

# The TOASTMASTER<sup>®</sup>

AUGUST 2003

**Don't Get Mad,  
Get Funny**

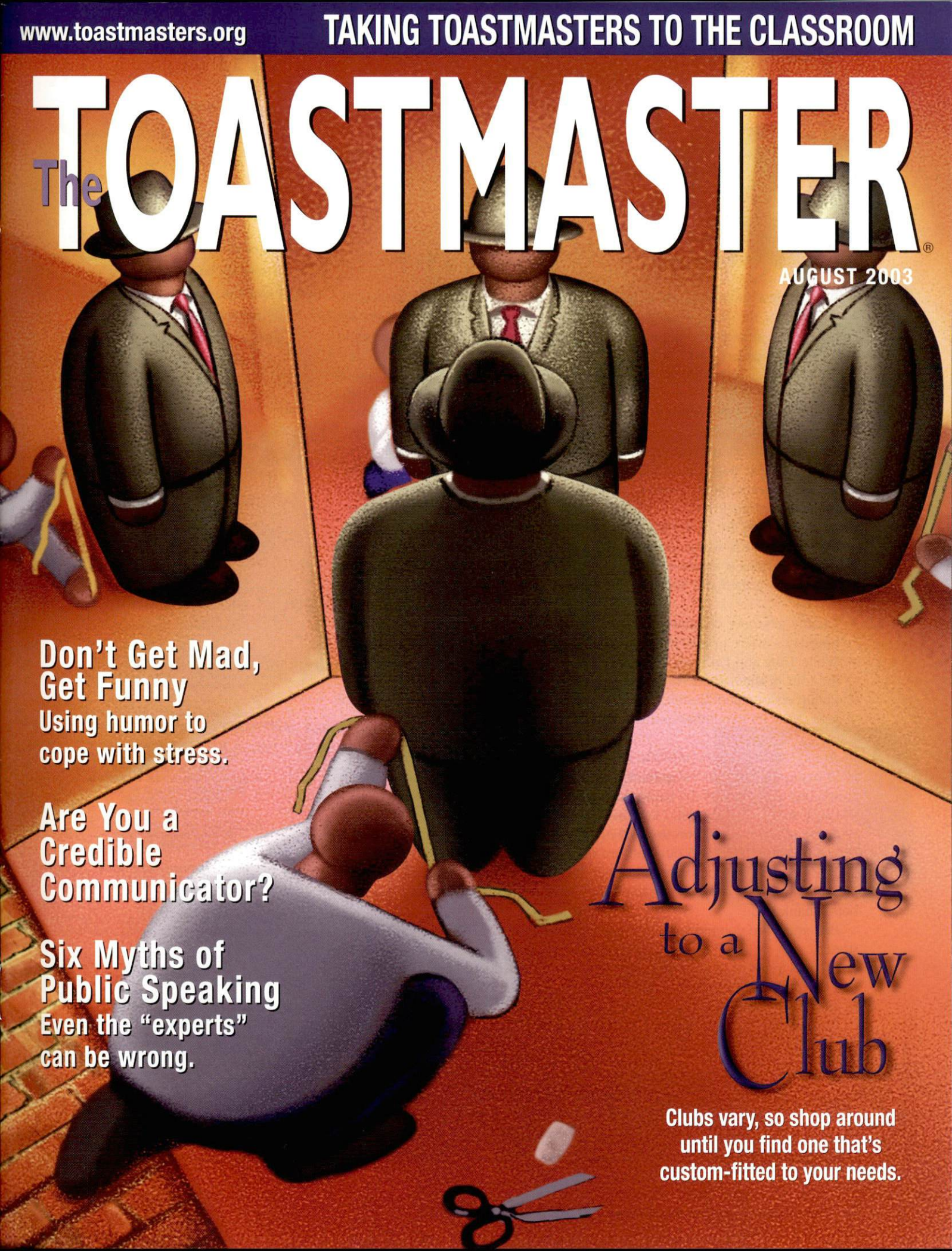
Using humor to  
cope with stress.

**Are You a  
Credible  
Communicator?**

**Six Myths of  
Public Speaking**  
Even the "experts"  
can be wrong.

**Adjusting  
to a New  
Club**

Clubs vary, so shop around  
until you find one that's  
custom-fitted to your needs.





## VIEWPOINT

# Teamwork in Action

◆ MY WIFE, BEA, AND I HAD THE EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY TO SEE TOASTMASTERS in action over the past year. We visited 12 countries, met 4,000 members and have seen the incredible difference our organization is making around the world, regardless of borders and cultures.

Toastmasters International is now represented in 80 countries, with almost 10,000 clubs and 200,000 members. Bea and I met 4,000 Toastmasters – that's only 2 percent of our membership. We still have to meet the other 98 percent! This puts our organization's size into perspective, doesn't it?

Our club and district leaders have had an outstanding year. If you've served as an officer this past year, thank you. You've helped your members achieve their best. Educational completions and the chartering of new members and new clubs are at record levels, and the number of clubs disbanding has dropped – proof that people are maximizing the benefits of their membership.

One reason we're so successful is because we involve our loved ones. Have you considered inviting someone you care about to join Toastmasters? Think of the benefits you have gained and you will find it easy to invite them to join.

- Tammy gave her daughter, Tiffany, a Toastmasters membership for her 18th birthday – what an investment in her future.
- While Tony and Pat were visiting their son, Ken, and daughter-in-law, Cheryl, the four of them chartered the city's first Toastmasters club.
- Phillip encouraged his son, Leonard, to join Toastmasters while he was in college. Now they're father and son DTMs.

Family members also provide great support for Toastmasters leaders. They allow us to spend time away from them so we can serve others. Bea has been incredibly supportive of my leadership roles. We have worked as a team to serve this wonderful organization. I couldn't have done this without her.

Great teamwork also occurs at World Headquarters in California. Executive Director Donna Groh and our staff are dedicated to our organization. Although they've had an enormous year of change, including remodeling the building and implementing new computer systems, they have maintained service to our members. Thank you.

Bea and I are volunteers, like you, and our payment is hearing your success stories.

After 21 years of membership and six years on the Board of Directors, I have had the privilege of seeing firsthand how Toastmasters is bringing out the best in people.

We are honored to have been your International President and First Lady.

*Gavin Blakey*

Gavin Blakey, DTM  
International President

*Bea Duffield*

Bea Duffield, ATM  
First Lady

# The TOASTMASTER

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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.

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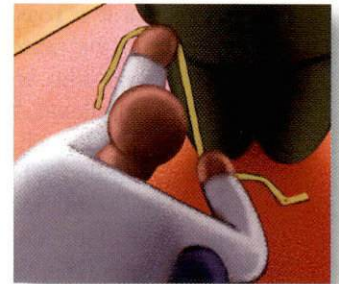
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### Common Sense Reigns

The May magazine's Board Report and the *TIPS* newsletter reported that it is Toastmasters' policy to use Mr. or Madam Chairman for the person presiding over a meeting. When I hear someone who is chairing a meeting being called the Chair or Chairperson, it just doesn't sound right. "Chairman" is a whole word much like "human," "woman" and "manager." I am puzzled why so many people feel the need to remove the word "man" from our language. We haven't started called a human a hu-person or referring to managers as personagers. Thanks for some common sense.

Elliott Katz, CL • Thornhill Club 8517-60 & Toast of the Town Club 8235-60 • Toronto, ON, Canada

### Another Record Breaker

The May issue describes how Jonah Mungoshi gave a 36-hour speech. I congratulate Jonah on this very fine achievement. I am a little surprised to learn that he thought the previous record was 26 hours, as my record of 50 hours 40 minutes set in February 1993 was still listed as the record by *Guinness Book of World Records* a year ago when I was speaking to them about another record we were contemplating as a means of raising Toastmasters awareness in District 70 (the origin of the idea for my 1993 record).

I also congratulate the speaker from India, but have to register a little disappointment that he did not break my record by a larger margin. When I set out to break the record in 1993, I deliberately aimed to break the previous record of 46 hours 10 minutes by a sufficient margin to pay respect to the person who had worked so hard to set it before me.

Incidentally my successful record attempt (as recognized by *Guinness*) was written up in *The Toastmaster* in Volume 59, No 9 in September 1993.

Nigel Bryan, DTM • St. Vincent's Private Hospital Club 1865-70 • Sydney, NSW, Australia

### Be Yourself, and Share the Silence

I would like to respond to two of the May magazine contributors: In her My Turn article, Judi Kanne says: "If you want to communicate from the podium, you should be well-read." I disagree. If you want to communicate from the podium, you should be yourself. By all means prepare – and if that involves reading, thinking, or whatever, fine. But above all, be yourself.

John Cadley says, "When you don't know what you're supposed to know – or when you do know but would rather not say – you can offer an 'I don't know' (and look like an idiot) or remain silent (and look like a crook)." I feel we would all be better off if more of us (especially doctors and teachers) were prepared to say "I don't know" and remain silent when appropriate. The "idiots" are those who don't

admit when they don't know, and who speak for the sake of speaking when it might be better to share the silence.

Dr. Neil Pakenham-Walsh, CTM • Oxford Speakers Club 3297-71 • Oxford, England

### Discovering the Actor Within

What a treat it was to see the April articles on acting and an actor's perspective. Dave Zielinski's tips on "How to Unleash the Actor Within" were right on target. You see, I've just completed my first role in a community play. Not only did I have to play the character, but I also had to carry off an Irish accent and sing a little! These things would never have happened if I hadn't joined Toastmasters. While working through TT's interpretive reading and storytelling manuals, I found that I had a flair for the dramatic. That discovery prompted me to take an acting class. And I actually got a role in the play! Now I find that the acting experience is adding some new dimensions to my speaking style and presentation.

Joy Lewis, DTM • Alpharetta Club 4941-14 • Alpharetta, Georgia

### The Quintessence of Communication

Thank you, Lee Glickstein, for the most meaningful article on public speaking I have read in 30 years. In "Lead with Charisma" (March) Lee expounds on the quintessence of communication. For the very advanced speaker who wants to be more, it's all there in that article. It's obvious that Lee genuinely loves people. "Your vehicle is the relationship you have with your listeners," he says. "Your essence is their essence." Which, taken to its penultimate, is one and the same. Ultimately, we are collectively one. Lee knows that all humankind is connected at levels beyond our perception. He teaches us how to use those levels. The world needs more speakers of his ilk.

Tom Ware, ATM-G • Parramatta Club 2274-70 • Sydney, NSW, Australia

### A Pot of Gold

The May issue of *The Toastmaster* delivered a pot of gold on my doorstep. Several articles have given me good suggestions to improve my communication skills. To excel in these skills, I learned that I should know how to pronounce words accurately (Kimberly A. Porrazzo's "Saying It Right"), read extensively (Judi Kanne's "To Be a Speaker, You Must Be a Reader"), and write regularly (Patricia Fry's "The Write Way to Success").

I may know hundreds and thousands of English words. But those words are of no use to me unless I know how to pronounce and use them correctly – both grammatically and idiomatically – in speaking and writing.

Ng Yee Chong, DTM • CPA Advanced Club 5255-51 • Singapore



Once a Toastmaster,  
always a Toastmaster

## Retirement – Reenlistment

◆ “JIM, WOULD YOU PLEASE STEP INTO MY OFFICE?” IT WAS the voice of my new boss, Bob West, manager of *The Spokesman Review’s* Retail Advertising and Sales Department. I had only been under his supervision for a few weeks and was thrilled with my first step up the corporate ladder.

Hesitantly, I entered his office and stood in front of his desk thinking, “Surely I haven’t goofed up already. I tried to do everything just right.” I also knew the rest of the staff was watching my discomfort as I sat down in his large, windowed office.

I took a seat at his oak desk and waited nervously. As his face broke into a large grin, he asked, “Jim, have you ever heard of Toastmasters?” I breathed a sigh of relief. “No, Mr. West. But I sure would like to.” And there lies the tale of my introduction to Toastmasters International.

He began to tell me about Toastmasters. He couldn’t contain his enthusiasm, and his grin turned into a huge smile. For the next 30 minutes, I heard about everything I could gain as a member of Gavelier’s Toastmasters Club. He had yet to mention that he was its president.

After listening to Mr. West extolling the benefits I would derive from attending and possibly joining his group, I was convinced. I wanted to be part of an organization that had attracted so many of our city’s business leaders. When I left his office, now more than 35 years ago, I had joined Gaveliers Toastmasters.

I never had a problem speaking in front of a group – or so I thought. So I joined Toastmasters for the camaraderie and knowledge I expected to gain from the group of people I would have breakfast with on Monday mornings. The friendships I formed during this time – not to mention business contacts – were invaluable and have proven everlasting.

As the weeks progressed, I realized my first impressions were way off base. My speaking ability was becoming more adept after each meeting. I was definitely honing my speaking skills and I knew it.

Five years and three children later, plus another step up the corporate ladder to management, I didn’t feel that I had the time to devote to Toastmasters and tendered my resignation. A choice, I’m sure, made by many young executives in Toastmasters at this stage in their busy life.

Life went on as it always does and suddenly, I was retired. My children had moved on to begin families of their own and my wife and I began examining our lives, looking for a purpose in the “Golden Years.” I began freelance writing and started putting together information for a book, but something was still missing.

And then I was called. Not into my boss’s office as before, but on the phone by a friend I had met at church, Terry Canfield. “Jim, how would you like to join Toastmasters?” he asked. This familiar phrase brought back so many wonderful memories I almost dropped the phone. His enthusiasm and warm friendly voice sounded so much like all the Toastmasters I had ever met; it was frightening. In a good sort of way.

When I left Bob West’s office, I started my journey with Toastmasters – a decision I never regretted. And with that simple phone call four years ago, it began again. Terry and the Lamplighters Toastmasters recruited, reenlisted and retreated this retired Toastmaster.

In honor of my reenlistment and to all other members on the Toastmasters journey, whether you are at the dawn of your experience or nearing its dusk, I offer this congratulatory toast: “Once a Toastmaster, always a Toastmaster!” **T**

**James A. Nelson** is a freelance writer and member of Lamplighters Club 449-9 in Spokane, Washington.

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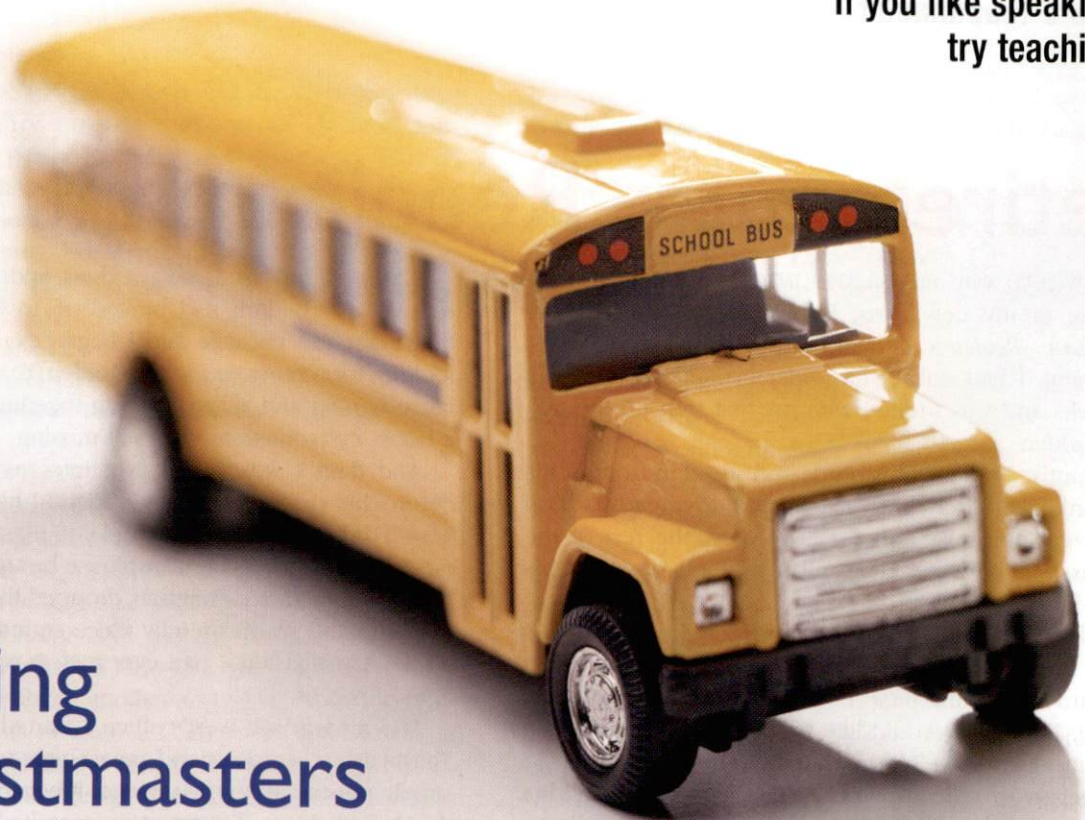
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## Taking Toastmasters to the Classroom



As a result of corporate buyouts, I recently found myself scanning the classifieds for a new employment opportunity. With the economy sagging, and world events seemingly gone haywire, I decided that it might be a good time to reevaluate my values and goals before jumping back into the corporate world. I had always dreamed of being a public speaker – that's why I joined Toastmasters and worked my way through the CTM. That's what I'd really like to do, but how to get started?

As I scanned the classifieds, I saw an advertisement that read: Substitute Teachers Wanted. Hey, I thought, I may not be a certified teacher, but I do have a bachelor's degree, and I do have my Toastmasters training.

I signed up for a three-day seminar with the Department of Public Instruction for substitute teachers, paid to have a background check and registered with a school district in my area. In just three weeks, I was given my first substitute teaching assignment.

As with any new position, my first day was filled with apprehension. I decided that, to cover for my lack of real

classroom experience, I would strictly follow the teachings of my Toastmasters club. I arrived at the classroom early to check out the tools I would be using, such as the overhead projector and audiovisual equipment, and to quickly study the lesson plan for the day.

I positioned myself outside the door to the classroom and I made it a point to greet each student as they entered. Toastmasters teaches us that this is the mark of a professional, and sure enough, the students relaxed when they saw an unfamiliar but friendly face in the classroom. Also, I wanted to make that personal connection with a few of the students before class, so I could later call on them by name to help with classroom chores and routines.

When the bell rang for class to begin, I said to myself, "It's showtime, and your paying audience awaits!" I put a lot of energy into my walk from the classroom entrance to the lectern, heightening the pace of my step, using hand gestures as I followed the first step in the "golden rule" of our Toastmasters club: Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.

Following this technique solidifies the interest of the class and helps dispel the notion of those few students who think that this is going to be an "easy day" because they have a substitute.

As a substitute, you don't get a lot of time to prepare. Usually you don't know until the morning of the assignment what subject, what grade, or even where you'll be teaching. This is where my training in Table Topics came in handy. Table Topics teaches us to think on our feet, to subtly move the subject matter from the unfamiliar to the familiar. I was once assigned to teach a high school class that was studying the poetry of Hilda Doolittle. I admit that my knowledge of her work was scant at best, but I was able to generate a lively discussion, nevertheless, and walked away with more knowledge from that class than when I entered it.

Our Toastmasters club stresses the importance of getting to know your audience. This is pretty easy when teaching, because you know the educational level and general interest of the audience. You certainly would not present to the 6th grade the same way you would to a high school class. But because you know the level at which you are expected to teach, you can quickly modify your message and present using the same techniques.

You will want to use all the tricks-of-the-trade that you learned in Toastmasters to enhance your classroom experience. Vocal inflection, hand gestures, moving away from the lectern – all are techniques that work well in a classroom setting. I've also found that occasionally invading the student's comfort space, without being intrusive, helps to enforce discipline and maintain interest – a critical challenge for the substitute teacher. The most important thing any Toastmaster will learn from substitute teaching is how to read an audience. Believe me, middle- and high-school students let you know in a heartbeat whether or not you have commanded their attention.

*When the bell rang for class to begin, I said to myself, "It's showtime, and your paying audience awaits!"*

Middle school students are naturally interested in any new substitute teacher's personal life. I usually end the last period of the day by tossing around a nerf-ball for a few minutes. When a student catches the ball, I get to ask a question about the day's lesson. If the question is answered correctly, they get to ask me any question they like. Usually I'll get questions like, "Where are you from?" "What do you do for a living when you are not teaching?" "Do you have any children?" or "How old are you?" It's a fun game and it lets the students get to know me, but I generally keep my answers to those given in my Ice Breaker speech.

The term "substitute teacher" is somewhat of a misnomer. There simply is no substitute for a well-qualified teacher in the classroom. However, teachers, like the rest of us, get ill, need a day off for personal business, or need to attend a seminar or conference. That leaves the school administration with the need to find a suitable replacement.

Every state (and country!) has different requirements for substitutes. Many U.S. states require a teacher's certification. Some states will issue a temporary license if you have a bachelor's degree. Still other states will allow you to sub with a two-year degree or, in some areas, with a high school diploma if you obtain special training from the school district. Check into the requirements for your geographic area and school district. You may find that you qualify already, or that you need only an additional college-level class or two. In any event, you may find – as I did – that substitute teaching, and the chance to put your Toastmasters training to use, can be very rewarding. **T**

**Charles P. Howes, CTM**, is a freelance writer, substitute teacher and a member of Green Bay Club 1350-35 in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He may be contacted at [www.charleshowes.com](http://www.charleshowes.com).

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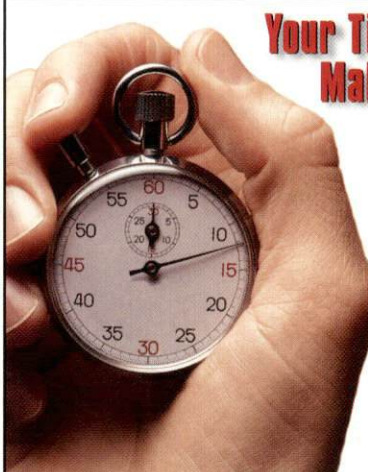
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# Adjust to New



**D**o you remember the first time you walked into a Toastmasters meeting? If you're like many newcomers, your palms were sweating, your knees were knocking and your throat seemed to have your vocal chords in a chokehold. It's was uncomfortable, but most of us survived.

Soon we felt at ease in our clubs. We looked forward to attending weekly meetings and accepted every opportunity to speak. And then something happened to upset our perfect Toastmasters world: It became necessary to change clubs.

It happens! People move, schedules change and clubs fold. Sometimes we outgrow our primary club and join others to tackle additional challenges.

If you've changed clubs or visited other Toastmasters clubs, you know they can vary. While they're all based on the same principles, they can differ in how those standards are carried out. I once belonged to a club that focused on grooming professional speakers. Members consisted of business professionals, including seminar leaders and those promoting a product or a book through public speaking. Standards were high and rules were rigid. For example, presenters who exceeded their time limit didn't qualify for the Best Speaker award that evening. Evaluations were strict, reflecting our members' high expectations. Over time, old members left, new ones joined and the club's character began to change.

No longer feeling challenged and having grown weary of the 20-mile drive twice a month, I eventually stopped attending.

Several years later, I joined a new club closer to home. I soon realized this club was very different from the one I originally joined. As this club developed, I yearned to share the things I liked best about my old club. I wanted to see some of the same standards used in this new club. But I kept quiet because I sensed that this group of Toastmasters had different goals from those of the members of my first club, and it became obvious that I had three choices: I could try to convince members to adopt my ideas. I could transfer to another club. Or I could adjust.

Are you among the hundreds of Toastmasters who will change clubs or become a dual member this year? While some of you will easily adjust, others will find it excruciatingly difficult to conform to new standards. Following is a guide to help you adjust:

■ **Be clear about your personal goals.** Ask yourself what you hope to gain from the Toastmasters experience and then evaluate each club from that perspective. If your goal is to earn your CTM quickly, you may want to join a smaller club that meets weekly so you'll have more speaking opportunities. If you're a seasoned Toastmaster, you'll probably prefer a club with several advanced Toastmasters who can help you achieve your more lofty goals. If you're simply interested in honing your basic communication skills, consider joining a new club made up of other beginners.

Joyce Shaul is a veteran Toastmaster who joined Bay Cities Toastmasters in Torrance, California, in 1982. She was very active in the club, serving in nearly every board position. When she moved to Ventura County, California, in 1998, she began searching for a new club. She says, "I attended a few clubs convenient to my home and selected Ventura Toastmasters." Shaul made it a point to choose another long-standing club. She explains, "The format is very similar, and not much adjustment was required."

■ **Go club shopping.** You don't have to join the club that's closest in proximity to your home or job. Maybe you prefer evening meetings to those held in the morning or at noon. Perhaps you'd rather join a club that meets twice a month instead of weekly. And what about the age issue? Although most Toastmasters clubs welcome members of any age, some might attract mostly college students or a majority of retired folks.

"If you're facing a move," Shaul advises, "get on the Toastmasters International Web site and locate clubs in your new area before you move." Suppose you join a club that you discover you dislike? Shaul suggests transferring to a more congenial club as soon as possible. "Every club needs a cohesive group comprised of compatible members," she points out. "There are so many types of clubs around that I'm certain you can find a suitable one."

# Joining a New Club

**Clubs vary, so shop around until you find one that's custom-fitted to your needs.**

■ **Join without expectations.** If you expect anything while searching for the right club, expect differences. No two clubs will be the same, because each is made up of a different collection of individuals and perspectives. It is these variations that present the greatest opportunities for personal growth. In fact, you will be doing yourself a favor if you don't settle on the club that feels most comfortable right off the bat. Open yourself up to challenges.

Kelly McKeethan, DTM, is a member of Downtown Dazzlers in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She says that approaching a new club without expectations helped her to grow. Here's her story: "I moved to a new town and joined a new Toastmasters club. I was an ATM and had well-polished skills. One veteran member felt I was too polished and needed to loosen up some. I figured that since he had been in Toastmasters for many years, I could take a pointer from him. I began to loosen up and worked more ad-libs into my presentations. I feel that this experience helped my speaking skills."

If McKeethan had gone into this club with the expectation that everyone would be in awe of the professional speaking skills she had worked so hard to develop, she may have missed an opportunity to advance.

■ **Let go of your attachments.** Avoid being so rigid that you can't accept new ideas. I know a long-time Toastmaster who club-hops. She can't tolerate clubs that operate differently from her original club. She never stays in a club very long because she constantly criticizes the members' ways of doing things. Rather than helping, she ultimately offends members, and they leave or the club asks her to leave.

Shaul sometimes offers her services to help establish new clubs and bolster those that are struggling. Some years ago, she joined one that was faltering. She says, "I eagerly responded when my suggestions were requested after attending a few meetings – notably, I proposed that the business part of the meeting should come toward the end instead of the beginning. I felt that holding Table Topics first and encouraging guests to join in provided a more exciting beginning for the meetings." Her suggestions were ignored. Officials kept the same format and the club soon folded.

■ **Avoid thrusting your opinions on anyone.** Go to a new club with an attitude of respect rather than condemnation. Participate with an open mind. If you see a blatant weakness in the club's structure, and you have a better idea, here are a couple of things you can do:

- Speak to the club president and suggest that he/she take your idea to the next board meeting.
- Ask if you can attend a board meeting to present your idea.

*"No two clubs will be the same, because each is made up of a different collection of individuals and perspectives."*

- Offer to give an educational session on the topic of your concern.

During her services as area and division governor, McKeethan learned that "It's usually better to offer input after being asked to do so."

### **Molding the Club to Fit the Member**

While members typically create a club's atmosphere, it's the officers who must do the nurturing. They are responsible for supporting ideas and activities that promote a positive environment and rejecting those that are detrimental. Board members of successful clubs are open-minded as well as discriminating.

Pete Bedell belongs to Tampa Downtowners in Tampa, Florida. He says that experienced Toastmasters often join his club bearing gifts. He explains, "In general, people have brought some good ideas with them, but they introduce those ideas slowly when they are appropriate. Some stick and some don't. Whichever occurs, I think the club is better off for it. I think our club has pretty much the same atmosphere as when I originally joined. The impact of these new ideas has enriched us in more subtle ways."

It's a real boost in the arm for a club when it attracts a newcomer. Every member has the opportunity to benefit. When your club lands a new member, take it upon yourself to help the newcomer adjust to your club format. Listen to his or her ideas and consider those that have a measure of merit.

One of my club's new members suggested another meeting place right off the bat. There were several factors to consider. On the con side:

- Our current meeting place was more centrally located.
- We had just done some advertising that directed potential members there.
- We could get breakfast at a reasonable price.

The pros were:

- The new place was free.
- The meeting room would be quieter.
- We wouldn't be required to pay for a meal.

We agreed to take the newcomer's suggestion and move. We have not regretted this decision.

When you join a club, check out the opportunities and challenges within the club's structure before trying to force any changes. If you see room for improvement that will benefit the entire club, offer your ideas with the utmost respect and generosity. After all, isn't part of the Toastmasters experience about learning how to conform? **T**

**Patricia L. Fry, CTM**, is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to this magazine. She lives in Ojai, California.

By Craig Harrison, DTM

**In every situation,  
become known  
as a person of  
your word.**

## Are you a Credible Communicator?

**W**hen you speak, do people listen? You don't have to shout or use a bullhorn to command attention and respect in the workplace. But you do have to be credible.

Credibility in the workplace means believability. Simply put, do people believe what you say? Is your reputation based on a track record of telling the truth? Are your estimates accurate, your forecasts realistic and your words solid? Or are you simply a big talker, a storyteller or a spin doctor? Strive to be a credible communicator.

### **The Right Way to Write and Speak**

From the moment you submit a résumé and then interview for a job, the credibility counter is activated. Are your *curriculum vita's* assertions accurate, your chronology factual and your affiliations, degrees and awards correct? Whether spoken or written, our communication must withstand the test for truthfulness.

Whether or not any inaccuracies are uncovered during the interview process, you can lose your job and damage your career immeasurably when you lie, misstate or misrepresent



sent your accomplishments. Pulitzer-prize winning authors have been undone, as have supposed war heroes and many a politician, by aggrandizing or completely falsifying their ac-

complishments. You're also susceptible to blackmail when you lie, by being threatened with exposure. Sports coaches who lie on their résumés, personalities who misrepresent stock transactions, or even athletes whose apologies for transgressions lack sincerity pay the price for their lapses in credibility.

### **Your Word is Your Bond**

People listen to what you say and how you say it. In every job situation, you have the opportunity to become known as a person of his or her word. Conversely, you can become

known for shading the truth, for telling people what they want to hear, or parsing words as a defendant might do under cross-examination in a court of law.

We've all heard of the boy who cried wolf so many times that when a wolf finally appeared, people had stopped listening. This boy's credibility had long ago turned non-existent. The same is true in the workplace. Whether you cry racism, sexism, ageism or favoritism, it's important that there be credence to your claims. You do everyone a disservice if you falsely accuse or ascribe such motives to people.

### Words Are Sticks and Stones

Beyond misrepresenting your own accomplishments or capabilities, be cautious of assertions made about others. Character assassination can be fatal to careers, and not just to those of the persons you're criticizing. Whether or not you're a manager, your words carry a weight that affects others. Gossiping about others or even spreading half-truths can flag you as dangerous, untrustworthy and ultimately, not promotable material.

One of the keys to success in the workplace is engendering trust from your co-workers. If you are gossiping or

betraying confidences, you destroy your own credibility – as an honorable co-worker, a safe confidante and an ally.

### Take the High Road

Workplaces provide ample opportunities for you to earn credibility. Your credibility rises every time you make a deadline, do what you say you'll do or are there in a time of need for others, the department or your company at large.

When you defend the honor of co-workers who aren't present, refuse to engage in gossip, or caution others to give co-workers the benefit of the doubt, you are showing wisdom and professionalism, which raises your credibility in the workplace.

Similarly, when you "say the right thing" or "do the right thing" in ethical situations, your credibility is enhanced.

### Tell It Like It Is

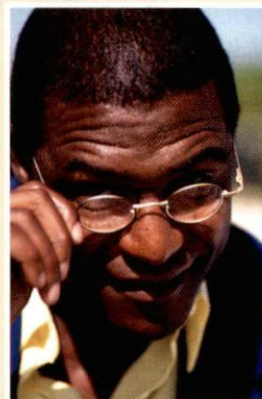
Often employees fall down when it comes to admitting mistakes. But credible communicators acknowledge their errors in a forthright and direct manner, remedy the mistakes and thus restore confidence in themselves. Those lacking in credibility might try to cover up, ignore or minimize their folly, often compounding the error of their ways. Ultimately, it's less important that you made a mis-

## When in Doubt, Tell the Truth

◆ IN 1992 NORTHWEST AIRLINES RAN PRINT AND TV ads claiming to be "Number one." Southwest Airlines responded with this ad: "After lengthy deliberation at the highest executive levels, and extensive consultation with our legal department, we have arrived at an official corporate response to Northwest Airlines' claim to be number one in Customer Satisfaction. 'Liar, liar. Pants on fire.'"

Children might use this refrain, but as adults, we have learned it's not polite to embarrass someone we've caught shading the truth. But just because no one confronts you doesn't mean they don't know you've lied. As speakers, communicators and leaders, our credibility depends on how we handle the following pitfalls:

■ **The accidental or unintended lie.** Many speakers qualify an anecdote by saying, "This is a true story." This statement inevitably creates doubts that everything else they have said is either false or half true. It's best to always cite the source of a story or statistic. That way, if the story proves false, you will not be accountable. For example, the opening story of this article can be found in the book *Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipes for Business and Personal Success* by Jackie and Kevin Freiberg.



By Tara Rishter, Ph.D., DTM,  
and Kai Rambow, DTM

■ **The false claim.** Many speakers have the bad habit of claiming someone else's material, particularly jokes, as their own. I've heard one professional speaker say, "I tell who told the joke, the first time. Then I acknowledge, 'As someone once said...'" And then I claim it as my own, 'As I've always said....'" How unprofessional!

Someone in the audience will surely know the original source, which these days is usually the Internet. This approach has two problems: The jokes usually have nothing to do with the subject matter, and everyone knows the punch line. You'll be better off working through Toastmasters' advanced manuals such as *The Entertaining Speaker*, so that you can be both dynamic and have original material.

■ **The incongruent lie.** During one presentation, a speaker emphasized the importance of "family values" and spending time with his family. An hour later, the same speaker bragged about being away from home, speaking on average 28 days out of every month. His listeners didn't miss this incongruency. Match your actions to your words.

■ **The manipulation lie.** This is another version of the false claim. Leaders often make decisions on their own and then

take than that you acknowledged it, fixed it and assured others that it wouldn't happen again.

### Know When to Say No

The credible communicator doesn't just tell people what they want to hear. Life would be easy if we could say yes to every request we received. Yet realistically, agreeing to something you ultimately can't deliver is detrimental to your reputation. Develop the fortitude to say no when it's the right answer, even through it may not be the popular one. Over the long term, you will be respected for the accuracy of your assessments, decisions and determinations, even if the news isn't music to the ears of all who listen. Sometimes the truth isn't popular or pretty, but a person who is a "straight shooter" is respected by all.

### Credibility Implicit in "A Toastmaster's Promise"

A great place to become a credible communicator is in your Toastmasters club. When you joined, you dutifully promised to serve your club, its members and Toastmasters International. As a member, honor your commitments.

*"Sometimes the truth isn't popular or pretty, but a person who is a 'straight shooter' is respected by all."*

Develop a reputation for fair, accurate assessments of others and yourself. Demonstrate a keen appreciation for the power of your own words to speak volumes about your own credibility. Credible communicators are both constructive and consistent communicators. They can be counted on to speak the truth at all times. Use your club meetings and relationships as opportunities to enhance your credibility!

### Earning Your Stripes

Strive to boost your credibility rating at work and in your professional relationships beyond your home club. You'll know you're succeeding when others tell you they know they can count on you, have confidence in your projections and feel secure in their knowledge you're on the team. Don't be in-credible – strive to be incredible! **T**

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say, "The committee decided..." Don't pull others into your lie. Instead, take responsibility for your decisions.

■ **The white lie** is tempting because it's usually used to spare someone else's feelings or make ourselves look good. For example, we might give a laudatory evaluation of a mediocre speech because we don't want to hurt the speaker's feelings. Or we rationalize with an excuse for being late to work. We'll lie and say, "The traffic was heavy," or "The car broke down." The problem with these excuses is that they have been used so often, that even if they were true, people will question them. It's best to just apologize and say nothing more.

■ **The lie of omission.** Evaluators may be faced with this dilemma: A speaker says something inappropriate or offensive. Rather than deal with a tough situation, the evaluator will congratulate the speaker and fail to mention the transgression. If you ignore the problem, you'll in effect silently state that it is acceptable. Instead, address the issue in a professional and tactful manner.

■ **The exaggerated lie.** People and organizations often exaggerate their claims to make the truth look better. Advertising is a good example of this. Remember, someone in the audience is bound to know the truth. Always be willing to substantiate any claims or statements you make.

■ **The outright lie.** One politician had his election team produce a book outlining his party's plan for governance. While running for office, he boldly responded to a question by saying, "It's

on page 110." The problem was that the book he was referring to wasn't even 100 pages long.

■ **The substitution.** To appear politically correct, people often lie by using vague terms and phrases, such as "It may have been misleading"; "You misunderstood"; "We have a different definition"; "Under the current interpretation." Never disguise a lie with clever wording. The truth may be uncomfortable, but people have a right to be treated respectfully and honestly.

Whenever you are tempted to "twist" the truth, remember that it usually means you have to invent more lies to support the first one. In addition, you need to remember the lie(s) in order not to be discovered. This requires quite a bit of energy and memory.

Telling the truth, consistently, adds to your believability, credibility and respectability. People will trust you, and know that you are reliable and have integrity. When we are honest, we feel good about ourselves and have peace of mind knowing we have treated others well.

Sir Winston Churchill expressed it best with these words, "The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, and ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is." **T**

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By Carmine Gallo

Author and leadership expert  
John Maxwell shares his  
“Irrefutable Laws of Leadership.”

## Building Blocks of Leadership

“People buy into a leader first, then the vision.” When I first heard John C. Maxwell speak those words at a recent business conference, I was impressed. In my years of communications coaching, I have been trying to impress upon clients that people buy into an idea only after a leader lays out a clear and compelling vision. So it’s imperative that people work on their leadership skills *before* attempting to rally others behind their company, service or cause.

But what are the qualities of a great leader? I again turned to Maxwell, who is an expert on the subject, having written about it in some 30 books and spoken to millions of people through sold-out speaking engagements. His recent book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, is a business bestseller. He granted *The Toastmaster* a rare interview for this article.

Maxwell began our conversation by outlining the building blocks of a successful personality: Relationship building (ability to get along with others), equipping (ability to share your vision), positive attitude and leadership ability. But he stressed that while all these traits are important, “everything rises and falls on leadership.”

Maxwell says the importance of leadership can be summarized in the Law of the Lid (Irrefutable law #1): *Leadership ability is the lid that determines your effectiveness. The lower your ability to lead, the lower the lid on your potential.* But leadership skills are not built overnight, Maxwell stresses. “They are developed daily by reading, listening, attending workshops and conferences, as well as regular Toastmasters meetings, and sharing ideas. Successful leaders are learners. And the learning process is ongoing, a result of self-discipline and perseverance. The goal each day must be to get better, to build on the previous day’s progress.”

According to Maxwell, “All great leaders share the ability to build and lead teams. One is too small a number to achieve greatness. Building a team is difficult, but you cannot do anything significant without one [a team]. A group is not a team. A team shares vision, mindset and heart. The compounding of great ideas happens in a team. And a great idea is the result of several good ideas.”

Maxwell stresses that every member of a team should have a role to play that fits into the big picture (Irrefutable law #2). Maxwell cites the example of Winston Churchill to illustrate how people buy into the leader before they accept

the vision. During the darkest days of World War II, England was struggling to keep coal miners working at dirty, thankless jobs. Instead, the miners chased the vision of glory on the battlefields and began enlisting in droves. One day, Churchill faced the miners and painted a picture of England's glorious war effort and how critical their work would be to the day England stood victorious. He convinced the miners that the goal is more important than the role.

According to Maxwell's Law of Connection (Irrefutable law #10), "effective leaders know you have to touch people's hearts before you ask them for a hand." In other words, are you likable? Do you connect with your team, audience or peers? Are you warm and engaging? Would they follow you anywhere? If not, you are failing to make the connection. I have seen too many leaders and speakers with great credentials and ideas fail to make this all-important emotional connection and, as a result, fail to reach their full potential. As Maxwell says, "The stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the follower will want to help the leader."

The law of connection helps Maxwell stand apart as a communicator. "All great leaders have one thing in common," says Maxwell. "The ability to connect with an audience."

Maxwell begins each speaking engagement by learning as much as he can about his listeners – their hopes, fears, challenges, ambitions, expectations. As an accomplished speaker, he is adept at spending the first three- to five-minutes of each presentation getting a sense of what resonates with a particular audience and when they tune out.

Adapting a presentation in the middle is a powerful skill, but difficult to master.

Maxwell mentions a famous Las Vegas entertainer, Danny Gans, as an example of someone who is an expert at adapting his presentation to an audience. As an entertainer, Gans is second to none with a \$150 million dollar deal to perform at a theater named after him at The Mirage hotel and casino. Although he performs nightly, only the first 20 minutes of the show is the same every night; the rest is improvised based on the reaction from each night's audience. Few of us can easily change or presentation in mid course, but being flexible is a valuable trait and an essential quality of the leader as communicator.

"A public speaker is self-focused while a communicator is other-focused," says Maxwell. "Instead of saying to yourself, 'here is my subject,' shift focus to the audience. Ask yourself, 'What do they want to learn from me?'"

Shifting the focus from "me to we," as Maxwell likes to say, can also relieve speaking anxiety. If you still have butterflies, Maxwell recommended to know your subject cold. Preparation breeds success which breeds confidence. Of course, there are no shortcuts to speaking success. Experience counts and Maxwell has experience in abundance. **T**

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*"Everything rises and falls on leadership. If I can make others become better leaders, it can make a positive impact in every aspect of their lives. That's really the heart of what I do – add value to people's lives. That's my greatest desire, and my greatest privilege."*

– JOHN C. MAXWELL

## The Paradoxical Commandments

By Kent M. Keith

1. People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.
10. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway. **T**

From *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*, by Kent M. Keith. Visit his Web Site, [www.paradoxicalcommandments.com](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com).



Trust isn't automatic;  
it must be earned.

## A Matter of Trust

◆ IN THE FALL OF 1982, SEVEN PEOPLE IN CHICAGO'S WEST Side died after taking Extra-Strength Tylenol® capsules that had been laced with cyanide. When the deaths were linked to Tylenol®, executives at Johnson & Johnson were faced with a monumental choice: shirk responsibility and assert that the tampering had occurred after the product had reached store shelves, or hold themselves accountable for the entire disaster and take drastic steps to restore trust in their brand and their company.

They chose the latter.

They immediately told customers across the country not to consume any Tylenol® products until they could determine the extent of the tampering. They halted all advertising and production of the brand. And they recalled all Tylenol® capsules from the market – about 31 million bottles with a retail value of more than \$100 million.

These actions, along with other steps Johnson & Johnson took when it reintroduced Tylenol® later, helped restore the public's faith in the company. The fact that corporate leaders valued character more than their own success is a key reason why Johnson & Johnson was able to emerge from this crisis with its good reputation – and its most profitable brand – still intact.

You may not be guiding a large corporation through a national public relations nightmare, but maintaining the trust of the people you lead is as important to you as restoring the trust of the American public was to Johnson & Johnson in the early '80s. That's because leadership functions on the basis of trust; it is the foundation upon which every relationship – at work, at home, in the community or anywhere else – is built.

As the makers of Tylenol® realized, trust isn't automatic; it must be earned. You can't demand it from others; you receive it. But you receive it only when you have three key attributes: character, competence and consistency. These three must mesh together for you to build trust and receive trust from the people you are leading.

Of course, once you have the trust of your people, you have to maintain it. If you slack off and start thinking only of yourself, you'll betray that trust and your ability to lead will be severely compromised. Fortunately, there are certain steps you can take to keep that from happening. Here are a few:

**1 Focus on shared goals more than personal agendas.** Never forget the fact that you are leading your company, office, team or department for the benefit of the people. When it comes to trust, it's not all about you.

**2 Stay away from politics.** Let it be known that you can't be bought. Don't even think about going down that road.

**3 Do the right thing regardless of personal risk.** If doing what's right causes you to get hurt, then grit your teeth and take the pain. That's what it means to be a leader.

*"You must have character, competence and consistency to build trust and receive trust from others."*

**4 Be accountable to others.** Don't rely solely on your own judgment to keep you on track. Ask a few trusted colleagues or mentors to keep tabs on how you're doing in all these areas.

**5 Follow the Golden Rule.** Treat people the way you want to be treated. It's that simple.

**6 Make sure what you say matches what you do.** This is, by far, the best way to earn and maintain the trust of the people you're leading. On the flip side, the quickest way to betray their trust is to say one thing and do another. If you want a concrete example of this, I have one word for you: Enron.

Next time you visit your local pharmacy, swing by the over-the-counter painkiller aisle and survey the number of products that bear the Tylenol® brand. Burn that image in your mind and call it up occasionally, just to remind yourself about the importance of trust in your role as a leader. As Warren Bennis says, "Without [trust], the leader cannot function."

**John C. Maxwell** is an author of more than 30 books about leadership, including such best sellers as *Falling Forward* and *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Through his company, INJOY, in Atlanta, Georgia, he shares his leadership principles with others through teaching, speaking and mentoring. He trains more than 25,000 leaders in the business world each year through his online training programs, and he reaches millions more through his books and seminars around the world. For more information, visit [www.maximumimpact.com](http://www.maximumimpact.com)





**What we exclude will determine what to include in a presentation.**

## You Don't Say

◆ As presenters, we are concerned with saying the right words, but what we don't say can be just as important. What we exclude will determine what to include in a presentation. Here are some suggestions to help you omit material to strengthen your presentation:

■ **Leave out material the audience already knows.** This requires knowing your audience well. For example, if I'm training a group of experienced speakers, I may leave out material on how to cope with stage fright; they already know how to do that. Ask yourself, "What does my audience already know about my topic?" An easy way to quickly lose your audience is to share information they already have.

Leave out information that is not based on your personal experience, experiences of others or specific research you've conducted. Before delivering your message, look for content that has no specific referent. Cut it out; it's unnecessary and irrelevant.

■ **Leave out extraneous material.** Everything you include should relate either to the point just made or to the key idea of the presentation. Whether it's a manuscript speech or an extemporaneous one, outline it and make sure everything fits. If it doesn't fit into a section of the skeleton outline, eliminate it. Making an outline for each presentation will, in addition, help you tighten the structure and make it easier for the audience to follow you.

Excuses about your lack of preparation for the presentation are good examples of irrelevant material. No one wants to waste valuable time listening to your excuses! Just give them your best and leave out the excuses.

■ **Leave out offensive material.** Read through your script or outline and look for any material that might be considered sexist, biased, patronizing, prejudiced, insulting or profane and leave it out. No matter how similar your audience may look to you, it's still diverse. If you are unsure about any material, leave it out.

■ **Leave out complicated sentences and words.** Oral speech is different from writing. In written script, you can



have long complicated sentences and the reader can easily follow your train of thought. In speaking, however, you want to have succinct sentences. Words for the ear are short, active, alive and instantly clear. We remember excerpts from speeches that follow these criteria: "Give me liberty or give me death!" "The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself." "I have a dream." Patrick Henry, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Martin Luther King Jr., are remembered for their brief, incisive words.

■ **Leave out the best material – until late in the presentation.** Don't put your best ideas or evidence in the speech too early. People take a little while to get into the rhythm of your delivery and content, so they may miss the best "pearl" if you put it at the beginning. People remember

best what you say last (assuming that you don't drone on forever), so you want to save your best until late in the presentation. Certainly you want to have interesting content throughout, but the early part of the speech is primarily to make the audience want to listen for more. Like a good mystery novel, the opening part whets our appetite to read further, but the author doesn't give the best clue until the end. The content of a speech should build to the climax near the end. Begin with an attention-getting device, but leave your most significant material until the end.

A speaker has many techniques to ensure great content in a speech; in addition, use these tips on how to omit material to make a more powerful presentation. What remains should then be relevant, informative and well-adapted to a particular audience. Remember, it's not just what you say that counts, but also what you don't say. **T**

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# THE SIX Myths

**H**ighly experienced public speakers are, mostly, a generous lot. Through books, training sessions and lectures they give freely of the wisdom they've acquired in facing hundreds of audiences. And to a surprising degree, the advice they give on the basic techniques of facing, addressing and entertaining audiences is remarkably similar.

Too often, though, the advice gets distorted. "The problem is that the advice is handed from one speaker to another, and something is lost every time it's repeated," a speech trainer told me. "What we often end up with is a bunch of rules, rigidly applied, that really amount to myths."

In the view of veteran speakers, here are six misconceptions badly in need of some overhaul:

**1 You can "read" an audience or an opponent if you know "body language."** Certainly, some familiarity with body language can help a speaker in debate, public

speaking and interview situations. Most of us accept the idea that moving a fist up and down emphatically will be interpreted as a hostile gesture. We've been assured that anything less than direct eye contact is a sign of "weakness." And we've been told that people who cross their arms are resisting whatever message they are receiving.

But Gwenn Marie, a principal and creative director of Coombs Media in Rochester, New York, feels that body signals can be misleading. Indeed, she feels they work against some speakers by making them more unsure and anxious than they need to be.

"One myth is that there's a certain way to hold your body or use your hands in a presentation," she says. "But I believe there is no substitute for authentic communication – and that audience members just know in their bones when something resonates for them. A 'natural' communication style supports acceptance of your message."

When audience members experience a presenter's style, Marie adds, they make choices about believing the messages, supporting them and repeating them to others. "If the message and delivery is to resonate with audiences, the message must be clear and truthful and include a reason to believe," she concludes. "The delivery should match a presenter's natural style."

Does "eye contact" convey sincerity? Some speakers believe the advice that prolonged eye contact makes a recipient uncomfortable is overempathized. And when a

es frequently are overloaded with facts. But anecdotes are more effective in getting a point across because they connect us emotionally.

"Speakers who feel they can persuade an audience by overwhelming them with facts are either arrogant or terribly naive, or both," says Bill Wheless, of Wheless Communications in Greenville, South Carolina. "If that's all it takes, why not cancel the meeting and e-mail the information to everybody? No, it takes more than facts. The best speakers are those who speak from the heart about things they truly believe; who use colorful language, examples and metaphors. They tell stories to make their facts interesting, understandable and believable."

Former President Ronald Reagan is still considered to be the top communicator among recent U.S. presidents. His speaking ability was one of his administration's leading assets; and the most potent weapon in his communications arsenal was his ability to reach for just the right illustration or example of what he was talking about.

Fortunately, anecdotes are easy to acquire. They can be borrowed, reshaped or even invented. A good place to start, say top speakers, is your own experiences – things that happened to you, conversations you had with other people, ordinary events that took place at home or work.

"Start collecting anecdotes," advises the speech writer for a large corporation. "You might spend a few minutes each day tracking down anecdotal material in newspapers,

*"When a woman holds her arms across her body, is she resisting the message? Maybe she is just feeling slightly chilled."*

# OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

**Even the "experts" can be wrong.**

woman holds her arms across her body, is she resisting the message? Maybe she is just feeling slightly chilled. As for fist-waving, some audiences interpret the gesture as a "show of power" rather than a sign of hostility.

In sum, trying to apply the numerous and sometimes contradictory "guidelines" of body language can get a speaker off his message.

**2 Get the facts right – they'll win the day.** The "facts" offered in a speech certainly need to be right, but they won't necessarily win an audience over. Business speech-

magazines and books. Newspaper feature stories are a rich source of anecdotal ideas for Toastmasters. Read and clip stories in which executives disclose their "secrets of success" or inspirational feature stories about ordinary people overcoming obstacles to succeed.

**3 Open your remarks with a funny story.** Speakers often begin their talks with a joke – sometimes, the kind of story heard in the locker room of the local health or golf club. The problem is that the story often has little to do with the message the speaker wants to get across to

the audience. What's more, the attempt to be funny can be disastrous if the speaker isn't, by nature, a "funny" person.

Jack Valenti, former presidential speech writer and now spokesman for the motion picture industry, puts it this way in his book, *Speak Up With Confidence*: "It's accepted dogma that one should begin a speech – any speech – with some kind of funny story. More often than not the story has little relevance to what follows, and it is usually presented with the skill one might expect of a butcher performing open heart surgery."

The use of humor in a presentation, though, is another matter. Effective speakers use humor to lighten the audience's mood. One veteran speech trainer puts it this way: "Follow the three R's of humor. Make your stories realistic and relevant – and avoid reading them verbatim."

The key to successful storytelling is to offer tales that are believable. If the story doesn't trigger gales of laughter, don't be disappointed; a colorful insight is always entertaining.

**4 Practice makes "perfect."** Some speakers practice their talks five or six times to make sure their presentation will be "perfect" – the gestures, the timing, the bits of humor. It's great to be perfect – but the pursuit of perfection may be a waste of time.

"Perfection – it's highly overrated," says Barbara Rocha, head of Barbara Rocha and Associates, of Pasadena, California. "We want so much to look good and get approval that we focus on trying to be perfect rather than on helping the audience get the message. It's the wrong focus. You'll end up being stiff and mechanical, making it almost impossible to connect with your audience. Speaking is about connecting, not about perfection.

"Rather than being perfect, be human," she adds. "You'll earn more trust and credibility by being genuine than you will by being perfect."

Rocha, author of three books on public speaking including *Getting Over Yourself: A Guide to Painless Public Speaking*, concludes: "It's better to make a mistake and be real than to be perfect and unreachable. So, comb your hair, plan a great message and then get the heck out of the way and let 'er rip. Fie on perfection."

For speakers worried about "ah counters," Rocha comments: "Don't worry about 'ums' and 'ahs.' The audience is on your side. They don't want to be made uncomfortable either, and they want the presentation to be a positive experience."

**5 Nervousness must be conquered.** Getting over the feeling of nervousness or "stage fright" is often a fledgling speaker's number one goal. But it's a goal that can never be completely reached. Even veteran speakers – who may have faced scores of audiences – still experience "the butterflies." So do singers, actors, athletes – even ministers. So common is the experience that it's a sign you're a member of the human race.

Every speaker knows the symptoms: Dry mouth and shrunk throat, quivering legs and fidgety hands, balloons in the stomach, a vapid, quavering voice, and a face that is cast in stone. Usually, the main thought on the speaker's mind is not about communicating with those eyes before him, but wishing he were someplace else.

Fortunately, none of this is serious. It becomes serious only if it short-circuits the speaker's ability to communicate his or her ideas.

Veteran speakers seem to agree that the fear and tension associated with public speaking should be considered a positive influence that sharpens the speaker's strategy to do his or her best. They reason this way: We are always facing difficulties. We make progress by meeting the challenge and conquering our fears. In that way, our emotions motivate greater effort – which invites growth and development.

In sum, "harness the butterflies" to produce a more effective talk.

**6 Establish your expertise to be credible.** Many speakers strive, at the outset of a talk, to lay out their credentials for speaking on the subject at hand. In leaning heavily on their (usually successful) experiences, they hope to convince an audience that they can speak on the particular subject with considerable authority.

But establishing expertise and reeling off personal achievement stories do not necessarily make the speaker more convincing. There are times when relating experiences that ended in disappointment and failure can be highly effective.

Barbara De Angelis, a leading motivational speaker, believes that sharing one's mistakes is a powerful way to connect with an audience. "I was forced, through all kinds of interesting events in my life, to publicly deal with my real failings," she told Michael Jeffreys, author of *Success Secrets of the Motivational Superstars*. "When I did, I knew I could truly trust my success because I knew people really saw me. They didn't see me as an image or a few chosen stories that I thought made me look good."

In sum, don't tell stories that make you seem perfect – but those that make you perfectly human.



Now, let's say you've decided to ignore these "myths." You give your talk, and right in the middle several people walk out. You begin to panic. Why are they leaving? Have you said something wrong?

Relax, say the experts. Those early departers may just be headed for a bathroom. It happens all the time. **T**

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

*"You'll earn more trust and credibility by being genuine than you will by being perfect."*

# On Your Own: Tips on Speaking Outside the Club

◆ WHEN WE AS TOASTMASTERS GIVE SPEECHES OUTSIDE OF our Toastmasters club, we quickly discover that the outside speaking arena often isn't as organized and efficient as we are used to. There is no Sgt. at Arms to greet guests and set up the room; no one to ensure that the meeting begins and ends on time, or to give an effective evaluation or positive feedback. However, our ongoing Toastmasters education and training equips us with the ability to be prepared for whatever situation comes our way.

I recently had an opportunity to accompany a fellow club member on a speaking engagement to promote her newly published cookbook. By the time the assembly was over, I had gathered some fundamental information to consider when giving an outside speaking engagement or accompanying someone who is.



- **Take along an assistant** – When you're invited to speak at a function, try to enlist the help of a friend, possibly a fellow Toastmaster. You, as the speaker, want to be mingling with the audience and those who invited you to speak. Your assistant can help you set up your speech materials, pass out your handouts or aid you in anything else you may need.
- **Carry a notebook and pen** – You may have ideas about your presentation or want to write down people's names and phone numbers or suggestions from the audience. Make sure your assistant also has a notebook and pen.
- **Have handouts prepared** – Have your handouts or any information for the audience prepared ahead of time. Don't wait until you get to your meeting assignment to assemble them. Include extras for guests who may not have been able to come. Be sure your phone and fax numbers and e-mail address are on your handouts.
- **Pass out business cards** – Your business cards carry the information necessary for others to contact you. Pass them out to each person you talk with.
- **Wear a name badge** – Take a business card and have it laminated and use it as your name badge. Keep one with you wherever you go. This appears more professional than a write-on paper name tag.
- **Introduce yourself** to whomever invited you to speak as soon as you arrive at your speaking destination. Have a bio prepared for your introduction, but if you are not formally introduced, give your own introduction when you get up to speak.
- **Comment on the previous speaker** – Write down a word or phrase that refers to a topic or remark a previous speaker has mentioned. You are making the audience aware that you have been paying attention to the meeting, thereby personalizing your talk.
- **Know your audience** – Do your homework before you go to a speaking engagement. Learn who your audience is comprised of, what the organization or group to whom you will be speaking represents, and adapt your speech material to that audience.
- If you are doing a no-fee speech, **learn if the group is recording the program**. If it is, ask for a copy of the tape. Also try and secure the names and addresses of the people who attended. If you have a product, such as a book or tape, you may choose to raffle one off and have each person sign up for the drawing, thus gathering names and creating a personal data base for future engagements.
- **Thank your host for inviting you** and ask to come back. Also ask for referrals for other speaking appointments. **T**

Donna M. Adams, ATM-S is a member of Beacon Club 672-13 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Stuck for speech ideas?  
Stimulate your imagination.**



## Get Ideas for Speeches

“Can you do a presentation on next year’s forecasts?” asks your manager. “Can you talk about the society’s aims?” asks a charity colleague. Sure you can. Your Toastmasters training has taught you to develop a good structure and make an impression with your delivery.

“Can you fill a speaking slot at the next Toastmasters meeting?” You can – but you just can’t think of a good idea for a speech subject.

Sound familiar? No matter how experienced you are as a speaker, finding good subject material poses a challenge. Like most challenges, it also creates an opportunity to develop creative thinking skills. Yet another benefit of Toastmasters!

Outside the Toastmasters environment, the audience for any speech is the starting point. You would consider your listeners’ level of knowledge and understanding – and what might interest them.

At Toastmasters, because you know the audience, your starting point has to be your speech objectives. However, your fellow Toastmasters still want to be entertained and possibly taken a little outside their comfort zones, but they don’t want to feel uneasy. Choice of subject material is crucial.

So what do you talk about? How do you get ideas for award-winning speech material?

### Stimulate Thoughts and Ideas

Staring at a blank piece of paper, or a blank screen, won’t bring ideas to mind! Do something. Get your brain working:

- **Pick up a magazine.**

Randomly choose any article and read it.

Try to develop the idea content and see if it could form the basis of a speech.

- **Choose a random word.**

Open a dictionary and choose a word with your finger. Or write down a page number and word number, then see what you get. If one word doesn’t work, find two words. Write one at the top of the page and one at the bottom and develop an association between them.

- **Keep an “idea box.”** Mine is a box file with tear sheets from magazines: cartoons, photos,

words, film reviews, names of books, inspirational quotes – anything that might spark my imagination. Shake it up. Choose one and make it the basis of a speech.

- **Think of a famous person.** Choose a famous person from history – either at random or by looking to see who was born on the current day or during the current month. Research that person; explore possible links with an interest of your own.

*"Anyone who waits to be struck with a good idea has a long wait coming. If I have a deadline for a column or television script, I sit down at the typewriter and just decide to have an idea."*

—ANDY ROONEY

- **Get ideas from other people.** Use every opportunity to sharpen your listening skills. You'll be amazed at how many ideas you'll get from your conversations with others. Or simply ask people for ideas – almost everyone will give you at least one suggestion.
- **Pick a quote.** Use a good quote from a book, or try the Internet to find a quote to spark an idea.
- **Listen to the radio.** In the car, or in a spare moment, tune into different programs. I recently got an idea for my No. 9 speech when I heard a radio interview with a woman who specialized in helping people to "declutter." I opened my speech with a pile of odd socks to catch people's attention!
- **Read widely.** Once you start an idea, develop it as you discover relevant points in related articles.
- **Explore the Internet.** It's a great source of material, but be wary of believing everything in cyberspace! Also be sure not to violate copyright laws.

#### Don't Let an Idea Go

- **Keep a notebook or file on your computer.** Write down ideas as they come, so that you won't forget them.
- **Every idea is good.** As with brainstorming, don't reject ideas or nip them in the bud, particularly if they don't fit with the objectives of your next speech. Make a note, nurture the idea, and it may blossom as material for a later speech.
- **Live and breathe ideas.** Start thinking of ideas as soon as you wake up in the morning and throughout the day.

- **Find thinking time.** Get away from the computer. Go for a walk; enjoy a bath or do anything that stimulates your thoughts. Try silence – some people believe that angels whisper ideas!

#### Make the Idea Your Own

- **Not new, but you.** The biggest problem, fellow Toastmasters tell me, is that they struggle to find totally new subjects. The reality is that nothing is new. Once you accept that every speech doesn't have to be on an original subject, many possibilities open. What the speech has to be is personal, human – and this is especially important – you! At our club we've had speeches on subjects ranging from donating blood to the classic English-cooked breakfast. These are not new subjects, but the speaker's personal interpretation and anecdotes made them interesting.

Remember, the most important thing is to choose a subject you are comfortable with – and one you will enjoy delivering. That way you are sure to be yourself and more confident in the delivery. **T**

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# Don't Get Mad,

# Get FUNNY!

**W**e all know that public speaking can be stressful. In fact, most American adults would prefer having a root canal and a bikini wax at the same time to giving a five-minute speech to an audience of strangers.

Using humor to cope with stress.

There are so many things that can go wrong when you get up on that stage – the microphone might stop working, the slide projector might burn out, the group in the next room might have such a good time that everyone in your audience leaves to see what's up. You might forget everything, including your own name; your bladder might decide halfway into your presentation that it requires your full and undivided attention NOW; you might accidentally spray Silly String on a guy in an African dashiki (hey, it happened to me, it could happen to you).... Is it any wonder that many speakers lie awake the night before a big presentation trying to settle their stomachs and praying for a UFO to carry them away?

But when you think about it, public speaking is really no more stressful than the rest of life. We all face challenges and obstacles every day, no matter what's going on in our lives or what we do for a living. I was listening to a story on the radio one day about divers who retrieve lost golf balls from lakes and other water hazards. The whole time I was thinking, "now there's a low-stress job." Until they interviewed a man who worked on golf courses in Florida and regularly had to fend off alligators! Which just goes to show that we all have our own unique stressors, as well as those most of us share, such as deadlines, long lines, traffic jams, peanut butter sandwiches in the VCR, kids with purple hair and too many holes in places there shouldn't be holes.

Unfortunately, all the little stressors of daily life can take their toll on our health. Recent studies show that up to 40 percent of employee turnover and almost 90 percent of visits to primary care physicians in the United States are for stress-related problems. Which means we stress ourselves out so much that we end up sitting on a cold lab table in a backless paper gown waiting for someone to come poke and prod us – which of course causes us even more stress. Not to mention the stress of trying to get our HMO (Huge Money-grubbing Organization) to pay for the visit.

The physical and emotional toll stress takes can have many forms, including insomnia, headaches, muscle tension, gastrointestinal distress, depression, irritability, lowered immune resistance, increased risk of cardiovascular disease, mood swings, TMJ and anxiety attacks, among others. It makes sense then, that those individuals who learn to cope with stress effectively are healthier. Even better though, is the fact that good stress managers also tend to be happier, more creative, and less likely to have their co-workers or spouses put "Kick Me" signs on their backs.

Being able to find the funny and laugh at yourself is one of the best ways to reduce stress and live a healthier life. Laughing strengthens your immune system, improves your cardiovascular system, produces endorphins that reduce pain naturally, suppresses depression and anger, enhances creativity and strengthens interpersonal relationships – to name but a few of the benefits.





Unfortunately in our "Grow up, get serious" society, we tend not to laugh as often as we should. A recent study of 1,000 adults found that 40 percent didn't laugh at all during a week, while another 40 percent laughed up to 89 times a day. Compare this to the fact that 5-year-old children laugh up to 400 times a day! In this case it's the kids who could teach us a thing or two.

It's one thing to know that laughter is good for you, but another to be able to find your funny bone when everything around you seems to be going wrong. It helps to

have a plan. Here are 10 tips for using humor to cope with your daily stressors:

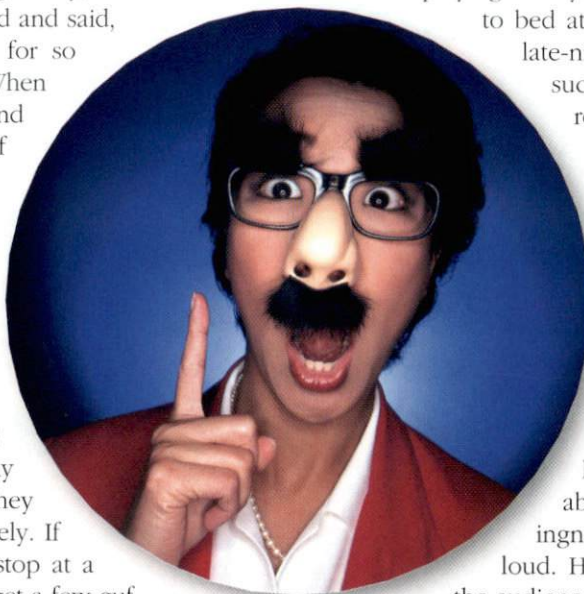
■ **Make funny friends.** People who make you laugh not only give you the gift of laughter (and all the associated benefits), they also help teach you how to change your perspective on life and lighten up yourself. Friends are really important to our ability to find our sense of humor because most of us laugh much more often (up to 30 times more) when we're with others than when we're alone.

Making funny friends can be one of the simplest ways of making sure you get your RDA of laughter.

I am lucky to have dozens of funny friends. My friend Nick, a very large man with a healthy appetite, was waiting in line at a fast food restaurant. The line was moving very slowly and everyone was complaining to the cashier. Finally, when Nick got to the front of the line, the cashier looked up at him and said apologetically, "I'm so sorry about the wait, sir." He smiled and said, "Honey, I've weighed this much for so long, it really doesn't bother me." When I got divorced, my funny friend Rhonda came over with a bag of chocolates and an offer to sleep with her husband in a pinch. Too bad I have that "Never sleep with your best friend's husband on the first date" policy!

■ **Read funny greeting cards, especially if you've had a really stressful day.** Greeting cards are great because they reflect many different senses of humor and they deliver the laugh almost immediately. If you're stuck in rush-hour traffic, stop at a store that sells greeting cards and get a few guffaws in while everyone else sits fuming in their cars. It doesn't hurt to buy a few cards either, to have on hand for special occasions and to keep the clerk from throwing you out of the store.

■ **Have five of your favorite funny movies on videotape so you can watch them when you're feeling overwhelmed by stress.** Consider funny movies to be part of your emergency first-aid humor kit. If you can't think of your favorites offhand, check out the American Film



Institute's list of 100 funniest movies of all time on the Web at [www.AFI.com](http://www.AFI.com).

■ **Start and end your day with something positive and fun.** Too many of us start and end the day by watching news programs, which are neither positive nor funny. Instead, try starting your morning by reading the comics or playing with your pets or children. Before you go to bed at night, do something funny: watch late-night comedians, play a funny game such as Balderdash or Pictionary, or read a good funny book such as Bill Bryson's *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*; Merrill Markoe's *What the Dogs Have Taught Me*; Steve Martin's *Pure Drivel*; Ray Romano's *Everything and a Kite*; or my books, *Bedtime Stories for Dogs* or *Bedtime Stories for Cats*.

■ **Laugh out loud when you find something funny.** Sense of humor has two components: the ability to see the humor and the willingness to take the risk to laugh out loud. How many times have you been in the audience when a speaker told a funny story or joke and you were the only one who laughed? We want others to laugh with us so we often let the group decide what's funny for us. That's why TV sitcoms have laugh tracks – they're afraid you won't laugh if they don't show you that it's okay to do so. Steve Allen Jr. once said, "If it's funny to you, it's funny." So be brave and laugh!

■ **Wear funny buttons in public.** Wearing a funny button communicates to everyone who sees you that you have a sense of humor and are open to humorous experiences. I

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often wear funny buttons to the grocery store, the library, airports, nude volleyball games (okay, maybe not the latter), and I almost always have someone come close to read the button, then share a joke or funny story with me.

■ **Look for the funny.** Instead of focusing on life's miseries, try to find the laughter in everything that goes on around you. Life is as full of things to laugh at as it is full of things to make us sad, irritated or confused; it just takes a shift in our perspective. Here's a good example:

I was driving down the road preparing to make a right-hand turn. Two lanes over, the driver of a gold Jeep Cherokee apparently had the same idea, and as soon as the traffic light turned, he veered in front of the car next to me, then in front of me, practically causing an accident. And as he drove off, he shot me "the finger" because apparently I hadn't gotten out of his way quickly enough. My heart was pounding from the near hit, and my blood pressure was about to go through the roof when I noticed the bumper sticker on the back of the Jeep. It said, "Mean People Suck." Indeed they do, I thought, as I laughed at the irony. By the time I finished laughing, I felt much better, and the desire to stalk the Jeep driver until I could exact my revenge had passed.

■ **Keep a funny journal.** A lot of people keep a gratitude journal in which they write down all the things that happen every day that they are thankful for. This is the funny version: Write down all the stuff that made you laugh today, whether it was a joke someone sent you on e-mail, a silly thing your spouse did, or a picture of how your hair looked when you woke up.

■ **Do things that are stupid and silly on purpose.** Much of our stress comes from fear of making a fool of

ourselves in front of friends or strangers. Face it, that's why most people are afraid of public speaking. And life is full of these kinds of fears. How many women have come out of the bathroom with their skirt tucked in their pantyhose? How many men have come out of the bathroom with their skirt tucked in their pantyhose? (Just checking to make sure you were paying attention!) If you're willing to wear a reindeer antlers to the grocery store in July, do Elvis impersonations on the bus, or sit in a high-chair at your next board meeting, chances are you won't be stressed out by little things like your pants falling down in the middle of your big speech.

■ **Fake it.** Studies show that you don't have to feel like laughing to get the benefits of laughter. It's just like exercise. If you work out you'll get fitter – whether or not you feel like working out. But if you fake laughter, chances are good that you'll soon feel like laughing for real. You should laugh at least once an hour whether or not anything strikes you as funny.

Becoming better at managing stress with humor is a lot like becoming a better speaker: You have to understand the fundamentals, take a few risks, and practice, practice, practice. And don't worry if you don't think you're naturally funny. (I wasn't voted class clown in high school; I was voted most likely to depress people!) Everyone can improve their humor skills and learn to start seeing life through Groucho glasses. **T**

**Leigh Anne Jasheway** is a humor and stress-management speaker, comedy writer and humor teacher. She is the author of nine published books, including *Don't Get Mad, Get Funny: A Light-hearted Approach to Stress Management* and *I'm Not Getting Older (I'm Getting Better at Denial)*.

"Making funny friends can be one of the simplest ways of making sure you get your RDA of laughter."



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**Losing because of too much laughter is better than losing because of no laughter.**

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Humor Contest

I love the sound of laughter, especially when I am intentionally the cause of it. I don't walk around telling jokes, but seeing the funny side of life tickles me, and I enjoy pointing it out to friends.

So a number of years ago when I lived in Las Vegas and the president of our Toastmasters club, Bachelor & Bachelorettes, asked for volunteers for the humorous speech contest, I thought I'd help her out. I had a hilarious memory involving my family and a childhood visit to a newlywed cousin's first apartment. This story had become part of our family lore, a classic in my father's repertoire of funny stories. I had heard him tell it many times, and everyone always laughed with great gusto in all the right spots. My father was my role model for wit, and I have met few people as naturally funny as he. I worked up a speech based on that long-ago visit.

Fortunately I tried it out first on a couple of friends from the club. I was embarrassed when they never even smiled, much less laughed, throughout my retelling of this saga. This brings us to:

■ **Avoid the You-Had-To-Be-There Effect.** Some experiences are hysterical when they happen to you, but unless you are a professional comedian and can judiciously embroider, edit and put over a tale, they are not funny in the retelling. Perhaps with the distance of time, or among people who did not know the original cast of characters, my telling of this story left my listeners cold.

"Don't do it," they advised. "We're not laughing." As if I hadn't noticed. That left less than a week to come up with something else. At the time, I was selling cosmetics for a multi-level marketing firm. Its product line included dozens of facial products for women to beautify their appearances. I thought I'd do a riff on these products, taking the angle of how long it takes women to get ready for dates, and at the same time make a statement about many women's insane need for lots of cosmetics.

■ **Know Your Audience.** My audience, the members of my club, were all single. That was a requirement for member-

ship. We were a very social club and had lots of parties, and in due course, there were a number of marriages among members. When that happened, we had a hilarious ceremony in which the newlyweds were drummed out of the club for breaking the rule.

Therefore, the subject of my talk – getting ready for a date – had my listeners' instant attention.

You would think that cosmetics, however, would be of interest only to women (who comprised half our membership). Nothing could be further from the truth, at least in a comedic context. Some of the men in the audience later told me they were fascinated by my description of how women prepare for a date, the number of cosmetics they use, and what they think as they get dressed. The entire audience was all ears as I outlined how many hours a woman needs to get ready. I summed it up with, "Total number of cosmetics and toiletries used: 98."

■ **Exaggerate.** No one uses 98 cosmetics at one time, you protest. Maybe not, but I got my biggest laugh with that line. My audience screamed. I had to wait for them to calm down before I could proceed with my speech.

If you set up the scene properly, exaggeration is a mighty tool for laughter. The sheer ridiculousness of a statement can render an audience helpless. By contrast, I said men generally use only three toiletries: shampoo, after-shave and, if their dates are lucky, deodorant. That got a big laugh, too. Because:

■ **Contrast.** If you can set up a situation in which you are contrasting things, such as how women – as opposed to men – get dressed for dates, the prospect for humor increases, as does the opportunity to exaggerate. After all, you're not sworn to tell the truth at all times in comedic speeches, only to entertain. Sometimes the more preposterous a statement, the funnier it is.

■ **Make Fun of Yourself.** Be sure you're not offending your audience if you're making fun of something. The

safest way to do this is to use yourself as the subject. For example, if a man had given my speech about cosmetics, he would have been making fun of women and they would not have appreciated it.

In the part of my speech where I described pulling on pantyhose, I warned my audience to be sure to roll the panties all the way up. To emphasize that point, I snapped the top of my own pantyhose through the dress I was wearing. It made a loud noise, but not as loud as the ensuing laughter. Which reminds me of:

■ **Using Gestures in Unusual Ways.** Yes, snapping your underwear is a gesture. So is two thumbs-up; a gesture I used to indicate congratulations for the dating man who remembers to use deodorant.

The gestures described above were unexpected, and surprise is an important element of humor. Most laughter does not come from jokes.

According to Arthur Asa Berger, a former professor at San Francisco State University and author of *The Art of Comedy Writing*, the best way to create humor is to use techniques of humor conversationally, rather than telling jokes with punch lines. This is not to say that jokes aren't funny. But in many cases, the jokes are familiar to the audience, or the speaker does not tell them particularly well. When you tailor your speech to reflect your own experiences, you are creating something fresh that no one has heard before. Once again, the element of surprise works to your advantage.

■ **Have Fun Yourself.** The first person you want to entertain is yourself. Don't memorize your speech – allow for the possibility that you might want to add some impromptu remarks or ad-libs, depending on your audience's reactions during the delivery.

Be sure to try out your speech on friends first, and be guided by their reactions to prevent disaster. Just as I thought my original story about my family would make a funny speech, it turned out to be a dud when I practiced it on friends. I was able to avoid making a fool of myself by quickly changing course and writing another speech.

■ **There Are No Rules.** According to the late Steve Allen in his book *How to Be Funny*, there are no rules about humor or funniness. It's not like a game or a musical instrument, which require certain definite actions to be taken in



*“Be sure to try out your speech on friends first, and be guided by their reactions to prevent disaster.”*

order to be performed successfully. What is funny is a matter of personal opinion.

That is why hearing an audience's laughter at something you say is such an exhilarating experience. You have struck a mysterious chord that resulted in laughter that united your audience in surprise and amusement. You might have broken all the rules mentioned in this article and still gotten big laughs. In all the books on humor I have read, not one “rule” of humor applies to all situations or all people. So consider my “rules” as guidelines for creating laughter. But Toastmasters has rules for their contests, so by all means don't forget the following rule when you participate in a Humorous Speech Contest:

■ **Don't Forget to Allow Time for Laughs.** Did I win the Humorous

Contest that evening? No, I did not. I was told later (in confidence) that although I got the highest score by far, I was disqualified because my speech was two minutes too long.

When you're on a roll and have an audience laughing hysterically, the strange, intoxicating thing (to you) that happens is that they begin to laugh at everything you say. Lines you didn't think were particularly funny get howls. You are relaxed enough to actually be able to ad-lib, which creates more laughter.

Although I had carefully timed my speech, I had not allowed extra time for all the laughs and the spur-of-the-moment quips. At one point, when I had set up a situation in which a woman can't find anything suitable in her closet, I invited the women to join me in finishing this sentence: “Oh, my God, I have nothing to wear.” The women, anticipating the ending of my sentence, enthusiastically yelled it out. That got a big laugh, and when I ad-libbed, “I see you know the drill,” that got a bigger laugh. “This is going well,” I thought, and delirious with success, I forgot to look at our timing machine. I never noticed when the red light went on. And stayed on. I urge you to learn from my experience.

All in all, as I've thought many times since then, I'd rather lose a humor contest because of laughter than because of no laughter. **T**

**Sandy Aptecker** is a freelance writer living in Boca Raton, Florida.

# The Power of Laughter

He or she who  
laughs, lasts.

◆ AN APACHE MYTH TELLS US THAT THE Creator made man able to walk and talk, to see and hear – to do just about everything. But the Creator wasn't satisfied. Finally he made man laugh, and when man laughed and laughed, the Creator said, "Now you are fit to live."

In Navajo culture, there is something called the First Laugh Ceremony. Tradition dictates that each Navajo baby is kept on a cradle board until he or she laughs for the first time. Then the tribe throws a celebration in honor of the child's first laugh, which is considered to be his or her birth as a social being.

We are not only *Homo sapiens*, the creature who thinks. We are *Homo guffawus*, the creature who laughs.

Did you know that babies are born with certain natural instincts? Neurologists have discovered that the reason babies cry right after they are born is that they instinctively understand the magnitude of the national debt they are going to be saddled with.

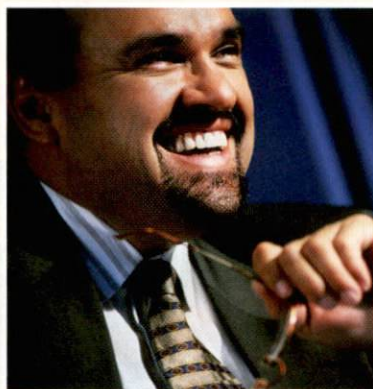
Just kidding. But I'm completely serious when I report the fact that 5-year-olds laugh naturally about 250 times a day. How sad it is that as we age, we almost inevitably gain girth and lose mirth. Many of us don't laugh 250 times a month!

"Man is the only animal who blushes – or needs to," wrote Mark Twain. He could have added, "Man is the only animal who truly laughs. Or needs to."

We all need to laugh. Recent studies have shown that he or she who laughs lasts. Author Norman Cousins, who used laughter to conquer a debilitating disease, wrote "Illness is not a laughing matter. Perhaps it ought to be. Laughter moves your internal organs around. It enhances respiration. It is an igniter of great expectation.... It has always seemed to me that hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outdoors."

Laughter stimulates the circulation, tones the muscles, energizes the lungs and respiratory system, stimulates endorphins in the immune system and provides superb aerobic exercise. In his book, *Make 'Em Laugh*, Stanford University professor William Fry explains, "When laughter gets to the point where it is called 'convulsive,' almost every muscle in the body is involved."

Laughter is also an elixir for the mind. Tests administered before and after humor therapy reveal a reduction of stress and depression and a heightened sense of well-being and creativity. More and more, science is discovering that it hurts only



"We are not only  
*Homo sapiens*, the  
creature who thinks.  
We are *Homo guffawus*,  
the creature who laughs."

when we don't laugh. "Laughter is to life what shock absorbers are to automobiles. It won't take the potholes out of the road, but it sure makes the ride smoother," observes author Barbara Johnson. "The most wasted of all days is one without laughter," adds the magician of poetry, e e cummings.

According to Robert Provine, author of *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, we laugh also to promote social bonding – a trigger that appears to be genetically determined. His studies document that we actually laugh more frequently during the course of conversation at things that aren't funny to show agreement or approval, than we do to voice our amusement at something that tickles our funny bones.

"Humor is not a trick," writes author and Minnesota Public Radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* host Garrison Keillor. "Humor is a presence in the world – like grace – and shines on everybody." The profound act of laughter is a special blessing to all of us who've been affected by the long dark shadow tragedy. The late and beloved humorist Erma Bombeck, whose syndicated newspaper column, *At Wit's End*, was read by millions, speaks to us today: "Laughter rises out of tragedy, when you need it the most, and rewards you for your courage." And the also late and beloved poet and humorist Richard Armour observed, "Comedy, I think, is as high an art as tragedy. It is as important to make people laugh as to make people cry."

As bread is the staff of life, laughter is its nectar. Go forth and practice random acts of laughter. Ripples of laughter will wash the brightest pearls onto the shores of your life. Laughter makes life the merriest of grounds and will keep you from getting dizzy.

In a recent *AARP* (American Association of Retired Persons) magazine interview, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan was asked, "And what is the single greatest thing that sustains you?" His answer: "A sense of humor. And I laugh at myself."

Employ Annan's wisdom. Be sure to laugh at yourself. Others are laughing at you, so why not you, too? **T**

**Richard Lederer, Ph.D.**, of San Diego, California, is the author of the best-selling *Anguished English* and many other books on language. He was Toastmasters' Golden Gavel recipient in 2002.



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- Redmond 2828 TM 2828-2, Redmond, Washington  
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 White Rose 5287-38, York, Pennsylvania  
 Union City 5269-57, Los Angeles, California  
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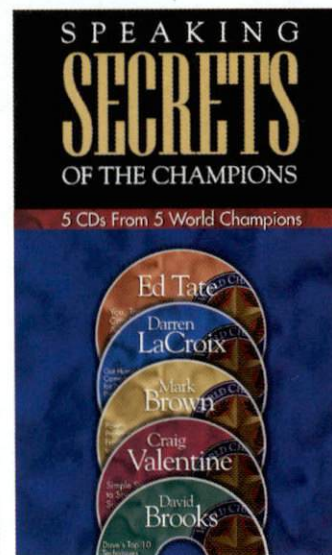
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