

TOASTMASTER

January 2009

What's the Scoop on Your Group?

Evaluate your group with this handy checklist.

Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C...

Creativity!

Step Away From Self-Sabotage





The Courage to Conquer Distractions

✦ Happy New Year to you all! I hope your holidays were filled with wonderful times spent with family and friends. Now we are back in the swing of things. Or are we? As much as I love the holidays, they can also be a distraction.

Students go home. Many of us travel. Some of our clubs suspend meetings. Refocusing is sometimes challenging.

Yet I am reminded that at any time, distractions of *many* degrees are all around us. Our members of District 82 were all set for their conference November 29-30 in Chennai, one of the largest cities in India. Then came the Mumbai attacks, in which a division governor lost a family member. As if that were not enough, a cyclone hit, bringing four feet of rain to the streets of Chennai. Yet the majority of the members who were registered for the conference, even that division governor, had the Courage to Conquer those deeply distressing – and distracting – events and attend a fabulous conference.

I recently visited with three past district governors from District 70 in Australia. Each was obviously disappointed that we will not hold our 2010 convention in Sydney. They noted that to some, that decision had been a distraction. Yet each of them said that the most important thing in Toastmasters is what happens in our individual clubs. Each shared stories of what this organization has meant to them and how they remained committed to our program. They had the Courage to Conquer the distraction of their disappointment and are focused on moving forward!

Others of us may be distracted by the economy. For some, the distraction may be a hectic schedule, disagreements with others or attitude problems. Whatever it might be, I encourage you to remember how your life has been changed because of Toastmasters! How has your career, your personal life, your belief in yourself been strengthened because of Toastmasters? Aren't you glad you didn't let distractions get the best of you? Aren't you thankful you kept attending those meetings?

This issue of the *Toastmaster* contains several great articles devoted to the health of our clubs, as well as to our personal self-improvement. As you consider both, think of the role that distractions can play. Remember that the only way for us to reap the benefits of Toastmasters is to be personally engaged and work the program in our clubs. Don't let distractions keep you from that. And by the way, clubs: Don't let distractions keep *you* from working toward the goal of being a Distinguished Club! As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The greatest thing in the world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving." As you begin 2009, move in the right direction. Get the most you can from Toastmasters by having ***The Courage to Conquer Distractions!***

Jana Barnhill

Jana Barnhill, DTM, Accredited Speaker
International President

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

The Toastmasters Mission:
Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.
Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.
It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

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.

Proud of Toastmasters

Businesses, governments and educational organizations need us today more than ever. Toastmasters International does more than help people become confident, informative and inspirational public speakers. We can be proud that our international educational organization also promotes effective leadership in management.

Roy Skinner, DTM • Zug Club • Zug, Switzerland

Amen to That!

On a recent trip to East Asia, I got to preach in a church in which I had preached two years earlier. After the service, a woman who remembered me came up to me and gushed, "Oh Jeffrey, you were outstanding. You were so much better than two years ago. What's the difference?"

My one-word answer: Toastmasters! She was so enthused that she made note of the Toastmasters URL – www.toastmasters.org – and was planning on finding and attending a meeting.

A few days later my wife and I were in China, where we were to teach English for a week at an English camp for children. A number of officials and a television station showed up at the opening ceremonies. Just before they began, the person in charge asked if I would speak for two to three minutes in the ceremonies.

My wife smiled at me and said, "Table Topics, dear"...albeit for an extra minute. Thanks again to Toastmasters, I aced my speaking, did it within two to three minutes with no ah's or um's, and if the Chinese had a word for the day, I would have used it!

Jeffrey Anderson, ACS, GL • CBN/Regent Toastmaster
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Keep Toastmasters in Tough Times

I want to emphasize that Toastmasters participation pays off, and to keep Toastmasters dues in your budget, even during unemployment.

For example, I revived my membership with Toastmasters three months after I relocated to San Jose, California. I visited nine different clubs in the Northern California area, attending their breakfast, lunch and after-dinner meetings for two weeks. As a result, I gained two coffee chats from working professionals, a free breakfast, two contacts willing to circulate my resumé and one informational interview. In exchange, I listened to the goals of these new networking pals. I took their business cards, keeping my promise to refer potential customers. After all, as Toastmasters we all support the mission to build up one another.

As a fresh MBA graduate and bride-to-be during this recession, I would like to [give] those nine Toastmasters clubs a standing ovation, for showing exceptional Toastmasters spirit of fellowship. A Toastmasters membership is a cost-effective decision and worthy expense during a recession.

Renee Lam, ACB • Sunrise Toastmasters of Walnut Creek
Cisco Speaks of San Jose

2010 Convention Location

As an Australian who was planning to attend the Toastmasters International Convention in Sydney, Australia, I am disgusted at the recent decision by our Board of Directors not to hold the 2010 convention in Sydney.

We call ourselves "Toastmasters International," but in the years I have been involved in Toastmasters I have yet to see a conference outside of North America. Sure, we

have a large base of members in the U.S. and Canada, but so, too, does Lions Clubs International, and its schedule for future conventions is: Minneapolis, Minnesota (2009); Sydney (2010); Seattle, Washington (2011); Busan, Korea (2012); and Hamburg, Germany (2013). Compare that to the upcoming Toastmasters Convention schedule: Mashantucket, Connecticut (2009); Palm Desert, California (2010); and Las Vegas, Nevada (2011). It makes our schedule look pathetic, and even more so when the word "International" is used in our name!!

Alison Edwards, CTM • Country Valleys Toastmasters
Biloela, Australia

Truly International!

I belong to Tuggeranong Toastmasters in Australia and my family hosts international students on a regular basis. Our last student, Yen Liang Lin (Eric), was from Taipei City, Taiwan. I took him to Toastmasters, as it was a great opportunity for him to get a different grasp of the English language other than through his intensive English classes and at home.

He loved it and was very impressed by the warm welcome he received. At the end, he got up and thanked everyone for a wonderful evening and said he'd find a local Toastmasters club upon returning to Taipei City.

I received an e-mail from him last week; he has joined an English-speaking group so he can continue to practice his English. He has already gone to a Humorous Speech Competition to watch others compete. Toastmasters truly is an international organization!

Colleen Murray, CC • Tuggeranong Toastmasters Club
Canberra, Australia

Mountain climber takes Toastmasters ideals to new heights.

Scaling Summits

Art Huseonica's idea of fun takes his breath away – literally. When he's where he wants to be, this Toastmaster is climbing in thin air at 17,000 feet, and he couldn't be happier.

"People say I'm crazy, but I like the mental and physical challenges of high-altitude mountain climbing," says Huseonica. "Even though I'm breathing hard and it feels like I've got cellophane over my face, the experience is exhilarating."

Huseonica, a member of the Kritikos club in Odenton, Maryland, has been involved in extreme sports for many years, including skydiving and hot-air ballooning, but he didn't begin serious mountaineering until four years ago. Since then, he has reached 17,200 feet on Alaska's Mount McKinley (also known as Denali – "The Great One"), turning back from its 20,320-foot summit because his guide was ill; climbed the Andes in South America twice, and scaled Mount Rainier four times.

When Huseonica joined Toastmasters in January 2008, he did so to improve his presentation skills, but he soon discovered significant parallels between the skills needed in his club and climbing.

"Good communication is critical with mountain climbing," says Huseonica, who serves as vice president public relations for his club. "When faced with extreme physical situations, it's important that you communicate precisely and concisely

and are very articulate so as not to waste your breath." He has seen other climbers suffer from conditions such as altitude sickness because of reduced air pressure and oxygen. This can affect the brain and lungs and even lead to death, so it's important that climbers pay attention to one another's body language.

"If another climber gets wobbly legs and starts walking like he or she is drunk, that's an indication that something is wrong," says Huseonica, who notes that climbers watch out for each other. "At times, in order to conserve oxygen, we'll use a simple thumbs up or down to check on each other's well-being."

Huseonica notes that many aspects of the Toastmasters Promise also apply to mountain climbing, and he has done a speech on the subject.

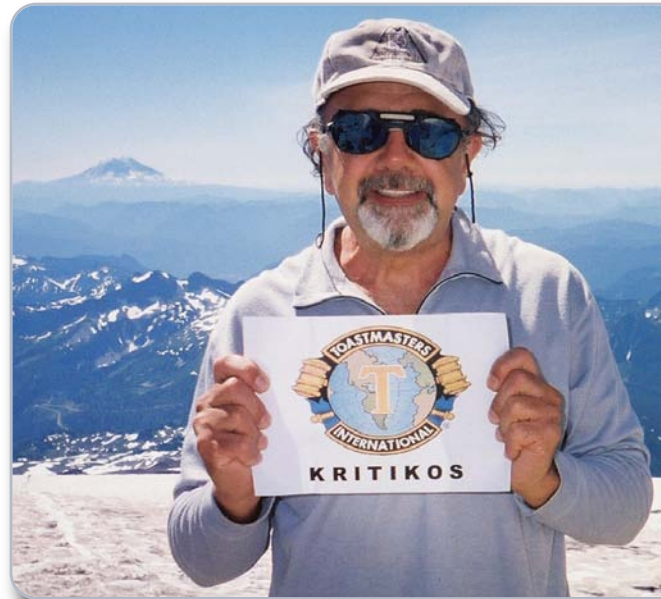
"Seven out of 10 of the Promise items relate to mountain climbing," he says. "For instance, Number Two is to be prepared. In mountain climbing, physical and mental preparation are key. Physically, you train and get all of the right gear, and mentally you psyche yourself into the climb."

Number 10 also applies, he says. "Maintaining honest and highly ethical standards during the conduct of all activities can be seen through the 'leave no trace' standards that climbers strive to meet by bringing

down all solid waste and only leaving their boot prints on the mountains they visit."

Fellow club member Anita Hoffman enjoys Huseonica's speeches about his climbing expeditions. "He's a very good speaker who is comfortable with his audience, and he has thrilling subject matter that keeps us all on the edge of our seats," she says.

Coley Gentzel has climbed with Huseonica on several occasions. He is program coordinator and a guide for the American Alpine Institute, a Bellingham, Washington-based company that conducts mountain tours. "People like Art are in a category all of their own," says Gentzel. "He's very passionate about climbing and great at sharing his enthusiasm with other climbers. He was instrumental in spearheading the Denali climb, which consisted of climbers who were almost all over the age of 50. Known as the 'Ice Agers,' they took a slightly less aggressive approach up the mountain. Art facilitated the group's correspondence in the



▼ Art Huseonica proudly promotes his Toastmasters club on the 14,410-foot summit of Washington's Mount Rainier.



has twice scaled Mount Rainier with Viesturs.

Though he enjoys all of his climbs, Huseonica especially looks forward to his treks with Viesturs, whom he met during the famous

From that experience I learned about self-reliance and depending on family.”

After leaving home, Huseonica served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years. Adventure comes naturally to him;

“Good communication is critical with mountain climbing. When faced with extreme physical situations, it’s important that you communicate precisely and concisely and are very articulate so as not to waste your breath.”

– Art Huseonica

► Huseonica and friends depend on good communication when climbing on steep ice.



months leading up to the 24-day trip. He and another climber

even created logos and T-shirts.”

Huseonica’s wife, Karen, feels that her husband’s involvement with Toastmasters has positively affected his climbing. “His membership has reinforced his confidence and self-assurance, making him even more careful and prepared when he climbs,” she says.

Known as “Base-camp Karen” by everyone who climbs with Huseonica, she talks with her husband via satellite telephone during his adventures and then e-mails her reports to friends and family.

Huseonica’s climbing mentor is Ed Viesturs, America’s leading high-altitude mountaineer. He

mountaineer’s travels across the U.S. promoting his IMAX-format film, *Everest*. “Ed and I got to talking at some of his book signings, and I gave him some suggestions for his Web site,” says Huseonica. “Eventually he invited me on a climb. The best part of climbing with Ed is that I learn something new every time.”

On their most recent climb together, on Mount Rainier, they did a speed ascent in order to prevent altitude sickness. During that climb, Viesturs took the picture of Huseonica holding the Kritikos Toastmasters logo (see previous page).

Huseonica suspects that the urge to climb mountains has something to do with his upbringing. He grew up in Homer City, Pennsylvania, an isolated town of just 200 people in central western Pennsylvania. “My father worked in the local coal mine, and we had outdoor plumbing,” he says. “The town was so small, there was just one store, one gas station and a small post office.

he spent a lot of time at sea and in isolated shore stations, and was trained to fly aircraft and work on submarines. Since retiring, he has worked in higher education administration and is currently a Web consultant and part-time teacher for the University of Maryland University College and warehouse manager for a school supply company. He also regularly uses his Toastmasters training to speak at local organizations and recently published his club’s Web site.

As for future climbing, Huseonica has been offered a 2010 spot in a Denali climb, and he is waiting for word about another Mount Rainier expedition with Viesturs. “I’d also like to go back to the Grand Canyon with my friend Ray Bellem and do that climb again,” he says. “It’s a beautiful area, and we have a great time climbing together.”

If you’re curious to know more about Art Huseonica’s adventures, he can be reached at karts@huseonica.org. And for more information about the American Alpine Institute, visit <http://www.aai.cc/>.

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Step Away From Self-Sabotage

Do you ever want to start a project, then don't? Have you ever said yes to a speaking engagement only to cancel later? Have you ever promised yourself that you wouldn't engage in a bad habit and then found yourself doing it even more?

People who become involved in speechmaking often find themselves sabotaging their presentations. Whether it's forgetting the name of the couple you are toasting, arriving late for a talk or accidentally leaving your PowerPoint file at home – you might be surprised to find that you are at the core of your own undoing.

It's not only neophytes who encounter this problem; experienced speakers find themselves blocking potential victories as well.

"Essentially, self-sabotage is consciously or unconsciously blocking yourself from succeeding or accomplishing some task or project," says Kevin Hogan, a psychologist and international speaker.

It's a process that happens to everyone, he notes, but some have a more ingrained habit than others. Hogan has an audio program called "Lifestorms: Blasting through Self-Sabotage for Breakthrough Results" that addresses the issue in detail.

Much of our "mental programming" has to do with expectations that start early in life. What was expected of you as a child? As a teenager? As an adult? For example, Toastmaster Steph Scott, a young woman in her 30s, received a number of powerful messages from her parents. Her mother exerted pressure on her to be perfect, saying things like, "You brought up your C grades to B grades, which means you can then bring up your Bs to As." Her mother also pushed her to become more popular.

Scott's father, meanwhile, taught her to stifle emotions by shutting her down with statements like, "Was it *that* good?" or "It couldn't be *that* bad."

Imagine how hard it was for Scott to give her first Table Topics presentation when voices in the back of her head said "Get it right" but "Don't be passionate about it."

Hogan, the psychologist, says kids who have been driven too hard to excel are particularly vulnerable to undermining themselves as adults.

"Children who had demands of being perfect," he says, "develop a perfectionism mindset where they never do anything in life, because they can't be perfect at its accomplishment."





Confidence Issues

Susan Guild, an experienced Toastmaster, grew up in an intellectual family. Her father and brother are lawyers. Advanced degrees were expected. She says her family and friends deeply affected her confidence.

“People frequently ask me about my education with questions like, ‘Are you working on your master’s or doctorate degree?’ My parents always valued intelligence backed up by scientific proof,” says Guild, a member of the Lexington Toastmasters in Lexington, Massachusetts.

As a result of these messages, it’s been difficult for her to trust her own intuition. “I see those old patterns as lint that is deeply matted through us,” she says.

Guild says one of the most common ways speakers sabotage their talks is when negative self-esteem gets the better of them. They believe others see them in the same light as they see themselves – and if that light is dim, it will be difficult to shine in front of a group.

At times she has tried too hard to win her listeners’ approval, Guild says. “The last speech I made, I decided to use lots of facts, because my Toastmasters group likes facts and numbers. But I lost my own individuality by attempting to do what I thought they liked. I realized that I was sabotaging myself by trying to please the club. It was like seeking others’ approval rather than giving respect to myself.”

Susan Coates, a Distinguished Toastmaster, says when she tries to copy someone else’s style, it gets in the way of her presentation. “Everyone has a different style and when they try to be someone else, it makes for a less effective presentation.”

Ways We Impede Our Success

Some people block their own success by putting off their preparation until the last minute. “I’ve been procrastinating to deliver my second speech,” says Manjunath Mavinakere, a member of Break Time Toastmasters in Houston, Texas. “It’s been a few months since I’ve given my Ice Breaker, and I have a lack of knowledge on the subject I want to speak about. Many times I feel I know the topic, but when I try to expand on it, it just goes way off board.”

Mavinakere feels that his procrastination stops him from succeeding at work as well. “The opportunities I miss to show my communication skills in front of people who are from different departments of the company stop me from moving ahead in my work.”

These are a few other ways that people undermine their own effectiveness:

- Not being willing to take risks
- Speaking too softly to be heard
- Doing just enough to get by

Block Out Damaging Behavior

Here are some helpful steps to avoid sabotaging yourself as a speaker:

- **Develop awareness of how you sabotage yourself**, especially in regards to giving talks. “Because self-sabotage is unconscious,” Dr. Hogan says, “no one is aware of it when they are actually engaging it. The benefit of being able to be in check is being in charge. When the unconscious mind is quelled, then the conscious mind can move forward and achieve.”
- **Dig in Deeper.** Og Mandino espoused this philosophy in his book *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. Allow your passion about the topic of your talk to drown out any attempts at self-sabotage.
- **Accept your own style.** Don't try to be a Martin Luther King Jr. sound-alike or pattern your mannerisms after your favorite TV journalist. Be the best *you* that's possible.
- **Use affirmations.** “Affirmations,” says Susan Guild, “have to be coupled with an inner belief.” In other words, you really have to believe what you're saying. So if you don't believe it when you say, “I'm a terrific speaker,” then find some other aspect of yourself that you can more realistically compliment, such as the sound of your voice or the ability to do excellent research. Then create a believable statement like “I do a terrific job researching material for my speeches.”
- **Commit the benefits of public speaking to memory.** This is a good principle to practice on the day of your speech. You can even write them down and keep the list in your pocket or purse as a reminder. They can include a greater sense of confidence, more career contacts and a chance to meet interesting people.
- **Monitor your progress.** Most behavioral experts agree that keeping track of your actions not only keeps you accountable to yourself, but gives you a running record of your progress. Pick up a notebook and begin to jot down the incidents of self-sabotage and the times you haven't given in to the urge to jeopardize yourself.
- **Create a personal reminder.** Guild found a clever way to keep awareness alive: She bought a charm bracelet and two charms. One charm had “best” written on it; “friend” was inscribed on the other. “I also wear it to honor myself while I'm doing presentations. The bracelet is especially valuable whenever anyone in the audience has pushed my buttons.”
- **Stick close to Toastmasters.** Undoubtedly you have found that there's no better place to obtain support than from other members. Don't sell this short. Your club can help you to enjoy the process of becoming a better speaker. □

Judi Bailey is a writer in Lakewood, Ohio, and a frequent contributor to this magazine. Reach her at author48@cox.net.

- Making excuses for poor performance by blaming things like illness or not having enough time to prepare adequately
- Allowing fears (like speech anxiety) to call the shots

The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy implies that if we expect something to happen in the future, then it *will* happen. For example, if you think you're a lousy speaker or will do a poor job, you will find ways to bring those expectations to fruition. You'll sabotage that speech. Perhaps you'll keep dropping your materials and look foolish and disorganized, or you will find that your equipment isn't working and that you could have prevented this situation if you had checked on the equipment earlier.

The opposite is true as well. If you expect to put on a dynamic presentation, you'll achieve that outcome through positive actions, such as remembering to wear your power suit or doing vocal exercises the day of the talk.

This mirrors the “law of attraction” philosophy: that what we think about the most often, with the greatest intensity, will then take place. So if you focus on an appreciative audience or a standing ovation, you will have a more effective presentation than if you concen-

trate on sweaty palms or a sleepy audience. Speakers who focus on successful productions project more energy, confidence and enthusiasm.

Step Away From Sabotage

Many of us have approached speaking engagements as drudgery, as a serious and sobering business, a dreaded task. But it doesn't have to be that way. Guild suggests you start picturing your presentations in a new light by asking yourself what could be fun or fulfilling about this project. She calls the process “going from the musts to the magic.”

She recommends changing focus from the risk of the task to its possible rewards, whether that involves gaining new clients, spreading the word about “going green” or receiving a burst of applause at the end of the speech.

“Still, the most important thing,” Guild says, “is to capture the essence of your message. Look in your heart to see why you want to give this speech. There you'll find your magic.” □

Judi Bailey is a writer in Lakewood, Ohio, and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster*. Reach her at author48@cox.net.

By Paul Sterman

Ted Sorensen hears echoes of Kennedy in Obama.

Tips From a Legendary Speechwriter

On the snow-dusted afternoon of Jan. 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy stood on the steps of the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C., delivering his presidential inauguration address.

Ted Sorensen, Kennedy's personal speechwriter and the man who drafted that address, was sitting close by as the historic moment unfolded.

"I sat high above the back of the podium with my sister, tense, thrilled, excited but anxious as his words initially met with silence from the crowd assembled below," Sorensen recalls in his 2008 memoir, *Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History* (HarperCollins). "Was it to be a flop after all? Not until one-third or more of the speech had been delivered did the first round of applause begin. Then came more, then more; and I relaxed."

It's almost comical now to learn of Sorensen's initial anxiety, given that Kennedy's inaugural address is regarded as one of the greatest political speeches of our time. A stirring call to action, it produced such classic phrases as "The torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans"; "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us

never fear to negotiate"; and this legendary line: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Nearly 50 years after JFK's memorable speech, Sorensen is among those eagerly anticipating Barack Obama's inaugural address, which he will deliver on Jan. 20 after he is sworn in as America's 44th president. Sorensen feels a strong connection to the incoming Commander in Chief. Like many, he sees a strong likeness between the new president's rhetorical flair and Kennedy's oratorical prowess.

"Obama is the first [politician] to come along who has the same gift to inspire and to mobilize people since the Kennedy brothers," Sorensen says in a telephone interview from his New York City home.

Although Sorensen is firmly in the Obama camp – and has championed various liberal causes through the years – it's a measure of how highly he's respected that he



▲ Famed speechwriter Ted Sorensen worked alongside John F. Kennedy for 11 years and was one of Kennedy's most trusted advisers.

draws high praise from both sides of the political aisle.

"Ted Sorensen is one of the great political speechwriters of all time," Peggy Noonan writes in an e-mail to the *Toastmaster* magazine. "...He worked very closely with John F. Kennedy, and their collaboration yielded speeches that were great gems of American political literature." Noonan's eloquently crafted speeches for President Ronald Reagan and later, for George H. W. Bush, made her a celebrated wordsmith. She now is a frequent political commentator and columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

Making Your Mark

Now 80 and nearly blind from a stroke he suffered eight years ago, Sorensen expresses definite opinions about inaugural speeches. They're a pivotal event for a president, one where he can put his first signature mark on his term, Sorensen notes.

The words the president expresses that day can have an indelible impact on millions of people around the world.

In 1961, Kennedy was well aware of the global audience tuned in to his inaugural speech, as evidenced by these words in his address (following up on his “Ask not what your country can do for you” line): “My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

When Obama presents his address, he, too, will be very conscious of its implications for an international audience – particularly given the increasing importance of globalization in today’s times (and especially considering Obama’s own multicultural heritage).

Sorensen contends that an inaugural speech should have a sense of

uttered his famous line, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”)

But most of the other presidential orations were verbose and laborious, Sorensen adds. “It was a pretty sad collection.”

Sorensen released his memoir, appropriately enough, in the thick of last year’s election season. *Counselor* focuses on his long career in politics and law (Sorensen has worked for the past four decades as a high-profile international lawyer, dealing with world icons like Nelson Mandela and Anwar Sadat). The book delves into detail about the craft of speechwriting and the various speeches Sorensen wrote for and with JFK. It’s a historian’s delight, with Sorensen referencing previously unpublished drafts of Kennedy speeches and public statements, as

well as his own strategy memos written to the late president.

There are also some light-hearted contributions to speechwriting

lore. One such nugget is when Sorensen confirms a grammatical snafu he made on a particularly memorable sentence. It was in the text of Kennedy’s famous 1963 speech in West Berlin, which he ended by declaring to the roaring crowd: “*Ich bin ein Berliner*” (I am a Berliner). These were highly significant and symbolic words, the president offering American solidarity to West German citizens in a world threatened by the Cold War.

Except for one detail: By incorrectly inserting the word “ein” into the phrase, Sorensen actually had Kennedy saying, “I am a jelly doughnut.”

The speechwriter says he received buckets of mail pointing out his mistake, but he also says he’s had Germans assure him that the West Berliners knew exactly what Kennedy meant that day.

A gracious, good-natured man, Sorensen is also known for his integrity and modest manner. “He’s a doll – witty, dry, fun, warm,” Noonan writes in her e-mail. “What a good man he is. I admire him so much.”

The Old School Spirit

Sorensen’s first real experience with public speaking came at Lincoln High School in Nebraska, where he was on the debate team and coached by teacher Florence Jenkins.

“I enjoyed it immensely,” he says in the interview. “My siblings were all on it, too.”

His father was also known for his public speaking. C.A. Sorensen won a Nebraska state oratory contest as a young man and in his noted law career he powerfully articulated his courtroom arguments. Meanwhile, Ted’s mother was a brilliant writer and editor from whom he inherited his literary talents. “You had to be able to express yourself in our family or else you wouldn’t get dinner,” Sorensen jokes.

In *Counselor*, Sorensen outlines some of his main principles about speechwriting. One of his key tenets is brevity. For the most part, Kennedy’s speeches were always kept between 20 and 30 minutes long. That inaugural address? It clocked in at just under 14 minutes. Which makes it the fourth-shortest inaugural speech ever given.

(At the opposite end of the brevity barometer is the inaugural address turned in by William Henry Harrison in 1841; he uncorked a one-hour, 45-minute opus – spanning more than 8,000 words. Even a snowstorm didn’t deter him from cutting it short. And Harrison died of pneumonia a month later. It’s ironic that the longest-winded speaker served the shortest term of all U.S. presidents.)

In the Sorensen School of Speechwriting, there’s an important rule: Don’t use more words than you need. And be simple, clear and direct. As a particularly effective example of

“Ted Sorensen is one of the great political speechwriters of all time.”

– Peggy Noonan

vision and power, and not get bogged down in a litany of policy points.

“It’s not a laundry list of what you’re going to do,” he says, “but a chance to enunciate your general principles.”

Before he started drafting Kennedy’s address, Sorensen studied many of the inaugural speeches given by past presidents. Historians say the best of these were delivered in times when America was at a crisis point (which bodes well for Obama, considering the almost-daily headlines of financial disasters in recent months). Sorensen says that Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural speech, when America was trying to heal from the Civil War, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s first inaugural address, when the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, were particularly inspiring. (It was in that 1933 speech that Roosevelt

this, he cites the beginning of Winston Churchill's radio address after the fall of France in June 1940: "The news from France is very bad."

Another Sorensen suggestion about speechwriting: Alliteration, rhymes and repetition can help make a presentation memorable.

Friend and Adviser

Sorensen worked with Kennedy for 11 years – from the time Sorensen was a 24-year-old fresh out of law school going to work in the then-Senator's office, to the tragic day in Dallas when the president was assassinated. He ended up being much more than a speechwriter in the Kennedy administration: Sorensen was one of the president's most trusted advisers and friends – someone who Kennedy once referred to as "my intellectual blood bank."

In fact, the most important work of literature he ever produced for Kennedy may have been a letter rather than a speech – the one he

drafted to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Historians agree the deft piece of diplomatic writing played a vital role in helping to end the crisis, in which the world stood on the brink of possible nuclear destruction.

One of the messages conveyed in *Counselor* is that, despite the cynicism often aimed at politicians, sometimes words – and speeches – do have a momentous impact on the world. The author proudly notes the influence that JFK's oratories had on issues such as civil rights, space exploration and nuclear arms control.

Sorensen's skills as a speechwriter had much to do with that. Still in his early 30s when he worked with the president, he had a potent intellect, a passion for political ideas and a knack for the poetic phrase. Kennedy's inaugural address embodied all those qualities. And the famous passage below is an enduring tribute to Ted

Sorensen's talent for crafting elegant rhythms and rhetoric:

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage – and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty. ■

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How to help your club solve those thorny problems.

A Little Creativity Goes a Long Way

Have you tried to help your Toastmasters club be successful, carefully using the tools and following the advice provided by Toastmasters International, only to feel your group isn't quite measuring up? Is your club small, like mine? Does it meet at a time when most of the locals, including the birds, prefer to sleep?

Cheer up – your fellow Toastmasters can come up with the innovative solutions you need. Let me share how our resourceful club – the Stamano Toastmasters in Stanwood, Washington – has responded to some of the challenges we faced.

special business meeting every time there was a fifth Wednesday in a month. All members would be included. We approved the idea and for several years we have made the best possible use of these special meetings.

For one thing, it's always a party – coffee's on and every member brings food to share.

Sometimes we have an officers meeting, where business is conducted and plans are made. Other times we induct new members, share special reports or tell humorous stories. At a recent such meeting, we had three visitors to the club;

Challenge 2: There was always a huge rush to be ready by the start of the meeting.

Yes, we're early to arrive, but not *that* early. We always had some last-minute scrambling: Maybe someone had to cover for a fellow member's unexpected absence, a speaker was late because of traffic – and someone else was looking for the guy with the door key.

Solution: Janina suggested that we schedule a three- to five-minute break after initial club exercises for any member or speaker who needed it. After experimenting for a few weeks, we made it a standard part of our agenda.

This "housekeeping minute," "pause for identification" or "speaker prep time" has become a life-saver for club members. Those who are covering for an absent member can prepare adequately, and speakers with tasks to finalize can use that last bit of time.

A few weeks ago, I was presenting the fourth speech in the *Success Leadership Series* – "Parliamentary Procedure in Action." It was the only speech scheduled at the meeting and I had written a role-play script that would involve all members of the club. When several guests showed up, I was concerned that my complex presentation would frighten them away. The short break allowed me to figure out a way to include roles for them

"Know what members and guest want to do and provide it for them; know what they don't want and give that to someone else. It's our Golden Rule."

Challenge 1: Officers meetings weren't happening.

We tried to schedule officers meetings but just couldn't find a time that worked. The hour before club meetings was too early; the hour after the meetings interfered with the work day.

Evenings were out of the question – after all, we *are* early risers.

Solution: One of our members – John – suggested that we hold a

while enjoying snacks, we got to know them, hear what they thought about our club and answer their questions about how Toastmasters works. Officers talked about their responsibilities and explained club roles. Before the hour was over, all three had completed applications for membership.

Results: Not only are the officers meeting regularly, but there's a bonus – we're having regular parties!



in my audience participation piece, and it gave them time to practice. Afterward, they thanked me for providing such an easy way for them to participate. All of them have since joined our club.

Results: Club meetings start on time even if key people are unavoidably late or absent, and last-minute confusion is gone. Bonus: There is an opportunity to adjust the program for special guests or unusual circumstances.

Challenge 3: Our club had too few members.

Many of our club members travel from significant distances and so some of them can't make all the meetings. When regulars are absent, we have to scramble to fill meeting jobs, some members inevitably have to take on extra duties, and it makes it harder on everyone.

Solution: Do more in the community to recruit new members.

Here's what we've tried:

- Submitting regular press releases to the local newspaper. The Toastmasters press releases we give to reporters earn full articles in the newspaper's community interest sections – far better than

a blurb alongside the various meetings listed in the calendar section.

- Serving as judges for the local high school's speech contest. We get to act like we are the pros.

Results: An influx of new, local members. Bonus: a greater community presence for our club.

Challenge 4: Visitors who wouldn't return to meetings and over-extended members who quit the club.

There was one man who joined our club on the first day he visited, borrowed a member's manual – and never came back. Meanwhile, we had placed him on our schedule and given him weekly assignments. We left messages and wrote notes that he didn't answer. Maybe he just wanted to put Toastmasters on his résumé. We never found out.

Solution: Know what members and guests want to do and provide it for them; know what they don't want and give *that* to someone else. It's our Golden Rule.

We began to communicate better with visitors and with members – to know why they attend meetings and how much responsibility they want.

A visitor named Bill recently recalled his experience visiting a

Toastmasters meeting on a military base 25 years ago – and the rather unique strategy employed by the club's Ah-Counter. "Every 'ah' and 'um' was punctuated with a BB [a lead pellet] dropped in a Folgers coffee can," said Bill. "I never went back!" We assured him that all of us are learning to control our 'filler' words by counting them, but we *never* subject each other to humiliation.

Ginger told us how she attended one Toastmasters club for months before she was permitted to give any speeches. She wished she could have participated much earlier in the process. Our officers now interview new members to discover when they would feel most comfortable beginning to give speeches. Peggy, a member for many years, thought she would leave our club: Her year-end business responsibilities allowed her no time to prepare speeches or even to handle the treasurer duties. The club members took over for her, encouraging her to take a sabbatical or just visit when she could.

Results: Bill has joined our club. Ginger is one of our long-term, very active members. Peggy is back as club treasurer, confident that her speeches will only be scheduled when she is ready. Bonus: enthusiastic, self-assured, committed club members.

So what are your club's challenges? Put your heads together and brainstorm to come up with new ideas to tackle those tricky problems. You'll be amazed at the creativity that is just waiting to surface. 📌

Eleanor Guderian, Ph.D., ACG, is a business consultant and writer with Professional DynaMetric Programs. She is vice president education for Stamano Toastmasters in Stanwood, Washington. Reach her at e.guderian@verizon.net.

Let's
Get
Creative!



Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C...

Creativity!

By Craig Harrison, DTM

Over time, many clubs fall into the doldrums. It's possible for meetings to become a bit stale, for members to lapse into a routine pattern each week. Sometimes it's a result of the sameness of the room, identical meeting formats, or the absence of enough new members to infuse your club with new energy. Over the years I've watched clubs succumb to lethargy. Yet the remedy is as easy as a little dose of vitamin C: Creativity.

Spice up lackluster meetings with periodic changes of pace.

Administer this vitamin to your club once every four to six weeks, and you'll see its life force return stronger than ever. Paula Tunison, DTM, past International Director and three-time District 55 Governor, agrees. "Toastmasters is like a love affair. Everything is exciting at first and then, if you're not careful, it can become dull and routine. Changing your meetings helps to keep it exciting."

Here are some of the many ways you can introduce freshness, fun and vitality into your meetings:

- **A different room layout.** Many times we accept the room layout as a given: the placement of the lectern, chairs and tables. For a change of pace, try reversing the location of the lectern before the next meeting. If possible, put it at the opposite end and feel the difference. Other variations: If your lectern is at the narrow end of a long table, try placing it in front of the wide side. Or consider removing the table and holding the meeting in a circle or semi-circle, a chevron or some other configuration of chairs. Remember, environment informs experience. Add flowers, a scent or some fun decorations for further effect. Create a new environment and the experience will surely feel fresh and exciting.

- **A joint meeting with another club.** Find one that meets nearby at the same time. You can host them for one meeting, and they can reciprocate another time. It's exciting to entertain guests who already know the Toastmasters traditions. The extra people and energy from this joint meeting doubles your fun!

- **A grab bag meeting.** Designate your next meeting as a grab bag where, upon the arrival of members, all meeting roles are drawn from a bag filled with slips of paper. Use a fill-in-the-blanks agenda, or a flipchart or whiteboard where you write in the roles chosen from the bag. Any member may end up as Toastmaster, speaker or evaluator. The drama adds a layer of excitement as even the "prepared" speeches feel like Table Topics.

- **Theme meeting.** Turn a normal meeting into a special event! Recently one club in the United States held an Academy Awards meeting where the Toastmaster wore a tuxedo, the Table Topics were related to movies and the winners gave acceptance speeches! Another club honored the American baseball season with a meeting in which each member assumed a baseball-related role, the Toastmaster became the manager, the General Evaluator became the head umpire, speakers became batters and the Topicsmaster became the pitcher. Members fielded topics. If your club tries this, you can dress the part as well!

Other themes may relate to topical holidays or current events of a local, regional or national nature. Celebrate the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japan, Independence Day in your country or even a club, district or company anniversary.

- **Costume parties.** These types of theme meetings are especially stimulating. You can wear masks and costumes for Halloween, caps and gowns at graduation

time, or go green for St. Patrick's Day. Adornments abound depending upon the theme for your party.

- **A time machine.** Your costume party or theme meeting can be tied to a historical period. At this meeting people dress like a past generation: platform boots and silk shirts with wide lapels for the '70s, bobby socks and leather jackets for the '50s, or even the Gatsby look from the roaring '20s. You'll find a new energy comes with such wardrobes. Or go back further: the Renaissance era, Roman or Greek empires or even the Stone Age. Perhaps you'd rather fast forward to the year 2058 or 3008? When the time comes, come in character.

In addition to dressing for a particular epoch, use related language, phrases and speech topics. *Methinks you speaketh the King's English* fits in your Elizabethan era. For the Roaring Twenties, your closing thought may end with "twenty three skidoo." And your Table Topics and speeches can relate to the themes of the era as well.

- **Go Hollywood!** Themes abound from the world of motion pictures. Whether you take your inspiration from Hollywood, India's Bollywood or the movies of Hong Kong, you'll find wonderful ideas from films as diverse as *The Matrix*, the *Harry Potter* series, *Jodbaa Akbar*, *Ratatouille* or *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

- **A progressive story.** The Topicsmaster begins the fun and it's continued by all the members. Collectively, you will tell a story designated by the Topicsmaster. This requires listening skills, creativity and quick thinking to complete. Each member contributes a sentence or two in the co-creation of a new story.

- **A debate.** Your Table Topics can have two participants arguing alternate sides of an issue. Or plan a debate with numerous "candidates" for a fictitious election to involve as many members as possible. Another alternative: You can ask Table Topics respondents to argue both sides of an issue. Decorating a table with politically themed bunting is optional.

We The People, a club in Reno, Nevada, allows a Table Topic responder to rebut the previous participant's topic as a debate activity. This builds listening skills and persuasive skills and also challenges listeners to think more, as divergent points of view are posed in the successive responses.

Even the prepared speeches for such meetings can take on a campaign tone, tackling issues and vying for the hearts, minds and votes of club members.

- **A television newscast** brings the world of journalism to your club. Your Sergeant at Arms can give the count-

down until you go live and also be the “voiceover” that introduces the newscast. Your Toastmaster of the day is the anchor, with Table Topics and General Evaluator as your Sports and Weather co-anchors. Speakers become field correspondents with reports, etc. You can even turn some roles into commercials.

- **A speech marathon!** Help your members earn their educational awards as you dedicate an entire meeting just to prepared speeches. For clubs with a lot of members and the constraints of a one-hour meeting time, this periodic pumped-up housekeeping event helps more members speak and shortens the wait time between speeches. It's educational for audience members to see multiple speeches in rapid succession. These popular events can be staged at a regular club meeting or scheduled in addition to your regular meeting time and place.

- **A reverse meeting.** Once a year, say on April Fool's Day, you begin with the closing thought, hear speech evaluations before the speeches, and generally reverse the order of your entire meeting. Once in a blue moon this fun variation of the usual meeting format is refreshing and fun. Give it a try!

- **The mute button.** In this meeting it's all done without sound. You can mouth the words to your speech or topic, but focus on communicating with facial expressions and

claims, issue representations of gigantic proportions and pull each other's legs for comedic effect. Then, just to confuse your audience, throw a bald-faced *truth* into the middle and see if they detect it! Make Pinocchio proud.

During Table Topics, play True or Lie. For some, this is easy. For others, less so!

Vote after each topic response on whether it was the truth or a lie. Alternately, confuse people with your version of *truthiness* – things that a person claims to know intuitively or “from the gut” without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination or facts.

If you're troubled by fostering lies in a Toastmasters meeting, rest assured that each April 30th you can honor National Honesty Day with a meeting dedicated to truth – which is often stranger than fiction!

Veteran Toastmaster Yew Kam Keong, Ph.D. (Dr. YKK) of Australia's Deloitte at the Barrington club explains why we should deviate from our regular program formats from time to time: “These meeting ideas are effective because they contain the essential elements of creativity: spontaneity, humor, playfulness and doing the unexpected. Toastmasters meetings will never be the same again. They will be even more fun...and with fun comes humongous learning!”

Dr. YKK, also known as the Chief Mind Unzipper, is an international creativity speaker, consultant and best-selling author (*You Are Creative – Let Your Creativity*

“Toastmasters is like a love-affair. Everything is exciting at first and then, if you're not careful, it can become dull and routine. Changing your meetings helps to keep it exciting.”

– Paula Tunison

gesticulations – use body language. A less ambitious version: Turn Table Topics into charades.

- **Every day is a holiday somewhere.** There are event calendars such as Chase's Calendar of Events that provide fascinating and timely themes you can build meetings around. For example: Sept. 24 is National Punctuation Day (www.NationalPunctuationDay.com) in the USA. For that week's meeting, ask members to discuss punctuation used in their speaking. Many holidays have their own Web sites to help you understand their origins, meaning and intent.

- **Tall tales are terrific.** Once in a blue moon, or every April 4 in the U.S. (“Tell A Lie” day), you can dedicate a meeting to embellishment, aggrandizement and bald-faced lies. Everyone can get into the act. Your speech introductions, speech contents, Table Topics and more can play fast and loose with the truth. Make outlandish

Bloom). In his 22 years as a Toastmaster, Dr. YKK has spoken to Toastmasters clubs in 10 countries and inspired creativity in countless people. His Web site, www.mindbloom.net, contains many tools for clubs and members.

Whether you employ these or other ideas to spruce up your meetings, that extra shot of Vitamin C will breathe new life into proceedings. While you never want to eschew the educational value of meetings, such variations on our traditional formats will add a new dimension to your Toastmasters training and keep everyone fresh. Any time you apply creativity to your meetings, the results will yield fun, energy and new perspectives. Ready...set...create! 📌

Craig Harrison, DTM, founder of LaughLovers club in Oakland, California, is a professional keynote speaker, trainer and principal of Expressions Of Excellence! For more resources, visit www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.



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Lift Your Club's Quality Bar

Imagine that you can choose between two different Toastmasters clubs: Club Smartstart and Club Dimwhim. Each meets weekly at a convenient time and place. Consider their traits and then decide which one you would want to join.

Club Smartstart has 25 active members who consistently attend and participate in weekly meetings. Meetings are scheduled and all roles are filled at least a week in advance. The Toastmaster selects an interesting theme, plans the meeting agenda and encourages everyone to incorporate the theme in the meeting in everything from Table Topics to the word of the day. Meetings are executed as well as they are planned – beginning and ending promptly. Members leave feeling excited and satisfied that their time was well spent.

Meetings are rarely themed and there is, at times, no written agenda to follow. Meetings end early for lack of content.

Do either of these scenarios strike a chord with you? Which club are you more likely to join and attend regularly?

Most people would want to join Club Smartstart, with consistent, high-performance meetings.

While it is the obvious choice, Dimwhim is not without hope – it can be transformed into a compelling club if members are willing to give the club some tender-loving care and lift the quality bar.

“It’s the weekly meetings – how well they are planned, attended and executed – that motivate members to return and inspire guests to join.”

Club Dimwhim has 20 members but only 10 of them are active in weekly meetings. Meeting planning is lax, as few members are willing to commit to filling a role a week in advance. Sometimes roles are filled the day before the meeting. Often, only five members show up for meetings and some need to perform two roles at the last minute.

Five years ago, I joined an established club that had dwindled to fewer than 20 members and lost much of its meeting protocol. After attending for several months, I thought about finding another thriving club. But instead, I decided to make that club into one I wanted to attend. I became club president and lifted the quality bar, which took

Transform your club through courage and care.



some courage. First, I had to invite visitors to the meetings.

I went back to the basics – I used a promotional flier, posted it on bulletin boards and e-mailed it to local companies. I asked members to spread the word to friends and colleagues. A member volunteered to build a Web site, which started a steady stream of guests. I explained the Distinguished Club Program, and encouraged members to work toward achieving a Distinguished award, which the club hadn't earned in quite a few years. By the end of June, the club had 20 members and achieved the Select Distinguished Club award! For the last four years the club has consistently earned Distinguished awards.

Toastmasters' annual measure for successful, quality clubs is the Distinguished Club Program. But it's the weekly meetings – how well they are planned, attended and

executed – that motivate members to return and inspire guests to join. Distinguished Club recognition often results from clubs with consistent, high-performance meetings.

What does it take to lift your club's quality bar? Jana Barnhill, DTM, Accredited Speaker and Toastmasters' International President, says that the answer is *courage*, emblazoned in her theme, "Toastmasters: The Courage to Conquer!"

When the *Toastmaster* magazine asked Jana how she hopes clubs and districts will fulfill her theme, she replied, "*One of the things I would like to see is an increased focus on quality, at every level. For clubs, that means a president may need to find the Courage to Conquer meetings that aren't as organized as clubs should be. It may mean challenging those who aren't following the program and are not delivering manual speeches or providing effective evaluations.*"

How do you lift the quality bar in your club? Give your club some tender loving care and proceed with courage:

■ **Be a meeting planner.** Wedding planners, event planners, corporate meeting planners and Toastmasters meeting planners work toward the same goal: to plan exciting, fun, engaging and full programs that attract participants. In most clubs, the vice president education leads scheduling, while the Toastmaster plans the meeting.

Both weekly scheduling and meeting planning are equally important, and it's everyone's job to proactively ensure fully planned meetings. How? Develop a scheduling system – whether it's an Excel spreadsheet, or a hand-written schedule – that shows the club's monthly programming. Ask members to schedule themselves or contact the scheduler with their dates and roles. If you are the Toastmaster, prepare a written agenda listing the theme, word of the day and roles along with the time breakdown.

■ **Take on a leadership role.** You, run for president? Yes! Think about it: Being president will challenge you to champion the club's quality; you can make a positive difference. If not president, consider another offi-

cer role: VP-education, VP-membership, VP-public relations, secretary, treasurer and sergeant at arms. When you commit to a leadership position, you will be inclined to attend meetings frequently, speak more often and develop your leadership skills. An added benefit is Toastmaster's leadership training, an excellent way to learn about your new job.

■ **Mentor new members.** Think back to the first time you set foot into a Toastmaster's meeting. What was it like? Did people greet you warmly? Did anyone brief you on how the meeting works? When you put yourself in a new member's shoes, you can imagine how insecure and overwhelmed they might feel at first.

Help ease some of their anxieties by befriending and coaching them along the speaking path. Explain what their Ice Breaker speech is all about and how to prepare and deliver it. They will appreciate your support and your club will benefit from their participation.

■ **Follow Toastmasters' protocol.** Toastmasters International has set up processes and designed educational

**Special
Announcement
Regarding April 2009
Dues Renewals**

Look for Your Renewal Invoice in Your E-mail Inbox!

Organizations around the world are becoming more focused on environmental concerns, and Toastmasters International is no exception. In an effort to combine first-rate service to members with environmental stewardship, WHQ will send the upcoming member dues renewal invoice via e-mail, rather than through the postal service.

Members will benefit from this change in several ways:

- Renewal invoices will be delivered faster and more efficiently.
- E-mail delivery is cost-effective, saving the organization (and its members) from unnecessary spending.
- Delivery by e-mail is more convenient for many members.

Club officers, please look for the April 2009 dues renewal invoice in your e-mail inbox the first week of March. Remember, member renewals are due by April 1, 2009. Club officers will be able to submit renewals online through the Club Business login: www.toastmasters.org/clubbusiness starting the first week of March.

We welcome your support in helping Toastmasters International save trees and postage!



materials to maximize clubs' performance and members' skills development. Be sure to use them! Always give manual speeches, use the timer, ah-counter, evaluation forms and voting ballots. Don't skip the general evaluation, or proper speaker introductions – each plays an important part in weekly meetings.

▪ **Constantly recruit new members.**

International President Jana Barnhill urges every Toastmaster to stay in Toastmasters until they have at least earned their Competent Communicator award and served as a club officer. Core members who stay at least a year are the club's lifeblood, but short-term members exit for various reasons: a new job, busy schedule, relocation or to pursue other interests. Club membership is also cyclical, like the stock market. Every April and October when dues are renewed, clubs can expect some members to drop out.

As membership churns, a club's top priority should always be to recruit new members. To be Distinguished, a club needs at least 20 members or a net increase of five members at the end of the program year, no matter how many of the other requirements it meets. With 20-plus active members, earning a Distinguished award often seems to take care of itself and meetings are more likely to be fun and dynamic.

▪ **Sustain efforts.** Once you have lifted your club's quality bar to the top notch, don't count on past achievements to ensure continued success. Sustain your proactive efforts to continue the club's Distinguished success.

Winston Churchill said, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others." Your courage in championing high-quality meetings will result in achieving your goals to become a better speak-

er and leader, and the club's goal of being Distinguished... or beyond. **T**

Janet Reese, ACS, CL, is a member of the Toast of Inverness Club in Centennial, Colorado. She is a public relations consultant, speaker, speaking coach and freelance writer for national magazines and newspapers. Reach her at Janet@RinPR.com.

Editor's Note: Additional tools are available to help you keep your club meetings interesting. Visit www.toastmasters.org/shop and search for the following:

- **Patterns in Programming** (Item 1314). A guide to exciting club meetings
- **Successful Club Series Set** (Item 289). Includes the module "How to Be a Distinguished Club"
- **Distinguished Club Program and Club Success Plan** (Item 1111). Available via the Toastmasters' Web store to view and purchase.

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HUMOR

Can Help You Through...

There will come a time in your career when a personal challenge will daunt you and you will have to muster all your professionalism to perform – even on days when you are emotionally exhausted and just want to cry. In my case, since I’m a motivational speaker and comedian, that means having to not only perform, but make people laugh, motivate them and move them.

Stress happens all the time, whether it’s due to medical issues, financial pressures, an ongoing family situation such as a nasty divorce, or circumstantial events such as your flight being delayed on the way to the biggest gig of your life. The key is, you need to be armed with information on how to handle it.

Last year I was faced with just such an agonizingly stressful situation when the two most important people in my life – my son, Spencer, and my mom, Rose – went into separate New York hospitals with life-threatening illnesses. Spencer went in at 5 a.m. grappling with pericarditis (an inflammation of the membrane surrounding the heart that can lead to the heart enlarging), and my mom was hospitalized at 8 o’clock that same evening with an incarcerated hernia that could have caused her death in a matter of hours if doctors didn’t remove two feet of her gangrenous intestines.

My son’s hospital was in upstate New York; my mom’s was in Queens, New York – about a two-hour drive away. I kept driving back and forth between the

two hospitals. In addition, I didn’t tell my mom or son that the other was in the hospital. Keeping that secret added to the stress.

Two days after Spencer was hospitalized, he was home, facing 10 days of required bed rest. I joked to him, “Spence, I always knew you had a big heart, but please don’t go overboard to prove it.” He smiled.

The following day, my mom came out of intensive care. While visiting her hospital room I joked with her, as well. “Jeez, Mom, I know you’ve been telling me that you wanted to lose weight and stop working...but this was one heck of a way to do it!” She smiled.

Humor has always been a great survival mechanism for people. On both the personal and professional levels, it helps reduce stressful situations.

On the same night my mom came out of intensive care, I was booked for a one-hour speaking engagement – ironically, for a “Social Workers Appreciation Day” at an assisted living home. I was physically drained from three days of non-stop driving to these two hospitals. In addition, I was emotional-

“The truth is funny if you just look at it in the right light.”

Summoning the strength to perform when struggling with a personal crisis.

By Fran Capo

ly drained from all the worry. (Yes, even positive-thinking comedians worry.)

I asked myself one key question: *Can I get in the right frame of mind to perform, do a great job and not be on auto pilot?* I decided I had two hours until I performed and I could do it.

Drawing from my experience, I offer seven strategies for performing during personally difficult times:

1 Stop and Breathe. That's basic enough, but many forget to do it properly. (Of course, if you forget to do it altogether this would be a moot point.) I'm talking about taking a few deep, meditation-like breaths to relax yourself. Take a breath, close your eyes and hold it for a count of eight. Then slowly exhale for a count of four. Do this until you feel yourself in a better place physically.

The powers of deep breathing have been known for centuries. You just have to remember to do it. It can stop you from panicking and give your body and mind the time needed to refocus.

2 Look at your situation realistically by asking the right questions. Everything in life depends on your attitude. And that starts with asking yourself the right questions. When you're scared and stressed out, give yourself a reality check. The answers can be empowering.

In my case, I asked myself, "Are my loved ones out of immediate danger?" Yes. "Do I need to be there with them all night?" No. "Would it benefit me mentally to be on stage, doing something I love, to get me in a different



frame of mind?" Yes. "Do I have the energy?" Yes. (We all have sources of stored energy.)

I asked more questions: "How can I make this a win-win situation?" By finding the humor in it. "Can I find humor in something so soon?" Yes, if I refocus my thoughts – not on the victim, but on the situation. "Would it be the professional thing to do?" Yes. "Is there a profound message I can share with my audience about this situation?" I knew there was, but I just wasn't sure what it was yet. I had at least two hours to figure it out.

Now, I could have asked myself the "wrong" questions: "Shouldn't I be with my loved ones now?" Yes. "Will the place forgive me if I don't perform under the circumstances?" Yes. "Will I be too tired to drive home?" Probably.

The key is all in what you ask yourself.



“According to my research, laughter is the best medicine, giggling is good for mild infections, chuckling works for minor cuts and bruises, and snickering only makes things worse.”

3 Learn to compartmentalize your feelings. There is a time to break down, and a time not to hang tough. At the moment of crisis you need to be strong. I learned to be my own cheerleader. “OK, Capo, you can get this done now...you can cry later.” Always allow yourself the release ...just do it when it benefits you. Being strong doesn’t mean you’ll never cry, it means knowing *when* to cry.

4 Refocus through gratitude and prayer. One of the easiest ways to refocus your mind is by going over a list of things you are grateful for, especially at a time of crisis. My list went like this: I am grateful that my son and mom are both alive. I am grateful that I have a speaking engagement and a chance to change people’s lives. I am grateful that I’ve been given the gift of humor – now let me use it!

Also, it helps to turn to a higher source. I remember sending out e-mail messages during those few days, asking everyone to pray for my loved ones. I personally prayed to God, Mother Mary and Jesus, then I spoke to a few loved ones who had already passed on. I also wrote to a priest, a rabbi and a Buddhist monk. I wanted no stone unturned! (Besides, I wasn’t sure who had the quickest connection.)

5 Find the humor and trust yourself. Now refocused, I stayed in the parking lot for 45 minutes before my speech and wrote jokes. I was a tad nervous. OK, who am I kidding? I was extremely nervous about whether the jokes would go over. I had to detach myself and think of the funny aspects common to all who have been in this situation. The truth is funny if you just look at it in the right light.

To verify the funny factor of my material, I called a comedian friend of mine, Janette Barber. She said, “Fran, trust me and trust yourself. It’s funny. Do as you always do. Make fun of the situation at hand, not the victim. Trust your heart – you’ll be fine.” She was right. Humor is a gift, and the best time to give a gift – whether to yourself or an audience – is when you truly need it. As long as it’s in good taste, people will laugh. People want to see the human element in a speaker, not just the polished speech.

6 Visualize using your previous successes. It was now 10 minutes until show time. I took some deep breaths, reminding myself that I had done this a million times before, and I visualized being fantastic onstage.

7 Once you are empowered, go onstage. I was as confident as I could be in the situation. As long as no one asked me about my mom and son, I knew I wouldn’t cry. I had one last decision to make: Should I be honest with the audience upfront?

I decided to begin with the truth. So I said, “You know, I sat in the parking lot for a few minutes – OK, 45 minutes – before I came in, writing some jokes for you people. You think I’m kidding...Nothing like a lot of preparation for a gig. But really, the reason I did that was that because my mom, as we speak, is in the hospital; she was just released from intensive care. I’d show you pictures but I know she’d get mad, because she doesn’t have any makeup on.

“But, really, she is in the hospital. Apparently, she had an incarcerated hernia, and, like all mothers, she was stubborn about going to the hospital:

‘Frannie, I’m too sick to go the hospital!’

‘Mom, do you hear yourself? That doesn’t make sense.’

‘Listen to me, the worst thing in the world is to go to bed sick and wake up dead.’

‘Wake up dead! Mom, people don’t wake up dead.’

‘Don’t correct me – I’m sick.’

“Anyway, she wound up going into emergency surgery. As she was lying there on the gurney, she held my hand and whispered, ‘Frannie, remember I love you all, and just in case anything happens, please get an autopsy, and don’t forget to turn off the hallways lights.’

‘Mom, I don’t think we should be worried about the electric bill at the moment.’

‘I don’t want to have to worry about it if I’m in heaven.’

'I think God will give you a pass on that one.'

"The surgery took eight hours, but I knew she was better today because of two things: One, she told me her doctor was cute – he looked like Doctor Kildare, the TV hero from the '60s – and two, she complained that the nurses woke her up to give her a sleeping pill."

I continued joking. The audience knew I was telling the truth and they were literally laughing 'til they cried. This material turned out to be perfect for my audience at the assisted living home.

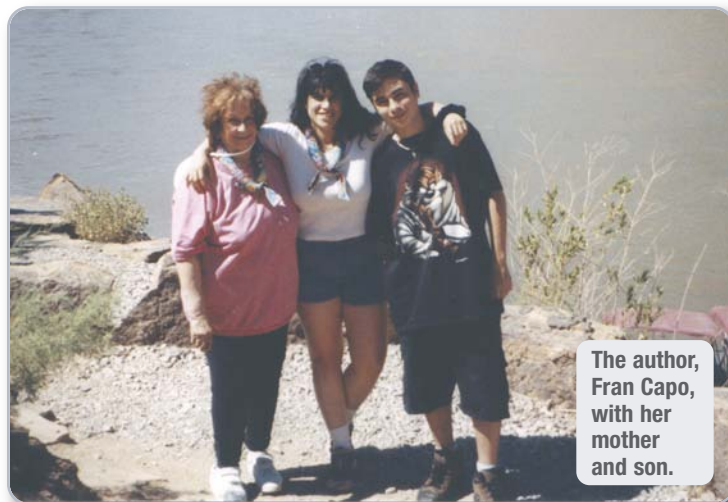
Life Is Precious

I teased the one male doctor in the room. I teased the social workers and I teased the director of the facility. I asked them, "Come on, tell me the truth, aren't there some patients you'd just like to smack?" They all smiled, but no one gave names. I talked about my son, and how I was playing race car driver going back and forth from hospital to hospital...Then I talked about how precious life was, how important their jobs were to the patients lying in those beds, and how important it is to put our hearts and souls into the careers we choose.

I ended my talk the way I always do – telling people to live with passion and laughter, and to go after their dreams.

Then I left them with one of my favorite sayings: "Remember to live every day as if it's your last...and one day you'll be right." I paused and added, "And I'm lucky that today wasn't that day for my mom or my son." I got a standing ovation and lots of hugs.


People came up to me and said, "You did a brave thing telling jokes about your mom and son. You were emotionally drained but you gave us your full self (or "Full Fran" as Janette calls it) in your performance."



I smiled. "I just did what I believe God put me on this Earth to do – motivate people and make them laugh. It's easy to laugh when things are good; it's hard to dig down inside yourself and find laughter when all you want to do is cry. But if you can find the power to laugh, you can find the power to heal...because in the end...laughter truly is the best medicine."

May all your sorrows be framed in laughter and may you always find a way to give it to your audience.

Postscript:

My mom, Rose Capo, died February 6, 2008 – and, yes, I told funny stories of my mom's life at the funeral. This article is in honor of her memory. Now, less than a year later, my sister has breast cancer. I continue to share the laughter with her. 

Fran Capo is a New York-based comedian, professional speaker, actress, author, adventurer and four-time world record holder. Read more about her at www.justlaugh.org.

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What's the Scoop on Your Group?

Let your club leaders know with this easy checklist.

We all have ideas on what an ideal Toastmasters club would be like. Most members might agree that enjoyable meetings, unlimited learning opportunities and a sense of belonging are what they look for in that “perfect” club. Well, they’re right.

This checklist offers you the chance to measure your club against the “ideal.”

Complete this questionnaire, then **give it to your club president**. The president will discuss the answers with the club’s executive committee, who should work on implementing any necessary changes.

Your answers, and the changes that your club may make thereafter, will put you well on the way toward becoming an ideal club!

Club Meetings

	YES	NO
1. Is your meeting location conveniently located, accessible and user friendly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are the program and agenda publicized, via e-mail or a club Web site, in advance?		
3. Do club meetings start and end on time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does the club president follow the pre-printed agenda?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does every member wear a name badge and membership pin?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are all guests and members warmly greeted at the door and made to feel welcome?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are all guests introduced to others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Is there a friendly atmosphere during the meeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is the meeting environment comfortable, pleasant and enjoyable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is your club meeting place easy to find, with signs posted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is the cost of meals reasonable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Is the Toastmasters International Catalog displayed at every meeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Is the business meeting conducted quickly and efficiently?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Are programs interesting and varied?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Are speakers, evaluators and other meeting participants reminded of their responsibilities well in advance of the meeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Are speeches well-prepared and based on manual projects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Are evaluations positive, helpful and constructive?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Is everyone given an opportunity to participate in the program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Are your officers effective in their roles as leaders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Do officers report on the club’s progress in the Distinguished Club Program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Membership

	YES	NO
21. Does your club set a membership goal each year and try to maintain a minimum of 20 members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Do your club’s leaders maintain a “member services” perspective?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Does your club regularly have membership drives and promote its meetings to media and in the community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Does your club participate in Toastmasters’ membership-building programs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Are guests introduced during the club meeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. After the meeting, are guests invited to join the club?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Are new members oriented to the Toastmasters program immediately after joining?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 28. Are new members reported immediately to World Headquarters so that they may receive their membership materials? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. Are new members assigned a mentor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. Are new members scheduled to speak soon after joining? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. Are new members assigned meeting roles soon after joining? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. Are new members formally inducted and given a membership certificate, pin and name badge? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 33. Is your club free of an absentee problem? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34. Does a member contact those who miss more than one meeting and encourage them to attend regularly? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35. Are all members assigned to a club committee? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36. Is your club free of members who disrupt meetings and have a negative influence on meetings and members? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37. Are members recognized during meetings for their accomplishments and contributions? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Educational Activities

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 38. Does your club begin each meeting by reading the Toastmasters Mission Statement? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39. Does your club provide opportunities for speaking outside the club? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40. Does your club regularly conduct programs from <i>The Better Speaker Series</i> , <i>The Leadership Excellence Series</i> and <i>The Successful Club Series</i> , in particular, working through Moments of Truth at least twice a year? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41. Are members encouraged to visit other Toastmasters clubs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42. Does your club enjoy occasional joint meetings with other clubs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43. Does your club encourage members to attend area, division, district, regional and international functions? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44. Do you know the value of and requirements for the various educational awards? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45. Does your club display wall charts for the CC, CL and AC programs (Items 307, 308 and 309)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:



General

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 46. Do you have a club newsletter or Web site? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47. Does your club take advantage of freetoasthost.org to create its Web site? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 48. Do you have a formal and impressive installation for club officers? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 49. Are you encouraged to attend your club's executive committee meetings? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50. Are you familiar with the proxy your club receives each March, which entitles it to votes at the Regional Conference and International Convention? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51. Does the club treasurer begin collecting October and April dues early and give members plenty of reminders about the due dates? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47. Do your officers thoroughly understand their responsibilities and carry them out? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 48. Are members encouraged to assume leadership roles in the club? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Take this tool to your club meeting and make your club even better. For even more help, be sure to work through the Moments of Truth with your club, available for free download at **members.toastmasters.org**.

Giving speeches is difficult – especially when you are blind.

A Better “I” Contact

“Your book changed my life,” one of my readers wrote.

I receive many letters of praise about my writing. But when it came to speaking to an audience, angst roiled my stomach. I was eager to talk to groups about my messages of hope, inspiration and encouragement. In order to move forward in my craft I knew I had to improve my oral presentation skills.

“You have to connect with your audience,” blurted my friend, a well-established speaker, adding, “You need to have emotion, gestures, facial expressions and voice variation.”

She paused. “And it’s equally important to have eye contact.”

Gulp. Eye contact? That task presented a huge obstacle. How does a blind person like me have “eye contact” with an audience I can’t even see?

I plunged into the task the same way I had faced every difficulty since I’d lost my sight – with prayer, planning and a good dose of perseverance.

And I joined a Toastmasters club. On the day I was to give my first speech, a member guided me to the front of the room. With clammy hands and a racing heart, I shared a five-minute Ice Breaker. When I was finished, another member helped me to my seat, and I waited for the evaluation. Not bad – it was sprinkled with positive comments and encouraging remarks.

Then came a blow I didn’t expect: “Janet, we need to find a way for you to continue to face the audience,” the evaluator said with kindness in her voice.

“What...what do you mean?”

To my embarrassment, I learned that during my speech I’d inadvertently turned my body and ended up facing the side of the room rather than the audience. A hot surge of humiliation burned my face.

I needed to find a way to remedy this. And the perfect solution was to request a table or lectern to use as a reference point.

Though that problem was solved, the eye contact part still remained an issue. Another strategy came to mind. Right before I had started into my Ice Breaker, I had asked the audience to respond to my greeting. When I heard their voices, I knew exactly where they were seated. So I turned in that direction when I spoke. I put the same plan into action for all my future speeches.

But the message itself needed planning as well. Most speakers have the luxury of using notes when they’re at the lectern; I hadn’t learned Braille, so I tossed that option out. I needed another solution to help me remember the outlines to my speeches. Word-for-word memorization was dangerous – if I forgot a portion, I’d be stuck.

A more effective route was to use acrostics: I would take a word such as happy to remind me of the five main points in my outline, with each topic represented by the first letter in the word chosen (h-a-p-p-y). To my delight, I found this method added clarity to my message.

I found the use of props also highlighted my message. In one of my talks, in order to symbolize a point I was making, I placed two plastic spray bottles similar in shape and size on the table before me.

Then I related a recent episode where, in haste and inability to tell the difference, I had grabbed the bottle of what I thought was hair spray. After mists of generous proportions dribbled over my head, I noticed my hair becoming wet rather than exhibiting the usual hold. Puzzled, I called out to my husband, “What kind of hair spray is this?” “Honey, that’s the jewelry cleaner we bought at the mall,” he replied.

Drawing on encouragement from fellow Toastmasters, I found new ways to add creativity and pizzazz to make my message impactful enough that the audience focused on that and not on the fact I cannot see.

“You’re getting a standing ovation,” whispered a friend as she helped me to my seat after a recent speech. This honor, though humbling, reinforces why it’s so important to persevere in life. But it also demonstrates something about audiences. Each person listening to my message has a unique reason for being there. It might be to receive bits of insight, inspiration or practical ways to move beyond struggles and pain, but each person is there for a reason.

And when I sense those needs, my focus is clear. And even though I can’t connect with their eyes, my message connects with their hearts. ■

Janet Perez Eckles, CTM, is a national speaker and the author of *Trials of Today, Treasures for Tomorrow: Overcoming Adversities in Life*. She is a member of the Osceola Toastmasters club in Kissimmee, Florida. You can reach her at jeckles@cfl.rr.com.



FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT!

By John Cadley

Big Words? Big Deal

I have no problem with people who try to impress me with big words. I just smile and say, “Your remarks are so sesquipedalian.” They don’t know if they’ve been complimented or insulted, and I like to leave it that way. If they want to impress me with big words, they’d better know the word for using big words.

Rather, my problem with these linguistic social climbers is that their choice of smarty-pants verbiage is so anemic, they drag out words like “inchoate” and “jejune,” which to me are really parodies of themselves. You use those words when you’re making fun of people who use those words. And we all know who those people are. They subscribe to the *New Yorker* and have a job in “communications,” which usually means they write grant applications for the local arts council. And in case you’ve ever wondered who submits those long-winded letters to the *New York Times*...yeah, it’s them.

These are the people who also say “arguably” a lot. Whenever I hear that word I want to flick them on the back of the ear. What they’re really saying is, “If anyone cared to argue with me about this I’d beat him like a dirty rug,” implying a superior level of intellect and erudition that we will have to take on good faith since the argument never actually takes place.

I have a couple of problems with this. First, to say that something could be argued is to beg the question: What *can’t* be argued?! Go observe a married couple for 10

minutes and you’ll find that the list of arguable topics stretches twice around the solar system.

Secondly, it’s just so unoriginal. These people all read the same magazines, pick up the same verbiage and use the same shop-worn show-off words. If they really want to display some serious language chops, they should use the word “argufy,” as in, “Bill Clinton is arguably the first president to be married to someone who might have been president if he hadn’t acted like the president in support of her bid to be president.” *Argufy* means “to argue or wrangle, esp. obstinately, over something insignificant” – which pretty much describes 99.9 percent of all arguments that have ever taken place. Again, go ask the married couple.

These people also use terms like *ipso facto*, *de rigueur* and *sine qua non* to make you think they know a foreign language, even if they don’t always know which language it is. And they are inveterate doers of the *New York Times* Crossword Puzzle. One of their favorite stratagems is to lure you into a game of Scrabble so they can put down words like “pari” and wait for you to challenge. Which you must do, by the way. If you don’t, the know-it-all who is bursting to divulge all he knows will in fact burst and then you’ll have a big, fat mess to clean up. (Pari means “a raw silk weight,” by the way – whatever *that* is.)

Oh yes, they’re also fond of ending some astute observation with “if you will.” If I will *what?* And what if

I won’t? Or else they say “as it were,” as in, “I had a brief conversation with him and he seemed sort of *non compos mentis*, as it were.” That’s like saying, “I talked to this guy and he seemed a little crazy, but did you notice the cool way I said it?” Well, yes, I suppose...if you think it’s cool to blow your own horn at the expense of someone with a mental illness.

My advice to these people is: If you’re going to use big words, study the master and do it right. I am speaking, of course, of the late William F. Buckley Jr. Now *there* was a man who could whack you over the cranium with a polysyllabic two-by-four and make you like it. Mr. Buckley used words like “chil-iastic,” “epigone,” “ferula” and “satyagraha” with a poise and confidence that left you certain no other word would do. He called them “out of town words,” which in itself shows a depth of imagination lacking in so many word-wealth wannabes. I urge them all to read Mr. Buckley’s books and essays, watch videos of his old TV program, and practice the raised eyebrow and serpentine darting of the tongue that punctuated Mr. Buckley’s *bon mots* so effectively. Then, and only then, will they hope to achieve that certain *je ne sais quoi* which is the mark of a true sesquipedalian. **T**

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