

# TOASTMASTER®

SEPTEMBER 2007

Unraveling conventional wisdom:

## Body Language Myths

Meet Chris  
Ford, DTM

Toastmasters' 2007-2008  
International President

The Speech or  
the Speaker

Handling the  
Hostile Crowd



## Toastmasters:

Shaping Ourselves...  
Shaping Our World

✦ Hello, Toastmasters around the world! Thank you for the confidence you have shown in me by electing me as your International President for 2007-08. It is both an honor and a privilege, and I'm committed to serve you and our wonderful organization to the very best of my abilities during the year ahead. Of course, you now have to put up with my mugshot in the next 12 issues of this magazine, but I'll hope you'll read my Viewpoint anyway!

Who among us is in perfect shape? Anyone out there? I know I'm not! Let's face it; we could all be in better shape – mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. There's always room for improvement! In Toastmasters, we're all about getting into good shape as communicators and leaders, and once we get into shape and stay in shape, we're better able to shape the world around us. Hence my theme for this year is, "Toastmasters: Shaping Ourselves... Shaping our World." What does this mean?

**Shaping Ourselves.** Depending on where we are in our Toastmasters experience, our emphasis varies from shaping ourselves as individual members to shaping our organization in support of the member. Those serving in club or district officer positions, and international positions, not only experience self-development as individuals, they also re-invest in the development of Toastmasters International as a whole. So as we take shape individually, we also develop better shape organizationally.

**Shaping Our Worlds.** We all have an impact on the world around us. Perhaps we're not individually or even collectively going to save the whole world, but we can make a difference in the worlds we live in: our personal world, our world of work, and our world of community. The skills we develop in Toastmasters are of limited value unless we export them outside the Toastmasters environment. When we use effective communication and leadership skills to make a difference in our various worlds, it's a way of paying our share of the rent for the space we occupy in this world.

During this Toastmasters year, I encourage you to think about how this organization is helping you to shape your life, and how you in turn have the opportunity to shape your worlds – both locally and globally. As Ralph Smedley expressed it: "Sometimes a man gets hold of an idea, and it shapes his whole life." I would respectfully add that it is by Shaping Ourselves through Toastmasters that we are indeed Shaping Our World.

Chris K. Ford, DTM  
International President

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### Body Language Myths

What you think you know  
about body language may be  
hurting your speaking career.

*By Dave Zielinski*

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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.

### Just Say the Word

I really enjoyed John Tillson's article "Snafu Survival" (July). However, he could have summarized most of it in one word: "Control." He skirted around it, described it, ran rings around it, but never did use the word. He essentially said if you are in control and can maintain control of any situation, you will never run into problems.

Ira Stoller, CL • Wayne Club • Wayne, New Jersey

### Zero Tolerance (And No Patience) for Acronym

Snafu? Excuse me? Did anyone check to see what this term means? First of all, it is not a word. It is an acronym. It should be written SNAFU. It originated in the military and has long been understood to stand for Situation Normal All F...ed Up.

I am in the habit of placing my extra copy of the magazine in a doctor's waiting room with contact information for our local club. I think I will skip this month. I don't think that this is the image of Toastmasters that I want to share with the non-Toastmasters members of my community.

Eileen Barrett, ATMS • North Valley Toastmasters Club  
Whitefish, Montana

### Cavalier in the Cockpit?

The cover of the July issue has the title SNAFU Survival. I object to the use of this acronym in such a cavalier way. The connotation that is conveyed when the origins of the acronym is considered is not the type of message I think should be conveyed by an organization that is supposedly dedicated to improved communication. The etymology of the "word" is from the military in a very abrasive environment where expression is performed through profanity.

Larry Vance • Waco Wordsmiths • Hewitt, Texas

**Editor's Note:** The word *snafu* is presented in lower-case format in most dictionaries, and is defined by dictionary.com as "a badly confused or ridiculously muddled situation." With its origins during World War II, this word became a cartoon character's name, Private Snafu, in a show produced by Warner Brothers Studios and approved by the United States government. According to the cartoon, the acronym SNAFU stood for: Situation Normal, All *Fouled Up*.

### Toastmasters Live!

In response to your article "Meeting on TV" (July 2007), I call your attention to our club TV Toastmasters Live! As our name implies, our meetings are carried live on public access cable. Members are encouraged to make presentations on topics of general public interest to retain viewers and generate further interest.

We encourage other Toastmasters clubs in the area to participate. The meetings are also broadcast as reruns during the following week. This enables the participants to record their performances on VCR or DVD for various purposes, such as marketing themselves as speakers.

Read about club 9175 on the TI Web site or view our club site, [tucsontv.freetoasthost.org](http://tucsontv.freetoasthost.org).

Saul Silven, ACS, CL • TV Toastmasters Live! • Tucson, Arizona

### Great Toastmasters Education

Since joining Toastmasters nearly two years ago I have learned more than I could have from any of the best educational institutions in the world. Four examples of what I have learned are:

- How to speak in public
- How to listen
- How to think
- How to lead

Is this not great or what?! Most members in our club agree. Thank God for Toastmasters!

Ulf Sandstrom, ACB • Sarasota Herald Tribune Toastmasters  
Sarasota, Florida

### From Ice Breaker to Author

I joined a Toastmasters club two years ago and have benefited from the experience in countless ways. Before joining the club I had writer's block – writing the Ice Breaker became an ice breaker for writing. After my Ice Breaker speech, I found I have a storytelling talent. This inspired me to base my manual speeches on personal stories, and so far I have delivered 18 manual speeches. Every club meeting built momentum in my writing. Now, when ideas come to me, I write stories and articles. In fact, I have even embarked on writing a book!

Thanks to Toastmasters for bringing out my latent storytelling talent and providing the impetus for my writing.

Jyoti Agrawal, CC • Gilbert Toastmasters Club • Chandler, Arizona

### Etiquette Missing in Club

I recently joined a Toastmasters club and had a horrible experience giving my first speech. Not only were people rolling their eyes, several audience members started laughing. I lost my concentration and messed up the whole speech.

I am writing because of my disappointment in Toastmasters. I definitely will not go back to that club again. I am in search of another club with more maturity and professionalism. The person who laughed apologized and claimed that he was not laughing at me, but it was still extremely rude and gave me the most horrible experience in my whole life. Thanks for listening.

Ruby Thang • Houston, Texas



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**Women's college basketball coach equips players with speaking skills – a real assist!**

# Legacy of Champions

When college basketball player Tavia Clemendor's coach, Jacques Curtis, told her she was expected to attend three Toastmasters meetings as part of her training, Clemendor wasn't happy. She didn't want to waste her only day off.

"At first I was resentful giving up my Sunday evenings," admits Clemendor, a senior at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. "After a couple of meetings, though, it actually got exciting. I soon noticed that I had become less shy and a lot more confident. Before I knew it, I was giving speeches that really mattered, like one of my favorites where I talked about goals and ambitions and how you should never let anyone deter you from your dreams."

Clemendor progressed at such a rapid rate that she soon found herself president of the college Toastmasters club, Legacy of Champions (LOC).

"When I became president of the club, I had no idea what I was doing, but I picked things up as I went along," says Clemendor, who is planning on attending medical school once she graduates. "The club has been a great experience for me and the other girls [on the basketball team]. In the beginning, there was a lot of giggling going on, but that eventually faded and members now take a lot of pride in the meetings and their speeches."

Coach Curtis, as he is called by the Shaw University women's bas-

ketball team, decided he wanted his players involved with Toastmasters soon after he joined the Cardinal Club Toastmasters in Raleigh, North Carolina, in July 2006.

"I realized that a public speaking class in college couldn't come anywhere near challenging the girls like Toastmasters can," says Curtis. "Table Topics and other benefits of the organization offer them invaluable learning experiences that enable them to stand up and speak comfortably."

Curtis had good reason to be concerned about his players' public speaking skills. From 2003 to 2006, his Lady Bears team made history, winning four CIAA (Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association) championships in a row and the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) South Atlantic Region championship in 2005 and 2006.

"It's important that the girls are professionally trained to speak in front of the camera and not be embarrassed," says Curtis. "I didn't want viewers to say they can play, but they can't talk, which often happens even with professional athletes. I have seen too many news interviews after sports events that do not reflect well on the players,

and I wanted to prepare my team to respond well during that process."

While Curtis originally joined Toastmasters to broaden his contacts outside of the coaching community, he quickly discovered that Toastmasters would benefit the girls on his team, says Lee Tyler, a member of Cardinal Club Toastmasters, who sponsored and mentored the LOC club, which chartered last October.

"Coach Curtis not only wants to create athletes who can express themselves, he also strives to build



▲ Shaw University basketball player Jan'el Baxter in action.

an enduring legacy for these student athletes because he knows that not all women on the team will go on to play basketball at the professional level," says Tyler. "Besides focusing on athletic skills, he also requires that the players maintain high standards in academics and personal development, which is unusual. Many coaches are only interested in the win-loss record and don't really care about the students' futures.

The LOC club was named for Curtis' Legacy of Champions Foundation, which is a non-profit organization designed to empower females by providing structured programs focused on athletic, educational, health and social development.

Curtis has always required his players to perform community service and decided to create a vehicle for such projects by starting the LOC foundation in May 2006. The foundation offers youth outreach programs, such as Big Sister and Read to Achieve, and in 2006 it inducted several influential women into its Hall of Fame. These experiences involved an awards banquet and a chance for the basketball players to meet successful women role models.

"Coach Curtis' goal is to help women develop skills and resources that will enable them to open doors in the business arena that are traditionally closed to women," says Cardinal Club Toastmasters member Becky Sansbury, who also mentored and sponsored the LOC club. "He wants to make the girls well-rounded and equipped to deal with whatever comes their way. When I suggested that he get the team involved in Toastmasters, he immediately agreed."

Tyler, Sansbury and her husband, Ed, helped Curtis start a club for the basketball team. "The only time available in their busy schedule was on Sunday evenings," says Sansbury. "Coach Curtis required his core

players to attend the first three meetings. It was a lot like parents getting their children to taste a new vegetable that they end up liking," says Sansbury. "They were hesitant at first, but by the second meeting they were taking on roles, and by the third meeting they had their first Ice Breaker."

While serving as a mentor for the new club, Sansbury was constantly amazed at the improvements they made.

"I saw a general rise in stature in these young women. Originally some of them shuffled to the front of the room or stared at their feet, but that all soon stopped," she says. "They became articulate and



Coach Jacques Curtis

letics that held the attention of the teen audience."

Jasmine Rivera is a senior and member of the LOC club. Like many other students, she was reluctant to attend Toastmasters at first, but she soon realized the value of membership. "Toastmasters just seemed like more schoolwork until I

went to a couple of meetings and realized what a good experience it could be," says Rivera, who is majoring in sociology with a concentration in criminal justice. "Toastmasters is great training for the real world. My speaking skills have improved a great deal and the networking opportunities really help."

**"I didn't want viewers to say, 'they can play, but they can't talk,' which often happens even with professional athletes."**

poised. What these young women demonstrated by their purpose, tenacity and youthful vision was absolutely astounding."

Thanks to Curtis' dedication to giving the girls every opportunity for growth, members often make professional connections and give speeches outside of the club. Three members, including Clemendor, spoke to high school students at a Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) conference.

"I was really proud of the girls who spoke at the FBLA conference," says Assistant Coach Latasha Shipman, who became a Toastmaster when the team members did. "They gave impressive speeches about their opinions on student ath-

Of course, their Toastmasters skills have helped their basketball team, as well. "Even though we see a lot of each other on the court and in school, we never have a chance to really talk," says Rivera. "The speeches, in particular, really change your perspective about a person in a good way and help you get to know each other a lot better." ■

**Julie Bawden Davis** is a freelance writer based in Southern California and a longtime contributor. Reach her at [Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com](mailto:Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com).

**Editor's Note:** Do you have an inspiring story of how the Toastmasters program has helped you? Tell us at [letters@toastmasters.org](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org).

Toastmasters:



**Meet  
Toastmasters'  
2007-2008  
International  
President  
Chris Ford, DTM**

**N**ewly elected International President Chris Ford comes to Toastmasters with much leadership experience – in Toastmasters and in a life-long military career. A retired Canadian Forces Brigadier General, he currently works for the Canadian Department of National Defence as Director General, Alternative Dispute Resolution. He lives in Casselman, Ontario, Canada, with his partner, Carole Campeau. Between them they have six adult children.

**When and why did you join Toastmasters?**

I have to admit I was a non-traditional joiner. I was stationed at Canadian Forces Base Edmonton in 1978, and one night after a regimental mess dinner, some of “the boys” got into a poker game. It was “nickel-dime” poker, and I set myself a limit of \$20. I lost that twenty bucks and was about to leave the table when my buddy Russ said, “Look, I’ll spot you a twenty – if you win, you can pay me back tonight, if you lose, you can pay me back tomorrow night.”

I lost again, so he said to come to his club meeting the next night with \$20 and we’d be square. I did, anticipating it would be a meeting of Gamblers Anonymous or maybe poker school, but no... it was the Settlement on Sturgeon Toastmasters Club! Russ said, “Now that you’re here, you may as well stay for the meeting.” Which I did... and the rest, as they say, is history! Moral of the story? No matter how you discover Toastmasters, joining is always a safe bet!

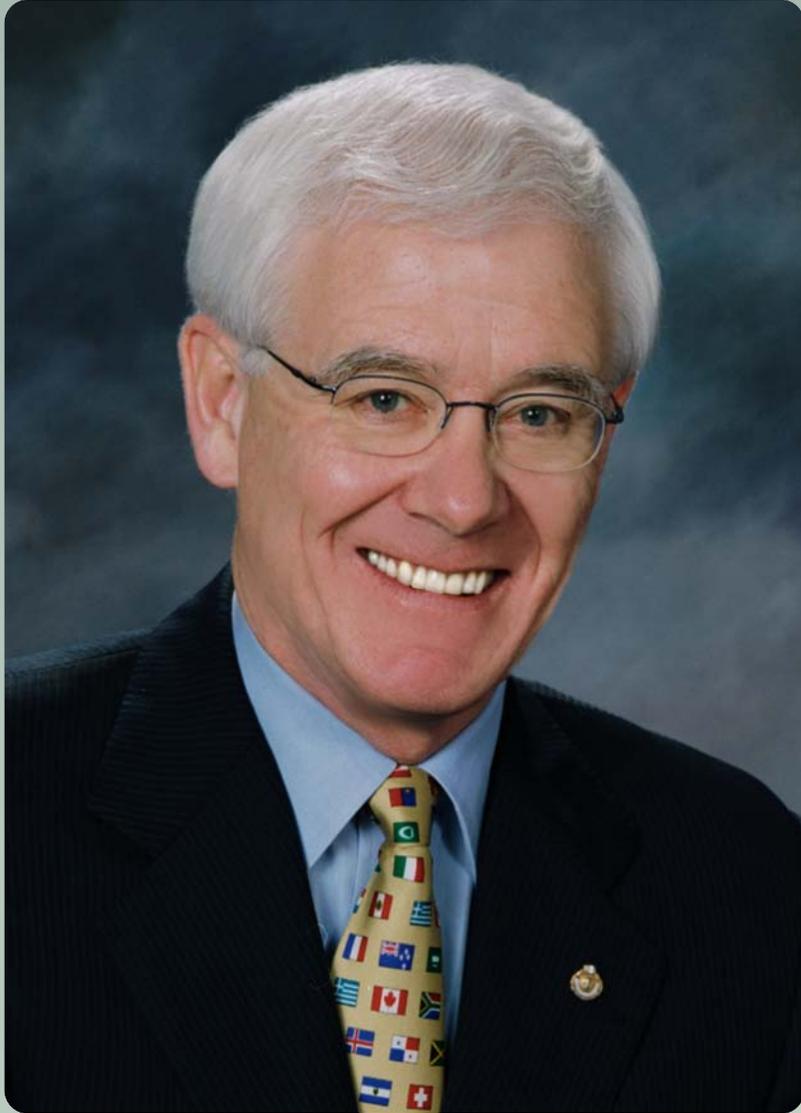


**“We use the skills we develop in Toastmasters to shape the world we live in.”**

**Tell us about your hobbies and interests outside of Toastmasters.**

It's important to me to stay in shape, so running, skiing and skating are three sports I pursue with a passion. I ran my first marathon a few years ago, for Team Diabetes Canada. That required considerable personal shaping, but I committed to doing it because it was an opportunity to raise funds for diabetes research, and that meant in some small way I could shape one of the worlds my daughter Kate lives in – the world of diabetes. I continue to support the Canadian Diabetes Association in a variety of ways: as advocate, conference emcee, founder of their Speakers Bureau, and as fund-raiser.

Downhill skiing is a favorite winter activity for Carole and me. There's nothing quite like the thrill of life on the edge, literally, of your skis as you throw caution to the wind and just go for it! In a way, it's not unlike taking the plunge into Toastmasters – it can be both nerve-wracking and thrilling at the same time, but as Susan Jeffers explains in the title of her recent book, you've got to *Feel the Fear - And Do It Anyway!*



**What's a little-known fact about you?**

I'm a Manxman. "A what?" you ask? A Manxman is someone born on the Isle of Man, a tiny island in the middle of the Irish Sea. It's a principality with its own government and banking system, but is essentially part of the United Kingdom for matters such as defense and foreign affairs. It's a beautiful little island, lacking only one thing – a Toastmasters club! District 71, you now have a challenge!

**Explain why you chose your theme, "Toastmasters: Shaping Ourselves... Shaping Our World."**

It was an easy choice. As I said earlier, getting in shape and staying in shape is important to me, and I think to most people. And if you're not in good shape yourself, how can you encourage others to get into shape, or in fact help in shaping the lives of others? This reasoning applies not only to our physical shape, but also to the shape we're in as communicators and leaders. People come to our clubs because they recognize they're out

of shape, and they want to get into better shape. Maybe they don't express it that way, but what they seek is a shaping experience that will allow them to develop skills in communication and leadership, concurrently becoming more self-confident and realizing their full potential.

But it doesn't end there. I don't know of anyone who has come to our clubs just to become a better speaker within the club or the district. There is a higher purpose for doing what we do. It is to make a difference in the worlds we live in: the world of community, the world of work, the world of family, the world of church. In short, we use the skills we develop in Toastmasters to shape the world we live in. It's one way we can pay the rent we owe for occupying space on this earth. So my theme, "Shaping Ourselves, Shaping our World" is an expression of what we do, and why we do it.

#### **You are a retired Brigadier General with the Canadian Forces. Tell us about your current profession.**

After a 35-year career in the Canadian Forces, specifically in the Canadian Military Engineers, I decided to make a deliberate career change to the field of conflict resolution. At the tender age of 52, I went back to university to earn a Graduate Certificate in Conflict Resolution.

This led to several opportunities as a consultant, and then in early 2006 I returned to the Canadian Department of National Defence as Director General, Alternative Dispute Resolution. Our work is centered on building individual and organizational capacity for effective conflict management. Fundamental to this work is – guess what? – effective communication! It's very rewarding work, because basically no one likes to be in conflict, so if we can help people and the organization manage conflict more effectively, that's a good thing!

#### **How has your Toastmasters training benefited your career?**

I find there is a synergy between what I do professionally and what I do in Toastmasters. To be successful as an officer in a military force, one must be a good leader and a good communicator. In Toastmasters, we develop good communicators and leaders. I've been very fortunate to get leverage between the two principal worlds I operate in.

Sometimes I think there is a stereotypical perception of the army officer that says leadership is all about giving orders. When I look back on my career in uniform, I'd say the order-giving part of it was way less than one percent. Military leadership is all about getting to know your people, building effective teams,

developing relationships with men and women under your command, so that when orders have to be given, the team will follow willingly.

Here's an example of how Toastmasters was helpful in my professional life: In the '90s, I was stationed in former Yugoslavia as the Chief of Operations for the European Community Monitor Mission. Part of my job was to give the daily operations briefing to around 150 people from 17 different nations. My Toastmasters experience had given me the tools and the confidence to make the briefings lively and interesting, occasionally somewhat humorous, even though we were discussing extremely serious operational issues in a combat zone.

Flip the coin over... I think my military experience in planning, decision-making, organization, team building and determination to succeed have been assets in my Toastmasters life. That said, I want to reassure our members that I'm not about to transform Toastmasters International into a fighting force, although it would be really cool if we could conquer the world!

#### **Do you often give speeches outside of Toastmasters?**

I believe we have to give speeches outside of Toastmasters if we are to put our skills to work in shaping this world, so yes, I do this very often. I look upon every outside speaking engagement as an opportunity to add value to the group that extended the invitation. Whether you are speaking about Toastmasters, or communication and leadership in general, or your particular professional and personal interest, let the audience know you are a Toastmaster.

I have spoken to very diverse audiences. Every occasion is unique, every audience is unique, and if you're communicating effectively, every message is unique – crafted for that particular audience at that particular time. And Toastmasters provides the tools and techniques to get this right, every time!

#### **What aspect of Toastmasters do you like best?**

Not surprisingly, it's seeing the growth and development in our members. Our clubs provide every member "the opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and growth." Watching a new member shaping up as a speaker, observing a more seasoned member taking shape as a leader at the club or district level – these are the rewarding aspects of Toastmasters.

I've seen so many new Toastmasters embark on a journey with us, getting into shape through our communication and leadership programs, and truly starting to

discover who they are and what they can achieve. When a new member like Clare, from my home club in Manotick, Ontario, can go from being nervous and awkward at the lectern to being a confident presenter at business conferences and meetings, it tells me we're doing something right.

#### **Tell us about your worst speaking experience.**

As Woody Allen once said, 90 percent of success is just showing up. My worst speaking experience was just that: not showing up! In 1981, I was the Canadian "exchange student" at the Defense Services Staff College in India. The local parish priest invited me to come to the children's school one day to talk to the students about life in Canada.

I made a mental note of the speaking engagement, and well, you know what can happen to mental notes. They're not worth the paper they're not written on! Now that was embarrassing, and I felt particularly badly that I had let the kids down. Note to self: No more mental notes!

#### **Tell us about a leader you admire, and why.**

One that jumps to mind right now is General Rick Hillier, the current Chief of Defence Staff in Canada. This guy is a "soldier's soldier." Despite the fact that he holds the highest rank in the Canadian Forces, he is there for the private and sailor and airperson. He is a genuine and sincere communicator, is straight to the point, packs a passionate message with wonderful "Newfie humor," and is equally at home with heads of state and politicians as he is with the a team of soldiers on patrol.

Rick Hillier leads by example. His concept of leadership is very much akin to ours in Toastmasters: For him, it's all about the soldier, just as for us it's all about the member. I'd say General Hillier is probably one of the most popular and effective Chiefs we've had in decades.

#### **In Toastmasters we are focusing more and more on leadership. Tell us why leadership and communication go hand in hand.**

When did you last observe a leader who could not communicate effectively? Look at the top leaders in your country, or your business world, or your profession. Are they not also great communicators? Consider great communicators you have known. Are they not also great leaders in their own right? Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, Pierre Trudeau, Margaret Thatcher, Martin Luther King, Jimmy Carter are names that spring to mind – all exemplary communicators and leaders. It stands to reason that the two go hand-in-hand: Great leaders

**"The opposite of success in my view is not failure, but if you fail to give it your very best effort, you have failed only yourself."**

inspire others through words and actions; great communicators lead others to act through the power of the spoken word.

#### **How do you define success?**

To me, success is deciding on the outcome I want to achieve, and then making the commitment to ensure the outcome is achieved. The decision may be mine alone, or perhaps it's a team decision. The actions required to achieve the outcome might be an individual or a team effort.

Either way, if you give each task your very best shot, even if you fall short of the mark, you cannot fail. And here is something to reflect on: The opposite of success in my view is not failure, but if you fail to give it your very best effort, you have failed only yourself.

#### **What's your dream for your term in office?**

My dream is that we, as a growing international organization, will courageously address the challenges of worldwide expansion, while at the same time preserving our roots and our heritage. Men and women change over time – reshaping themselves to be relevant and responsive to a changing environment. We must also reshape ourselves organizationally, to be relevant and responsive to a changing world. Are we up for the challenge? There's no doubt in my mind!

#### **If you had a message for every Toastmaster, what would that be?**

I invite our members and leaders around the world to develop a deep sense of personal commitment to Toastmasters. It doesn't have to be for 25 years or 10 years, or even two. But for the time you are a member, commit to getting the most you possibly can from our programs, and commit to giving back what you can to your club or your district.

Then take what you have learned from Toastmasters and apply it in the real world. By doing so, you'll be Shaping Yourself and Shaping Your World! 

“Good company in a journey makes the way seem shorter.”

– IZAAK WALTON

# DTM Stands for Dearly Treasured Memories

✦ **DTM:** Some say that stands for “Distinguished Toastmaster.” I say it stands for *Dearly Treasured Memories*... because that’s what I received on the path to my coveted DTM.

When I joined Toastmasters nearly 10 years ago, it was a means to an end. A co-worker encouraged me to improve my speaking skills in order to be competitive for a training position within the company. I wanted that promotion! Unfortunately, I already worked for the hiring manager, but in a different capacity. Day in and day out while I sweated my fate, I reported to the man who would decide my future. Of course, being eight months pregnant didn’t help my outlook on the situation – or my perception of the outcome!

to reflect on why you have joined Toastmasters, what you have gained through the experience and where you want the journey to take you.

So what does all that have to do with your DTM?” I’m glad you ask! I share this brief history to let you in on my *Dearly Treasured Memories*. You see, I began the path as a means to an end, but I continued on the path because of dear friendships.

After I obtained the positions I wanted in my career, I found that Toastmasters had become embedded in my life. The technical aspects of my DTM achievement – the education awards, the High Performance Leadership project, serving as area governor – can be found in materials available through Toastmasters International. What

didn’t accomplish the objectives of a speech. As I provided evaluations, I found gems to be aware of in my own speeches. As others in my club improved and earned various Toastmasters designations, I was inspired to work toward the next goal as well. Other heart strings are tied to the members that spurred me on by challenging me. It’s often hard to keep the competitive spirit subdued with direct challenges like “I’ll finish ATM before you,” or “Let’s join the speech contest – to see who will win.” Through the challenges of competition we all won.

Competing in the speech contests provided the most growth opportunity in the shortest amount of time. The first time I met a World Champion of Public Speaking I was inspired to reach for that wonderful goal myself. At each level of participation in Toastmasters, I have been encouraged to stretch and I gather more Toastmasters experience.

As I reflect on my journey to DTM, I realize that many of my friends have ties to Toastmasters. I can remember some who gave speeches while looking at mystery spots on the wall, and some that were so frightened they visibly shook for 20 minutes after giving a speech. There have even been a few who had me wondering why they joined at all, since it

**“It is because of all the friends along the way that I have the DTM today.”**

I lost my bid for that position to a colleague. After recovering from the pain and rejection and returning to work after the birth of my son, I decided that I would try this thing called Toastmasters. I wanted to do whatever I could to improve my chances to get the job the next time. As I write this article, I am hoping that you too will take time

you won’t find without experiencing it for yourself are the many heart strings tied to this achievement.

During my journey to DTM, many members encouraged me to take the next step. Through helpful evaluations, they provided me with tools to make every speech better than the one before. Through kindness they encouraged me when I

seemed they had no challenges with public speaking.

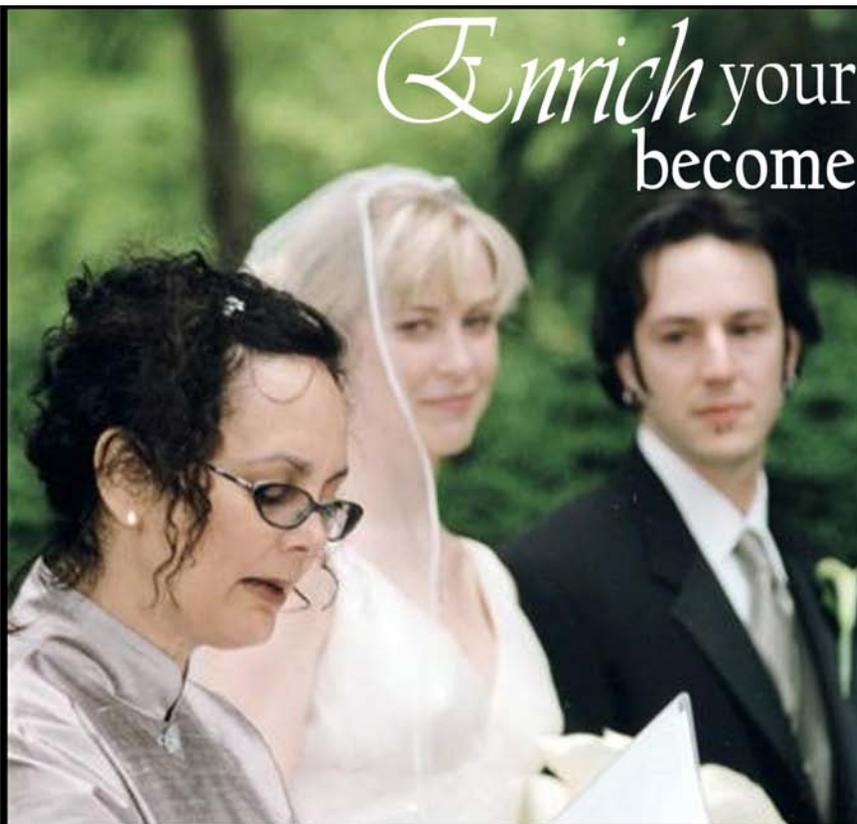
I treasure the memories I've gained on this journey. It is because of all the friends along the way that I have the DTM today. I've enjoyed giving speeches that wowed. I've learned from the ones that flopped (although I'd rather forget those). I've been challenged in trying to give helpful evaluations. I've attended contests, participated in contests, and lost contests...all in an effort to

improve my skills. I've attended parties, participated in themed meetings, taken the DTM walk at the district conference, and now I've written this article. It is amazing how difficult it is to put 10 years of memories onto one page.

As I have taken you through this small glimpse of my *Dearly Treasured Memories*, I hope you have been encouraged to start (or continue) gathering your own DTM. I hope you have rekindled

the spark that started you on the journey and that you will take up my challenge. I call on you to be there with me when I get my next DTM...because gathering *Dearly Treasured Memories* is a process that I plan to pursue for a long time to come! 

**Melissa Brown, DTM**, is a member of Top O' The Rock Toastmasters Club in Folkston, Georgia. Reach her at [melissa.brown@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:melissa.brown@jax.ufl.edu).



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Which is more important:

# The Speech or the Speaker

Which is more important to a presentation – the speech or the speaker? Do the words make for a forceful lecture, or is it the way the words are delivered?

Once an actor in a television series I had written asked me a similar question. He said, “Do you think your script is more important than the actors who deliver the lines?”

I told him I had been writing television comedy for many years and I had never once written a funny line. He was a bit skeptical about that response, so I explained that none of my jokes were funny simply sitting on paper. They didn’t generate laughter until some performer spoke the words and breathed life into them. Playwrights need skilled actors to perform their lines; actors need plot, conflict, clever or witty dialogue to keep an audience interested in the performance.

Asking whether the message or the messenger is more momentous is like asking which hand is more significant when you applaud – the right or the left. Obviously, it’s the teamwork of both that produces a welcome ovation. It’s the same with a persuasive lecture. The message should be well conceived, well organized, and well written, but it must also be delivered passionately and skillfully.

To illustrate this point, when I speak on comedy writing I’ll often ask some person in the audience to name a favorite comedian. Let’s imagine that person says, “Robin Williams.” Then I’ll ask another who we’ll assume responds, “Joan Rivers.” Next I present a fantasy. I tell the audience that this evening I’m going to treat all of them to a visit to two nightclubs. First we’ll watch Robin Williams perform and then we’ll catch Joan Rivers’ show. (I do caution them that even though this is a fantasy, I will still limit them to a maximum of two drinks.)

I caution them further, though, that we are going to have a miserable evening. Why? Because

before we go to see these performances, I will take Joan’s material and give it to Robin Williams. Then I’ll take Robin’s act and present it to Joan Rivers. Both shows will be disastrous. Both Robin and Joan are brilliant comedians. Both of them have funny, professional routines. But neither one of them will be entertaining doing the other person’s material.

The point of this fantasy is that the material and the comedian should blend. The act should suit the performer. A speech should be well constructed, but also tailored perfectly to the speaker.

Following are some hints to help you tailor a speech to your speaking style and create a presentation that will generate the right hand – left hand cooperation needed to produce sincere applause.

- **Be sure to say what you want to say.** The content of your speech should be something that you personally agree with. It’s difficult to speak with conviction about a notion that hasn’t won your heart.

Once I worked with the great comedian and not-so-great violinist, Jack Benny. My partner and I had written a small bit that Benny was to do on our variety show.



▲ The author, Gene Perret, has a captive audience during Toastmasters 2005 Convention in Toronto.

Benny called and told us he loved the material, but wanted to discuss it with us before he would agree to appear on the show. When we met with him, he wanted to know why he was doing this particular piece. We explained our reasoning. He didn't accept that. We suggested another reason. He remained unconvinced.

Mr. Benny had a logical argument against any reason we presented. Finally, his representative said, "Jack, it's only a three-minute bit. Why don't you just do it the way it's written?"

Benny said, "How many times do I have to tell you that when I'm doing a joke about my Stradivarius, I have to be holding my Stradivarius." He was saying that he had to believe in any joke he did. For him, that was the only way to do justice to the comedy material. As a speaker, you will be much more credible and more effective if you talk about ideas you believe in.

■ **Make your speech compatible with your speaking style and platform presence.** I worked for many years for a great platform professional, Bob Hope. He performed at state dinners at the White House, at royal banquets

before kings and queens. He was funny, but he always spoke with dignity and class. Consequently, any one-liners we wrote for Bob Hope had to conform with that stature he presented behind the microphone.

Many comedians present a wacky, zany, goofy stage presence. That's perfectly fine, so long as it's funny. However, the contrast should be obvious. Bob Hope's style demanded a certain type of material; the zany comics demand another.

You have a unique style as a speaker. Whatever speeches you create should mesh with your individual mode of speaking.

■ **Limit yourself to material you can deliver competently.** All of us have limitations. The late Don Knotts created one of the finest characters in television history – Deputy Barney Fife. Don was a skilled actor, yet you wouldn't cast him as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Tony Bennett is an acclaimed vocalist, yet you would walk out if he started strutting around the stage like Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones. Professional performers know enough to do what they do well.

We all have our skills and our shortcomings. The trick is to highlight your talents and hide your failings. I've worked with many legendary entertainers, people who are noted for being "so versatile, they can do anything." You'd be surprised how often material had to be rewritten because these stars who "could do anything," said, "I'm sorry, but I can't do this well."

It's not a weakness; it's a strength. It's common sense to present to an audience only what you can competently perform.

Be honest about your own talents. Know what you can do effectively and what you can't. Then give yourself a speech that makes you look good...no, let's make that *brilliant*.

Remember, once you step onto the podium, it's no longer the speech that is being evaluated, nor is it the speaker. It's the combination of both. The *presentation* is what will get the ovation. **T**

**Gene Perret** has won several Emmys for his work on *The Carol Burnett Show*. He was Bob Hope's head writer for 12 years and has written many books about humor. Contact him at [gper276@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gper276@sbcglobal.net).

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# Handling the Hostile Crowd

By Judi Bailey

**Y**ou're perfectly primed to do your talk. In fact, you're really cookin'. The opening comes off without a hitch – you've connected with the audience and they with you. But wait – someone barks a comment from the back row, “Hey! How can you say that? What are your qualifications?”

“Wh-what?” you reply, now noticeably nervous.

“How do we know you're knowledgeable enough to talk about this?”

Limping over your credentials, you pray that this satisfies that pain-in-the-neck. It seems to settle him somewhat. But way across the room you hear, “The second point you made is wrong...”

You're beginning to wish you had never set the alarm clock.

No matter how polished and professional your skills are, you can't control how your audience acts. Many speakers have encountered problematic individuals:





participants disrupting by talking among themselves, someone who disagrees rudely, a non-responsive group, those who interrupt you continuously, those who challenge your qualifications to give the talk, and other awkward situations.

For instance when Diane Knaus, of the Annapolis Maryland Toastmasters club, gave a presentation for a remodeling project for her church, a man got up to say he thought she was wrong to consider renovation.

**“If a heckler repeats an objectionable behavior invite that person to talk with you at the end of your presentation.”**

“I let him have his say, but members were becoming upset over his rudeness,” she said. “I took a deep breath, cleared my throat and explained that the congregation had already decided they wanted to learn more about the plans. I then asked if he would like to speak about this after the meeting. He didn’t.”

At the following project meeting where the congregation was slated to vote, this man showed up and asked to address the group. He apologized to Knaus for his previous behavior and announced that he was willing to offer his help to the group. The way Knaus handled the situation enabled this fellow to examine what he was doing and maintain his dignity so he could humbly return to the group.

### **Who Are These “Difficult” People?**

They are you and me under pressure – feeling uncomfortable, intimidated, powerless, lost or overlooked. The “difficult” people may seem quite different from us, but are they really? Perhaps they are simply exaggerated forms of our own imperfections.

The most important component of your talk is to educate and/or entertain an audience, whether that is a group of three or 300. Kirstin Carey, president of Orange Tree Training & Speaking Group, Inc. near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, warns her clients not to allow one audience member to spoil it for the rest of the crowd. Usually, she says, the audience recognizes the “heckler” for who he is.

Most mental health experts agree that disorderly behavior is a symptom of an unmet need. The more you understand the motivation behind the behavior, the more you understand that individual’s need, which



enables you to control damage to the rest of the group. This doesn't mean your role is to satisfy these needs, but recognizing the scenario can help you keep from taking the feedback personally, giving you the freedom to choose a more effective response.

Typical forms of the "thorny set" include the following. To help you recall the different types use the acronym: H-O-S-T-I-L-E

- **The Heckler** – Insulting, rude, persistent, this person is driven by the unmet need for a sense of personal worth.
- **The Over-zealous** – Often the first to raise or answer a question, this "eager beaver" makes it difficult for others to participate. This is an expression of a strong need for approval.
- **The Squawker** – An all-encompassing negativity is expressed in whining and complaining. This individual craves acknowledgment.
- **The Turned-off** – The audience member who is snoring, daydreaming, or writing out bills is experiencing an unmet need for connection.
- **The Intimidator** – Attempting to monopolize the situation by using aggressive words or actions, this person is operating under a desire for power.
- **The Lost** – Having little awareness of the benefits of your information, this person has a need for information or direction.
- **The Expert** – This "know-it-all" challenges the speaker and argues with other participants using limited knowledge on the topic. A yearning for recognition propels this behavior.

## How to contend with the hostile group

You have two choices in dealing with disruption and resistance. You can prepare in advance and mold your expectations to the reality of your situation. And you can take action on the spot, during your speech.

### How to prepare yourself in advance:

- **Know your audience.** "One of the most important things that Toastmasters teaches you," says Knaus, "is that you need to know who is in the audience and who may be for or against your position."

- **Validate your data.** "Take the time to check facts," Knaus says. "You owe your audience integrity." Double-checking information also serves to solidify your confidence and enables you to more easily cope with the bullies who confront you on accuracy.

- **Design your talk around the time of day.** "If the talk is in the morning when participants are apt to be more rested, I tend to give more detailed information," says Jennifer Mayo, a technical trainer and public speaker. "But when I speak right after the lunch hour or later in the day when listeners are likely to be tired, I break up the talk with stretch and snack breaks whenever possible and use two or more formats for visuals, like writing on the white board and using a flipchart." Upbeat background music, lower room temperature and using more light also helps keep the potentially drowsy awake – and add interest.

- **Keep your purpose in mind at all times.** If you are giving tips to victims on how to deal with stalkers, don't forget all the people you can help. If you are presenting statistics on global warming, remember the urgent need for action. Staying focused on your gut-level motive supersedes any annoyance and helps you to stay the course.

- **"Seek first to understand, then be understood"** is one habit of Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Concentrate on the needs of the audience rather than on how you are doing and you'll leave the crowd better off than when they came in. Study people – observe their behavior and listen to their concerns – to better comprehend their wants and needs so that you can offer a more appropriate presentation.

- **Give others the right to be wrong.** This is tough. When you stop demanding that others adhere to your point of view, you can relax, take a step back and allow confrontation without feeling threatened. So

what if someone else sees the proposition differently? You don't have to change people who choose to act disrespectfully. What you must do, however, is prevent them from interfering with the rights of the rest of the group.

#### How to manage the situation on site:

■ **Set Out:** One of the best gifts you can grant your audience is to lay out parameters ahead of time. "Most problems can be staved off by how you start out," Mayo says. "If you address issues up front, your listeners will know what to expect. If you respect the audience members, they will respect you." That way she claims, members won't have to use interruptions and power plays in the attempts to get their needs met.

"Much of the talking that occurs between listeners involves things that can be settled before the speech begins," Mayo claims. This might include participants asking each other if they are hot or cold, when a break can be expected, or deciding where they'll eat lunch.

As an example, this is how she starts her speaking engagements: *We're all important here. I understand*

*you all have things going on outside of here. Please turn all cell phones off or put on silent mode. If you need to take a call, please go out to the hallway so as not to disrupt the rest of the group. You can expect a five- to seven-minute break on the hour. There are food and drink machines down the hall and smoking is permitted in the lounge downstairs. If you get hot or cold, let me know so I can adjust the temperature.*

Make sure the group understands that you are establishing these rules so that they don't have to be disturbed or interrupted during your speech. Without directly saying so, make it clear that these guidelines are not for you, but to make their time with you comfortable and valuable.

■ **Step Aside:** Whenever a personal attack is being launched on you, imagine it's a gust of wind and all you have to do is take a step to your left or right for it to blow right past you. Symbolic action is powerful, so be sure to physically take that side step. It gives you a sense of control over the situation.

Concede a few points. Pick your battles carefully; not all of them need to be won. Jamal, a member of



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the Express Toastmasters Club in Karachi, Pakistan, says, "One must be humble enough to clearly admit to questions that don't have answers rather than giving wrong information." In fact, when you want to take the wind out of a dissenter's sails, agree with the criticism. Rather than responding to the attack, simply thank that person for sharing their opinion or say something like, "that's an interesting point," then continue with the presentation. If a heckler repeats an objectionable behavior or nastily demands a more comprehensive response from you, invite that person to talk with you at the end of your presentation.

Another way to step away from unnecessary conflict is to give the group a break. Mayo used this technique while teaching an adult education class. "I had mentioned a number of places to buy a computer when one of the students sarcastically started in on me about my recommendations and detailed what he would suggest instead. Mayo allowed him to make his point, which was a good one, and explained that she made her recommendations based on the needs of the class and the students' lack of computer experience."

Nevertheless he continued to raise the issue throughout the lecture. "I could feel the tension in the room so I gave them a break," Mayo says. A couple of the guys walked out with him and I assume talked to him about his behavior because his tone was much less caustic throughout the rest of the class. Sometimes the peer pressure of the group is your greatest ally. You just have to trust the audience to use it."

■ **Step Up:** Of course there are times when you have to take a more direct tack. But be careful: embarrassing an audience member can make the whole group uncomfortable.

"It's quite easy to lose the audience's attention," says Arsalaan Haleem, also a member of the Toastmasters Club in Karachi. "One thing I have learned is you have to maintain eye contact. If you do, there is less chance of them getting distracted. It gives you a more attentive audience."

Stepping closer to a participant who is drowsy or disruptive works similar to eye contact; they both make it difficult for the disrupter to remain hidden. It helps to raise your voice at this point as well. Asking that person a direct question is another way to bring him or her into the limelight. Once "discovered," most people will comply with the needs of the group.

But remember, whether someone is whispering on the side of the room, nodding off in the front or constantly raising a hand from the back row, you can still pull off a super speech. Keep a few of these tips in mind and you'll soon be looking forward to an opportunity to try them out and successfully overcome the next hostile crowd. **T**

**Judi Bailey** is a writer in Lakewood, Ohio. Reach her at [author48@cox.net](mailto:author48@cox.net).



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# Responding to Hecklers

Not all audiences are as nurturing as Toastmasters clubs.

By Mary Ward Menke, ATMB

Consider the predicament comedian Michael Richards found himself in last year. The former *Seinfeld* star was performing his stand-up routine when a table of African-American and Hispanic customers jeered him, shouting, “You’re not funny!” Richards responded with a tirade of racial slurs, appalling the audience and abruptly bringing the performance to a close. A few days later, following much media scrutiny, Richards apologized, saying his comments were fueled not by racism but by anger at being heckled. Those involved refused to accept his apology, insisting that heckling is commonplace and that performers should be able to deal with it.

But it’s not just comedians who have to deal with hecklers. Most professional speakers have a story about a keynote address they delivered to a dinner crowd where they felt more like the main course than the entertainment.

What, exactly, is heckling and why do people do it? One definition of “heckle” is “to harass and try to disconcert with questions, challenges or gibes.” Michael R. Edelstein, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and author of *Three Minute Therapy*, defines it as “interrupting with derisive comments.” He says hecklers often act out emotions such as hostility, resentment or anger. Or they simply disagree with what the speaker is saying. They’re thinking, “I’m right, you’re wrong and you must see things my way.” Another reason is that they just want to show off and impress the audience.

Dr. Helen Friedman, a psychologist in St. Louis, Missouri, agrees: “Some people may just want to participate with the performer, to give them something to bounce off of and add humor to the show.”

Another contributing factor is the influence of alcohol. Some people become loud and uninhibited when they’re drinking and don’t realize they’re disruptive.

“And then,” Dr. Friedman says, “there’s always that one person in the audience who just doesn’t like you. These people sometimes take great pleasure in undermining the speaker.”

If most people agree that Michael Richards’ response of racial slurs left much to be desired, then what’s the right way to deal with hecklers? Edelstein suggests that



speakers respond in a manner that is comfortable for them. He offers three suggestions:

- Ignore the interruption and continue
- Respond in kind (i.e., in the same manner as the heckler)
- Use humor, such as good-natured joking

Scottish comedian Billy Connolly offers an example of how to combine responding in kind with humor. During a performance, a heckler kept interrupting the comedian. After a while Billy got fed up and stopped in the middle of the story he was telling and said, “Hey, you, stop telling me how to do my job. Do I come to your work and tell you how to do your sweeping up?” The audience roared with laughter and the heckler was silenced.

Tony Brent, “The Money Magician,” was performing in Orlando, Florida, a few years ago when a female patron became disruptive. “Early in the show, she decided she was the funniest person in the room,” Brent recalls. “Now, normally if a heckler is yelling stuff that is actually funny, I will roll with it and use their comments to get them on my side and still keep the show moving along. Stopping and having a conversation with a funny heckler can turn into a great thing if handled correctly,” Brent says. “My style is to begin asking questions to the

*(Continued on page 29)*

Learn to muzzle  
your pet peeves!

# Managing Anger

By Caren Neile, ATMS, CL

*“Speak when you are angry  
and you will make the best  
speech you will ever regret.”*

– AMBROSE BIERCE

Many years ago, I worked with an extremely unpleasant man who irritated me relentlessly. Because he was much older than I and had seniority at work, I kept my feelings to myself. Then one day, he said something fairly innocuous – something that at any other time wouldn’t have caused me to raise an eyebrow. I turned around and let him have it – sounding off for a good five minutes, in front of other employees, no less, about just exactly what I thought of him.

You may think this experience disqualifies me to write about anger management, but in fact, it taught me an important lesson: Anger is a perfectly normal human emotion. It only becomes a problem when we don’t know how to handle it in a healthy, constructive way. And surprisingly few of us do. That’s because in many families and cultures, we’re taught to corral our negative emotions. Women, in particular, are expected to be polite. Salespeople are taught that the customer is always right. And many children, students and low-level employees are supposed to kowtow to their superiors and not make waves.

But isn’t it a good idea to keep the peace, you might ask? The answer is, it depends on the situation. Appropriate anger in the face of injustice is what propelled people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi to fight for important social reforms. Unexpressed anger at a spouse or co-worker can turn inward and lead to depression

or high blood pressure. What’s more, anger can lead to passive-aggression (behavior expressing resentment in an unassertive way) which, as in the example above, can pave the way for a meltdown that takes both parties by surprise.

In short, it’s better to learn how to manage anger than to try to ignore or avoid it – or to allow it to explode. To take control of your anger, remember the acronym: C-A-L-M.

**Cognitive restructuring.** It’s easier to change the way you think than you think! We tend to fall quickly into patterns of thought such as, “He’s always out to get me,” or “There’s no hope of fixing this” if we’ve thought that way all our lives. The following are ways you can control the messages you send yourself:

- Looking for humor in a situation instead of heartache.
- Acknowledging that something is frustrating but not worth losing your cool over.
- Stepping back from your emotions and trying to see the situation logically.
- Considering the consequences of your negative thought patterns to yourself and to others.
- Determining and working to overcome what it is that makes you react the way you do.
- Learning to look at the situation from the other person’s point of view.

Of course, this all takes practice. After all, it’s practice that helps us form new habits.



## Selected Resources for Managing Anger

- [www.angermgmt.com](http://www.angermgmt.com)
- [www.apa.org/topics/controlanger.html](http://www.apa.org/topics/controlanger.html)
- [www.habitsmart.com/anger.html](http://www.habitsmart.com/anger.html)
- [www.mayoclinic.com/health/anger-management](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/anger-management)

**Assertiveness.** There is an important difference between assertiveness and aggression. Assertiveness means that you respect both yourself and others. If you are unjustly accused of mislaying an important document at work, state your case clearly and concisely without getting nasty and defensive. This will not only make you look calm and in control, it will also prevent escalation of the conflict.

Most people respect those who are assertive, whereas they tend to bully or steamroll over the needs of those who let them. When you feel that you are respected, you will have less reason to get angry.

**Laying back.** Yoga, anyone? Deep breathing, visualization and other forms of relaxation are key to calming the angry spirit. Remember the old saw about counting to 10 before you respond to someone who makes you mad? Simply slowing down your reactions – and getting much-needed oxygen to the brain – can often help to stabilize out-of-control emotions.

Sit in a comfortable chair and loosen your tie or belt. Breathe deeply from your diaphragm rather than shallowly from your chest. (Your abdomen will rise with each inhale when you're doing this correctly.) You might also want to slowly repeat a simple word or phrase, such as "calm down" or "relax." If you practice these techniques on a regular basis when you are not angry, you'll have them at your fingertips when you need them to help you unwind.

On the other hand, if you're in the midst of the full fight-or-flight effect with pumping adrenalin, racing heart and shaking limbs, you may want to work off that energy with a brisk walk around the parking lot or calisthenics in your home or office. In this way you're channeling the body's natural reaction toward a more useful goal.

**Memory aids.** Have you seen people walking around with inexpensive rubber bracelets? These are often used as mnemonic devices that help keep us on track with any new initiative. Try wearing a bracelet, plain rubber band or other concrete reminder to help you focus on controlling your anger. You might switch the hand you're wearing it on every time you engage in undesirable behavior and count how many switches you make during a day or a week. It's a great way to chart your progress.

Changing a lifetime of reaction to anger isn't going to be easy. That's why there are assertiveness training classes and counseling sessions that can give you tailor-made techniques to meet your particular needs. In some cases, a psychologist can make a difference in a highly angry person's behavior in as little as eight weeks. You may also want to take a look at a few books and Web sites [see box] that can help.

Anger management will improve life for you and for those around you. Once you begin to rethink angry attitudes, determine what caused your unhealthy reactions to anger, learn how to effectively express anger and move past your past, you're sure to live a happier, more productive life. 

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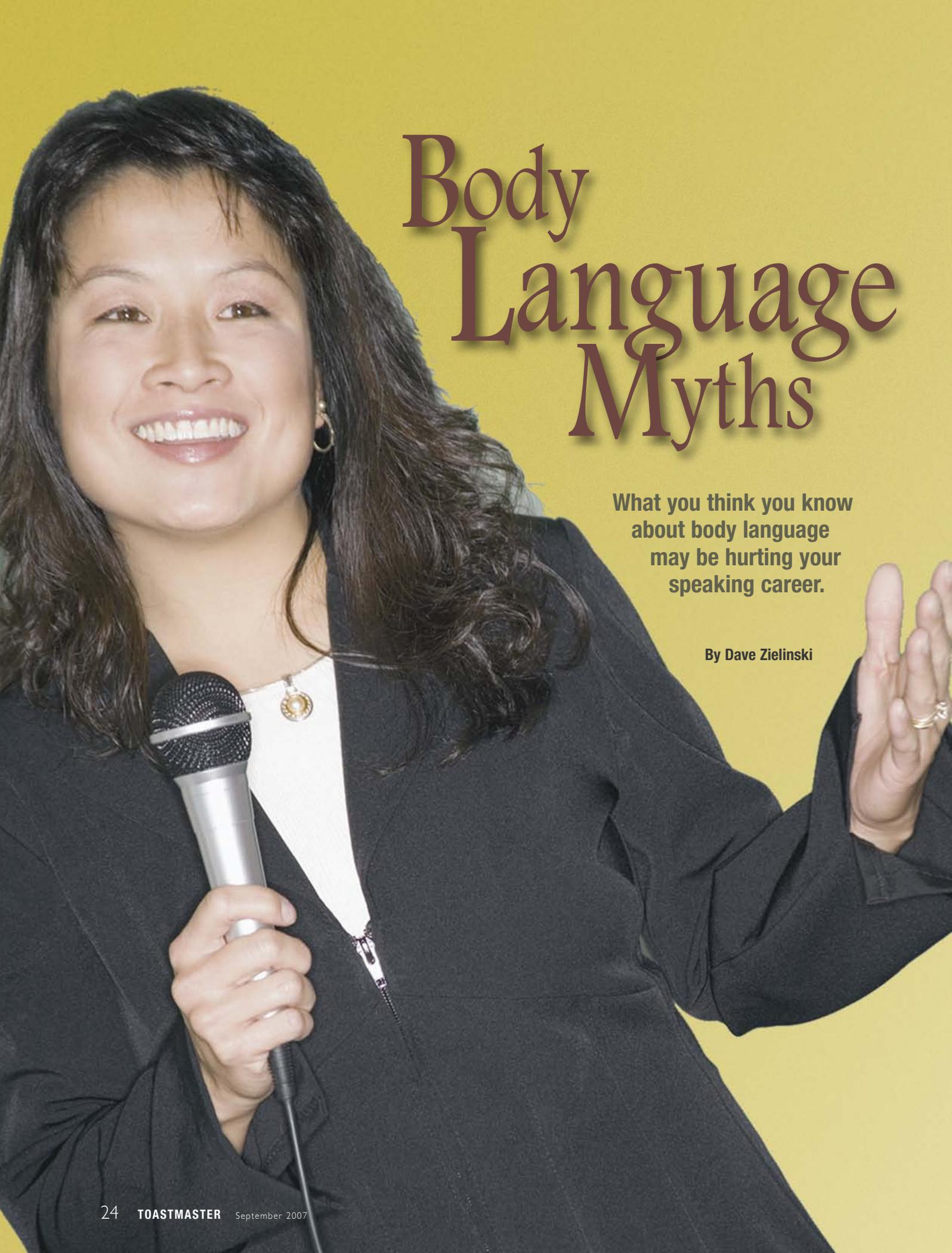


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# Body Language Myths

What you think you know  
about body language  
may be hurting your  
speaking career.

By Dave Zielinski

**Y**ou're being introduced to the sponsors of an important speech you're giving next week. To create a good first impression, you arrive full of pep. You talk fast, shake hands firmly and quickly. Your gestures are sharp and energetic. Have you sufficiently impressed your hosts with your enthusiasm and credibility?

Likely not. Establishing a credible first impression is often more about talking and less about moving. It's about using a slower, lower manner of speaking with fewer gestures. People subconsciously associate self-confidence and empathy with a controlled body style. Your hosts likely thought you were either trying too hard to impress or were sky high on espresso.

*A sales representative is pitching his organization's latest-and-greatest business planning software to a prospect at the senior management level. Midway through the presentation, the prospect leans back in her chair and crosses her arms in front of her. Should the rep read the body language as unspoken resistance to his price or benefits and quickly shift gears?*

The prospect in fact loves the product, but simply was chilled by the cold temperature in the conference room.

*A speaker stands rooted behind a lectern, exhibiting little discernible body language. But his content features an abundance of real-world examples, strong metaphors and visuals that amplify rather than distract. He also throws in some self-deprecating humor for good measure. Yet aside from good eye contact and periodic head movements, he could be a mannequin on the stage. Does this noticeable lack of body energy have the effect of passing out Sominex to the audience?*

In fact, this speaker scores high on post-speech audience evaluations for authenticity, compelling content and strong storytelling ability.

The first two scenarios have one thing in common – speakers who thought they knew something about body language but sabotaged themselves either through the subconscious messages their own actions sent or by misinterpreting another person's body language. However, we see in the third scenario that it is just as possible to ignore the body language “dos” and “don'ts” and still achieve a successful presentation.

We've all been conditioned to believe that some hard and fast rules exist for body language, guidelines that allow us to decode the subliminal messages being sent by certain gestures, postures, eye contact or other movements. Who among us hasn't been advised at some point not to cross our arms while speaking, to avoid moving a closed fist up and down, or – especially in the case of women – to replace naturally flowing hand gestures with sharp moves or jabs to drive home a point?

Every day in the United States, speech coaches tell their students to stand with their feet 6 to 8 inches apart, use the “Z” rule of eye contact and use the wide, sweeping hand gestures of a televangelist when speaking. And every day, a good deal of their advice is wrong.

### Urban Myths

Recent studies on the psychology of body language suggest that much of common wisdom that most people accept as gospel is really nonsense. There is no denying that some body language is universal – a smile is a smile regardless of whether you are in Boston, Buenos Aires or Berlin – but intentions and interpretations are far more frequently in the eye of the beholder than we imagine, and they are complicated by cultural factors, family origins, social dynamics, personal habits – and even room temperatures.

Indeed, much of what people think they know about body language is really urban folklore. The three examples in the opening of this the article illustrate that there is far more gray than black and white when it comes to the golden rules of body language and that includes many of the “rules” governing speaking scenarios. That doesn't mean all conventional wisdom is suspect. Speakers who make nervous circles with their hands or rock back and forth behind the lectern would still be wise to kick



**“There is far more gray than black and white when it comes to the golden rules of body language.”**

those habits. Knowing how and why our bodies betray us onstage, though, is a good step toward making sure our body language is working for us, not against us.

### Power and pitfalls of non-verbals

Body language is complicated because it is a double-edged sword. It has the power to amplify and elucidate the spoken word and, conversely, to express unspoken thoughts and feelings, sometimes to the point of betraying a speaker's true intentions. Author John Napier put it best in his book *Hands*, a seminal work on the evolution, mechanics and functioning of the human hand. "If language was given to people to conceal their thoughts, then gesture's purpose was to disclose them." Experts on non-verbal behavior say we literally "leak" our true or masked feelings through our body language and movements.

Most theories on body language suggest that verbal and non-verbal communication operate independently of each other. But one theory holds that language and gesture are a single, integrated system. In other words, no separate gesture language exists besides a *spoken* language – a supposition that David McNeil, a University of Chicago professor of linguistics and psychology, explores in his book *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal About Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). "Just as binocular vision brings out a new dimension of seeing, gesture reveals a new dimension of the mind," McNeil writes. He also theorizes that gestures do not simply *reflect* thought, they also *affect* thought. Gestures occur, he says, because they're part of a speaker's ongoing thought process, and without them thoughts might be altered or incomplete.

**"Many body-language bromides are little more than urban myths."**

showing others how you feel about yourself and the world," says Kare Anderson, a speaker and presentation skills coach with Say It Better Center of Sausalito, California. While people consciously read your body language, Anderson says, they subconsciously react to your body signals. If a person's mouth is saying one thing but her body another, a creeping sense of confusion and skepticism can overtake the listener, preventing a speaker's true message from connecting.

### Myths and Misinterpretations

Certainly some common wisdom regarding effective use of body language in speeches is based on sound empirical research. But many body-language bromides are little more than urban myths that have seeped into our belief systems by sheer repetition, passed along in how-to books or industry conferences like so much gossip.

For example, how many times have you dragged yourself to an opening sunrise session at an industry conference, only to be greeted by a supercharged speaker who launches himself onstage to the strains of the *Rocky* theme song? "How is everybody this morning?" he bellows, gesturing in broad televangelist strokes, followed by the obligatory, "I can't hearrrr you!"

Research suggests that such attempts to energize early-morning audiences are ill-conceived at best. Morning speakers are better off starting out at an energy level that more closely approximates the audience's. "Speakers do it because they think they're going to lift the audience to their level, but the research shows that the more you look different from someone upon first contact, the more likely they'll feel different from you and less they'll like you," says Anderson. "That doesn't mean the early-morning speaker doesn't come out without presence or warmth, only that he or she start at a medium range of energy and be more conversational."

### Crossed Signals

Consider too the open versus crossed arms body-language axiom, which says that people who cross their arms are more resistant to whatever message they are receiving. This may be true in some cases, but it's folly to generalize their interpretation to every situation. "Research shows that many men are most comfortable in conversations with their arms crossed in front of their bodies," Anderson says, "which doesn't necessarily mean they are disbelieving or resisting a message. And many women, when they are feeling slightly chilled, will cross their arms in front of them during a conversation."

Since humans are naturally imitative animals, someone who crosses his arms may simply be mirroring someone else's body language. "If you see people up on stage crossing their arms, you're more likely to do it yourself, often instinctively or without realizing it," Anderson says.

We've all undoubtedly heard that moving our fist up and down empathetically may be interpreted as a hostile gesture. Yet communications expert Phyllis Mindell, author of the book *How to Say It For Women*, says her experience is that plenty of strong speakers use the gesture effectively to show power. And although some how-to books discourage open-palm gestures as being weak or cold, Mindell says that, depending on the situation, they can work well "as gestures of friendliness and inclusiveness."

### Know Yourself and Your Body Will Follow

If you're striving to use body language in a way that better enhances your spoken messages, experts say your best bet is simply this: Be your own counsel and do what comes naturally, because the most effective gestures are spontaneous ones. Trying to apply the numerous and often-contradictory "rules" and guidelines of body language that the experts hand down can turn you

# How Well Can **You** Read Body Language?

**H**ow good is the average person at reading body language? Can we get better at discerning what faces or bodies in our audiences are truly telling us about the impact or tempo of our speeches? Or conversely, about a speaker's true intentions or convictions?

University of San Francisco psychology professor Maureen O'Sullivan studies how well people detect deception by relying on non-verbal cues from others. Given a video of subjects to review in controlled studies, most laymen detect lying about 60 percent of the time – barely above a flip of the coin. "Most people are pretty terrible at discerning whether other people are lying," O'Sullivan says. "But if you ask them, 'Is the person you're watching comfortable?' most will be able to determine that the liar is less comfortable than the non-liar, but they won't go to the next step of calling them a liar."

Yet one intriguing body of research suggests some people are much better than others at reading non-verbal cues that indicate lying, implying that with the right training and practice, people can become much better at interpreting body language. In this study, O'Sullivan and colleague Paul Ekman of the University of California at San Francisco tested the ability to detect lying among groups that included the U.S. Secret Service, CIA, the FBI, the California police, psychiatrists, judges and college students.

To the researchers' surprise, the Secret Service agents came out markedly ahead of the other groups in ability to accurately judge lying or truthfulness; more than 50 percent of the agents scored at or above a 70 percent accuracy level in assessing videotaped interviews where interviewees were asked to either tell the truth or lie about a film they'd just been watching.

What made the Secret Service more foolproof than others? For one thing, the researchers found that the agents used different information than the other groups did, tending to emphasize nonverbal more than verbal cues. O'Sullivan says the agents appeared to possess superior skills in spotting or decoding "micro-expressions," subtle emotional information displayed on the face. The agents also knew that facial muscular movements typically included more masking-type smiles when subjects lied and more enjoyment-type smiles when they told the truth.

into a quivering mass of self-consciousness, steering you way off your message.

"There are a lot of myths that work against presenters, making them more anxious and unsure of themselves than they need to be," says Gwenn Marie, an executive presentations skills coach with Coombs Media in Rochester, New York. "One of those myths is that there is a certain way to hold your body or use your arms and hands in a presentation. But from my perspective, it's far more important to align the message and the body language with the natural and authentic being of the presenter."

Whether you're a natural cheerleader, statesman or provocateur on stage, what's more important is what's in your blood, says Marie. As long as your message and non-verbals are aligned with your "blood" or natural inclinations, you'll be effective and believable.

If someone is a natural gesturer, Marie says, more power to him or her. But she believes some speech coaches go wrong trying to strong-arm speakers who aren't natural gesturers into using more motions. "There's nothing more painful than a speaker who goes off-message because he's focusing on using gestures that some golden rule says he should use, but that don't come naturally," she says.

Even if one of her clients is nearly motionless on stage, Marie won't encourage more use of body language as long as other key elements of good presenta-

tion are in place – voice quality and variation, conviction, strong content and good eye contact.

## **Body and Mind, Working Together**

Speakers can bring energy to presentations in plenty of other ways rather than having to rely on the artificial energy created through unnatural gestures. Those things include a passion for their content, confidence in their knowledge or appropriate use of humor. "Some speakers may not have the gestures, but they have an amazing sincerity and intensity about them, so they don't need the non-verbals," Marie says. "They carry it with their voice, their content and their aura."

It's particularly important that speakers be encouraged to gesture naturally in high pressure situations, Marie says. She has seen high-powered executives become thrown by large crowds or the presence of TV cameras and microphones, so she is constantly looking for ways to give them permission to be exactly who they are.

"It's amazing what happens to speakers when you give them the freedom to be themselves," she says. It's the best way possible to make sure the body and mind are speaking the same language. **T**

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**Dave Zielinski** is a freelance writer who divides his time between Wisconsin and South Carolina.

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## Responding to Hecklers

(Continued from page 21)

heckler in a non-threatening tone as opposed to simply yelling insults back at them.”

In this particular case, though, the woman wasn't funny. When she started cursing at him, Brent tried to quiet her down without making the situation worse. The woman stood up, “flashed” the audience and then stormed out of the room. “Fortunately, the rest of the audience could tell that she was out of control and they didn't hold it against me,” Brent said. “Had I started insulting her at the beginning, the audience might have gravitated toward her side, not realizing the confrontation wasn't my fault.”

Sometimes speakers are faced with an audience member who keeps asking questions. In many cases, the person isn't trying to be disruptive; he or she may genuinely wish to understand what the speaker is saying. The speaker should try to answer the questions without taking too much time away from the rest of the audience. If appropriate, the speaker might suggest a meeting after the program or during a scheduled break.

Then there are those who disagree with the presenter's point-of-view, especially if the topic is controversial. Friedman was once presenting such a topic and a woman in the audience kept raising her hand and refuting everything she said. At one point, the woman said,

“I've read books that say... (the opposite of what Friedman was saying).” Friedman took the opportunity to lean into the lectern, smile and say, “I don't know what kind of books you're reading, but...” The audience laughed, the tension was broken and she was able to continue with her presentation.

Many seem to think that Michael Richards' choice of response ruined his career. Friedman cautions that we shouldn't be too quick to judge his behavior, saying, “He was probably trying to be more outrageous than the heckler, which you don't want to do because it usually backfires.”

Does she think his career is over? “Hogwash,” says Friedman. “We all make mistakes.” Citing the inappropriate behavior of other celebrities that once grabbed media attention, she says, “This, too, will soon become yesterday's news. Nothing lasts forever.”

Ultimately, confidence in your speaking skills and your knowledge of the material are crucial to maintaining control of your presentations. A speaker's objective when faced with a disruptive individual or individuals, Friedman says, is “to be sympathetic and get the audience to bond with you, not with the heckler. You must be able to put the hecklers in their place without bashing them.” 

**Mary Ward Menke, ATMB**, is a writer and editor in St. Louis, Missouri, and a member of South County Toastmasters.

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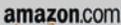
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