

TOASTMASTER®

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A Portrait of Love and Leadership

One member shows how skill-building helps at home.

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What Does Mentorship Look Like?

I'm always interested to hear how our members joined Toastmasters. Many people delayed the decision for a long time. Some of the more adventurous among us attended a meeting even when we had no idea what to expect.

I joined in 1987 because two co-workers, Arnold and Bill, came to my desk and said, "You're a pretty smart guy, Jim, but you say nothing at meetings. Come with us to a Saint John Toastmasters meeting."

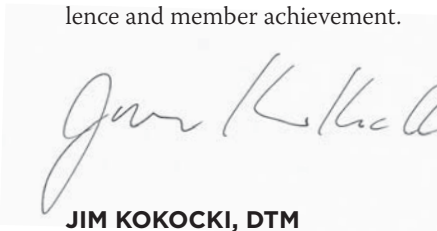
It was a good fit. I was strong technically as a computer programmer but was loath to speak up. The club met from 6 to 8 p.m. on Mondays. It still does. But back then we met in a conference room at a mid-tier hotel. Arnold, Bill and I would each leave the office around 5 p.m. and meet in the small bar at the hotel before the meeting. The beauty of this was that when a customer purchased just one beverage, he had access to the luncheon salads that sat on ice all day. Sometimes I'd have a soft drink. And we'd dine on the macaroni salad, the three-bean salad and a salad made of three kinds of cold cuts. I wouldn't indulge in this gastrointestinal science experiment today, but in those days it seemed to make sense.

The point of this story is that every week I was able to spend about 45 minutes with my first two mentors in Toastmasters. I remember nervously rehearsing my 30-second meeting-role description with them the first time I was scheduled to serve as timer.

Does your club facilitate mentoring relationships? Are you perceived as personally accessible to mentor new members? It's a busy world we live in and sometimes our actions send a different message than what we intend.

If I had experienced a difficult entry to Toastmasters, perhaps I wouldn't be in the position to offer this column. Mentoring is so important to member achievement and club excellence. Every member can make a direct contribution by serving as a mentor to improve the experience for another member.

As we develop, our needs from mentors evolve. In the final phase of a mentoring relationship, the two parties end their mentoring arrangement and redefine their relationship. Please speak at your club about some of your mentoring experiences. Talk about your needs at the time and how you have evolved. And share your stories to help others make progress in club excellence and member achievement.



JIM KOKOCKI, DTM
International President

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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

P.O. Box 9052, Mission Viejo, CA 92690 U.S.A.
+1 949-858-8255 • Fax: +1 949-858-1207 • Voicemail: +1 949-835-1300
www.toastmasters.org

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For information on joining or building a club, visit: www.toastmasters.org

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“After reading about the historical foundation of Toastmasters, we expected members to be wearing tuxedos and pearls.”

— Tasha Hart
Daybreak club
Jackson, Tennessee

Give and Take

Congratulations to the Mirkins for 25 years of marriage, as noted in the “Anniversary Meeting” article (September). Mr. Mirkin offered parallels between the qualities of long-lasting personal relationships and Toastmasters. I found his points instructive, and want to add a point on the section titled “Giving.”

His sentiment that giving is more desirable than taking in a relationship or a Toastmasters club struck a chord. Having experienced this value in others, including myself, I have found that it's the inability to *receive* from others that limits learning. How many times have you deflected the gift of praise about a speech? How often have you failed to receive the gift of constructive criticism about a speech? In both cases, a learning opportunity is missed.

In my marriage and in my club, I endeavor to give *and* receive “gifts” with grace and intention rather than raising one act above the other. After all, every time we give, someone else receives. I encourage every Toastmaster to practice valuing both actions and see what they learn.

David McCain

Toast of Flagstaff club
Flagstaff, Arizona

Just Write

The famous Nike marketing hook “Just Do It” would have been a great alternative to the title “3 Ways to Shake Off Writer’s Block” by Kathleen Fordyce (October). Like Fordyce says, start with a list; initially, the quality of what you write doesn’t matter.

I wrestled with writer’s block the first year I participated in National Novel Writing

Month, where I had to write 50,000 words. From that experience, I can confirm that taking a few minutes to write down what ideas you have—no matter how ugly the writing seems—is key to unlocking the door. The more you write, the more insight and inspiration flows. That is how I wrote 50,328 words in 30 days.

Stop judging yourself. Start where you are. Just do it.

Amy Clements

Capital City Club
Madison, Wisconsin

An Unexpected Welcome

I wrote my first book a year ago and found myself being asked to speak. What I could say on paper came out sticky in conversation. My spouse and I began searching for public speaking classes and discovered Toastmasters. Our next hurdle was to find a club in our area.

After reading about the historical foundation of Toastmasters, we expected members to be wearing tuxedos and pearls. How would my spouse and I be accepted coming from an African American middle-class background? At our first meeting we discovered a diverse group of people as eager as we were about this adventure in speaking.

Our first issue of the *Toastmaster* (August) mentioned Marquesa Pettway (in “From Free to Feel”), a “speakerpreneur” who has the same ambition that I have. The colorful people, cultures and backgrounds represented throughout the issue inspired us. My spouse and I found something so enjoyably unexpected.

Tasha Hart

Daybreak club
Jackson, Tennessee

Three Suggestions

I have been a member since 2004 and have enjoyed seeing the evolution of the *Toastmaster* magazine. With the increased editorial emphasis on respecting and embracing cultural differences in clubs and business, I offer three suggestions:

1. Tailor content for the people reading it. Begin separating (or should I say, “growing”) the magazine into publications more aligned with cultures of North America, Asia, Europe, etc. Some North American

references are lost on or even offensive to readers outside of North America.

2. John Cadley’s column used to be the first thing I turned to when receiving the magazine. Now I find him very “North American” and showing his age. His essays aren’t current or relevant anymore.
3. Page 2, where our International President’s “Viewpoint” is located, should instead have an essay from the editor, and the last page of the magazine should be where the President’s message goes, perhaps with some words of optimism promoting the revitalized education program.

Lindy Smith, ACS, ALB

Electric Toasters club
North Fort Myers, Florida

The Elevator Speech

Many noteworthy articles appear regularly in the magazine; therefore, I always enjoy reading it end to end! One such article is in the August issue, “The Elevator Speech” by Christine Clapp, DTM. It is excellent advice for anyone, Toastmaster or not.

I attend interview panels at my company for internal staff movements. At most of these I find that candidates don’t make good use of that golden opportunity when they are asked, “Tell us about yourself.” Another occasion is when guests drop in at our club meetings and they are asked to introduce themselves.

The three points described in the article are well worth developing by any prospective candidate looking for a different position or seeking a better career opportunity, or even when making small talk in social settings.

I especially liked the last point, “Start a dialogue.” Yes, when asking an open-ended question, you feel at ease and pave the way to making a lasting impression!

Many thanks for publishing articles of great value.

Shyamalie Jayasekera, ACB, CL

The Colombo Toastmasters club
Colombo, Sri Lanka

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write it in 200 words or less. State your name, member number and home club, and send it to letters@toastmasters.org. Please note: Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity, and may be published in both the print and electronic editions.

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ON THE COVER: Photo of Paulo Vasconcelos by Liliana Benites

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▶ MEMBER MOMENT

Destined to be Distinguished



Nirmala Lilly

As the eldest daughter of seven children growing up in Trivandrum and Kochi, Kerala, India, Nirmala Lilly was fated to forego higher education and settle into an early marriage. However, the Distinguished Toastmaster says she knew she was destined for more.

Lilly is now the CEO and owner of Infinity Hospitality Services, a firm that focuses on tourism, consultancy and training in India and internationally. She also is a member of the Institute of Directors [a nonprofit association] and a managing committee member for many businesses and organizations in Kerala. Lilly holds an MBA from Delhi University in sales and marketing and a post-graduate degree in public relations.

In Toastmasters, she quickly stepped into leadership roles, including area governor, division governor and lieutenant governor marketing for District 82, and made it her mission to charter and revamp clubs.

A Toastmaster for nearly a decade, Lilly is currently a member of two clubs: the Kerala and Assisi Toastmasters clubs.

Why did you join?

It took two years; I was petrified to stand in front of an audience. But because of the sheer persuasion of fellow Toastmasters, I joined. Once I did, it was like a duck to water, there was no looking back. I was pretty confident that I would become a better communicator and leader and would shine in the corporate world.

How has Toastmasters played a role in your career?

Although I worked with Taj Group of Hotels for 18 years, because of my poor communication skills, I could not reach higher positions. My Toastmasters experience made a huge impact and I gained confidence in speaking and interacting with my higher-ups. Toastmasters was and is the medicine for my weakness as far as articulation is concerned. It gives me the courage to quit and get better jobs, better positions and better [salary] packages and, of course, recognition.

Why did you take on leadership roles?

After I completed my *Competent Communicator* manual, I tried to understand the various roles and leadership positions. I participated in all contests and received accolades as well. I realized it was a wonderful opportunity for anyone and wanted to spread the good message of Toastmasters as much as possible.

Toastmasters taught me that “you learn best practices by doing.” This leadership experience helped me immensely in my professional life.

What’s it like being a Toastmaster in India?

The expansion of Toastmasters clubs started happening in Southern India in 2009 and the number of clubs is still growing. The scope for clubs is vast, as India is a multilingual country. In Kerala, we speak Malayalam. Ever since the Kerala Toastmasters club chartered in 2010, it has achieved President’s Distinguished as well as District 92’s popular award, called the Golden Gavel. It is a quality club in terms of education and leadership, and we are trying to be the role model for others.

▶ IN BRIEF

SHOW OFF YOUR CLUB VIDEO

Share your club’s story and enthusiasm for the brand and your club could win branded materials (e.g., lectern, banner) valued up to \$100. For contest details, and to see the latest winning video, visit www.toastmasters.org/BrandVideos. The contest will continue through 2016. To see a playlist of winning videos, go to <http://ow.ly/zZjdx>.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE STATS

Learn about our global organization! See the research results drawn from member studies, surveys and focus groups on the Statistics and Data Hub webpage (www.toastmasters.org/Data). Visit the page for maps, infographics and reports that summarize member experiences.

WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

In your speeches, focus on what makes you stand out. It could be your interests or hobbies, your life or work experience, or perhaps the area where you live. If you differentiate yourself from others by highlighting your unique perspective, you won’t have to compete as much with the crowd.

FOLLOW THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow Jim Kokocki on Twitter (@TI_IntlPres) and Instagram (TI_IntlPres) for updates about his district visits, leadership inspiration and more.

▶ SNAPSHOT

Convention Party in Hong Kong

On August 29, Division H of District 89 hosted a Convention on Demand party in Hong Kong. More than 80 members and guests attended to watch highlights from the 2015 International Convention together. In the middle, wearing pink, is event creator Jim Wan, club president, posing with members of his home club, Hong Kong Achievers.



▶ ADVICE FROM MEMBERS

Give the Gift of Good Listening

BY PENNY GOULD, CC, ALB
SUNDOWNERS TOASTMASTERS
SPRUCE GROVE, ALBERTA, CANADA

Sometimes the most lasting and impactful gifts have no monetary value. Research shows that couples who engage in effective communication have closer and more satisfying relationships, so make this the year you give your loved one the gift of good communication.

When we think of communication, we often think of how we speak. The other side of communication, and perhaps the more important side, is how we *listen*. Give the gift of good communication by being a good listener. Use your **EARS**: Engage, Acknowledge, Repeat and Support.

It's pretty obvious that in order to listen, your partner needs to talk. **Engaging** your partner may be as simple as asking how his day was. If she's particularly quiet one evening, gently inquire what's on her mind. Or ask for advice on a problem you are dealing with. Show you are interested in your partner's thoughts and opinions.

Once you have your partner talking, it is important to **acknowledge** him or her as a speaker. Have you ever been annoyed because someone starts texting while you talk to them? We are surrounded by distractions, but good listeners acknowledge the speaker by providing their undivided attention. Maintaining eye contact, nodding appreciatively and responding with appropriate facial expressions are all signs of acknowledging the speaker.

Sometimes, in spite of our best intentions, the message we hear is different from the message intended by the speaker. Listening and understanding are not the

same. **Repeating** what the speaker said, but in your own words, gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify or correct a misunderstanding. The purpose here is not to express your own opinion or react to what you have heard, but to ensure you clearly understand the point your significant other is making.

The last element of being a good listener involves **support**. This encompasses accepting your partner's right to be heard and right to an opinion. Support means treating your partner with respect, even when you disagree with an opinion.

This year, make a commitment to use your **EARS** to become a good listener and give a gift that outlasts any material possession or service.



QUICK TAKES

▶ LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

Paying Tribute to “Yogi-isms”

The English language can often be used to eloquent effect. But sometimes it's the *misuse* of English that produces the most entertaining results. Case in point: Yogi Berra.

Berra, who died September 22, 2015 at 90, was a legendary baseball player for the New York Yankees. But he was almost equally as well-known for his quirky and colorful use of words. Berra had a knack for saying things that were unintentionally amusing—phrases that were ridiculously redundant or disjointed but that conveyed a strange sense of logic nonetheless.

His sayings came to be affectionately called “Yogi-isms.” The late William Safire, the famed language columnist for *The New York Times*, described such phrases as “happy mistakes.”

Here are five of the most celebrated quotes attributed to Berra:

On the key to baseball success: *“Ninety percent of the game is half mental.”*

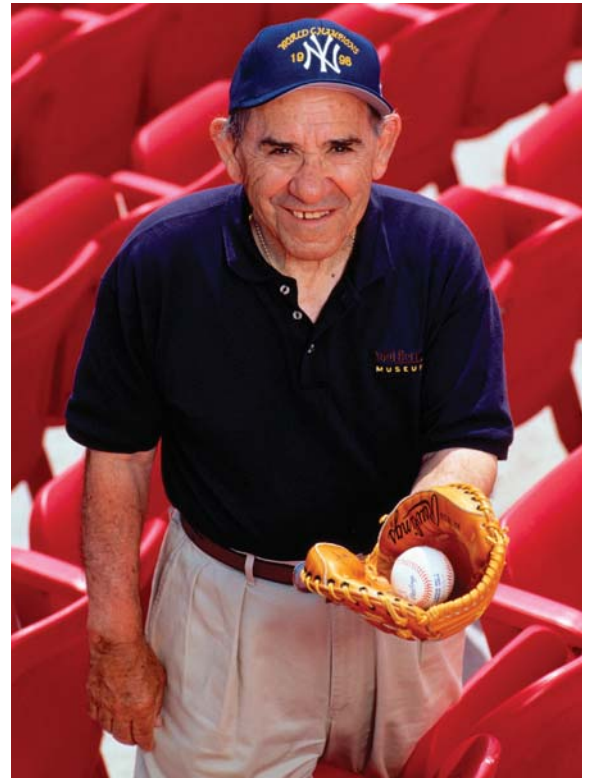
On fan attendance: *“If people don't come to the ballpark, how are you gonna stop them?”*

On the importance of being attentive: *“You can observe a lot by watching.”*

On taking advantage of opportunities: *“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”*

On never giving up in a ballgame: *“It ain't over till it's over.”*

Over the years, Berra was quoted so often that it became difficult for writers to know exactly what he did say and what was altered or mistakenly attributed to him. Yogi had an answer for that too: *“I really didn't say everything I said.”*



Baseball legend Yogi Berra was also a beloved cultural figure.

How do you feel about controversial speech topics in Toastmasters?

“ Part of the Toastmasters Promise is: ‘To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow.’ Whatever it takes to achieve that goal is more important than pushing the envelope just because we can.

“Criticizing club members for their unwillingness to address touchy topics goes against that principle. Toastmasters can flex their debate muscles in clubs that specialize in debate.”

Ruth Nasrullah, ACB, ALB

Speakers R Us ▶ Houston, Texas

Nasrullah's article “You're Speaking about What?!” appeared in the April 2012 Toastmaster magazine.

“ Technology has decreased the distance between cultures—ideologically and religiously. The emotions tied to religion and politics tend to divide us, and speaking about emotionally charged subjects is something we must learn. It should be viewed as a challenge, not only to become good speakers but also good diplomats. Religion and politics are fair game, as long as we tread lightly and speak encouragingly.”

Mathew Suddath

Toastmasters of Richmond Hill ▶ Richmond Hill, Georgia

“ Controversial topics aren't automatically offensive. If I stick to the facts when I'm discussing, for example, the similarities and differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam (a fascinating topic, by the way), would anybody be offended if I was respectful of all three faiths during my speech? If my club had a taboo against speaking about politics and religion, I'd probably find a new one.”

Vincent Tume, CC

Candu Toastmasters ▶

Mississauga, Ontario, Canada



Members contributed to the discussion on the LinkedIn Official Toastmasters International Members Group.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Read *Toastmasters International's policy on controversial topics on the next page.*

▶ MEET MY MENTOR

Joyce Feustel, DTM

Katrina Johnson, CC, ALB, landed her first job shortly after graduating from college, and she panicked when asked to make a presentation to her employer's board of directors. Katrina had managed to dodge public speaking all through high school and college, but she didn't want her fear of public speaking to hold her back from succeeding in her career.

Her supervisor suggested she look into Toastmasters, so she visited the Timberline club in Denver, Colorado. There she met Joyce Feustel, DTM. Katrina mentioned she needed to prepare for a speech at work and Joyce convinced her that Toastmasters could help. Katrina joined that evening and Joyce became her mentor.

First, Joyce helped Katrina define specific goals, including speaking slower, using pauses and keeping her speeches simple and concise. They also set a goal of earning a Competent Communicator award, which Katrina accomplished within two years. She has also earned an Advanced Leader Bronze award.

Katrina still fears public speaking (although not as much as before), but her new goal is to speak professionally to encourage the younger generation to face their fears, just as she does every time she steps in front of an audience.

Tell us about Joyce.

Joyce has a social media tutoring and training company focused on getting baby boomers up to speed with social media, yet she is always there for me, regardless of how busy she is. She spent hours at my home helping me organize my first few speeches, correcting my phrasing and giving me tips on how to breathe and slow down while speaking.

How has she helped you improve your skills?

I run my speeches by her to get her feedback on things like pauses and potential areas of confusion for the audience. She helps time my speech, advises me on different points of view to consider and sets goals for me, such as hitting three key points or incorporating five pauses into the delivery of my speech. She also provides management insights and has taught me how to run a successful club, serving as its president.



FROM LEFT: *Katrina Johnson and Joyce Feustel*



What is the best feedback you ever received from Joyce?

"That was great—pauses, pace and timing!" Just hearing that from her kept me positive about my next speech and led me to become the president of the club. Who knew someone so frightened of public speaking would take on such a public role.

NOMINATE YOUR MARVELOUS MENTOR!

Do you know an exceptional mentor who has positively influenced you? Send a 200-word description and photo (1 MB or larger) of you and your mentor to MentorMoment@toastmasters.org.



▶ TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL POLICY ON CONTROVERSIAL SPEECH TOPICS

Toastmasters International does not officially prohibit or place restrictions of any kind upon any speech topic, content or language. Clubs are simply encouraged to exercise good taste and cultural sensitivity for the greater good. Individual clubs do have the right to limit speech topics, content or language by a consensus of members. Club leaders should guide their members on how to observe good taste and sensitivity in the context of that particular club. Club websites are useful for advising members and guests of established club practices and policies, and ensuring continuity through changes in leadership.

TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



1 | ANNA PURNA KRISHNAN, FROM DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, poses near the Matterhorn mountain in Zermatt, Switzerland.

2 | YERMURAT NURGOZHA, ACB, ALB, (RIGHT) AND ASSEL STAMBEKOVA, ACS, ALB, FROM ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN, visit Bayanul National Park in Kazakhstan.

3 | MIKE MAUNSELL, FROM CLONMEL, COUNTY TIPPERARY, IRELAND, climbs to the summit of Carrauntoohil, Ireland's highest mountain, located in County Kerry.

4 | SELVI FRANITA, FROM JAKARTA, INDONESIA, stands in front of Mount Bromo, an active volcano in East Java, Indonesia.



View more photos on your tablet or on our Facebook page: Toastmasters International Official Fan Page.



PICTURE YOURSELF HERE! Pose with the *Toastmaster* magazine—print or tablet edition—during your travels and submit your photos for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue. Visit www.toastmasters.org/Submissions. Bon voyage!

My European Adventure

From Germany to Belgium to France,
I've savored my 50-year journey.

BY FRANK THOROGOOD, ACG

In 1964 I was a young man living in Frankfurt, Germany, working as a chartered accountant. In January of that year, the Frankfurt Rhein-Main Toastmasters gave a demonstration meeting at the social club to which I belonged. The members were brilliant, most of them belonging to the United States Armed Forces Radio and Television Network.

The next month I attended a meeting of the Rhein-Main club (which is no longer in existence). When asked to say something at the end, I was terrified. I muttered a few words—and soon joined the club.

Toastmasters has been a grand adventure, one that I have experienced in different languages and in clubs and contests all over Europe.

Thus began my 50-year journey in Toastmasters. It has been a grand adventure, one that I have experienced in different languages and in clubs and contests all over Europe.

After living in Germany, I moved to Paris, France, in 1967, and joined Toastmasters UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The club stopped short in 1970, when a new member suffered a heart attack while giving his Ice Breaker speech. The man died, and the club was discontinued.

In the early '70s I moved again—this time to Brussels, Belgium. Seeking to renew my Toastmasters involvement, I wrote (there were no emails or faxes then) to Toastmasters International in Santa Ana, California, asking if Brussels had a Toastmasters club. The reply: No, but why not start one?

I put an advertisement in a local English-speaking magazine for anyone interested in a Toastmasters club to attend a meeting at my home. Twenty-two people came, 20 joined immediately and we had our charter within a few weeks. The Brussels Toastmasters club is still going strong 43 years later.



Maggie and Frank Thorogood

In 1975, it was back to Paris! Upon my return to the city, I joined the newly formed, English-speaking Toastmasters of Paris. Eventually, I joined several other clubs in Paris as well. In 1991 I won the European entry in the International Speech Contest. This was the equivalent of the district finals, but Europe was not a district at the time. Our European membership was called the CCET, the Continental Council of European Toastmasters. Eventually it became District 59. About 90 people were present for that 1991 contest, compared to

the 450 at the District 59 finals of the same contest in 2014.

After being a “Toastmasters widow” for 35 years, my wife, Maggie, ATMB, finally thought it would be good to see what I was up to in these long weekend meetings far away, and she joined the French-speaking Forum des Rives de Seine club near Paris. One year, *both* of us were in the District 59 finals of the Table Topics contest in English, she from her club and I from mine. Maggie took home the first-place prize.

After retirement, we moved to Nice, on the Côte d'Azur in France, and immediately founded Toastmasters NICE, a bilingual French and English club. Now our hobby is to travel to Toastmasters speech contests and meetings in other countries. Last year we were in Krakow, Poland, for the District 59 spring conference; in Rome for the Division G conference; and in Berlin for Division C's celebration of Toastmasters' 90-year anniversary and the division's Table Topics and Humorous Speech contests. Maggie and I were judges in both contests and in both languages, English and German.

Throughout these 50 years, we have made friends all over Europe, and our lives have been greatly influenced—as have so many others—by Toastmasters. I am so happy that on that day in 1964, the Frankfurt Rhein-Main club made the effort to give a demonstration meeting. It transformed my whole life. **T**

FRANK THOROGOOD, ACG, is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants and a member of Toastmasters NICE in Nice, France.



On Top of Her Game

Meet the newest Accredited Speaker: Ellie Kay, ACS, ALB, AS



To earn Accredited Speaker status, Ellie Kay delivered her “Heroes At Home” speech to judges and a large audience of Toastmasters at the 2015 International Convention in Las Vegas.

BY MARY NESFIELD

Ellie Kay is the most recent Toastmaster to achieve Accredited Speaker status. This is the highest speaking designation in Toastmasters—a title signifying excellence in professional speaking techniques.

Kay, who earned the title at the 2015 International Convention after a long qualifying process, joined Toastmasters almost three years ago, when she was already a successful public speaker with a career that had taken her around the

A graduate of Colorado Christian University with a bachelor’s degree in human resources management, Kay serves as a family finance expert for major media outlets and Fortune 500 companies. As a keynote speaker at conferences and events, she mixes humor with hard facts to spread her message about making smart financial decisions.

Kay’s true passion is advising military families on finance—a topic she knows

Admissions Liaison Officer for the U.S. Air Force Academy, Kay has counseled and mentored high school students on admissions requirements for the academy.

Her career has taken her far, both literally and figuratively. Kay travels the world providing financial literacy education to families that live on U.S. Air Force bases. “It’s where my passion and profession overlap,” she says. “I love helping these military families.” She sits on the advisory board of the Military Family Advisory Network and has received the Army’s highest civilian medal, the Dr. Mary E. Walker Award, for outstanding dedication to improving the quality of life for soldiers and their families.

Kay has been featured in television programs, newspapers and magazines. She has stood in for two U.S. presidents’ wives, one year filling in for Barbara Bush at the Non-Commissioned Officers Association’s annual “Military Spouse of the Year” event and another time substituting for Laura Bush at the National Guard Association’s annual convention. She is also a published writer—a best-selling author who recently finished her 15th book.

“Look at the [Accredited Speaker] criteria early. There are very specific things that you have to do to be prepared.” — Ellie Kay

world. The Palmdale, California, resident had spoken professionally on financial matters for about 25 years, but she joined a club as a way to try out and practice new material for her speeches. She also joined as a way to give back.

“I am passionate about public speaking,” she says, “and for those who have a desire to be able to communicate on a higher level, on a level with greater excellence, I want to help them get there. I love helping new speakers go from good to great, and that’s why I’m in Toastmasters.”

intimately. Raised in a military family (her father served in the U.S. Navy and in the U.S. Air Force, and her grandfather served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII), Kay married a fighter pilot and was one of a handful of U.S. Air Force spouses who graduated as a Master Trainer through the Army Family Team Building training and awareness program. Of the couple’s seven children, three are serving in the U.S. military—one is in the Marine Corps, another is in the Air Force and another is in the Army. As an

Aiming for a New Title

In 2014, while talking with Michael Notaro, DTM, PIP, about the Accredited Speaker Program, Kay realized that she had already met most of the criteria needed to apply for the Accredited Speaker (AS) designation. She had given more than 25 speeches outside of Toastmasters and was paid for at least 20 of those speeches. The only thing she didn't have was a video of one of them. The video had to meet specific guidelines. Fueled by her passion for public speaking, she switched into high gear and finished one in two days to meet the deadline. "I was very excited to pass that first level," she says.

Kay's desire to give back has earned her dozens of volunteer awards. She is area director of District 33 and president of her club, Shop Talk Toastmasters, in Lancaster, California, which allows her to help a great many people come into their own as leaders, she says.

She believes anyone can be a great public speaker if they're willing to put in the work. And practice is part of that work.

"Even if you are a professional speaker," she says, "the day that you stop doing the work is the day that your skill set is going to fall away and you're not going to be all that you can be as a public speaker."

The speech that helped her earn the AS title, "Heroes At Home," was one she had given around the world numerous times throughout the years, but that doesn't mean she didn't practice it before delivering it in August during the International Convention as the final step in meeting the AS program requirements. In preparation, she gave it at her club a week before, but she felt it wasn't her best. She changed the two-minute opening and practiced it for two hours before finally delivering it to a large Toastmasters audience and a select group of judges

"It was incredible," Kay says about the experience. She found it natural and easy to imagine she was addressing an audience filled with military members.

"I am so thrilled to be an Accredited Speaker," she says. "It was a lot of work. I practiced a lot, and I did what I'm passionate about, and it turned out pretty well. I

look forward to the opportunity to help others in their speaking journey even as I have been encouraged by so many in this pathway to Accredited Speaker."

How to Become an Accredited Speaker

The AS program recognizes Toastmasters who have achieved a level of proficiency that enables them to be paid as professional speakers. Candidates must be current members in good standing. They must also have earned one of the following education awards or higher: Able Toastmaster, Advanced Toastmaster Bronze or Advanced Communicator Bronze. Program candidates progress through two levels of evaluation and are judged by a panel of professional speakers.

It is a rigorous process. Since the program's inception in 1981, less than 20 percent of all applicants have become members of this exclusive group.

STEPS:

1. Review the Accredited Speaker Program rules as well as the eligibility and application requirements.
2. Give 25 speeches lasting at least 20 minutes, 15 of which are paid, to non-Toastmasters audiences with a minimum of 20 people. This requirement must be met by the time one applies for Accredited Speaker status.
3. Have a video of yourself giving a 20- to 45-minute presentation before a live audience.
4. Have five different clients of your paid engagements submit recommendations on the official Accredited Speaker Program Recommendation Form.
5. Complete the Accredited Speaker Program Application.
6. Submit a completed application between January 1 and February 1.

Please note: International officers or directors, candidates for international officer or director, region advisors and applicants for region advisor are not eligible to participate in the Accredited Speaker Program.

After completing the six steps, applicants pass through two levels of evaluations.

Level 1

Applications are reviewed for completeness, and video submissions from accepted applicants are reviewed by a panel of judges. An applicant whom a majority of judges agree demonstrates high-caliber presentation skills advances to the next level.

Level 2

Applicants who pass Level 1 are invited to present before a live audience, including to a panel of judges, at the International Convention held in August each year. Applicants whose live presentations meet the required level of professionalism (as agreed upon by a majority of judges) are awarded the AS designation.

Those who become Accredited Speakers will receive a professional reference from Toastmasters International as well as publicity and potential spokesperson opportunities. They also receive an Accredited Speaker pin, badge and plaque.

After receiving her Accredited Speaker award, Kay gave this advice to those who want to achieve the designation: "Look at the criteria early. There are very specific things that you have to do to be prepared." She also suggests attending workshops by other Accredited Speakers. "Get educated ... get coaching ... have people listen to your message," Kay says, "and don't be thin-skinned. Take the criticism that is given to you in a productive way so that you can go from good to great." ■

Level 1 applications are accepted January 1 through February 1. For more information on how to apply, see the Accredited Speaker section on the Toastmasters International website at www.toastmasters.org.

MARY NESFIELD is associate editor of the *Toastmaster* magazine.



A Portrait of Love and Leadership

A father in Portugal shares the value of communicating at home.

BY PAULO VASCONCELOS, CC

When I joined Toastmasters in late 2007, I was young and single, with no family attachments. Eight years later, I am happily married and I have a 3-year-old son and year-old twins (a girl and a boy). I am also a member of the EDP Toastmasters club in Porto, Portugal.

The skills I acquired in Toastmasters have improved my self-esteem and my confidence, and I'm determined to speak to groups of people. But more than that, my Toastmasters experience has deeply impacted the way I develop relationships with my friends and family—my children, in particular.

How does Toastmasters affect a family? Let me share a story about something that happened earlier this year.

EDP Toastmasters is an innovative club that enjoys presenting challenges to members. Sofia Lage, the club's vice president public relations, came up with an idea to keep members' club spirit alive during the summer holidays (the holiday is one month long), but also to help us get to know one another better. In the last club meeting before the holidays, she challenged all members to capture the essence of summer, along with the Toastmasters spirit, in a photo. Club officers would later enter the photos into a PowerPoint presentation and members would vote on their favorite.

I thought, *This isn't a good fit for me.* With three toddlers, my holidays are not glamorous enough for a winning photo. A beach in paradise, an exotic mountain—these are the kinds of images that should win the prize.

But in true Toastmasters fashion, I wasn't going to give up. I asked Liliana, my wife, to help set the stage in our home garden, away from the daily mess. Our goal was to express unity, bonding, leadership, love and true communication between a father and his children. The cover photo of the February *Toastmaster* magazine, for a story titled "Leading with Love," perfectly underscored this message.

Capturing an image of me with our three children was a challenge and an act of affection. We felt Liliana's presence on both sides of the camera. Her special tenderness brightened the experience.

After the summer break, at our next club meeting, my photo was rated the best, and my prize was a coffee table book of photos of Arouca Geological Park in northern Portugal.

The message of leading with love—at home, at Toastmasters meetings, in your community and at work—is powerful and, through EDP's summer challenge, I tried to embody it.

The message of leading with love—at home, at Toastmasters meetings, in our community and at work—is powerful and, through EDP's summer challenge, I tried to embody it. My story shows how Toastmasters can affect members' personal lives. Embrace a challenge and show the Toastmasters spirit, and you'll achieve your goal! Our club also benefited from the challenge by posting the interesting member photos on our Facebook page, thus attracting new members by showing what a fun and innovative club we have.

Growing as a parent

Verbal and nonverbal communication are both critical to parenting. Serving as grammarian and developing my active listening skills in club meetings have helped me pay more attention to language. Learning the proper usage of one's mother tongue from an early age allows children, like mine, to acquire good language skills to better express themselves.

Toastmasters helps people gain a rich vocabulary, master difficult words, and learn proper articulation and sentence structure. Using body language effectively is also a powerful interaction tool we learn to use in clubs. All of these skills are a parent's ally.

Being able to "speak" through gestures helps me, as a parent, communicate with my twin toddlers. When your toddler doesn't yet speak, facial expressions and body language are excellent channels for communication. Showing expressions of surprise, apathy, happiness, sadness or enthusiasm stimulates a baby's ability to catch meaning, recognize feelings and understand others.

Sofia, club VPPR, says she uses the sandwich method commonly used in speech evaluations to provide motivational feed-

back for her young daughter. "My daughter is more welcoming of my requests," she says, "and it's a smoother way to evaluate her accomplishments—helping her always aim for excellence, while not compromising her self-esteem."

Since early times, parents have had to promote attitudes and behaviors that boost communication and leadership in their children. We develop these competences in Toastmasters and they lead to healthier and happier parent-child relationships.

Couples do better when they optimize feedback

Couples feed on daily communication, expressing their feelings while actively listening to their partners. Words and gestures nurture the relationship. Without communication, relationships won't last.

Tiago Guerra, CC, CL, the EDP Toastmasters club president, says, "Our ability to listen, actively and carefully, is one of the skills we can improve in Toastmasters. I assure you it has made a difference in my marriage! I'm not so stressed out or impulsive, and that makes me a better listener." He says he now thinks things over before presenting his arguments.

Developing mechanisms for improvement are crucial to the growth of a relationship. In Toastmasters, in addition to developing listening skills, we also learn to give feedback. In relationships, evaluation and constructive feedback can be powerful tools—if given without malice, just as we do in clubs.

Leadership and balance within the family

Club member Luís Carrilho, CC, CL, says that Toastmasters has exceeded his expectations. "I am more confident, and have overcome my shyness," he says.

Luís shared one particular moment during his son's seventh birthday party, when his friends and family asked him to speak. "This was something I had always tried to avoid," he says. "However, this year I embraced the challenge and seized the opportunity."

He proceeded to deliver an impromptu speech. "To everybody's astonishment, including my own, I spoke fluently and inspirationally about the importance of frequent family gatherings. I finished with a call to action for another family gathering." His speech was met by a round of applause. "But best of all," he said, "I saw my son's proud face staring at me like never before."

Embrace a challenge and show the Toastmasters spirit, and you'll achieve your goals both inside and outside the club—and even at home. ■

PAULO VASCONCELOS, CC, is an electronic and telecommunications engineer for EDP, Portugal's biggest energy utility company, where he plays a key role in company communication within communities. In 2007, he joined Toastmasters as a charter member of the Oporto Toastmasters Club in Matosinhos, Portugal. In 2014, he helped charter a new club, EDP Toastmasters club in Porto, Portugal, and helped coordinate a Youth Leadership Program in Tabuaco, a village in Northern Portugal.

Speaking One-on-One

6 tips for better conversations.

BY KATHLEEN FORDYCE

Every day we exercise our communication skills during social interactions. The way we communicate one-on-one can make or break a relationship, and how we express ourselves, handle confrontation and work toward a compromise makes all the difference.

Fortunately, Toastmasters is a great help in this area. The skills practiced in club meetings help you talk with children, hold difficult discussions with employees, speak effectively to bosses, engage potential new clients and handle disagreements with friends.

Liliana Valle, ACB, an airport manager in California, says, “It was those skills that you learn through public speaking—the hand gestures, the eye contact, trying to get buy-in to be on the same page, being able to pick up on those cues, those movements—that I think helped me get my job.” She earned a promotion just six months after joining Toastmasters.

Perfecting your interpersonal and speaking skills can help in all situations, says Mary Claire O’Neal, a communication consultant, coach and author from Lexington, Kentucky. “The better you get at the interpersonal part, the better speaker you become,” she says. “You can be so situationally aware that you connect better with your audiences.”

Begin improving your communication skills and relationships with these expert tips.

1 Consider Your Audience

Toastmasters know that before you prepare a speech, you must consider your audience and their familiarity with your topic. What’s in it for them? Do they share anything in common with you? Perhaps a career, a passion or an interest? Likewise, it is important that you develop an understanding of any person you speak to one-on-one.

Robyn Hatcher, a New York City-based communications-skills expert and author of the book *Standing Ovation Presentations*, says the key to good communication with other people is “figuring out three things: what motivates them, what their communication style is and how they prefer to get information.”

Hatcher offers an example that she often sees when working with companies to improve communication. Many employees, when talking to a boss, provide detailed information when the boss just wants a quick summary. If you know someone who struggles to sit through lengthy discussions, ensure your message is succinct so the person won’t get frustrated.



Planning your message beforehand is also important—especially so when a situation has the potential to get heated, says O’Neal.

“Too many times people are in drama mode and they confront someone—and that doesn’t do anything but create a bad result,” she says. Strategize your communication like you would with a speech, O’Neal advises.

2 Examine Your Intent

It is important to examine your feelings and intentions before a conversation,

“When you have a conversation with someone, think of them as the most interesting person in the world. Being curious will take you away from being judgmental.” — author Robyn Hatcher

to ensure you know what you want to say and why you want to say it. Pinpoint your ultimate goal and how it will impact the person you are talking to.

“We have to think, *What’s in it for them? What’s my bottom line and how am I going to get it across?*” says Hatcher.

If you are talking to your child or spouse about an issue at home, don’t vent or accuse, say experts, but present your message in a way that shows you want to work together to solve the problem. For example, don’t say, “You always leave your shoes in the middle of the floor.” Instead, say, “When you leave your shoes in the middle of the floor, I feel like you don’t care if I trip over them.”

“It’s about aligning the heart and the mind,” says O’Neal, “and making sure that the intent of your communication is the highest it can be and comes from a place of compassion, or in the case of a family, love.”

Stephan Labossiere, a relationship coach and speaker from Atlanta, Georgia, says that being positive is critical. “If you do that, even if [someone] has a different style than you, it becomes easier for them to be receptive to what you say.”

3 Pay Attention to Your Nonverbal Cues

Eye contact, posture, hand gestures, vocal tone and other nonverbal cues impact conversations just as much as they do speeches. “It’s like there is a magnifying glass on you, because most of the time when you are talking, there is nothing else [for the other person] to do but to watch you,” says Hatcher, the communication-skills expert from New York.

Nonverbal cues are even more important when you first meet someone. For example, eye contact is needed

but shouldn’t be overdone, because it can make someone feel threatened, say communication experts. People can also interpret a great deal from the tone of your voice; for example, if you end each statement like a question, it might make you sound insecure.

Jeanne McDermott, CC, a small-business owner in Massachusetts, says the feedback she gets in her club has made her more aware of nonverbal cues. “When out with friends, and in networking situations, I think about not only what I am saying but how I look,” she says.

4 Listen Intently

“Communication is about speaking *and* listening,” says Labossiere. “Not listening to make a rebuttal, but listening to understand how the other person feels.”

O’Neal suggests working on being present in the moment and blocking out all distractions. “A person speaking to you deserves nothing less than your undivided attention. That means you have to hear exactly what is said in the moment.”

Make sure you focus on what the person is saying and not on how you will respond. “If you are just waiting for your

chance to jump back in, the conversation is not going to make the progress it can make,” notes Labossiere.

Having trouble staying focused? Be curious. “When you have a conversation with someone, think of them as the most interesting person in the world. Being curious will take you away from being judgmental,” says Hatcher.

5 Acknowledge Others

An easy way to improve relationships, communication experts say, is to regularly acknowledge the people close to you. Pointing out what you love, admire or respect about someone, along with thanking them for small actions, can help at work and in your personal life.

It is also important to acknowledge someone’s feelings during a discussion. “If you dismiss somebody, you hurt the potential of future effective communication with that individual because they will feel like they can’t talk to you,” says Labossiere, the relationship coach from Georgia.

He adds that “some people think, *I can’t be dismissive to my co-workers and my spouse—but with kids, I don’t have to acknowledge how they feel.*”

Not true. “We’ve all been kids,” he says, “and we know how it feels when we try to express ourselves to our parents and they dismiss us. It makes us not want to talk to them again.”

You can discipline children and disagree with them, but acknowledge their feelings so they can be comfortable talking to you.

6 Assert Yourself

Being assertive means that your opinion is just as important as another person’s, says Hatcher. Stating your opinion must be done without harming, hurting or disrespecting the other person, she adds, but “you need to make it your right, or duty, to assert yourself.”

Many new Toastmasters fear speaking in front of an audience, but they are slow to address their fears as they progress in the program. It can be the same when facing others one-on-one. It takes confidence to feel

comfortable with sharing your thoughts, ideas and feelings. Practice helps build confidence in dealing with difficult situations.

"I'll sometimes role-play with my husband before having a difficult conversation with somebody, to make sure I am doing it in a way that is non-threatening," says O'Neal, the communication consultant from Kentucky.

Hatcher also suggests making small changes to build your confidence. Altering your body language and vocal tone can raise your confidence level. "Power posing" is another great tool, she says. In a hugely popular 2012 TED Talk, social psychologist Amy Cuddy introduced the concept of power posing to boost one's confidence. Standing or sitting in a powerful pose—one in which you essentially take up as much space as possible—is like shouting internal encouragement to yourself, says Cuddy.

"Some people think, I can't be dismissive to my co-workers and my spouse—but with kids, I don't have to acknowledge how they feel."

— relationship coach Stephan Labossiere

Moving Forward

In every relationship, there will be conversations that don't go as planned, but if you set out with good intentions and follow through, you should see improvement. As O'Neal notes, the only thing we can control in this world is ourselves—our reactions, responses, thoughts, feelings and statements. So if we get those things right, then even if someone doesn't like our message, "we have done the very best we can," she says.

"If people learn to deliver their messages in a more positive, loving manner," Labossiere adds, "they will see a significant increase in effective, productive conversations." ■

KATHLEEN FORDYCE is a freelance writer living in New York. Follow her on Twitter @KathleenFordyce or visit her website www.kathleenfordyce.com.

Learn more about how to improve your interpersonal communication skills. Order the *Interpersonal Communication* manual (Item 226M) from the Toastmasters Online Store at www.toastmasters.org/Shop.

Members and non-members alike can lead a communication program for teenagers in their community. Check the store for the Interpersonal Communication kits (Item 701).

Talk Smart at the Holiday Office Party

BY DON GABOR

All speaking is public speaking—whether you are giving a Table Topics presentation at your local club or making small talk with colleagues and clients at the holiday office party. Make a conversation faux pas at the office party and your professional image could be headed for trouble. Keep these tips in mind:

Don't make inappropriate comments, even in jest

Using sexual innuendos or telling off-color jokes is a sure-fire way to send your prospects for advancement into a downward spiral. Never forget that the office party is a business—not social—situation, where most of the rules of business etiquette apply.

Don't ask closed-ended questions

Asking these types of questions—ones that produce only "yes" or "no" answers (e.g., "Did you enjoy your meal?")—will stifle conversation. Instead, show attentiveness and a desire to find common ground by asking open-ended questions that encourage others to elaborate and reveal information about themselves. Begin questions with "Why..." or "What do you think about ..."

Don't talk too much or too little about yourself

People love to talk about themselves and their pets, kids and grandchildren, but if you are the one doing all the talking, you will quickly become a bore to other guests. On the other hand, if you are too tight-lipped, then people may see you as secretive, defensive or lacking interest and enthusiasm. The remedy is to exchange information about various light subjects [with whoever you're speaking to] at about the same rate so that you both know what the other enjoys and likes to talk about. Offer some information and then allow the other person enough time to fully respond with information of their own.

Don't talk about politics or controversial subjects

Heavy political "discussions" or lectures about pet social issues often polarize people who otherwise get along. The best thing to do when someone brings up a political or controversial subject is to say, "I never discuss such topics at parties." Then it's up to you to change the discussion to a less volatile subject.

The holiday office party is a great place to make small talk, establish rapport and build better relationships with your colleagues, acquaintances and clients. As long as you focus on upbeat subjects that lead to sharing common interests, goals and experiences, you'll have plenty to talk about!

DON GABOR is a professional speaker and author. Reach him at www.dongabor.com. His latest book, co-authored by Saori Kawano, is *Chef's Choice*.



Holiday Gift Giving Around the World

Respect for cultural differences is a gift worth giving.

BY DEAN FOSTER

Based on an article published in internationalHRforum.com December 20, 2011.

Gift giving can be a little tricky when the recipients are international colleagues. Cultural differences can turn a terrific gift at home into a terrible no-no abroad. Since this is the season for gift-giving, here are some important cross-cultural tips to consider:

- **Style matters as much as substance.** Sometimes the wrapping is as important as the gift. Color, style and design carry different meanings in different countries. For example, in Asia the colors white and black are often associated with funerals, while red means health and happiness, and gold signifies wealth and success. A gift presented in a white box is not appreciated in East Asia. Red or gold wrapping is much preferred, and in East Asia, no gift, no matter how small, should ever be presented unwrapped.
- **Symbolism is important.** For example, clocks are not good gifts for your Chinese associates, no matter if they are in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan or San Francisco. The word in Mandarin for *clock* is very similar to the word for *death*.
- **Avoid fine linen handkerchiefs in Korea.** Handkerchiefs, even of the finest quality, are symbols of sadness. In all Asian

cultures, avoid cutlery as well (such as penknives with corporate logos), for they represent the cutting of a relationship. In Korea, avoid pens with red ink: very bad luck! Additionally, the number *four* in Chinese culture is associated with death, so avoid giving gift items in a set of four.

- **Consider the country's traditions.** Leather goods are not appropriate in India, where Hindu traditions hold the cow sacred. So avoid giving leather picture frames and attaché cases.
- **Fine brandy or wine, while appreciated in many cultures,** are generally a no-no in Muslim countries since Islam shuns alcohol. On the other hand, many Japanese people savor brandy and Scotch, so a quality bottle of either makes a fine holiday gift in Japan.
- **In Japan, citrus fruits are highly prized and very expensive.** A box of those well-packaged fancy fruits from Florida or California is a terrific idea: Not only is it a special treat, but it can usually be parceled out to many, and in Japan, there are usually many on the team. It is a good way to recognize the efforts of the whole office.
- **A wonderful gift to your Muslim associates** (any follower of Islam, from the Arab Muslim world all the way to Malaysia and Indonesia) would be a fine silver compass: No matter where in the world your Muslim associates may be, they can always

locate Mecca and perform their daily prayers.

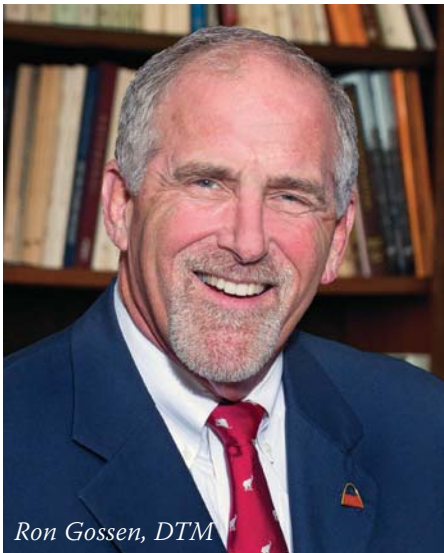
- **And finally, avoid sending** coals to Newcastle: No wines to France or Italy, no beers to Germany, no chocolates to Belgium, etc.

How you present the gift is also important. In Asia, for example, one does not typically open the gift in front of the giver. And in some countries, gifts should reflect the status of the recipient.

In Europe and Latin America, if you are presenting flowers as a gift (perfect for a dinner invitation to someone's home), be sure to unwrap the flowers before presenting them to the hostess. Additionally, if you send flowers in Europe, try to keep them odd numbered, and remember, red roses are far too personal. And avoid chrysanthemums: They are used for funerals.

Generally, a gift that reflects your home country, and is difficult to find in the recipient's country, is much appreciated. And sending the culturally appropriate gift will ensure a positive memory that will endure long after the gift is gone. ■

DEAN FOSTER is an expert on culture in business and frequently lectures at various universities and conferences. He is the author of many books including *Bargaining Across Borders* and the *Global Etiquette Guide series*. He is the director of his own firm, *DFA Intercultural Global Solutions (dfaintericultural.com)*.



Ron Gossen, DTM

It's a Matter of Give and Take

“When you learn, teach, when you get, give.”

– American poet Maya Angelou

BY RON GOSEN, DTM

New Toastmasters join for precisely the right reasons—to build on their speaking and leadership skills. They attend club meetings to “get” what Toastmasters has to offer. New members are respected for their self-awareness and welcomed on their journey of personal discovery.

After a certain point, however, members are often motivated to remain active for another reason. For the most part,

Members are motivated to “give”— to give back and pay forward Toastmasters’ gifts to us.

it’s not about gaining more expertise, no longer about “getting.” Many have already gained just about as much expertise as they’ve sought. Now they are driven by a different purpose: altruism. They are motivated to “give”—to give back and pay forward Toastmasters’ gifts to them.

This is a unique magic embodied in Toastmasters’ culture. It’s like the late American poet Maya Angelou intoned: “When you learn, teach, when you get, give.”

In daily life, there are more ways to serve others than there are stars in the sky. Altruism abounds and opportunities are abundant. Whether as volunteers, tireless workers or enlightened leaders, we have so many opportunities to give of ourselves. But even with all the helpful things we can do, I believe it is truly rare that we actually change lives.

Toastmasters, however, is different. We’ve seen lives changed. We’ve heard about lives changed. We’ve helped change lives ourselves.

Having been a college professor for 12 years, I have seen hundreds of students come through my classes. Some students may remember me and my classes (fondly, I hope), and some may actually apply the lessons I have taught them. But I’ve asked myself, *Did my teaching actually change my*

students in any meaningful way? I would be grandly delusional to answer with anything other than, *It’s highly doubtful.*

But in Toastmasters, I have seen people’s lives changed by the experience, and so have you. I have made a difference and so have you. Nothing has a more positive impact on life’s trajectory than helping others acquire new or improved skills. Like the talent to bring others to laughter or tears with a speech, or the ability to be a leader.

But fellow Toastmasters, you and I represent only the current part of that magic. It may seem trite to say, but we “stand on the shoulders of giants.” For almost a century, members—both living and deceased—have been dedicated to building the reputation we enjoy, the processes we employ, the culture that governs our actions and the results we

influence. Many Toastmasters, through countless hours of work, have created and repeatedly improved those processes.

The Toastmasters method and resources, whether used to enhance our public speaking or our leadership skills, are unique in the world. As members, we find solutions to complex challenges. We are given a set of precise roadmaps to guide us through a journey of self-discovery and personal mastery. All of this is the result of decades of work by enlightened volunteers motivated to serve others.

We current members voluntarily give our time and collective cerebral energy to continue the legacy of Toastmasters founder Ralph C. Smedley. The efforts to create Toastmasters’ revitalized education program may rival, or even exceed, the monumental contributions made by those who came before to guide us through the organization’s original educational paths.

Ralph Smedley’s concepts have been taken to heart by the millions of Toastmasters who have followed him. And it is always good to remember something he once said: “Let us share with others the benefits we have gained for ourselves.” ■

RON GOSEN, DTM, is the chief marketing officer for the University of Missouri in St. Louis. He is a member of the St. Louis Triton Toastmasters.

The Message of You

It's so familiar that
it's invisible.

BY JUDY CARTER

Editor's note: This article is adapted by the author from her book The Message of You: Turn Your Life Story into a Money-Making Speaking Career (St. Martin's Press).

Have you ever imagined yourself a speech contest winner, perhaps the World Champion of Public Speaking? As Toastmasters, you want to deliver a speech that transforms people's lives. But how to find that message or story that inspires the audience to action?

Okay, I'm going to say something shocking. Ready? *Your greatest speech already exists, even though you don't know it.*

It's in the advice you give to your friends, in the lessons you teach your children, in the stories you tell your family. You've given parts of your speech when you helped your sister build her website, or when you shared the story of your immigrant grandparents' journey to a new country. The Message of You speech is in the stories you share that inspire others to tell the truth, conquer their fears and lead happier, healthier and wealthier lives. Your greatest speech is in the stories you tell every day.

The Message of You is a distillation of all of your experiences, personal and professional, that form the meaning of your life. It's what you'll be remembered for when you die, your legacy. It's what you stand for, are associated with, are famous for or might become famous for.



The thing most World Champions of Public Speaking have in common is that their speeches reflect the message they have lived. What's tricky is you may not be aware of yours. Often the meaning of our lives is lost on us. It's so familiar that it's invisible. We're not objective about what we're bringing to others, unable to see our own impact. Yet these are the very things that make people want to listen and know more about us.

The good news is you can discover The Message of You and develop it to enhance your current profession, win Toastmasters contests and even launch a successful career as a professional speaker.

So, How Do You Find Your Message?

The secret to finding The Message of You lies in the word itself. You can't spell "message" without a M-E-S-S. You can't see that mess without A-G-E. And when you reflect back on the messes in



The author Judy Carter

your life you can become a S-A-G-E. See it now? M-E-S-S-A-G-E!

Your “mess” may have occurred in your childhood. Perhaps with “age” you can see that the mess was the first step on your road to success.

Turn Your Mess into a Message

Look back to your childhood or youth and dig deeper to find a situation that was a “mess”—a party you weren’t invited to, a time you were bullied or rejected, or when you did something regrettable.

My childhood messes not only provide me with comedy material, they also give

me purpose. As I wrote the book *The Message of You*, memories I’d forgotten came to mind and I saw how they’d shaped me and were part of my success. One repressed memory was the pain of being a child with a severe speech impediment. I was laughed at and sometimes considered developmentally disabled. I now see that experience led me to becoming a comic. If kids were laughing at me, I would control the laughter by inviting it. My impediment pushed me to become a professional speaker. Speaking was hard for me and I was determined to overcome the difficulty.

We are not successful in spite of our messes, but *because* of them.

My first indication of the life-transforming power of *The Message of You* came when I gave my speech “Laughing Your Way Out of Stress” to newly wounded soldiers at the veterans hospital in Long Beach, California. I arrived and saw they had decorated a large multipurpose room. After discovering that I was to speak in the spinal injury unit, I realized the mess I got myself into. I could hardly say, “Hey, just laugh it off!” What could I say to a 22-year-old who’d just learned he’ll never walk again? My message wouldn’t work and I had no back-up plan.

On one side of the room the staff sat

Often the meaning of our lives is lost on us. It’s so familiar that it’s invisible.

in chairs, staring blankly at the floor, looking depressed and tired. On the other side were the patients, mostly young men, many attached to ventilators. Along with spinal cord injuries, I saw burn victims with their entire bodies wrapped in yellow gowns.

I was introduced to Nick Mendes, a soldier paralyzed from the neck down after an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded in Afghanistan. He whispered “Hi” as the machines pushed air in and out of his lungs. His father, who had moved into the hospital to be near his son, took me aside and said, “I’m glad you’re here because Nick has stopped doing his physical therapy. He’s falling into a depression. The nurses tell me that if he doesn’t do the therapy, he could die. I hope you have a great message for him.”

SPEECH IDEAS



Judy Carter speaks to wounded soldiers at a veterans hospital in Long Beach, California, in 2011. To connect with her audience, she shares a personal story before continuing with her prepared comedy material. Pictured on the left is Nick Mendes (in the foreground), who became paralyzed while serving in the Army in Afghanistan.

Oy! I scrambled to come up with an approach, a great joke, a story, anything appropriate that would make them feel that I was sensitive to their situations. I was out of my league. How could I understand their pain? What could I possibly say that would be useful? I was being introduced. It was too late to leave. My mind went blank, I slowly walked to the center of the room. It was quiet except for the ventilators. I had nothing.

Sometimes when you have nothing, that's when magic happens. I opened my mouth to speak and surprised myself by telling a story I'd never told. Somehow I was taken over by a message from my past that I had buried.

I heard myself telling them about my older sister, Marsha, who was a quadriplegic from birth as she had severe cerebral palsy.

Laughter exploded out of them, as it does when people go too long without laughing. It was more than entertaining; it was healing.

After my parents died, I found a small group home for her where she had professional nursing care as well as classes and weekend outings. That's where she lived until she died a few years ago in her late 50s. When I arrived at her funeral, I expected to see a few people, but was shocked. There were more than 100 mourners. People I didn't even know—her teachers throughout the years, her nurses, her caretakers, her friends.

One attendee after the next spoke about how my sister gave meaning to their lives. Story after story was told about my sister's humor, and warmth. I learned that some people there spent holidays with my sister rather than with their own families. I had no idea. My sister Marsha—who couldn't talk or walk, who was fed through a tube in her stomach and solely communicated with facial expressions and gestures—had the ability to turn strangers into friends. She'd been able to make a difference in other people's lives.

As I told this story, I felt the mood in the veterans hospital change. Although everyone still felt their pain, it was different

when we all—both staff and patients—experienced it together. I had shared my “eureka moment” about my sister. I realized that, despite her limited capacity, she gave more to others than many of us who are fully functional. Her life stood for the message of caring and helping others become better people. Marsha's message had made her important to many.

That message from my past had been lost for so long. But it came out when it should have. Everyone in the room needed it. I walked over to Nick's bedside. I held his hand, put my face very close to his, and said, “All our lives have purpose. We might not know what it is, but you must believe that you will find it. You can inspire and help others. And when you do, you will help yourself. That's why you must get well. Your life has meaning.”

I spoke those words to Nick, but I also listened to them. We all speak about what we need to learn. I realized that I was the vehicle, a transmitter for the message, and the message was bigger than me. Once I became comfortable with the soldiers, I delivered my comedy material. People laughed. Actually, laughter exploded out of them, as it does when people go too long without laughing. It was more than entertaining; it was healing.

Your Message Matters

A year later, I visited Nick to see how he was doing. He'd been discharged and lived on a military base in Southern California with his father and a caretaker. He was sitting up straight and breathing on his own.

While wheeling around in his mouth-operated electric chair, he had plenty of attitude. As he worked with his therapist to regain movement in his arms, he told me that he wanted to write a book. I asked him what his message was and he said, “I never truly appreciated the power of family. Without my family, I would be lost.”

Then this young man looked directly into my eyes and said with the wisdom of a sage, “See, Judy, you and your body can do more than you think, more than you can imagine. I've learned to never quit. Never give up. That's my message. When I was first injured, a doctor told me I would never walk, that I would never move, that I would never be able to do *anything*. And now look at me, Judy ...”



At left: Judy, Nick, and Nick's father David. At right: Judy signs a copy of her book, *The Message of You*, for Glenda Laurent Dickonson at the 2015 International Convention in Las Vegas.



Nick slowly raised his hand and raised his middle finger [to form an obscene gesture]. "I can almost give that doctor the finger!"

A noble goal. A succinct message.

To have played a part in Nick's journey was an honor. It was humbling and rewarding. And what it took was recalling my past and being willing to reveal it.

I look forward to being part of your journey as well.

The Message of Me is helping you to find The Message of You. Together, we can create a ripple effect of inspiration. **T**

JUDY CARTER is the author of *The Comedy Bible* and *The Message of You*. She is Dean of the online *The Message of You University*. Go to judycarter.com/Toastmasters for more tips.

7 STEPS TO FINDING YOUR MESSAGE

- 1 Set an alarm for 30 minutes and make notations of the major personal moments in your life. Write very quickly; don't spend hours on it.
- 2 After 30 minutes, mark the moments that were successes. For example, your marriage of 10 years, owning a home, organizing a neighborhood watch, the after-dinner conversation when your kids actually enjoyed talking to you.
- 3 Next to each success, write your lowest point of failure or defeat—your "mess." For instance, one of my biggest successes was speaking with former U.S. President Bill Clinton. My "mess" was being 7 years old and called "retarded" by other kids because of my speech impediment.
- 4 Examine your list. Chart how you got from one of the messes to one of the successes.
- 5 Ask yourself: *Do these moments reflect a larger journey?* In other words, do all of these moments have something in common? Have they been leading you in a specific direction? Have they been part of a lifelong struggle?
- 6 Write in detail about one "eureka" moment when you hit the bottom and how your life changed. Put yourself in that moment and feel the event unfold while focusing on your feelings and thoughts during that time.
- 7 Now, write out the lesson that you learned from your journey. This is what you will teach others. It's *The Message of You*.

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How to Be a Ruthless Editor

Pack more punch in your speeches by pruning your prose.

BY MITCH MIRKIN, CTM

There are few situations in life in which being ruthless is a virtue. Editing your own speeches is one of them.

It's natural for all of us who write to want to preserve every word of the "final" draft we've labored over, carefully crafted and lovingly nurtured into existence. Each clever phrase, sparkling anecdote and colorful adjective seems precious. How could we consider cutting even a single word of all that sheer brilliance?

But cut we must, if we care about our audience and want to communicate effectively. As one famous author put it, "In writing, you must kill all your darlings."

Using one of my own Toastmasters projects as an example, I'd like to share steps you can follow to edit your own speeches more effectively. I call it the P-R-U-N-E method. Each letter stands for

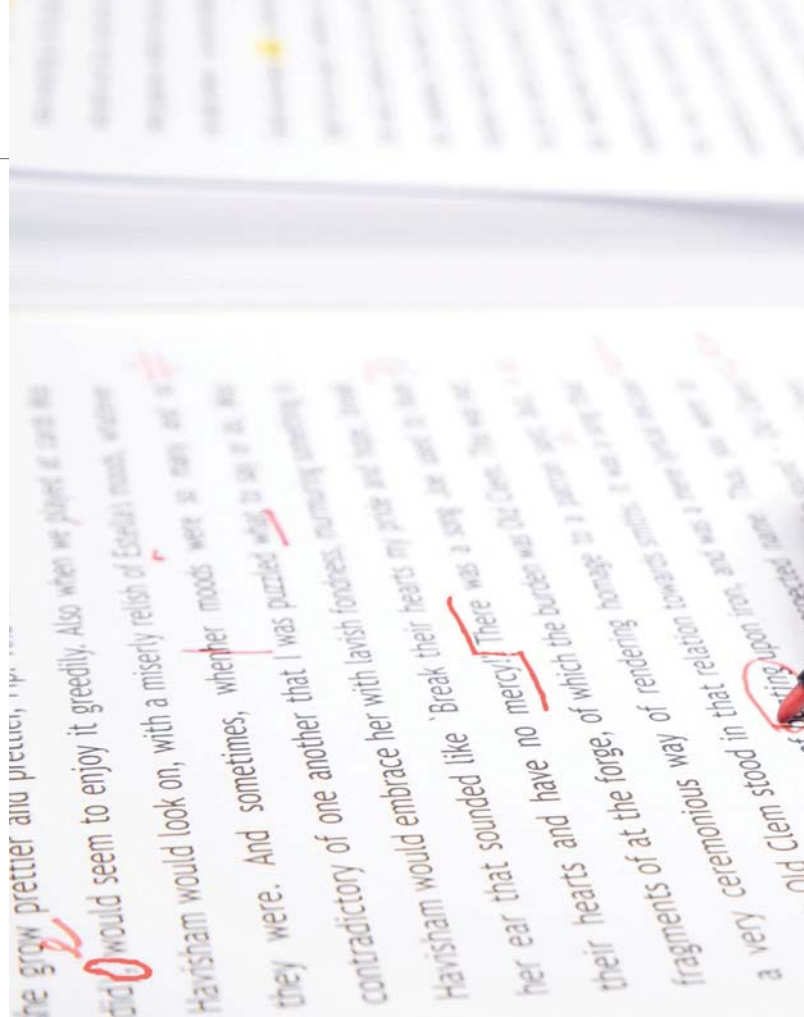
Banish stale, tired, uninspired lines from your talk. Take no prisoners.

a potentially problematic type of content you'll want to consider cutting: **Platitudes**, **Redundancy**, **Unnecessary words**, **Needless complication** and **Excursions**.

When you prune, you remove branches from a tree or bush to improve its shape or growth. Even living branches, bursting with greenery and flowers, may have to be thinned out for the greater good. Likewise, pruning away certain elements from your speech, even if they seem perfectly fine in their own right, may help the overall speech and allow it to come alive and blossom.

I recently gave a Toastmasters speech about body language across cultures. I focused on hand gestures that mean different things in different regions of the world. As I wrote the speech, I realized I had almost nine minutes of content for a five- to seven-minute talk.

Yes, it's possible to request more time, but generally it's best to fit your material into the prescribed length. That alone is one reason to prune your speech. But even more important, a vigorous edit will make your speech tighter, clearer, smoother and more impactful.



Here's what to look for as you prune:

Platitudes—These are trite, insipid statements. They will bore your audience. In my speech, for example, what if I had opened with the painfully obvious observation that "we live in a multicultural world"? Or what about this jaw-dropping revelation: "Poor communication can produce unintended results." Can you just hear the yawns?

Banish stale, tired, uninspired lines from your speaking or writing. Take no prisoners. Instead, aim to use fresh, vivid, concrete language that will make your listeners sit up and take notice. I included this line in my talk: "Welcome to the wild, wacky world of cross-cultural communication, where the wrong hand gesture can insult your host, spoil a potential business idea or perhaps even start a war." In short, strive to use colorful, punchy prose in place of platitudes.

Redundancy—A speaker may repeat certain elements for emphasis or effect. That's not redundancy. Here, I'm talking about superfluous repetition. After you've made a point, there's no need to keep hammering it. In my speech, I wanted to share examples of faux pas by U.S. political leaders. I found three good stories: one about Richard Nixon when he was vice president, another about former President George W. Bush during his second inauguration, and a third about former Vice President Walter Mondale and a speech he gave before the Japanese Parliament. Each story was juicy and relevant, but they all illustrated the same point about world leaders and their gaffes. So I decided two anecdotes were enough, and I axed the Mondale story. It would have been overkill.



Unnecessary words—Scan your speech for extra words and phrases that don't need to be there. What if I had written: "You should be aware that in certain countries around the world, any physical contact or touching between men and women in public—even a handshake—is strictly and absolutely forbidden and unacceptable." The idea is good, but it's expressed in too many words. How about the following instead: "In some countries, any touching between men and women in public—even a hand-

A vigorous edit will make your speech tighter, clearer, smoother and more impactful.

shake—is strictly forbidden." I got the same point across but in roughly half the words. Your audience will appreciate your being brief and concise. And your words will pack more punch.

Needless complication—I once got some excellent advice from the founder of our club, Allan Kaufman, DTM. I had prepared a Table Topics activity for our next meeting and previewed it with him. It was a tad involved. He suggested I come up with something simpler. "People are tired," he said. "They've been working all day. They don't want to have to think that hard." I began to apply this idea across the board; in my speeches, too, I saw how it was best to avoid complicated ideas.

In preparing my speech on body language, I came across seminal research by psychologist Paul Ekman showing how people

from different cultures interpret facial expressions. He had found wide agreement across cultures, with a few minor differences. Rather than go into all the details and nuances of the findings, I boiled it all down to a simple idea: "Research has shown that facial expressions, unlike hand gestures, basically mean the same thing to people around the world." Then I moved on to my next point. I extracted only the essential idea I wanted to convey.

In your speech, find ways to simplify, summarize and streamline. In a five- to seven-minute speech, your listeners don't need—and can't process—all the fine points. Delving into complicated details will lead your listeners to tune out.

Excursions—These are tangents and digressions. Project 2 in the *Competent Communication* manual, "Organize Your Speech," tells us "most listeners will remember only three to five main facts or ideas. For a five- to seven-minute talk, three facts or ideas are plenty." Every sentence in your speech should support and advance these ideas and their subpoints. Stories, statistics, examples, explanations—all of it should help your audience grasp and remember your main ideas. Any element that does not serve this cause should be cut, even if it's interesting and colorful in its own right. Save it for another speech. Otherwise, you risk diluting your focus and lessening the impact of your main ideas.

In my talk, I could have gone on several tangents that were part of my overall topic but outside the scope of my main ideas. I did devote a sentence to acknowledging other aspects of body language I didn't focus on—eye contact, for example, or how close we stand to the other person—but only as a transition to my conclusion.

In the end, the speech I gave, if I may say so myself, was "lean and mean." It got the point across in a clear, concise, lively way. It kept people's attention. There were a few things I wish I had done better (like delivering my closing line more smoothly), but that's why I attend Toastmasters.

As you get set to write your next speech, prepare to prune away. And be aggressive (even ruthless, I daresay) when needed. Good pruning makes for lovely lilacs—and crisp communication. **T**

MITCH MIRKIN, CTM, is a member of Randallstown Network Toastmasters, based in Baltimore, Maryland. He works as a writer and editor for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Member Achievements

Cheers to you!



**Louise Hyland, ACG, CL
and her daughter, Tiffany**
TIC Talkers
Newport Beach, California

Finding My Support System

As a member since 2003, I have long since come to value my Toastmasters friends as family, but never more than this year.

In March, I was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer that would require a rigorous chemotherapy treatment schedule, followed by surgery and radiation. What has become a favorite activity of mine is telling anyone who will listen how my Toastmasters family continues to show up for me. Every. Solitary. Day.

My mentor who gave me a magnificent bottle of wine forbidding me to touch it until I am 100 percent cured, so we can share it. My fellow members who drive out of their way to my new home close to the hospital to take me out to lunch or visit. The member who sends me a card at least once a week. The many members who contributed to a meal fund that allows meals to be delivered to me when I am unable to cook for myself during the worst of chemo. The cards, the books, the gifts and the homemade food.

When people find out I'm a Toastmaster, they often ask me what I feel I've gained from my membership. It's a challenging question to answer, because I know what they're looking for: improved speaking skills, confidence, networking opportunities and leadership skills. But I'm always sure to finish my answer with the attribute that may be the most important. What I have gained from my membership is love.

My Marathons

In June 2013 I set a challenge for myself: I would run a marathon every month for 12 months. I didn't know if I was fit enough or whether I could recover quickly enough between each race. But I did know that I wanted to do something that challenged me mentally, physically and emotionally.

I started the challenge in July 2013 with a 46-kilometer (approximately 28 miles) run in the hills of Christchurch, New Zealand. In August I visited an Alpine Village where I ran from the village up and over a mountain pass, to a ski field, then back again. I climbed more than 1,700 meters (approximately 5,600 feet) that day and took more than seven hours to finish.

Things were looking good. I felt strong, my fitness was improving and I was starting to get some momentum.

Then, in September of that year, I had a major setback. I was struck with a bad case of gastroenteritis. I was unable to eat for several days and rapidly lost strength and fitness. However, I was determined that this would not defeat me. I used the idea of every hardship being a twist in a great speech for each of the subsequent marathons to help me mentally battle through the hard times. This mindset was especially important when I ran 86 kilometers (approximately 53 miles) in one day to check off the last two mara-



John Kelly, ACB, ALB
Sunbelt Speakers
Marlborough, New Zealand

thons of the challenge. It also provided me with an abundance of speech material and helped rekindle my passion for Toastmasters.

For more information about my 12 months of marathons challenge, check out www.facebook.com/12marathons.

A Night to Remember

I joined Toastmasters in January 2015 unable to speak in front of an audience. I battled depression and anxiety for most of my life until three years ago, when an experience dramatically shifted my perspective. After four months in Toastmasters, I received an email inviting me to attend an event about raising awareness for men's mental health. Instead of just attending, I contacted the organizers and asked if they were looking for guest speakers to share their own journey with depression. A week later I had an interview with the event organizer, and after a coffee, she offered me a seven-to 10-minute speaking slot at the event. I presented my speech in front of 300 guests and received publicity in the Western Australia newspapers for my courage and participation.

If it wasn't for Toastmasters I never would have had the courage to raise my hand for such a task. Toastmasters provided me with the platform to practice my speech and receive feedback before the event. I am now approaching local schools to share my experience and help give hope to young people all over Perth.



Desiree Holz
Plain Speakers
East Perth,
Western Australia



Nagarajan Tamil Arasan, ACS, ALB
TASCA Toastmasters and
Bahrain Advanced Toastmasters
Manama, Bahrain

Hard Work Pays Off

I started my Toastmasters journey in 2007 and found that Toastmasters transforms attitudes and creates positivity among people. In 2009, I participated in speech contests, just like other members. People said that I was good at humorous speeches—I didn't know I had some talent in that area.

The very next year, I won the Humorous Speech Contest at the club, area and division levels. I eventually lost at the district level—but I didn't lose hope of winning. I tried again the following year and won non-stop up to division. I did the same the year after that. This year, my goal was to win the Humorous Speech Contest at district.

After writing my draft speech, I left it alone for two days and when I picked it up again, I visualized it from the audience's point of view and edited it accordingly. After another two days, I visualized it from the judge's point of view and edited it again. I said to myself repeatedly, "To win, you have to be distinctive from others." It all came together for me at the District 20 conference in May. The speech was hilarious and successful because it met the expectations of the audience. I delivered it with poise and powerful punchlines. The audience of about 1,000 Toastmasters roared and I won the district championship. Five years of hard work and perseverance finally paid off!

Here's to Public Speaking

I've worked in public relations for nearly two decades and have experience talking in front of a crowd. However, I still experience the sweaty palms and chest-pulsating panic that affects millions of people. As I advanced in my career, I found myself getting extremely nervous when I had to present to large groups. In the communications field, I often write speeches and prepare clients to address crowds. But how can I confidently counsel my clients if I'd rather die than speak in public?

To begin, I watched endless hours of TED talks and attended a training seminar with a well-known coach. The only way to improve was to force myself into situations where I had to deliver impromptu as well as prepared speeches over and over again.

My husband, a former All-American collegiate wrestler and former wrestling coach for Rutgers University, also reinforced this notion. He believes repetitive drills are one of the most impactful training techniques. I planned to practice until I was numb. For me, repetition helps build muscle memory, and I find the impromptu practice greatly benefits my prepared speeches. I'm far from being an expert, but I'm getting better week by week.



Tracey Cassidy
Mile Square Toastmasters
West Orange, New Jersey



Silent Nights

For a happy holiday, the fewer season's greetings, the better.

BY JOHN CADLEY

This holiday season I'm asking everyone: Please watch your language. The things we say, innocuous and banal as they may seem, can crush the holiday spirit like a Thompson Seedless grape. It starts with the very first phrase to leave our lips in mid-November: "Are the holidays here already?" The words themselves are harmless; the tone of voice not so much. There is a certain trepidation, an anxious edge, which makes that innocent phrase sound like: "Is it really time for another chemical face peel? I'm still recovering from the last one."

Another, more obvious example is the way we refer to the season as something to be gotten through ("I know I need a heart-

Finally, there's the office holiday party.... Remember: Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of office gossip.

lung transplant. Just let me get through the holidays). Here, we allude to all the upcoming parties and celebrations of this festive time as if we're facing a winter trek across the Columbia Icefield.

We also turn words inside out, reversing their meaning in the most peculiar ways. For instance, the owner of a warm, comfortable home who leaves that home to sleep in a tent on a slab of cold concrete in the middle of December—we would call that person crazy. Unless the concrete happens to be the parking lot of a Walmart that is selling flat-screen TVs at half price to the first 50 customers through the door, in which case we call that person smart, as in "smart shopper." At a time when discounts and rebates are falling like manna from heaven, insanity becomes superior intelligence.

Be mindful of your motivations, too. Oh, how innocently we ask someone, "Done your holiday shopping yet?" It's not innocent; it's sadistic. You know they haven't done their shopping. You're just trying to feel better about not doing yours. And if they say, "Yes, I have," then *you're* the one feeling bad, especially if they tack on "in July." Given all the other pressures of the year-end season, that could put you right over the edge.

Furthermore, do not—I repeat, do NOT—send out a cheery Christmas letter detailing your family's activities for the year. Believe me when I tell you that nobody wants to hear about your snorkeling trip to the Cayman Islands, especially when they've just gotten off the phone with their attorney to see how the bankruptcy proceedings are going. Yes, your children take wonderful pictures with their healthy faces all aglow. Not everyone's children look that way—and you know it. Holiday cards, on the other hand, are acceptable. They're written by professionals who know how to say "Season's Greetings" without an agenda.

Another caveat: Do not look at all the craziness of the holidays and say, "Isn't this crazy?" You have bought into crazy, my friend. You have embraced it. You're doing the tango with it like someone on *Dancing with the Stars*. "Isn't this crazy" can only be said by people who lock the doors and shut out the lights until New Year's Day. And that's a whole different kind of crazy.

Finally, there's the office holiday party, which I prefer to call Burning Man because of the myriad opportunities it offers to see your career go up in flames. Assuming you're not going to get wasted and dance on a table, the only other way to self-destruct is by opening your mouth. Remember: Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of office gossip. You can't talk shop or you'll be called a workaholic. You can't get personal because, well, it's too personal. All you can do is make vacuous small talk which, when fueled by that second vodka martini, will turn into the Talk of the Office. You don't think so? Go ahead, say something safe, like "Nice to see you." What could go wrong? Well, depending on who you say it to, it could make you a hypocrite ("Nice to see me? He hates me."), a snob ("He sees me every day. Nice to be ignored."), or an adulterer ("Nice to see my wife? What's going on?"). You see my point.

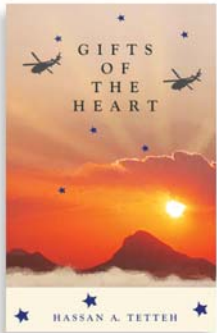
I don't mean to be a humbug. I just know that you will enjoy the season so much more by following the example I am going to set right now. I'm going to shut up. ■

JOHN CADLEY, a former advertising copywriter, is a freelance writer and musician living in Fayetteville, New York.

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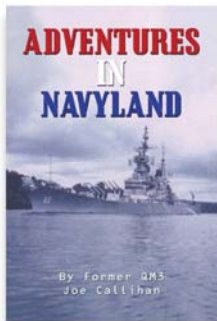
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Adventures in Navyland offers an unusual view of life in a Navy Op Center located Panama Canal Zone. As you share the many true adventures encountered by Qm3 Joe Callihan, you will experience a rollercoaster ride of emotions. The thrill of catching a spy; the danger of standing watch on an LST in a land inhabited by Pigmy's with poisonous blowgun arrows; and the fun of transiting the Canal aboard the battleship New Jersey. These are but a few of the many *Adventures in Navyland*. Author Joe Callihan is a patriotic American. He entered active duty with the intention of serving to the best of his ability. Was he successful? You decide. *Navyland* is also available in the Military History Museum, Largo, Florida.

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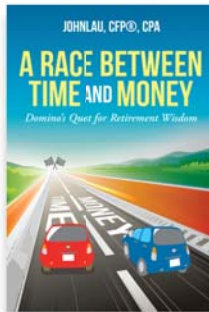
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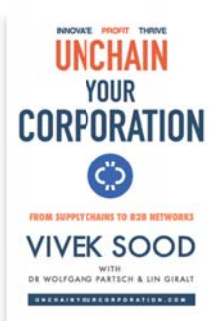
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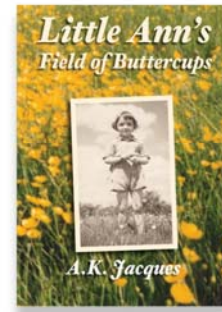
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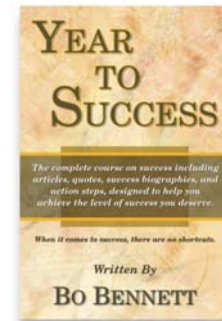
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