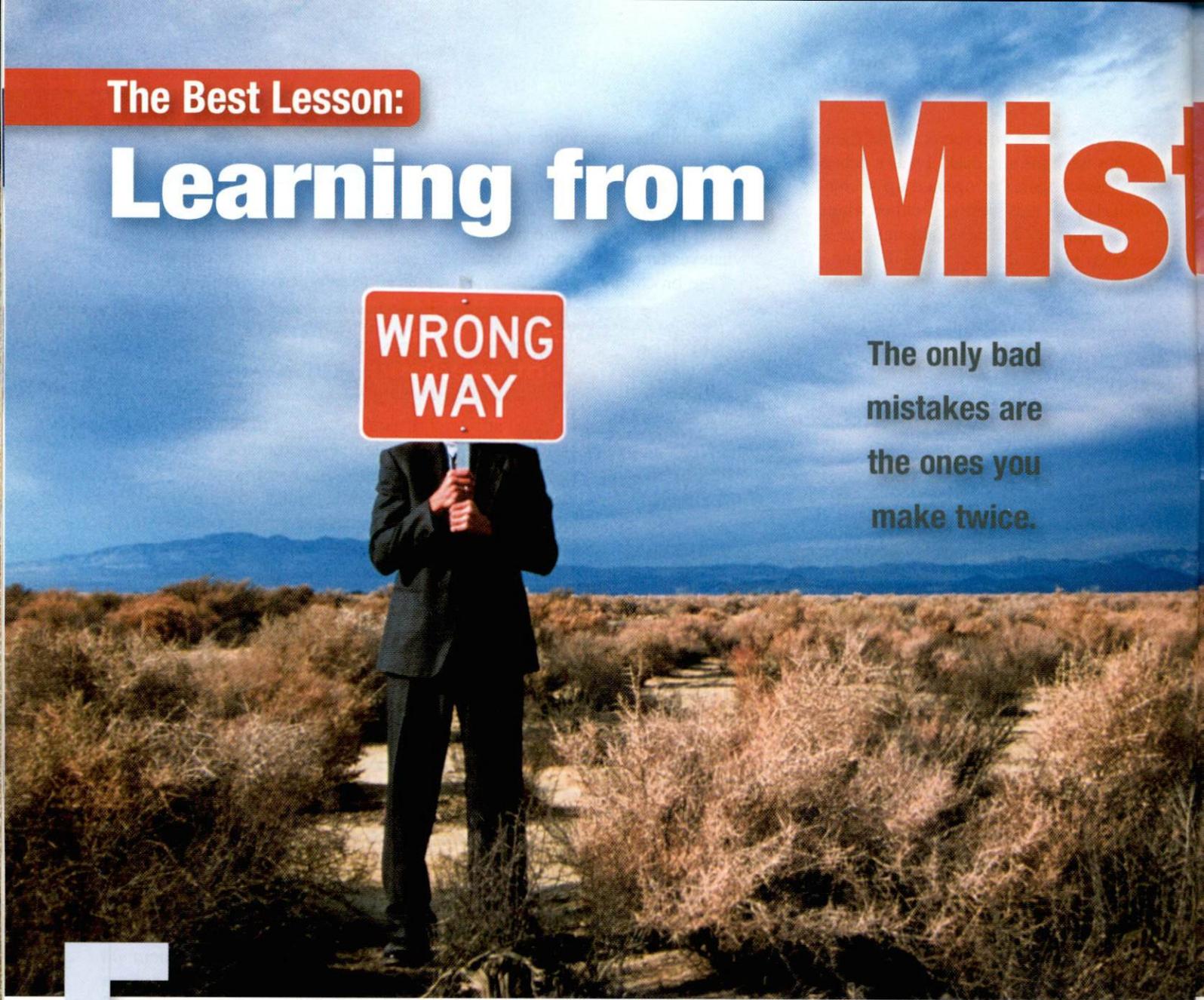
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The Best Lesson:

# Learning from

# Mist



WRONG  
WAY

The only bad  
mistakes are  
the ones you  
make twice.

**E**ven though he was facing his first audience as a paid speaker, Patrick Donadio felt supremely confident. He was fully prepared. He had modeled his talk on the performance of a speaker he admired. He had memorized every word. He had even spent considerable time in the library,

searching for just the right opening joke – the kind of bang-up opening his favorite speaker had used.

“But I started getting nervous while I was being introduced,” he recalls today. “Then I got up, started off with my joke, and ... nobody laughed! Dead silence! Then someone in the back of the audience got a bad coughing spell. I got distracted – forgot what I was going to say next – so I decided to read the rest of my talk. Only by this time I was so confused that I couldn’t find my place.

I fumbled around with the pages and skipped to the last 10 minutes of my speech. And when I finished, there was just dead silence. The audience didn’t realize the talk had ended. Then the introducer came up and started to clap, so the audience finally followed suit.”

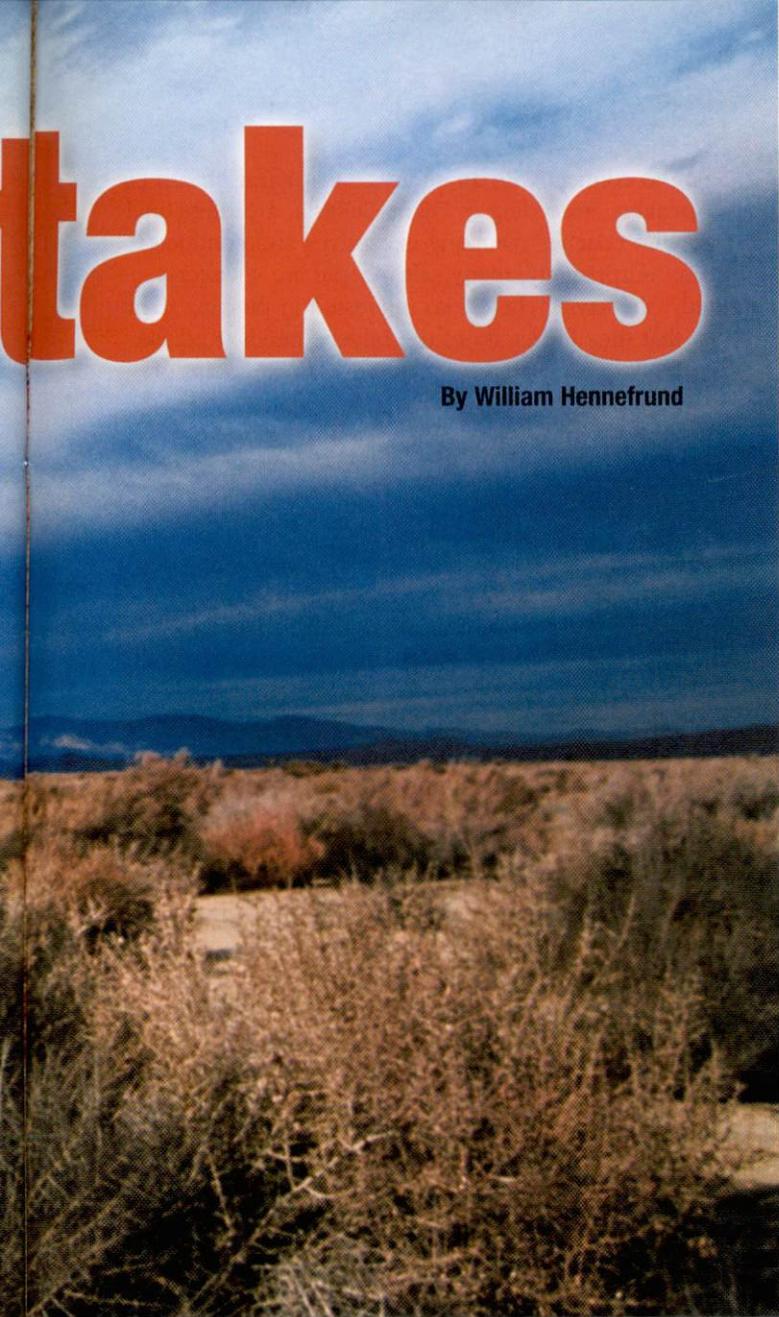
After it was over, Donadio fled to his car, telling himself, “there’s got to be an easier way to do this.”

Perhaps nothing creates more anxiety for a speaker than the prospect of “losing it” – an audience visibly bored, a joke that falls flat, a few pages of a speech totally lost or a sudden case of stage fright. Here, though, is where top speakers shine. Far from being discouraged, they regard a setback as a learning opportunity. I’ve talked with a number of highly successful speakers – speech coaches, motivational speakers, trainers – and they all vividly remembered “disasters” that set them on a better path.

Today, years later, Donadio is a nationally recognized business coach and speaker, based in Columbus, Ohio. As he analyzed his first professional outing, Donadio says he

# It takes

By William Hennefrund



got off on the wrong foot by “trying to be like somebody else – that other speaker I admired. The real me is not a joke teller. I’m not a performer. The real me is not a memorizer. I’m a conversationalist, and I like to talk from the heart.” So he urges his clients, “Be yourself. Don’t try to be like other people.”

“Often, at training sessions, when the camcorder is on, the speaker will suddenly become someone else – not the person I know,” he says. “So the major thing I stress is the importance of being true to yourself – not trying to be a carbon copy of someone else.”

Patricia Fripp, now an in-demand keynote speaker accustomed to addressing many kinds of audiences of up to 10,000 people, remembers that a big mistake early in her career was accepting an engagement when the odds of success were strictly limited.

“I was hired to speak to the sales executives of a vegetable company, and the meeting planner wanted to put

on a serious after-dinner program with really heavy content,” she recalls. “Several activities besides my talk were scheduled, most of which included alcohol. In talking with the meeting planner, I suggested that maybe – considering that the cocktails might be flowing – I should give a light, entertaining talk rather than the sales speech they requested. However, the meeting planner assured me that a skills-building talk was what they wanted – these were hard-working, sober people who would be up at 5:30 the next morning making phone calls.”

Fripp, who is based in San Francisco, traveled to near-by Monterey for the talk, and had her first misgivings when it turned out the dinner meeting was being held in a winery. “After all, wineries don’t make money catering gourmet dinners,” she says. “Their cash flows when the wine flows.”

An inspection of the meeting site added to her dismay. “Wineries are not built for acoustics,” she points out. “The walls are big wine barrels. Voices echoed off them, caroming off the ceiling and fluttering to the floor – dead. To top it off, the portable microphone they provided had a really short cord, and there was no extension cord available. That was a real problem for me, because I like to walk around and connect with the audience when I’m speaking.”

The evening started with wine tasting, then a cocktail party, followed by dinner with champagne, followed by after-dinner drinks.

“As I wandered around mingling, which is my style before a talk, I noticed that the vegetable sales reps were turning into stewed tomatoes – and their wives into wilted lettuce,” Fripp quips. “I’d seen fresher-looking things growing in my refrigerator.”

When it was her turn to speak, Fripp realized she faced an impossible situation. Even the president of the company mentioned to her that they really didn’t need a speaker; by this time the 5:30 a.m. workday start was not too far off. But the meeting planner, who had tasted far too much wine, insisted that Fripp deliver the talk as scheduled. When it came her turn to speak, she cut out most of the content she had planned; switched to some light remarks,

**“Nothing creates more anxiety for a speaker than the prospect of ‘losing it.’”**

and was finished in less than 15 minutes. Nobody noticed – including the meeting planner.

The lesson Fripp took away: Learn more than the inexperienced meeting planner. Confirm if the “off-site” location is really designed for the program intended. And finally, “Don’t be so excited at getting an invitation that you accept something that is not going to allow you to succeed.”

Steve Boyd, professor of speech communication at Northern Kentucky University in Fort Thomas, Kentucky,

# Masters of Mistakes

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- Steve Boyd is professor of speech communication at Northern Kentucky University in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. E-mail: [info@sboyd.com](mailto:info@sboyd.com).
- Patricia Fripp is a keynote speaker, sales trainer and speech coach. She served as the first woman president of the National Speakers Association and has spoken at three Toastmasters international conventions. E-mail: [pfripp@fripp.com](mailto:pfripp@fripp.com).
- Patrick J. Donadio offers keynotes and seminars and is a past president of the Ohio Speakers Forum. E-mail: [Patrick@PatrickDonadio.com](mailto:Patrick@PatrickDonadio.com).

also learned the hard way to say “no” to certain speech invitations.

“One of my early mistakes was being willing to speak on any subject a client or a program chair would ask me to speak on,” he says. “I was way over my head in the early years, taking engagements that I had no business accepting. I’m really not a sales trainer, and yet I did some programs on selling that I never should have done.

“On one occasion, I was hired to give a program on sales training. But then, the boss of the person who hired me also wanted to interview me. He found out in short order that I had little or no experience in sales, so he cancelled the program. That was a loud message to me about not taking on programs where I had no background.”

Since then, Boyd has strictly limited the subject matter of his talks. He keeps in touch with other speakers and knows their areas of expertise. “If I get an invitation to give a talk, and the subject matter isn’t right for me, I’ll

## “Be yourself. Don’t try to be like other people.”

recommend another speaker,” he says. “I have no trouble saying no if I think it’s the wrong audience or the wrong topic for me.”

Boyd adds that another mistake in his early years of speaking was failing to adapt material to a specific audience. “When I started out, I was in my early 20s and most members of my audiences were much older. I just couldn’t deliver the kind of information they needed. Nowadays, I’m more careful about tailoring the message to suit the audience. But I’m also more careful about choosing the right audiences. There are three or four types of groups that I simply say no to because I know I don’t relate well to them. I believe a speaker can have a great talk and yet fail because the audience is not the right one for him or her.”

Failing to connect with an audience is a hazard faced by many speakers, according to Diane DiResta, a professional speaker who coaches company executives and conducts seminars. “Surprisingly, many salespeople are speaker-centered,” she says. “They’re so interested in pushing their product that they forget about the buyer’s needs. I advise them to begin a presentation from the listener’s point of view and continue to address what’s important to them.”

DiResta vividly recalls one of her earliest assignments – to give a talk to about 40 salespeople at a breakfast meeting. “It turned out that the meeting was going to be held at a deli. There was no private room and the sales people were all seated together near the door. I got off to a shaky start because of the noise of customers getting take-out, and the clanging of the cash register.”

DiResta coped with this bad situation by walking from one group of salespeople to another – and in the process, learned the importance of choreographing interaction with an audience.

“That came in handy a short time later, when I was hired to give a writing seminar to a group of trainees at a multinational bank in New York City. Their manager had told them it would be a one-hour session – but actually it had been planned for one entire day. It was also the day before the trainees faced an important exam.” It was, DiResta recalls, a disaster in the making.

“They were furious when they heard my seminar was to run through the day,” DiResta says. “They threatened to boycott the whole session. But as I thought about it, this seemed like a real opportunity to interact with the students. So the next morning I addressed the problem up front. I said: ‘What’s important to you is to have time to study. What’s important to me is to give you quality training. How can we make it work?’ Then I listened. We negotiated a half-day of training. We did one exercise instead of two.”

As a result, DiResta says, the trainees were very attentive, and “nobody trashed me on evaluations.”

If a speaker takes on a lot of speaking engagements, DiResta says, he or she is likely to run into difficult situations that call for spur-of-the-moment ways of coping. But sometimes the effort brings unexpected rewards.

“I had thought my breakfast meeting at the deli didn’t really go over,” she says. “Then to my surprise, some time later, one of the participants wanted some private coaching sessions.”

One speaker sums up his experiences this way: “When I started out as a professional speaker, I was always afraid of making mistakes; everything had to be perfect. I would stew, sweat and worry. Eventually I got the message. The only bad mistakes are the ones you make twice.” **T**

**William Hennefrund** is a freelance writer living in Woodbury, Connecticut.

## To Err is Human; to Self-Deprecate, Divine

IN MAKING LIGHT OF YOURSELF, IN recounting mistakes, in confessing to doubt or weakness, you say to an audience: See, I am one of you.

All Paris roared with delight when John F. Kennedy quipped (with a nod to his beautiful, French-speaking wife, who had taken the city by storm), “I do not think it altogether inappropriate to introduce myself to this audience. I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris, and I have enjoyed it.”

William Faulkner was self-deprecating in a more serious vein. In accepting the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, Faulkner began: “I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to

**“The best stories are those**

**we tell on ourselves.”**

my work – a life’s work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit. So this award is only mine in trust.” Faulkner went on to say that he wished to use his moment of acclaim “as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail.” His message was that it was “the poet’s, the writer’s, duty” to remind mankind “of the courage and honor and hope... which have been the glory of his past... to help him endure and prevail.”

It may seem like no great thing for the greatest of us – a JFK or a William Faulkner – to play the humble part. As lesser mortals, we walk a fine line between self-deprecation and self-abasement, or between self-deprecation and self-incrimination.

*Never* begin a speech by telling the audience that you flat-out don’t know what you’re talking about. The other day, a fellow Toastmaster showed me a draft for a speech he was working on that did just that. What he *meant* to say was that he would speak from the perspective not of the scholar, but of the informed layman with a wealth of personal experience relating to the subject matter.

It is also important to judge the mood of the audience. When Richard Nixon said, “I am not a crook,” he may have thought he would be applauded for his modesty. However, as this remark was

received at the time (and is remembered today), he gave voice

to the very thought he wished to deny. I know of an embattled CEO who made a similar mistake in speaking at the annual shareholders meeting. The CEO (not one of my clients, by the way) began by saying, “I know many of you think that I should resign.” That caused half the room to erupt in applause. Waiting for the clapping and cheering to subside, the distraught CEO then said, “Well, I’m not going to do that” – provoking a loud chorus of boos.

Churchill, a master of the self-deprecating remark, knew better than to begin one of his wartime orations by saying, “I know I have the reputation of being a pompous old windbag, and I know that many of you think I should shut up before the Germans get really, really mad. Well, I’m not going to do that.” There is a time to



self-deprecate and a time to puff out your chest and appear larger than life.

Still, I urge you to remember the old gag: “Where does good judgment come from?” “It comes from experience.” “And where does experience come from?” “It comes from bad judgment.” There is an inexhaustible supply of good stories to be mined from that one simple truth.

Over the years, I have seen endless corporate speeches dealing with leadership and the need for change, and, as a speechwriter, I have contributed at least a hundred thousand words of my own to this vast *oeuvre*. I know this much: The speeches that hit home come from executives who learn from their mistakes and are human enough to admit it.

The best stories (the ones that audiences warm to the most) are those we tell on ourselves. **T**

**Andrew B. Wilson**, a freelance speechwriter in St. Louis, Missouri, regularly writes for CEOs of several large and well-known companies. Contact him at [www.abwilson.com](http://www.abwilson.com).

# Confusing Communication

By Shula Hirsch

**“England and America are two countries separated by the same language.”**

– GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

When my husband and I discussed taking a trip to Europe, we decided to select a country where the people spoke English. England, of course, was our logical choice. However, when we began our three-month stay, we soon discovered that even there, we would encounter problems in communicating with the natives. We were aware that the British had some peculiar ideas and confusing concepts, such as driving on the “right” side of the road, which to them is the left, not really the right, but we never knew they didn’t speak English “correctly.”

True, we Americans sometimes distort the language with expressions such as “give me a break,” when we don’t refer to something being broken, or even “hanging out,” when we mean idling to pass the time as opposed to hanging from a tree or a noose. Nonetheless, most of our language makes sense – at least to us!

As soon as we arrived at Heathrow Airport and hailed a taxi, we were met with our first communication problem. The taxi driver blurted a series of unintelligible questions, forcing us to take out a card that indicated the address of our hotel. He acknowledged our written request and proceeded to drive us to our destination. However, the frustration did not stop there. During the hour or so car trip, he tried in vain to talk to us, but he might just as well have spoken in ancient Greek. In



fact, he reminded us of Eliza Dolittle in *My Fair Lady*.

The problem transcended accents. Throughout our stay, we heard “English” expressions that were foreign to us and caused us to question how the English speak English.

Upon arrival, we went to the bank and asked the teller where we could cash our traveler’s checks. “You queue at the far right,” she said. Queue? All we wanted was some British money. It was then that we discovered that in England you do not stand in line, you queue up.

In the supermarket you push a trolley, not a cart. I always thought a trolley was a vehicle of transportation for people, not a vehicle for carrying canned goods. Another time, when I asked to speak to the store manager, I was sent to the cashier, then to the salesperson, then to another salesperson when someone overheard my request and said, “You don’t ask to speak to the store manager. You request an audience with the governor.”

You must be careful of embarrassment since a “fag” refers to a cigarette and a “joint” is not an illegal substance, but rather, a cut of roast beef. “Braces” have nothing to do with wires on the teeth of adolescents. They are the objects that hold up ladies’ garter belts. The hood of a car is a “bonnet,” gasoline is “petrol,”



a pharmacy is called the “chemist” and an elevator is the “lift,” which makes sense only if you are going up. We once ordered corned beef and got an ear of corn on the side of a slice of beef. If you want corned beef, you must order “salt beef.” Confusing communication indeed.

A phone in England is not busy, the phone is “engaged.” “Mind your bag” translates into “beware of pick-pockets.” Unlike subways throughout the world, a British subway doesn’t move. Rather, it is an underground tunnel through which pedestrians cross a street. The moveable train is the “tube.” A policeman is a “bobby,” and if his name happens to be Bobby, he is presumably Bobby Bobby. If you need directions, you will probably be told to “go to the top.” Don’t look for a mountain, a hill or even an incline, for “go to the top” in an Englishman’s English means “go to the end of the street.” Don’t be surprised when you meet the costumed “Beefeaters” at the Tower of London. They are not replicas of meat-eating dinosaurs, but rather men who guard and give tours of the Tower, regardless of what their eating habits may be.

One day during our stay, my husband decided to check his weight and the scale read 10. Impossible! We subsequently discovered that street scales register weight in stones

and not pounds. He had enough stones in his kidneys years ago and now all he wanted was weight in language that had meaning to him. On the other hand, in the grocery store, food is not weighed in “stones” nor in “pounds,” but in kilograms. As if we weren’t confused by now, there’s more. In England, “pounds” do not refer to weight, but rather to money.

Before the beginning of one show we attended, the announcement came over the loud speaker that “The house is quiet.” Of course it was quiet; the curtain was about to be lifted! People then scrambled for the closer, more expensive seats, transforming a “quiet house” to a very noisy one. We later discovered that “a quiet house” has nothing to do with silence, but rather, means that there are available seats and you are welcome to take a better seat than the one you purchased.

During Christmas in London, we noticed signs advertising “Boxing Day.” My husband, a boxing fan in the States, was happy to see this and asked our landlord where and when the program would take place. Imagine his disappointment when he discovered that “Boxing Day” does not refer to a prize fighting event. It is the day after Christmas when people return undesired boxed gifts to the department stores.

We loved our stay in England despite the periodic confusion in communication. In the meantime, if you are an American contemplating a trip to England, be sure to take an interpreter. This way, when someone shouts “mind the gap,” you’ll know to watch the space between the platform and the train when you board the tube. **T**

**Shula Hirsch** is an adjunct assistant professor of English at Hofstra University in New York and a freelance writer.

**Editor’s Note:** We realize that “confusing communication” is a two-way street and welcome your comments about American English at [sfrey@toastmasters.org](mailto:sfrey@toastmasters.org).

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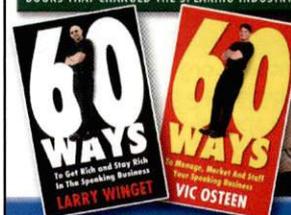
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