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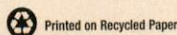
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Committed to Succeed



I had been told that my visits to districts would be the most rewarding tasks of my presidency. As I write this, I have just completed my first two visits – to the Territorial Council of China and District 81-P in the Caribbean, and they completely blew my mind!

China's Toastmasters were holding their first-ever conference this October. There are just over 500 members in 24 clubs in all of China, and about 280 showed up for the conference. That's more than half of all their members! They showed enthusiasm, a desire to learn and commitment to improve as Toastmasters.

In Beijing, I met Xiao Yang who was elected club president last December when the club had only nine members left. In less than a year, she rebuilt her club to 54 members and the club is now getting ready to split. I also listened to a new member, Debra Guo, as she delivered her Ice Breaker describing her trials and tribulations in learning English. Her persistence and passion won the day as she gave one of the best Ice Breaker speeches I have ever heard. Both Xiao Yang and Debra showed commitment to what they wanted to achieve.

Our organization's goal, worldwide, for this year is for every area to grow by one club. By the time you read this, I fully expect Shanghai's two area governors, Eric Barnes and Eugene Tang, to have each doubled the size of their areas, and to still be going for more. That's commitment!

While Council Chairman Warwick Fahy and Corporate Visit Coordinator Rebecca Hong had me dashing about Shanghai with seven corporate visits, plus one more in Beijing arranged by Council Vice Chairman Keith Ostergaard; our baby district, District 81-P, took the cake when District Governor Erich René and Past Council Chairman D'arcy Lopes took me on 11 visits, including visits to the Prime Minister, the Governor General, the Lieutenant Governor of Curaçao and corporate CEOs. The level of commitment, not only of the local Toastmasters but also of all the corporations and government officials I met in both China and Curaçao, was Simply Amazing!

Every club but one in District 81-P renewed in October with as many, if not more members, and they are continuing to build more clubs. In fact, Curaçao has long passed the standard of one club per population of 10,000 that we like to use. But they're not done yet! That's commitment!

In Haiti, Area Governor Jean-Robert LeBrun has launched a crusade to use Toastmasters as a tool for helping his country and has built three new clubs so far this year. He is working on six more before the end of June. That's commitment!

These visits have confirmed that commitment is the key to the success of our members, clubs and districts. Are you committed to succeed? Cavett Robert once said, "Commitment is doing what you said you would do... long after the mood in which you said it had passed." No matter what the odds and difficulties, stay true to your commitment and you will succeed. With your success, your club and your district will be successful. It is Simply Amazing!

Johnny Uy, DTM
International President

FEATURES



Tune-Up Your Table Topics

Instead of aiming for a perfect response, strive for perfect learning.

By Jack M. Kantola, DTM

PAGE 8



Panel Moderating Made Easy

The moderator has a challenging leadership role in the panel discussion.

By Marian Schickling and Carol Sauka

PAGE 16



Beware of the Sales Pitch

When speakers praise a product excessively without supporting their claims, they lose credibility.

By John K. Borchardt, ATMG

PAGE 24

The Toastmasters Vision:

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

The Toastmasters Mission:

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

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

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

ARTICLES & DEPARTMENTS

3 Viewpoint: Committed to Succeed

By International President Johnny Uy, DTM

5 Letters to the Editor

6 My Turn: No More Vampire Words

Filler words sap the lifeblood of speeches.
By Richard Hash, DTM

11 For the Novice: Table Topics: A Question of Mind Over Matter

Confessions of a shy Toastmaster.
By Bill Monsour, CL

12 Can We Talk?: Graduating from Table Topics 101

From scared beginner to successful contestant.
By Linda L. Isaacs, CTM

14 Toastmaster Profile: Speaking Up at Beauty Pageants

These contestants defy stereotypes.
By Julie Bawden Davis

20 How To: Taking Control of the Teleprompter

Avoid a zombie-like performance by following these tips.
By Michael Landrum, ATMB

22 Manner of Speaking: The One-Minute Power Introduction

By George Olds, DTM

28 2006 Article Index

30 Hall of Fame

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

Simply Amazing!

It was really amazing to read the views of our new International President, Johnny Uy, in the September issue. More specifically, I was amazed at his description of the cultural differences between Asia and North America. Even more amazing was our President's ability to give a balanced view about the whole of Asia, even though within Asia, we can find significant differences in cultures.

He said, "When complimenting an Asian for a job well done, do not be surprised if you get a response like "You're exaggerating," or "I just got lucky" instead of a simple "Thank you." Very true. The politeness of Asians is a virtue that can be both positive or negative depending on the situation. As an Asian myself (hailing from India, living in Bahrain), I asked myself what my habit was, in such a situation. I would have said, "that's alright, that's nothing." I guess I need to do a lot more to improve!

I am also enjoying a number of features in the magazine; they provide Toastmasters around the world with valuable information, varied viewpoints, encouragement and techniques to succeed. "Don't bring me flowers" by Sharon Reshni was a nice write-up. I also enjoyed "Laws for Positive Leadership" by Victor Parachin – this article should motivate every Toastmaster to complete the CL award!

Agnel Pereira • ICAB Toastmasters Club
Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain

Content Counts!

No amount of technique makes up for inadequate or boring speech content. A good speech is one where the speaker has something worth saying and says it well. Saying it well means structuring the speech and choosing words, images, stories and statistics that seize the audience's attention and gets the content across.

Gestures, vocal variety and eye contact matter only if they are bad to

the point of distracting or irritating listeners. These things come naturally when the speech comes from the heart and mind of the speaker.

If you have to practice gestures and vocal variety, there is something wrong with your speech. In Toastmasters we emphasize technique too much, and content too little.

Michael W. Bowles, CTM • Advance Club, Brisbane, Australia

It Happened to Me!

I heard my name called out. I walked up, looked at the audience and delivered a sentence or two. Then I went blank – completely blank. It was an awesome, unforgettable and a mind-blowing experience! During those few seconds, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and all the other planets – including ones yet to be discovered – had come to a stop. I slowly walked back to my seat.

But what made this experience simply amazing was the encouragement, the motivating words scribbled on notes by my fellow members. They gave me enough courage to go back and make another attempt.

This experience established the fact that Toastmasters is such a fabulous learning ground. You will always be accepted and acknowledged, no matter how you perform. You are with a group that wishes you well.

Josraj Arakkal, Manama Toastmasters • Manama, Bahrain

Competent vs. Confident

The letter by Dominic De Mas in the September issue under the above topic drew my attention. It asked, "What is the point in being confident if you do not have the skills?"

In response, I would like to ask,

"What is the point being competent if you do not have confidence to deliver?" Not only in public speaking but in any action, you must have confidence to perform better. Of course, having knowledge and skills will strengthen the confidence.

Palitha Perera • BCIS Toastmasters Club • Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Toastmasters in Nigeria

I am a Nigerian who just started attending meetings. Joining the club gives me confidence that after a series of meetings, I will become a very good speaker and leader for my country.

The presence of this organization in my country will better the lots of the youths in Nigeria and Africa. Your organization is great!

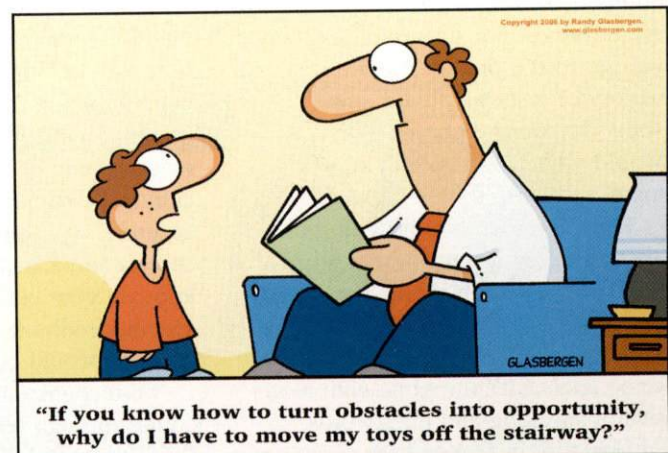
Ogunleye Temitope Ade • Eagle Club • Lagos, Nigeria

For My Children, for Myself!

I joined Toastmasters so that I could help my children with their projects, papers and speeches. The immediate reward was the feeling of accomplishment each time I completed a speech project.

There is no safer, more encouraging environment than my club meetings. Being a Toastmaster is a life-changing experience that not only broadens your opportunities but gives purpose to your life!

Maureen Proctor • Artful Articulators Club • Nashville, Tennessee



"If you know how to turn obstacles into opportunity, why do I have to move my toys off the stairway?"

No More Vampire Words

Just as vampires suck life from their victims, so word-vampires suck life from our presentations. Word-vampires are those unnecessary space-fillers such as “ah,” and “um” that we use to fill awkward silences between sentences or thoughts. The way to stop a vampire is to drive a wooden stake through its heart. We can drive a stake through the hearts of word-vampires by counting them. After 12 years’ Toastmasters experience, it’s my opinion that filler words need the counting stake driven through them as quickly as possible.

Professional speakers allow no vampire words. Yet in Toastmasters, we debate whether to count filler words – even though it is easier to eliminate them when we know precisely how many we use.

Toastmasters clubs with a “We Don’t Count Ahs” stance permit word-vampires to have a seat in their meetings. Those clubs overlook the power of having a specific strategy for tracking and eliminating these ineffective utterances.

In other life situations we rely on numbers to help us deal with a variety of issues. For example: Let’s say you go to the doctor and after a battery of tests you learn some spots on your liver need removal. Would you want to know how many spots are there?

How confident would you feel about surgery if the doctor said, “Oh, I never count them. The number of spots isn’t important. What is important is that we know you have some spots.” It’s the same with more skillful speaking and filler words. Surgery for ahs begins with counting

them and measuring our progress in knowing them.

A human skeleton only has the bones it needs. There are no extra bones. A skeleton with extra parts doesn’t work as well as one with only the bones it needs.

The same is true with a speech. A speech skeleton is primarily held together when there is a clear objective, appropriate sentences and well-chosen words. It takes all parts to make it work. A speech with superfluous fillers doesn’t work as well as one with only the words it needs.

Imagine that week after week your evaluators said, “John, you used fewer ahs this week than last week.” What would that tell you? Nothing. It’s not specific. How could you know if you used three or 23?

After a year of those same nonspecific evaluations, could you determine whether you had improved? Could

you then tell if you still used three or 23? Could you honestly say that Toastmasters was helping you become a better speaker? In Toastmasters, attention is focused on a variety of elements to improve a speaker’s presentations. Feedback is directed toward gestures, vocal variety, dress, eye contact and a host of factors that will improve your competence. Without specific feedback, the Toastmasters program would be a waste of time.

We recognize how improvement comes through feedback and without feedback there is no improvement.



Filler words sap the lifeblood of speeches.

Counting ahs is no different from telling a speaker he sticks a finger in an ear at the end of every sentence.

Nothing is more insulting than hearing a speaker who has achieved the Advanced Communicator (AC) or Distinguished (DTM) Toastmaster status, has been a Toastmasters for several years, who may belong to several clubs and who still can’t put five sentences together without three or four ahs.

Unfortunately, any Toastmaster holding membership for six months can probably name at least one

“I am convinced that ahs do count, and should be counted.”

person who fits this description. I’ve found that such speakers generally belong to clubs that do not count ahs.

I am convinced that ahs do count, and should be counted. Toastmasters is a performance-enhancing experience where all the tools to help us become better speakers should be used. Counting ahs is just one of those tools. **T**

Richard Hash, DTM, is a member of the Speaking Machine and Aesop’s Fables clubs in Sacramento, California.



She was an Italian supermodel.





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Please don't call on me." How often have you thought this plea or heard it muttered by a fellow club member? Why do we have this inordinate fear of standing up and speaking before a group of friends that is probably the most tolerant audience in the world?

I believe it is because we want each and every Table Topics response to be perfect. We want it to be a memorable reply that perfectly (and humorously, in most cases) addresses the topic we have been presented.

Well, I have news for you! It isn't going to happen – at least not every time you get called on. Maybe we should change our expectations for Table Topics. Instead of going for a perfect response we should strive for perfect learning.

To understand how this change in perspective works, we must understand the purpose for Table Topics. Most experienced Toastmasters would agree that Table Topics is a process to help you:

- **Think on your feet.** It improves your ability to access the hard drive of information contained in your brain. In our life outside Toastmasters, the most frequent use of Table Topics skills is to respond to questions we are asked, and this should help you react intelligently.
- **Develop a short speech in moments.** This is an important perspective on Table Topics. Instead of just answering the question we are asked, we should use the question or topic as the foundation for a mini-speech.
- **Deliver every message with energy.** Always try to connect with the audience.

Looking at Table Topics as an important exercise in improving our communication

Instead of aiming for a perfect response, strive for perfect learning.

Tune Up Your Table Topics

By Jack M. Kantola, DTM

skills, and nothing more, will help us use this exercise more productively. Here are seven tools to do just that:

1 No judgments – Avoid making judgments about your presentation in advance. We are often prone to censoring ourselves and that inhibits our performance. Thinking about how our response will be received as we walk to the front of the room instead of creating a mini-speech is not a productive use of our time. When called on for Table Topics, just leave the judgments at your seat and use the time to create a brief speech based on the topic you have been presented. Then go up and deliver. You don't have to be perfect every time you deliver a topic. You just have to learn and grow.

2 No "Tee Ups" – Frequently when called on to deliver an impromptu speech, we start our presentation with what is called a "Tee Up." This is just like the golfer placing the ball on the tee for the first shot of the hole. A "Tee Up" in Table Topics could be any of the following...

- "This probably won't be very good."
- "I haven't had time to prepare."
- "I don't know anything about this topic."
- "I'm not good at this."

Just as it is appropriate to place the ball on a tee at the tee box, there are occasions in speaking where it is appropriate to preface your remarks with a qualifying comment. However, I recommend that you avoid them at all costs in Table Topics. Don't say anything that lowers the audience's expectation. It weakens your connection with them and reduces the impact of your presentation.

Related to the "Tee Up" is trying to prepare in advance for a Table Topic by coming up with a generic response, usually an attempt at humor. This approach will definitely impede your learning and will probably not help you win a ribbon. Don't do it! Just address the topic and learn from your response.



3 Build your knowledge base – The more subjects you are familiar with, the easier it will be for you to deliver a short impromptu speech on one of them. If you are not interested in the world, the world is not going to be interested in you. Think about that. No matter if it is in cocktail conversation or in dealing with people in your job, the more you know about what is going on in the world, the more effective and interesting you will be. This doesn't mean that you should try to be an expert on all subjects. At least have enough knowledge about a variety of topics to ask intelligent questions about them.

4 Use the topic as a basis for a mini-speech. Too often we make the Table Topics session a question-and-answer period. The Topicsmaster asks the question and we answer it. Instead, use the topic as the basis for creating a mini-speech. While we may not know the exact answer to the question asked in the topic, we usually have enough information, thoughts, feelings or opinions to develop a one-and-a-half minute speech. Work on developing an opening, body and conclusion for your presentation.

5 Connect with the audience. If we simply respond to the topic presented, we are very likely to look primarily at the Topicsmaster when responding. By concentrating on connecting with the audience, we are more likely to mold our response into a mini-speech. Look people in the eye. Work on selling an idea to the audience!

6 Emphasize your physical presentation. Make sure your whole being is delivering your Table Topic. If we focus on just answering the question, we are more likely to stand in one place and deliver in monotone with no gestures or energy. If we focus on giving a mini-speech, we are more likely to deliver it with more energy and enthusiasm. Strive to put energy into your delivery.

7 Have fun! Just relax and enjoy yourself. What is the worst thing that is going to happen if you don't deliver your Table Topic well? You will not suffer any physical harm. It won't cost you anything – except maybe for those ahs and the fine for not using the word of the day. The audience you are speaking to is in the same boat as you

are. They are not likely to sink that boat. The worst thing that can happen is that you don't win the ribbon for best Table Topic of the day. Big deal!

The best thing that can happen is that you climb one more rung up your ladder to effective communication. Stretch! Dare to fall on you face! This is the place to try those things you wonder if you can do. How do you think I found out I shouldn't sing in my presentations?

"The more you know about what is going on in the world, the more effective and interesting you will be."

The purpose of Table Topics in the club environment is to improve rapid access to the information contained in your memory and use it to create an impromptu two-minute speech. Making up a response is fine because it helps break down the barriers to developing a response. While it is permissible to wander from the truth in your Table Topics response, you should avoid doing so in communications outside the club.

Use these Table Topics tools and you will benefit by becoming a more effective communicator. This will help you become more confident in any situation and more successful in your career. You will also benefit by connecting more deeply with fellow club members and having some fun along the way. **T**

Jack M. Kantola, DTM, a Toastmaster for more than 30 years, is a member of Riverside Breakfast Club 1348-12 in Riverside, California. He was runner-up in the District 12 Table Topics Contest in 2004.

How Do You Build Your Knowledge Base?

- **Read books.** No, not just easy fiction. Set a goal for yourself to read at least six books each year that will improve your knowledge about your career, your knowledge about what is going on in the world, and your ability to communicate or to lead.
- **Read the newspaper.** At least scan the paper each day or subscribe to one of the on-line news services that e-mail you the headlines each day. Scan the headlines and then read the stories that are most interesting or important to you.
- **Watch the news on TV.** Yes, I know – it is all bad news. Even so, you will be more informed about the world around you.
- **Listen to books on tape during your commute.** What a great use of your commute time. There is so much material available on tape or CD today. Both books and tapes on self-improvement on a variety of topics are available from your library or bookstore.
- **Steer your conversations outside of TI to topics of current interest.** All some guys can talk about is sports. While it is okay to have a keen interest in sports, it is better to build a broader knowledge base. Talking about current issues helps you put your thoughts into words that you can later use to respond to Table Topics. Plus, you gain the added benefit of becoming a more interesting person.

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Confessions of a shy Toastmaster.

Table Topics: A Question of Mind Over Matter

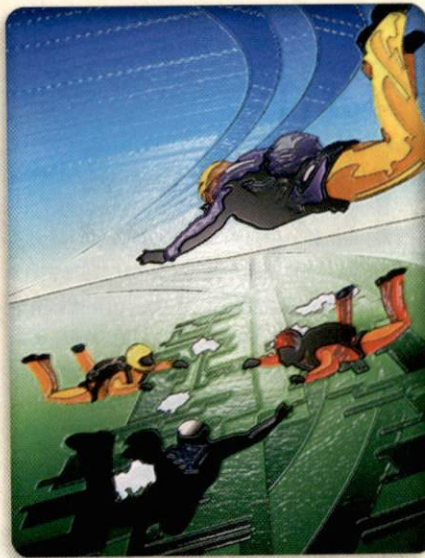
I was at a dinner party recently where one of the guests suggested we all share stories about our most embarrassing moment. Arrrrgh! Then, walking to a restaurant in town, a TV reporter stopped me to ask my opinion on politics. Yikes! My words and face on TV? At work, my boss asked me what I thought of the new vacation policy. Talk about pressure! Getting caught off guard or unprepared scares me.

Not surprisingly, Table Topics has always been just plain painful. But now I see it as a fun exercise and a useful skill I am eager to develop.

Answering a Table Topics challenge is a bit like jumping out of an airplane at 3000 meters. Believe me, I know; I've done both. You study the statistics; your mind tells you it is safe. But then the plane door opens and there is that moment when you hang outside the plane, about to drop. Your survival instinct screams that you will die if you do it. But you make the leap despite your panic.

In my way of thinking, if you want to live to tell your grandchildren all about how you became a champion at Table Topics, it is likewise a question of mind over matter. With experience, you grow accustomed to that adrenaline rush that never goes away. You build up your self-confidence, knowing you are *not* going to die or fall on your face.

Learn to trust how smart you are, and be yourself. I think it is better to draw from your own knowledge and experience instead of making up a story and acting like someone other than yourself. Learn to rely on – and share – who and what you are.



Step by Step...

Here are some steps I have used to help build my self-confidence. You can use these in your club for answering Table Topics.

Pick a word at random out of a dictionary and immediately say the first thing that comes into your head. Try it four or five times and notice how fast your brain serves up an image or an idea for an answer.

Now, go a step further. Still picking words at random, ask yourself what is the first opinion that comes to mind? Begin by saying *I think that...*, or *I love how...*, or *I feel that...* Again, you will find that you always have a personal idea on the topic when you listen for it.

Now, add the next step. Right after you pick a word and find your opinion, immediately state a *message*. You can do it. Based on your opinion, you can always find a connection to make with your audience, however small. Maybe your message amuses, informs or inspires your audience.

I'll demonstrate. From the word *flowers*, in my mind's eye, I immediately see a passion fruit flower like those I saw in my mother's garden. That flower image stuck in my head because, and here comes my opinion, *I'm fascinated by rare and exotic flowers*. From this outlook, your message could take you in any one of a million directions. I thought of saying this: *Who knows what research could tell us about the special healing powers of these flowers?* Maybe it's not the most brilliant answer. Don't worry; it's solid enough to work with. It also contains a human element – healing – and that's an important link to make if you want to touch the listeners' heartstrings.

What I have just demonstrated is how, in a few seconds, your brain can provide you with both an opinion and a moving message. They can be your beginning and ending of a two- to three-minute Table Topics speech. How you connect the two parts with background points can be worked out while you are talking.

Open your speech by stating your opinion. Then, share your background thinking for a minute. Eventually, focus on transitioning to your end statement. Finally, make your heartfelt message statement with confidence. You did it! You jumped into the clouds, your idea parachute opened and you made a safe landing right in front of your audience. ■

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Graduating from Table Topics 101

By Linda L. Isaacs, CTM

**From scared
beginner to
successful
contestant.**

“Would any of the guests like to volunteer?” the Topics-master asked. Slumping in my chair, I thought, “I want to improve my public speaking skills – but not today!” It was July 2004, and I had come to my first Toastmasters meeting. I disappeared for six months, then returned in December 2004 to join.

Less than a year later, I won the District 46 Table Topics contest. How did I get from scared beginner to successful contestant?

When I joined Toastmasters, I was determined to conquer my nervousness about speaking in front of a group of people, especially while answering questions. I decided to try to speak at every meeting, one way or another. When the spring contest came around, I volunteered to give the target speech for the evaluation contest. Bit by bit, my nervousness decreased. A few times, I even won the Best Table Topics ribbon at our weekly club meeting!

When the fall contest was announced, I did not want to miss a speaking role. So I volunteered for the Table Topics contest, competing against two excellent speakers who could probably wallpaper their bathrooms with their Best Table Topics ribbons. I did not expect to win, but I wanted to do my best. On the way to the contest

I repeated, “Opening, Body, Conclusion,” hoping to avoid rambling in my response.

To my surprise, I won! I was excited and happy, but also a little horrified. Now I was going to represent the club at the area contest, and I did not feel qualified at all. How was I going to practice impromptu speaking?

The following week I left town to visit my mother. I had just read an article in the *Toastmaster* magazine about the benefits of visiting other clubs while traveling. So I went online and discovered that not only was there a club a short drive away from my mother’s house, but it was hosting a lecture about how to successfully compete in a Table Topics contest. What a relief! I was bound to learn something, since I knew practically nothing.

How to Practice

The speaker suggested practicing by creating a “grab bag” of slips of paper with Table Topics questions, pulling them out and answering them one by one. I practiced at home with a timer that rang at two minutes and continued to count seconds after it rang, helping me learn to finish before the 30-second grace period, so I would not be disqualified in the contest. I recorded and played back my answers.

My mentor, Katie, spent a Sunday afternoon asking me questions and giving me feedback on my answers. I solicited questions from my club, found questions online by entering Table Topics into Google and Google Groups, and found an online resource from New Zealand which e-mailed me two questions each day. I listened to radio and television interviews and tried to come up with my own two-minute responses to questions.

Know the Scoring

To know how to do well, I needed to know what counted. I tracked down a judges' guide, which showed that out of a 100 possible

points, 55 were for speech development and effectiveness, while 15 points each went to physical, voice and language. I decided that during the competition, my mental energies needed to go toward speech content and organization, not delivery. However, I made an effort to intro-

“I decided to try to speak at every meeting, one way or another.”

duce more body language and vocal variety into my everyday speaking, hoping I would expand the range of what felt normal to me and thus be more expressive during the contest.

Be as Comfortable as Possible

Impromptu speaking requires even more focus than prepared speeches. For my mind to be sharp, I needed to be as relaxed as possible.

I made it a point to arrive early, walk around the room and the stage area, and get comfortable with the premises.

During the days before the contest, I thought about what kind of internal dialogue would help me as I waited to compete. I found it effective to downplay the fact that a contest has winners

and losers. I reminded myself that all of us were winners simply for participating, and that I was gaining valuable experience. I was last to speak in the area, division and district contests, which offered breeding ground for nervousness as my fellow contestants disappeared one by one.

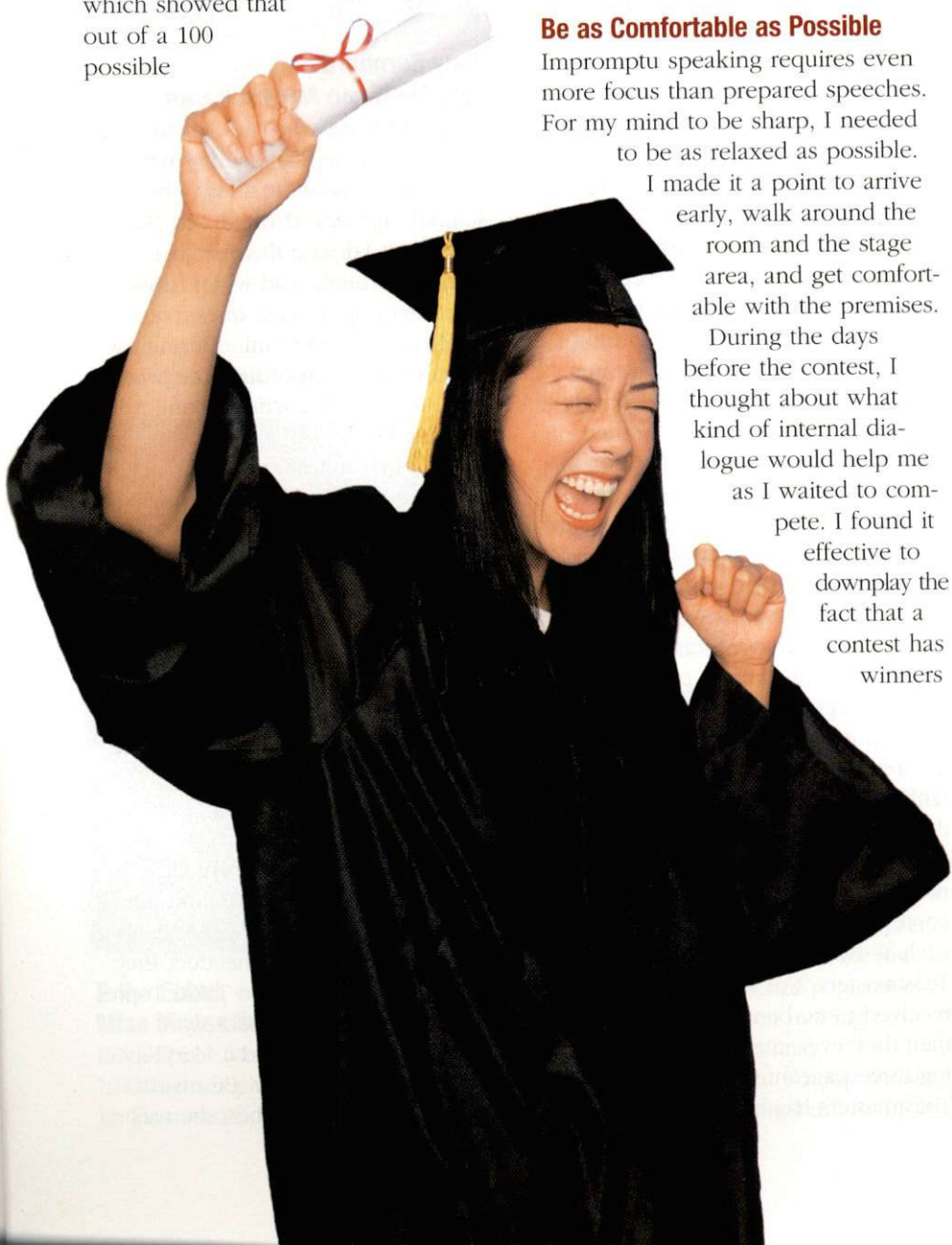
I focused on how wonderful it would be once the competition was over. When I came out to speak at the district contest, I was genuinely happy. No more practicing!

Support from the Audience

At each level of the competition I was fortunate to have a few people I knew in the audience. At the division level, though, I received some unexpected support. The most responsive and enthusiastic audience member, sitting right up front, was one of my competitors! After I won, she came over to congratulate me, and she was there at the district competition supporting me again. She sat all the way to one side of the audience and some members of my club sat all the way to the other side. By speaking first to her, and then to my fellow club members, it was easy to speak to the entire room.

So with the constant practice made possible in my Toastmasters club, the tips from the Toastmasters club I visited, the help of my mentor and some lucky breaks with the contest questions, I went from scared newcomer to Table Topics winner. It was a great experience! But what I remember most is the wonderful example of good sportsmanship displayed by my competitor at the division contest. Karen, in what really matters, you are the real winner! 

Linda L. Isaacs, CTM, is a member of Mile Square Toastmasters in West New York, New Jersey.



Speaking up at Beauty Pageants

By Julie Bawden Davis

“During their reign, beauty contest winners are asked to appear at public functions and speak, not wear their swimsuits.”

— JUDY BERNHARDT

Think beauty pageants are all about good looks? Think again. The truth is a contestant's intelligence and ability to maintain composure and articulate her views account for 50 percent of the judges' decision.

“Those judging the contest look for the best overall well-rounded candidate,” says 2006 Mrs. Michigan Jody Bernhardt, a Toastmaster who won the title in April and went on to win the fitness portion of the prestigious and nationally televised Mrs. America pageant in August. “You might look great, but if you fail to verbalize your views well, you're not going to win. They say that the pageant can be won or lost during the interview that occurs off screen. Judges also watch to see if a contestant wins over the audience when she answers her onstage question.”

Another pervasive myth about beauty contests is that contestants are simply looking for attention. “In pageantry we say that competing gives you a microphone,” says Bernhardt. “Many women have a cause, and pageantry gives them a platform. It's also important to keep in mind that during their reign, beauty contest winners are asked to appear at public functions and speak, not wear their swimsuits.”

Realizing how important communication skills are in the beauty contest process, some contestants, such as Bernhardt, have sought out Toastmasters. Not surprisingly, they've received more benefits from joining than they ever imagined. The following three pageant winners share how Toastmasters has helped them:



**Jody Bernhardt,
Mrs. Michigan America, 2006**

Jody Bernhardt won Mrs. Michigan United States in 2005, and when she watched video of the show, she saw some things that alarmed her. “I really felt that I'd won the title by the skin of my teeth, and when I saw the video and my onstage question, I realized why,” she said. “During my short answer I said “um” four times, and I made a distracting tisking noise with my lips.”

After that revelation, Bernhardt looked up her local Toastmasters club and started attending. “I knew I needed help polishing my speaking skills and achieving a greater level of confidence in front of people,” said Bernhardt, who is a member of the BDO Club in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She soon received invaluable help with Table Topics, which happens to be very similar to the onstage impromptu question that all participants must answer.

“The club members were extremely friendly and supportive, and they really rallied behind me,” Bernhardt says. “Knowing what I needed, they did an entire meeting on Table Topics and that helped tremendously.”

A mother of four and a MaryKay cosmetics sales director, Bernhardt decided to compete when she was

35 after reading the book, *Life is Not a Dress Rehearsal*, by Sheri Rose Shepherd. "Shepherd was Mrs. United States, and in the book she talks about how wanting to spread the word about eating disorders in women triggered her interest in seeking a title," said Bernhardt. "That got me thinking about spreading my own message."

Now that she has her pageant titles, Bernhardt is able to share the subject of her platform, which is teaching women to prioritize and live a balanced, full life that includes keeping themselves fit and healthy. "I teach women that if we don't figure out what our priorities are and take some time for ourselves, we let others control our lives and that has negative consequences," she said. "My message is all about taking charge of your life and making it the best it can be."

Bernhardt credits Toastmasters with helping her develop her message. "Going through the 10 steps to achieving my CTM changed me as a person," she says. "I've really developed personally thanks to my participation in Toastmasters, and now I'm able to share what I've learned."

Read more about Jody Bernhardt at www.mrsmichiganamerica.com



Erika Ebbel,
Miss Massachusetts, 2004

Erika Ebbel, Miss Massachusetts 2004, has used her platform of beauty and brains to spark kids' interest in math

and science. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate and Ph.D. candidate in analytical biochemistry at Boston University School of Medicine is founder of the WhizKids Foundation, which offers a variety of science and math outreach programs.

"Initially society is impressed by appearances and how you present yourself," says Ebbel, who also won the talent portion of the Miss America contest in 2004 by playing the piano. "When young children see that you can be glamorous and still enjoy math and science, you make a great role model."

In 2003, a year before she won the Miss Massachusetts title, Ebbel decided to join Toastmasters. "I was first runner-up at the 2003 Miss Massachusetts contest and had won the interview portion that year when the executive director of the pageant suggested I join a Toastmasters club and hone my presentation skills even more," she says.

Ebbel joined the Tuesday Toastmasters club at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and found the experience invaluable. "Table Topics and two-minute responses gave me the ability to talk about anything and the capacity to quickly respond," she says.

After winning the Miss Massachusetts title, she ran a local pageant in Boston and took the opportunity to spread the word about Toastmasters. "Whenever anyone asks how I learned to express myself so well, I credit Toastmasters," says the petite blonde.

To learn more about the WhizKids Foundation, go to www.whizkidsfoundation.org.



Mary Bell,
Top 10 finalist
Mrs. New York
America, 2002

When Mary Bell joined Toastmasters to help her prepare for the

Mrs. New York America pageant of 2002, she planned on making her membership a short one.

"Initially I thought I'd stay for six months and then quit, but I soon

found that I really enjoyed the organization, so I stayed and earned my DTM within four years," says Bell, who is president of the Impressionists club in Rochester, New York, and a past division governor. "I'm also currently co-chairing my regional conference."

In preparation for the 2002 beauty pageant, Bell found Table Topics to be invaluable, as well as the help of other members. "All of the club members helped me tremendously with my speaking skills and confidence level, especially those Toastmasters who have been in the organization for many years," she says.

Bell found her Toastmasters experience valuable because it not only helped her speak during the Mrs. America contest, but kept her focused, as well.

"I can't say that I wasn't nervous at all during the pageant, but Toastmasters helped me stay calm," she says. "Instead of worrying about what they were going to ask for my onstage question, I simply answered directly and honestly, which is something Toastmasters teaches you."

Bell credits her communication skills for helping her place in the top 10: "I was up against some stiff competition. Many of the contestants in that particular pageant were in the 19 to 24 age range, and I'm in my forties."

Participating in a beauty pageant had always been a dream of Bell's, who was second runner-up in a contest her sophomore year of high school. She had planned on competing in more pageants, but after graduating from college, she was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and spent many years battling the illness, undergoing a series of surgeries.

Finally, four years ago her health was stable enough that she was able to enter the Mrs. New York America contest. "I'm thrilled that I was able to fulfill a lifelong goal, and I have Toastmasters to thank for making that dream a reality," she says. **T**

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Panel Moderating *Made Easy*

The moderator has a challenging leadership role in the panel discussion.

By Marian Schickling and Carol Sauka

You've received a request to moderate a panel discussion at an important conference, and you are going to gain tremendous benefits from doing it well. Your experiences in public speaking will be significantly expanded, and it will look great

on your résumé. So, how do you succeed in this job? First, you need to know what the job requires.

Part referee, part coach, you as the moderator will have a challenging and exciting leadership role in the panel discussion. Your responsibilities start well before the conference and can extend beyond it, but the bulk of the activity takes place onstage. There, you manage the interaction between the individual panelists and between the panel and the audience. You ensure that each panelist has

an opportunity to speak (but does not hog the limelight). You also see that all the panelists (and the members of the audience) “play nice” together. Finally, you keep the atmosphere positive and energized.

A good moderator is a timekeeper and a peacekeeper, a stage manager and a people manager, a juggler and a judge. You will need to be impartial, steady, focused, aware and alert. As panel moderator, you have the least amount to say and the most to do!

Panel moderating is a multi-tiered responsibility, but like the smoothly sailing duck, you must look calm and confident on the surface while paddling like crazy underneath. Here are ten essential tips to keep you afloat:

1 Take the job seriously. As a panel moderator, you have a number of serious responsibilities to others as well as to yourself – and you will be demonstrating those responsibilities in a very public forum. If you’ve been asked to use parliamentary procedure, for example, review *Robert’s Rules of Order* and any organizational bylaws established for public and/or private meetings. Take the job seriously from the beginning.

2 Prep hard to make it look easy. Familiarize yourself with the topic of your panel discussion and how it fits into the overall conference. Request a copy of each panelist’s proposal (or presentation, if available). Google the panelists and find out as much as you can about them. Use this information to help craft your panelist introductions.

Think about the ground rules you want to use for the discussion. Ask the conference organizers to send you any rules for the event that they have developed or used in the past. Amend them to meet current needs. Once you have developed a satisfactory list, send it to the panelists so they will know what to expect. The earlier they have these guidelines, the better.

You might also want to ask the conference organizers for a description of the layout of the stage. It will give you a picture in your mind of what to expect when you get there (and what to rearrange in a hurry if what you see on arrival is not what you expected to see).

You will also want to broach the subject of “back-of-the-room sales” with the conference organizers. It is likely that your panelists will have something to sell (a book, tape, or whatever). It is customary to have a table set up at the back of the room or just outside the conference room to accommodate these sales. Make sure you understand how this will be handled so you can share this information with the audience and with your panelists.

3 Include the panelists in your planning. Aside from gathering information on the panelists and sending them guidelines, talk to each one at the conference before the session. Seek them out in a social setting, introduce yourself and let them know how happy you are to be part of the event. Share your relevant credentials with

them; it gives them confidence in you. If you don’t have relevant credentials, share your enthusiasm. That will work too! Review with the panelists your planned introduction of them. Ask if there is anything in particular they want you to include, and update your panel introductions with that information. Ask them if they will be available after the event to talk to members of the audience.

4 Address the staging of your event. It is reasonable to expect the conference organizers to have implemented a plan for setting up the stage, and if you asked for a description of that plan prior to the conference, you should be well-prepared for what you see on site. Move any equipment

“A good moderator is a timekeeper and a peacekeeper, a stage manager and a people manager, a juggler and a judge.”

you do not intend to use out of the way, put up a clean flipchart on the easel and clear away anything left behind by the last group of speakers. (Panel moderator as busboy? – a little known and rarely mentioned responsibility!) And don’t forget to check those pesky technical details: Do the microphones work and are they placed to meet your needs?

5 Deliver a great introduction. The time has come; the seats are full; there is an energizing buzz in the room. That’s your cue – step up to the microphone and introduce yourself and the panel topic. Be very brief; the audience didn’t come to hear you – they came to hear the panel discussion. Introduce each panelist in a brief, relevant, balanced and informative way, and be sure the audience knows which panelist you are talking about.

6 Review the panel logistics with the panelists and the audience. The trick here is keeping it brief and to the point. You want to review the agenda for the event (“First, we will hear from the panelists, and then we will have a question-and-answer session, followed by...”). You will also want to review the ground rules. The audience will be hearing them for the first time, and the panelists will get a refresher course. If the panelists have previously indicated that they would be available for informal discussions with audience members after the event, be sure to mention that as well and designate an area for this activity. Remember that the room you are using might be needed for another session, so your informal discussions will need to take place elsewhere. Perhaps a good location would be those “back-of-the-room sales tables” (if they are actually located outside the conference room).

7 Manage the panel interactions with style and confidence. This is undoubtedly the most challenging part of the panel moderator’s role. The general rules are easily mastered – thank each panelist after their presentation, don’t

Panel Etiquette

Consider incorporating the moderator guidelines into your behavior and communicating the panelist guidelines to the panelists well before the event.

Guidelines for the Moderator

Guidelines	Why?
Place your watch flat on the table before the presentation starts and look at it surreptitiously to monitor the time elements.	If you leave your watch on your wrist, you will appear rude if looking at it during the session.
Encourage latecomers to join the session and take a seat. (You may have to do this more than once as they filter in. Consider doing it during breaks in the action.)	Discourage latecomers from blocking the doorways and aisles, which might impede the view of those who came on time.
Enlist others to distribute handouts and move microphones around the room as needed.	The moderator, as the leader of the session, should stay in one place and be visible at all times.
Manage the movement of AV equipment during the session. When a panelist has finished with it and the next panelist doesn't need it, have it moved out of the way.	Removing the equipment allows the next panelist to have a clear playing field and enables the audience to have a clear view as well.
When you are speaking to a panelist, look at the panelist rather than at the audience.	It is not necessary to always face the audience; just make sure they can still hear you if you address your remarks to the panelist.
Limit your beverages to water – and only from a glass.	Slopped water looks a lot better on your jacket than spilled Coke (not that that would ever happen to you). In addition, cans and bottles create clutter.

Guidelines for the Panelist

Guidelines	Why?
If you have to share a microphone, make sure it is directly in front of you before you start speaking.	Trying to contort your body to share a microphone placed between you and your neighbor will disrupt your presentation and possibly cause it not to be heard clearly.
Make sure the microphone is turned on before you start speaking.	Audiences have been known to get very surly if you forget to do this.
If you are reading from a script, place the microphone between your script and your mouth. You may have to read the script at arm's length, so use a large font size when you create it and practice.	If the script is not beyond the mike, you will tend to read into your chest, which muffles the message and tends to look as if you are dozing off. This is probably not the impression you were aiming for.
Never push the mike away and say, "Can you hear me without this thing?"	A polite audience will just mumble incoherently, which will be a perfect match for the way the rest of your remarks will be received.
If you are using a laptop, don't look down at it as you go through the presentation. Use paper notes instead and make eye contact with your audience from time to time.	See the reference to dozing off above. Also, making eye contact with the audience limits their ability to do the same thing.
If you are using props, keep them out of sight until needed.	A pile of props on the table is distracting to the audience and may interfere with their line of sight to you.
If you have handouts, make sure they are stapled before arranging to have them distributed.	It's a little courtesy that helps the audience not look like idiots while trying to figure out which pages they should keep and which to pass on to the next person.
Don't get up and distribute the handouts yourself. Arrange to have someone else distribute them for you.	Doing it yourself takes too much time and distracts from your authority and presentation.
Limit your beverages to water – and only from a glass.	Heads of state have been known to sip water from a bottle during a speech, but the trend has yet to catch on in business circles.

indicate by voice or gesture your personal opinion of the content, and manage the time elements of the discussion. And, while you're doing that, also head off any impending clashes between panelists or between a panelist and an audience member and take charge of any and all attempts at grandstanding or hijacking the discussion.

The trap for moderators is in *failing to take control* when conditions clearly warrant it. Horror stories abound of panels gone awry when one panelist gobbles up too much time and others are left scrambling to create the Reader's Digest Condensed Version of their remarks on the fly. The resulting presentations (through no fault of the remaining panelists) are disjointed at best and embarrassing at worst – a nightmare for all concerned. (Even the audience will start to squirm in their seats.) And you, as the person responsible for making sure that *didn't* happen, will not be the most popular person in the room.

The key to avoiding this unpleasant scenario is to anticipate the problems that might come up and practice handling them. Certainly, a panelist going over the allotted time is a reasonable expectation. Develop a pithy response to it (before the conference), write it down on a cue card, and practice saying it until it comes out with confidence and authority. *"I'm sorry to have to interrupt your interesting presentation, but you have used up your allotted time. I'm sure, in fairness to all, you would want me to go on to the next panelist. Ms. Darvey, I believe you are next."* Make the culprit a partner in your move to budget time fairly, and move on to the next speaker before he or she can draw another breath.

Another scenario is the audience member who interrupts the speaker. If you're caught off guard, you might be tempted to respond with the unoriginal and highly inflammatory, "Sez you!"; but if you practice beforehand, you could smoothly say: *"We respect your right to your opinion, but in the interest of time and in fairness to the speaker and the rest of the audience, please hold your comments until the end of the session when you can have a one-on-one discussion with the speaker. Please continue, Mr. [panel speaker]."* It's important to lead the discussion back to the point where it was interrupted and give the heckler nothing to do but sit down.

The more likely grandstanding or moving off topic by an individual panelist can be handled by saying, *"We are limited as to our time. We can address this topic later in the session if time allows or after the session in one-on-one discussions. The next topic is..."*

If two panelists decide to slug it out (verbally, of course) and the conversation grows too heated, you might suggest a "seventh-inning stretch" for the audience (and the panelists). Announce a short break. This timeout should distract the combatants long enough to help them recall where they are, who's listening, and the manners their mothers tried so hard to drum into their heads.

8 Facilitate the question-and-answer session that follows the panel discussion. If at all possible, plan for a Q&A

within the time limits of the session. It enables the audience to participate and to gain additional insight into the topic. (And, if some obnoxious panelist, despite your best efforts, ran away with the previous discussion, you can lop off a little of the Q&A to recoup the time without seriously impacting the flow of the event.)

The Q&A session is not only important for the answers received, but for the questions asked. Make

"The trap for moderators is in failing to take control when conditions clearly warrant it."

sure everyone heard the question. If microphones are not available in the audience, repeat the question yourself so everyone hears it. Avoid having each panelist address the same question, unless they have something fresh to add. In the unlikely event that no one in the audience has a question to ask, come up with one of your own to start things rolling. Make sure you manage the time elements here as well. Make an announcement when the time is up for Q&A and move on to the closing remarks.

9 Segue smoothly into the closing. As the time for the event runs out, make sure you let the audience know that you have reached the end. Thank the panelists for their contributions, remind the audience of the availability of the panelists post-event (and the availability of their products, if there are any). Thank the audience for their attention and participation.

10 Follow up after the event. If you have the opportunity to meet socially with the panelists, be sure to do so and to thank them again for their contributions. Seek out the conference organizers, as well, and let them know how things went (with an emphasis on the positive). Once you return home, send letters to the organizers and specifically to the person who asked you to moderate the panel expressing your appreciation for the opportunity and the benefits you received from it. And don't forget to pat yourself on the back! Panel moderating is challenging and calls upon a host of skills and abilities. It also takes courage, commitment and intelligence to do it well. Now you know why they asked you to do it! **T**

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*"Words are but the
signs of ideas."*

– SAMUEL JOHNSON, (1709-1784)

Taking Control of the Teleprompter

By Michael Landrum, ATMB

Avoid a zombie-like performance by following these tips.

Many executives these days find themselves reading a scrolling white text on a dark background when delivering a speech. These speeches are often delivered to large audiences at annual corporate meetings. They are often presented in tandem with PowerPoint shows in large halls where the speaker is projected on the screen by live video. Under these circumstances, it's very difficult to reach out to an audience effectively or to read their responses. You might think it would help if the speaker could set aside his or her notes and face the audience, but unfortunately, that doesn't always work.

The Teleprompter is a valuable tool for speakers. As useful as it is, however, it comes at a cost. Most speakers understand the importance of maintaining eye contact in order to build and keep rapport with the audience. But doing so is difficult while reading – even reading words on a screen. Speakers who are new to Teleprompters also tend to drop their voices into a monotonous recital, or – in combating that – to overplay the speech with too much expression.

"All I have to do is read off the Teleprompter? No problem!" Many speakers mistakenly think that reading a speech from a Teleprompter will be easy, so they neglect practice. That is a serious miscalculation. While it may be simple enough to read from a scrolling text, it is not so easy to turn that into an energetic, rapport-building speech that successfully moves an audience to action.

It's ironic that expressing your ideas is so often impeded by the gadget scrolling the words. As a result, most first-time efforts at Teleprompted speaking are wooden, monotonous and dull. If you would like to avoid this kind of "zombie-like" performance, here are seven suggestions that will help:

- **The pause that refreshes.** The great danger of the Teleprompter is the relentless roll of the words. You must impose your rhythm on the speech – not the other way around. And the most important element in rhythm is the pause. Pausing is a sign of confidence in a speaker.

It's important to remember that the prompter will follow your lead. If you stop, it will stop. You can insert pauses into the text and look away from it to re-establish eye contact. The Teleprompter operator will pause with you and resume scrolling when you resume speaking. If you need assurance that the scrolling will pause along with you, be sure to discuss your concerns with your Teleprompter operator.

- **Read in phrases.** Of course the pauses are not the only way to control the pace of the speech. In your rehearsals, look for figures of speech – groups of words that work together – and read from phrase to phrase rather than word to word. Good phrasing is essential to overcoming a monotonous rate of speech. You must interpret the speech, then enliven the right words with energy and emphasis.



■ **Use short and simple sentences.**

The idea to be expressed must be quickly grasped by the listener. Compound sentences and convoluted syntax are fatal traps for the speaker. Find interesting, lively verbs, and beware the passive voice: "meetings were held..." Repetitions are positive qualities in a speech. Restate your points in different ways. These are good ideas for any speech, but especially for one using a Teleprompter.

■ **Perform with energy.** To avoid the typical "wooden monotone" so often found in speeches from a Teleprompter, the speaker must speak through the screen on which the words are reflected to the audience beyond. It's vital to endow that glass with a personality and express yourself with extra energy to that personality. Be positive and optimistic with an open demeanor that invites agreement. Smile!

■ **Rehearse on video.** One of the most valuable tools for any speaker is a camcorder. Videotape your rehearsals to discover the energy level of your communication. Are you talking to someone, or simply droning on? Is your face animated? Is it too expressive – are you mugging? Play it with the sound off

and see. Is your voice expressive enough? Are you shouting? Cover the screen and just listen to the playback. Remember, the purpose of rehearsal is to make it seem easy.

■ **Give yourself stage directions.** The new versions of Teleprompters allow you to use different fonts, colored text and many symbols to indicate emphases, emotions, gestures and facial expressions that will appear on the screen with your text. (e.g. Point to chart, and Gesture to the

compelled to copy the styles of other speakers... find your own. And be sure to take a backup of good old paper notes to the lectern with you. Teleprompters, like any technological device, can let you down.

Above all, remember that a public speech is more than words read into a microphone: It is a performance intended to communicate ideas. If those ideas are important to you and you want them to be important to your listeners, you must fill them with

"Be sure to take a backup of good old paper notes to the lectern with you. Teleprompters, like any technological device, can let you down."

Chairman). Your operator will be helpful in suggesting and creating useful text notes. Of course, you should practice these thoroughly.

■ **Keep your options open.** It's not always a good idea to have an entire speech written out on the prompter. Suppose you want to insert an ad lib? Some people respond to that by simply putting an outline on their prompter rather than a word-for-word speech. Also, don't feel

your passion, commitment and the force of your personality. Whether you are presenting your own report or a speech that has been written by committee, you'll want it to be a direct and dynamic communication. With proper use, a Teleprompter can help you reach this goal. **T**

Mike Landrum, ATMB, is an active Toastmaster, executive speech coach and speechwriter in New York. Reach him at www.CoachMike.com.



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The One-Minute Power Introduction



Every speech should be unique, because every audience is unique. Likewise, every speech deserves its own unique introduction. Never leave it to the Toastmaster to “ad-lib” an introduction; prepare a “One-Minute Power Introduction”!

A powerful introduction sets **you** up (as an ‘expert’ on the topic), sets **your topic** up (to be of interest to the audience) and sets **the audience** up (to better understand your message).

The introduction should explain **who** you are (your background that makes you the ‘expert’ on the topic), **what** you do (that will make the topic interesting) and **why** you do it (what the audience will get out of your message).

A powerful introduction will be no longer than 150 words – about one minute of speaking time – and they should be short words, preferably one syllable. Why? Because you want your message to be understood. Avoid words like *dialogue* and *interface* when what you mean is *talk*.

If you want to be seen as an expert on a topic, tell people what you do in relation to that topic using words like *works*, *helps* and *builds*, – action words that set you up as someone who actually does things.

Be specific. Which sounds better: “Jane Doe’s job is to dialogue with stakeholders.” Or “Jane works with 24 community groups such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Red Cross and Girl Guides”? The first description makes poor Jane sound like a bureaucrat; the second makes her sound involved and an expert in community service.

Avoid acronyms that might not be understood. The R.S.P.C.A. in one country is generally referred to as the Humane Society in another. Likewise, avoid industry-specific jargon if your audience is not from that industry.

Use groups of threes, like Jane’s example above. Or, “Sam speaks, trains and writes about good nutrition.” Threes are easy on the speaker, easy on the listener and easy to remember. They add structure to your message.

Say something unique about you. For example, “Chris Lee was given the ‘Employee of the Month’ award for attaining the highest sales ever achieved in February.”

Maybe you collect baseball cards, or you are a gifted gardener. Say so, even if it has nothing to do with your topic, because it will make you sound human, and you want your audience to connect with you on a human level, don’t you? Real people are always interesting to listen to.

Make a statement of belief that sums up your topic. “Kim believes that you ALWAYS communicate – even your silence speaks volumes when facing racism, sexism or homophobia in the workplace.” This tells the audience that your topic – communication and diversity – is important to you as a speaker, and shows your audience that you have a passion for your topic.

Write it in the third person. Use “he” or “she” instead of “I” or “we.” Introductions are meant to be read to your audience by some-

one else, usually the Toastmaster.

It is important for introducers to have a copy of the introduction as far in advance as possible so they can practice reading it. Ask them to read it exactly as it’s written, with no embellishments.

Then, make sure you take the time to actually listen to the introducer read it before you speak, for timing purpose and also to ensure correct pronunciation of any unfamiliar words. (I usually print out a hardcopy for my introducer in at least 16- or 18-point font, bolding words I want emphasized, and I use hyphens instead of commas to ensure appropriate pauses.)

Finish the introduction with a slogan or a catchy phrase, something that will stick in the listeners’ memory. For instance, “When it comes to the workplace, Pat believes in the old saying, ‘Safety is our number one priority.’”

With every speech, you want to be seen as an expert on your topic, with an extensive and interesting background that is relevant to both the subject and the audience. Make sure your introductions assist you in this goal. ■

George Olds, DTM, is a charter member of Rainbow Toastmasters in Toronto. He can be reached at goldsgo4results.com.

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BEWARE

of the Sales Pitch

When speakers praise a product excessively without supporting their claims, they lose credibility.

"There are worse things in life than death. Have you ever spent an evening with an insurance salesman?"

— WOODY ALLEN

The speaker had just completed a well-organized, polished presentation at an international conference. Yet, there was very little applause. In contrast to the many questions other speakers received after their presentations, this speaker didn't receive any. The session chairperson even chastised the speaker in front of the audience. What went wrong?

The speaker had delivered an overly commercial presentation, in essence a product advertisement with little support for her claims of the product's performance. She had done this at a professional conference without determining the sponsoring organization's restrictions on "selling from the platform," nor had she considered the audience's expectations.

"Speakers at a professional conference walk a fine line between promoting sales of their employers' products and services and meeting the conference sponsor's commercialism restrictions," notes experienced speaker Mahendra Doshi, an engineering consultant and managing editor of the journal *Progress in Paper Recycling*. Whether you're giving a speech to a local fraternal or civic group or giving a presentation at an international conference, you need to adjust the amount of merchandising to an appropriate level. When speakers praise a product excessively without providing support for their claims, they lose credibility with

their audience.

"Overly commercial presentations are definitely a waste of the audience's time and money," observes Doshi. Consultant Terry Bliss says, "Trying too hard to sell their products can lead speakers to exaggerate, present contradictions and speculations, and repeat trade names so often the audience becomes tired of hearing them."

The focus of a speech that's too commercial is on what the speaker is trying to sell. The speech and slides are sprinkled with brand names and company logos. Absent are unbiased comparisons to other products or services and detailed technical explanations of how the speaker's product works and under what circumstances they work best. While this type of commercial pitch may be fine for a sales call, it is almost always inappropriate for a professional conference.





Determine Audience Expectations

So what's the alternative? How can you avoid sounding like an advertisement while still persuading the audience that you and your employer offer valuable products and services worth their consideration? As Toastmasters, we all learn the importance of understanding and meeting audience expectations. For professional presentations, these are usually set by the sponsoring organization's speakers' guidelines. Speakers should consult with conference organizers if they need any clarification of these guidelines.

Speakers' guidelines often set limits on merchandising, and conference attendees expect speakers to respect these limits. For example, the International Association for Food Protection considers "excessive use of brand names, product names or logos, failure to substantiate performance claims,

and failure to objectively discuss alternative methods, processes, and equipment to be indicators of sales pitches."

Many speakers determine audience expectations by conversing with people as they enter the presentation room. However, when using this technique to determine an appropriate level of commerce, you may find yourself experiencing severe problems if you're required to make a major overhaul of your speech and visual aids only minutes before your presentation. So it's best to talk to the sponsor of your speech well in advance to determine the appropriate level of merchandising, and design your presentation and visual aids accordingly.

Acceptable Commercialism

To capture the audience's interest, experienced speaker and Westhollow Toastmasters club member Shirish

Pariptyadar says, "My strategy is always to help people identify a need for my solution." He advises presenting at least one major set of performance results or an example customized to the audience's interests. "This gives them a reason to listen to you," he observes. Speakers should spice their speeches with other interesting, useful information. For example, The Society of Manufacturing Engineers notes in its guidelines that speakers should educate the audience about options and solutions, not just the product they represent.

**"Your idea sells; you don't.
Never ask for the sale in
your presentation."**

In his 2001 e-book *Really Bad PowerPoint (and How to Avoid It)*, speaker Seth Godwin notes, "The reason we do presentations is to make a point, to sell one or more ideas." This is key. In your promotional presentations, you want to avoid directly selling a product or service. Instead, you want to present useful, interesting information and sell the audience the concept that you and your employer understand particular problems and can help audience members solve them. John Johnston, senior business consultant with Shell Oil Company, says, "You don't have to sell much; give people the facts and let them decide. Industrial marketing isn't like consumer marketing. The audience is already interested in your cool idea or they wouldn't be there."

Scott Wellington, a Shell Oil engineer, adds, "Your idea sells; you don't. Never ask for the sale in your presentation," he advises. "This happens afterward in personal conversations with audience members." So don't offer commercial information such as product bulletins or a salesperson's contact information to the audience. But do have this information available so that, in personal conversations after your presentation, you'll be able to give people information directly rather than promising to send it to them later.

Wellington advises being "bluntly honest when comparing your product with a competitor's. Explain when it works and when it doesn't." Johnston recommends identifying a problem that you know some audience members are having. Explaining how your product solves this problem "makes your message personal and helps get your message through." Bliss says, "When you discuss product performance, be clear about the conditions under which the product was evaluated. Be sure these conditions are realistic and that your examples represent how many audience members would use the product. Real-world examples are more persuasive than the results of laboratory tests."

"Show that you understand the big picture," advises Bliss. This means, in addition to demonstrating that you thoroughly understand the details of your product, showing that you understand the audience's problems and how the product would be used to solve these problems. "Be honest about the product's limitations. If it hasn't been evaluated as a solution for some problems, be forthright and say so," he

adds. Far from being harmful, an occasional admission of this sort adds to the speaker's credibility.

Using accepted industry terms in your presentation implies that you are knowledgeable about your audience's businesses. Also use high-quality visual aids that follow the conference guidelines. For example, the Society of Petroleum Engineers informs speakers at its conferences, "Company logos must be limited to the title slide and used only to indicate the affiliation of the presenter and others involved in the work." The American Chemical Society does not allow trade names to be used in the titles of presentations given at its conferences.

It's not difficult to modify a sales pitch to make the amount of commercialism acceptable to conference organizers. Consider the following sales pitch for a new ingredient for laundry detergents: "Product X delivers superior stain removal. So it is an excellent ingredient for laundry detergents." Without details, it is hard to evaluate what this sales pitch really means. In contrast, the following statement, while less of a sales pitch, still delivers a commercial message but in a way that provides more useful information to the audience:

"When used as a one-percent additive in Cleano Laundry Detergent, Product X provides 50% more removal of dirty motor oil and grass stains than does Cleano without the additive. These tests were performed using the coldwater wash and rinse setting of a commercial washing machine. Similar results were obtained when the same amount of Product X was added to WonderWash and SuperBrite laundry detergents. We plan to determine if Product X performs well as an additive to commercial stain removers."

Compared to the first statement, the second one indicates the speaker has evaluated Product X performance under a variety of conditions: against different stains, in different laundry detergents and in cold wash water. This provides useful information for audience members wishing to improve the performance of their employer's laundry detergent. In addition, by admitting that the performance of Product X in stain removers hasn't been evaluated, the speaker adds to her credibility while indicating that she is aware this is an important audience concern. However, she is not pretending to have all the answers.

To borrow from Mary Poppins, "A spoonful of sugar helps the commercialism go down." In this case, the spoonful of sugar is the useful information you provide your listeners. By avoiding making a sales pitch, carefully choosing the content of your speech, presenting it well and being prepared for follow-up, your presentation will benefit your audience, your employer and your own professional reputation. ■

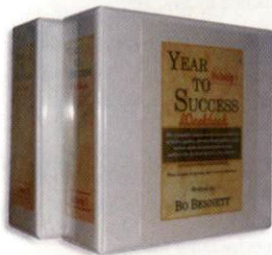
John K. Borchardt, ATMG, is a member of Westhollow Club 5768. He lives in Houston, Texas, and can be reached by e-mail at jkborchardt@aol.com.

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Article Index 2006

Club Meetings

- Turning Guests into Members
Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM Feb/28
- From CTM to CC – The New Name is
'Competent Communicator' Mar/20
- Start a New Toastmasters Club
Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM Mar/28
- Absent But Loyal
Caren Neile, ATMS May/8
- So You Want to Be a Speaker?
Lance Miller, DTM May/12
- A New Toastmaster Serving Up Speeches
Carrie Yugwood Jun/5
- Recruiting for the 21st Century
Toastmaster
Steve Brandon Jun/8
- Do You Want New Members?
Jennifer L. Blanck, ATMB, AL Jun/10
- Recommendations from an Ex-guest
Michael Stout, CTM Jun/14
- District 45's Triple Crown Program
Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM Jun/19
- How I Learned Customer Service
as a Club Officer
Craig Harrison, DTM Jun/20
- From CTM to CC – The New Name
is Competent Communicator Jul/32
- A Party to Die For
Tracey Maroney, ATMB Aug/14
- Member Retention Strategies
Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM Sep/15
- How to Succeed in Toastmasters
Rajeev Pandey, DTM Oct/26
- Tune-up Your Table Topics
Jack M. Kantola, DTM Dec/8

Communication

- Speaking of Nightmares
John Kinde, DTM Jan/10
- Projecting Potential
Craig Harrison, DTM Jan/22
- Debunking the 55%, 38%, 7% Rule
Judith E. Pearson, DTM Jan/24
- The Science of Silence
Cliff Suttle, ATMG Jan/27
- Reading Your Listeners'
Nonverbal Signals
Charles R. McConnell Feb/12
- The Yoga of Public Speaking
Caren Neile, ATMS Feb/22
- The Fear of Public Speaking
Joann M. McCabe, ATMS Apr/18
- Teeing Off at Toastmasters
Sigrid Macdonald, CTM May/11
- The Art of Listening
Tracy Line Jul/22
- Getting the Council to Vote Yes!
Gary King, ATMB Jul/24
- My Day as a Reluctant Lobbyist
Susanne Rieble, ATMS Jul/27
- Be a Cultural Detective
Jeanne Feldman, CL Oct/28
- How Well Do You Listen?
Patricia Tsang, CL Nov/11
- How Strong is Your Toastmasters
Network?
Renate Zorn, DTM Nov/14
- The Art of Mingling and Networking
Katherine Meeks Nov/16
- The 30-Second Me Strategy
Nannette Potter Nov/22

Want a More Powerful Voice?

Judi M. Bailey Nov/24

Beware of the Sales Pitch

John K. Borchardt, ATMG Dec/24

Humor

Dos and Don'ts For When
the Mike Won't

Gene Perret Jan/14

Humor to the Rescue

John Kinde, DTM Mar/24

Fool Things I have Done

John C. Spaitb, ATMB Jun/16

That's Not Funny!

John Kinde, DTM Oct/16

How to Tell a Joke

Larry Getten Oct/20

Laugh With and Learn From
the Comics

Gene Perret Oct/22

Let's Take a Meeting

John Cadley Nov/8

Language/Speech Writing

Getting Your Audience to Say 'Yes!'

David Garfinkel Jan/19

Complacent No More!

Kathy Hrastar, CTM Feb/5

Confessions of a Political

Speechwriter
Michael Scroccaro, CTM Feb/14

Lessons from Oscar

Gene Perret Apr/10

The 3 Biggest Speechwriting Mistakes

David Garfinkel Apr/32

Communicating Through Songwriting

Darren McClelland, ATMB May/16

Think Purple Cow

Eric Feng, ACB Oct/8

Dubai or not Dubai

Patricia Fry, ATMS Oct/30

No More Vampire Words

Richard Hasb, DTM Dec/6

Leadership

Blow Your Own Horn at the Office

David Boyce, ATMB Feb/16

Turn Team Conflict into

Team Harmony
Dave Zielinski Mar/8

Teaming with Success

Craig Harrison, DTM Mar/12

The Wit and Wisdom of Leadership

Gene Perret Mar/14

Toastmasters 2006 Golden Gavel

Recipient: *Jim Kouzes* May/21

The Leadership Challenge

Jim Kouzes Jul/30

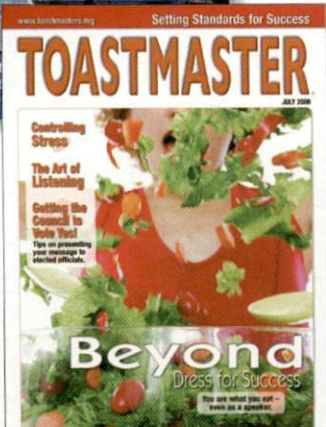
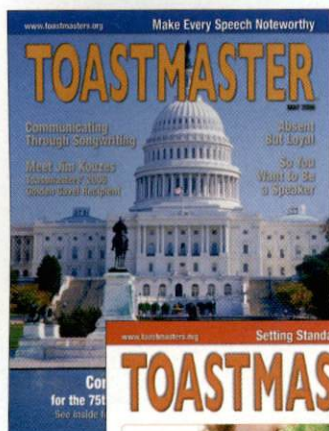
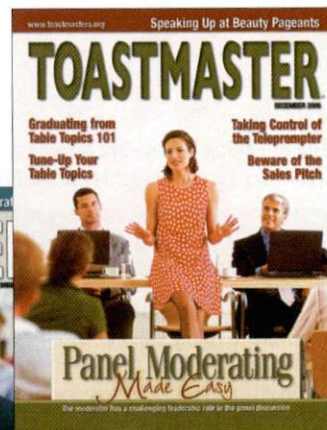
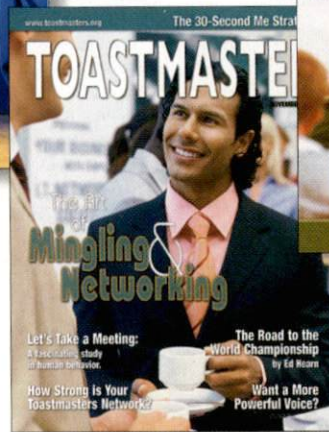
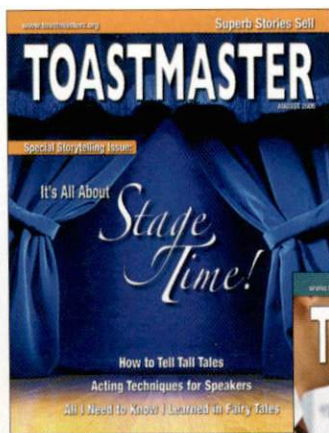
Becoming a New Competent Leader

Bonnie L. Maidak, ATMS/CL Sep/12

Laws for Positive Leadership <i>Victor Parachin</i>	Sep/16
Picking Potential Leaders <i>John C. Maxwell, Ph.D.</i>	Sep/22
Panel Moderating Made Easy <i>Marian Schickling and Carol Sauka</i>	Dec/16

Personal Growth

From Toastmaster to Wine Expert <i>Chuck Bletben, ATMS</i>	Feb/6
Rising Above Failure <i>Victor Parachin</i>	Feb/24
Talk Up Your Toastmasters Talents <i>Dena Harris, CTM</i>	Mar/16
Competent or Confident? <i>Frank S. Adamo, ATMS</i>	Apr/6
Learning From Each Other <i>Barb Adamski, CTM</i>	Apr/12
Speaking to a Diverse Audience <i>Laura Gillson, ATM</i>	Apr/15
Overcoming Nervousness as a Learning-Disabled Person <i>Robert Ward, ATMB</i>	Apr/16
Conquer Table Topics Phobia <i>Rajiv Ramaratnam, ATMG</i>	Apr/22
Are You an Extrovert or Introvert? <i>Sbelia Spencer, DTM</i>	Apr/24
Becoming a Better Parent <i>Elliott Katz, CTM</i>	Jul/6
Beyond Dress for Success <i>Tonya Zavasta</i>	Jul/10
Set Your Standards for Success <i>Sam Silverstein</i>	Jul/28
All I Really Need to Know I Learned In Fairy Tales <i>Caren S. Neile, Ph.D., ATMS</i>	Aug/8



Prepared for Tomorrow's Opportunity <i>Ed Sykes, DTM</i>	Sep/6
On the Shoulders of Giants <i>Marilyn Jess, ATMG, CL</i>	Sep/26
A Question of Mind Over Matter <i>Bill Monsour, CL</i>	Dec/11
Graduating from Table Topics 101 <i>Linda L. Isaacs, CTM</i>	Dec/12

Presentation Skills

Finding Your Voice <i>Lance Miller, DTM</i>	Jan/16
Boost Your Business with Public Seminars <i>Sam Silverstein</i>	Jan/20
Romancing the Audience <i>Michele Caldwell-Kelly</i>	Feb/8
Try Poster Presentations <i>John K. Borchardt, ATMG</i>	Feb/19
Make Every Speech Noteworthy <i>Mark Buschena, CTM</i>	May/14
Thank You and Come Again <i>Gene Perret</i>	Jul/18
How to Tell Tall Tales <i>Elizabeth Keogan, ATMS</i>	Aug/11
It's All About Stage Time <i>Carolyn Callan, ATMB</i>	Aug/16
Acting Techniques for Speakers <i>Ed Brodow</i>	Aug/18
Two-Minute Tales! <i>Craig Harrison, DTM</i>	Aug/22
How to Present an Idea and Be Heard <i>Sam Silverstein</i>	Sep/20
The Road to the World Championship <i>Edward E. Hearn</i>	Nov/12
Get Moving <i>Nowell King, ATMB</i>	Nov/28
The One-Minute Power Introduction <i>George Olds, DTM</i>	Dec/22

Tech Topics

How to PowerPoint <i>Kevin Lerner</i>	Jan/20
Want a Club Web Site? Use FreeToastHost.org	Apr/28
Make Your Web Site Your Best PR Tool <i>Sylvia Wilson, CL</i>	Apr/30
PowerPoint - From Average to Awesome <i>Kevin Lerner</i>	Aug/24
Are You a 'Finer Designer'? <i>Marian Schickling</i>	Aug/26
When Networking Isn't Working <i>Craig Harrison, DTM</i>	Nov/19
Taking Control of the Teleprompter <i>Michael Landrum, ATMB</i>	Dec/20

Toastmaster Profiles

It's a Wonderful Life <i>Nina Insinna, ATMB</i>	Jan/8
The Puzzled Players <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Mar/6
Learning to Think in English <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Apr/8
Terrence Holmes: Champion for the Less Fortunate <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	May/6
TI Sparks Comedian's Career <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Jun/6
Finding the Confidence and Courage to Move On <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Jul/8
Speaking Out About Autism <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Aug/6
Vicky and Lu, the Hippo <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Oct/7
Cancer Survivor Fulfills His Dream <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Nov/6
Speaking Up at Beauty Pageants <i>Julie Bawden Davis</i>	Dec/14

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 Marvin Henry 590114-42, Calgary, Canada
 Elbrist Mason 1684-43, Jackson, Mississippi
 Erma J. Bayley 3702-43, Little Rock, Arkansas
 Valerie L. Baham 2346-47, Jacksonville, Florida
 Ronnie Lee Crum 5821-47, Tallahassee, Florida
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 Susan Orosco 3046-52, Los Angeles, California
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 Christine Fitzsimmons 7936-54, Champaign, Illinois
 Kai A. Makeda 7480-55, San Antonio, Texas
 Jennifer L. Mitchell 8461-55, Schertz, Texas
 Patrice R. Eaton 2659-56, Houston, TX

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 Jean McAllister 9806-60, Wasaga Beach, Canada
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 LouLou Borduas 901116-61, Boucherville, Canada
 Curtis H. Naus 404-62, Grand Rapids, Michigan
 Tom Pritchard 432-63, Hermitage, Tennessee
 Helen Chen 7265-67, Taipei, Taiwan
 Ronald Wiplinger 7265-67, Taipei, Taiwan
 Marianne E. Steentsma 3410-69, Ipswich, Australia
 J. Augustesen 4140-70, Hornsby, Australia
 Wivina B. Pumatong 8512-75, Cebu, Philippines
 Robert E. Puro 9626-77, Decatur, Alabama
 Philip D'Mello 1836-79, Manama, Bahrain

Anniversaries

December 2006

70 YEAR

Ocotillo 68-03, Phoenix, Arizona

65 YEAR

Sioux Falls 210-78, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

60 YEAR

Verdugo Hills 434-52, Verdugo Hills, California

50 YEAR

Mid-Del 2257-16, Midwest City, Oklahoma
 Central 2277-31, Worcester, Massachusetts
 Sheboygan 2121-35, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
 Business-Professional 2207-55, San Antonio, Texas

45 YEAR

Helmsmen 770-F, Huntington Beach, California
 Newport-Mesa 1300 1300-F, Costa Mesa, California
 Downtown 1894-10, Akron, Ohio
 Gladiators 3392-27, Alexandria, Virginia
 D S C P 3403-38, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Columbus-Whitehall 3002-40, Columbus, Ohio
 Naracoorte 3395-73, Naracoorte, Australia

40 YEAR

South Gate 1587-01, South Gate, California
 Fairlawn 2803-10, Akron, Ohio
 United Health Group 1389-53, Hartford, Connecticut

35 YEAR

Germantown 2394-36, Germantown, Maryland
 Fredericton 2204-45, Fredericton, Canada
 Whakatane 1106-72, Whakatane, New Zealand
 Napier 1542-72, Napier, New Zealand
 Masterton 3199-72, Masterton, New Zealand
 Nelson 3758-72, Nelson, New Zealand
 Gulf Coast 2095-77, Biloxi, Mississippi

30 YEAR

Jacobs Engineering 729-F, Pasadena, California
 Sunuppers 2834-02, Des Moines, Washington

Four Seasons 373-06, Roseville, Minnesota
 North Adelaide 2557-73, North Adelaide, Australia
 Talkabout 3077-73, Shenton Park, Australia
 Bayanihan 2844-75, Manila, Philippines

25 YEAR

Mile O Communicators 2969-21, Dawson Creek, Canada
 Speecom 4751-51, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 Windsor 4745-53, Windsor, Connecticut
 Thame 309-71, Thame, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom
 Eden-Epsom 4748-72, Auckland, New Zealand

20 YEAR

San Clemente 6463-F, San Clemente, California
 Downtown Debaters 6451-01, Long Beach, California
 MY-T Speakers 6446-06, Eden Prairie, Minnesota
 Cross-Talkers 6470-15, Murray, Utah
 Toastmasters of Carroll 6443-19, Carroll, Iowa
 Centennial 6456-21, Vancouver, Canada
 Charleston (formerly Charleston Town Center) 6455-40, Charleston, West Virginia
 Yes I Can 6466-43, Memphis, Tennessee
 Toast Busters 6476-57, Martinez, California
 Opportunity 6473-66, Glen Allen, Virginia
 City of Sails 6475-72, Auckland, New Zealand
 Heritage 6480-72, Mt Wellington, New Zealand

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The Holidays Are Coming!

Start your shopping now!

Visit our online store at <http://www.toastmasters.org/store/> or check out our catalog. Below are some great gift ideas for any lucky Toastmaster on your list!

Leather Set (Catalog Nos. 7003, 7004, 7005, and 7007). This handsome leather set includes a large slotted pocket portfolio pad, with a pen loop, paper pad, and two extra interior pockets (\$29.95); a classic multiple pocket travel wallet for travel documents, passport, and credit cards (\$19.95); a compact business card case with two fully gusseted inside pockets, suitable for credit cards or business cards (\$9.95); and a handy luggage tag with a clear view window for your business card or label for easy identification (\$5.95). Each piece is stamped with a silver Toastmasters International logo on the front side.

Crown Pen (Catalog No. 6607). Presentation quality blue and chrome pen, topped with the TI emblem encased in a clear dome. Pen displayed in an attractive box. \$9.95.

Paperweights (Catalog Nos. 6613 and 6614). Choose between a 2" x 2" beautiful onyx paperweight with TI emblem and small engraving plate, or a clear lucite paperweight in a nice box with a satin bag. Engraved with Toastmasters' official emblem. Either would make a great gift! Or get both for a little variety. At only \$4.50, you can't beat the price!

Earrings (Catalog No. 5704). These 1/2" diameter gold-plated earrings with hypo-allergenic posts would be great for all the ladies in your life. Only \$7.50.

Silk Necktie (Catalog No. 6684). This rich blue silk necktie with thin, horizontal stripes in muted burgundy and gold tones would look great on any guy. \$27.50. Also available in extra long (Catalog No. 6685). \$30.00.

Silk Scarf (Catalog No. 6686). A blue silk scarf with a gold design and soft burgundy border would make a beautiful complement to any woman's wardrobe. \$27.50.

Watches (Catalog Nos. 6682 and 6683). Elegant two-tone watch features stainless-steel band and water-resistant dial. Toastmasters International is imprinted on watch face. Comes in an attractive, durable steel case. Available in either men's or women's. \$40.00.

Toastmasters Caps (Catalog Nos. 7000A, 7000B, and 7001). Caps are a great way to show your Toastmasters pride! Available in natural color with a burgundy bill and embroidered Toastmasters emblem (\$8.95); khaki color with a blue bill and Toastmasters embroidered emblem (\$12.00); and denim with "Toastmasters" embroidered in white (\$8.95).

Desk Clock (Catalog No. 6624). For the continuously tardy Toastmaster, or anyone who just wants to know what time it is. This black contemporary curved analog clock with alarm feature displays "Toastmasters... Find Your Voice" in white on the lower bottom front. \$12.00.

Gift Certificates (Catalog Nos. 6630, 6632, and 6634). Gift certificates are perfect for those "hard to buy for" Toastmasters. Available in \$5, \$10, and \$25 denominations.

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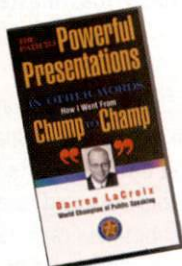
~ Michael Erwine, Eaton Rapids, MI



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