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The Value of Honest Evaluations

Evaluations are one of the most transformative aspects of the Toastmasters journey. I vividly recall an experience I had shortly after arriving in the United States as a student. One day, I happened to listen to a voicemail I had left for a friend, and it hit me—I wasn't enunciating clearly. It sounded as though I had marbles in my mouth. I was shocked that my family had never pointed this out to me.

When I confronted them, their response was, "Oh, we understand you perfectly, so it's never been an issue for us." I couldn't help but think, *Sure, it's not an issue for you, but what about everyone else? How much are others really understanding me? Why didn't you tell me?*

That's where Toastmasters stands out. Here, we have people who not only pay close attention to what we say but are also genuinely invested in helping us improve. Not that my family wasn't supportive—it simply didn't occur to them to provide this kind of feedback. Toastmasters, however, provides the constructive evaluations we need—feedback that can make all the difference in our personal and professional communication.

I particularly look forward to evaluations from certain club members who truly excel in this skill. Their feedback is not only insightful and constructive but often a masterclass

in itself. Regardless of the speech, they uncover areas for improvement that many of us might not have noticed, offering fresh perspectives that help both the speaker and the audience grow.

What makes these evaluations even more remarkable is how they're delivered—openly,

in front of the entire group. This is a stark contrast to the private feedback sessions I'm used to at work. The experience of giving and receiving feedback in a public setting sharpens our communication and listening skills while building confidence. It's a testament to the unique and supportive

environment Toastmasters creates—a space where people are genuinely committed to helping each other succeed.

In Toastmasters, feedback is viewed as a vital tool for personal and professional growth. The evaluation process does more than enhance speaking skills—it nurtures the ability to give constructive feedback, sharpens active listening, boosts self-confidence, and fosters continual development. These are invaluable qualities that enrich every personal and professional interaction, making the Toastmasters experience truly transformative.

We have people who not only pay close attention to what we say but are also genuinely invested in helping us improve.

Radhi Spear, DTM
International President



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Members of **Ragama Toastmasters Club** in Ragama, Sri Lanka, show their excitement as they celebrate their fourth club officer installation.

Traveling Toastmaster



Subodh Chavan of Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, displays the Toastmasters logo while visiting a living root bridge in Meghalaya, India.



Lisa Greene of Springboro, Ohio, holds a printed cover of the magazine near the Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska while aboard a cruise ship.

A Well-Lived Toastmasters Life

Herb Nowlin has gained lasting friendships and family memories.

By Paul Sterman

Herb Nowlin, DTM, shares a birthday with Toastmasters International. Both were born on October 22, though the organization's debut, in 1924, came a couple of decades before his. It seems fitting that the 82-year-old and Toastmasters have the date in common, given all they have done for each other over the years.

Leadership and service have been common themes in Nowlin's life. He was a U.S. Navy pilot in the Vietnam War and worked for more than 40 years as an attorney specializing in family and immigration law. The Ventura, California, resident joined Toastmasters in 1976 and remained a member until about five years ago, when he

began battling early dementia. Nowlin served in numerous Toastmasters leadership roles, including on the Board of Directors from 1984 to 1986.

In addition, for 20 years he helped bring order to Annual Business Meetings at the International Convention as the official Parliamentarian for the proceedings.

"Herb was very well-liked, very gentlemanly," says Jim Sullivan, DTM, a longtime fellow member of Nowlin's in the Sandpiper Toastmasters Club in Ventura.

Nowlin has always been a highly disciplined man who values rules and regulations, say those who know him. So perhaps it's no surprise he developed a passion for parliamentary procedure,



Herb Nowlin, DTM, circa the late 1980s

a system of guidelines that helps people navigate group discussions and facilitate effective meetings.

How did he manage to learn the abundance of parliamentary rules?

"Just one at a time," he says.

Family Fun

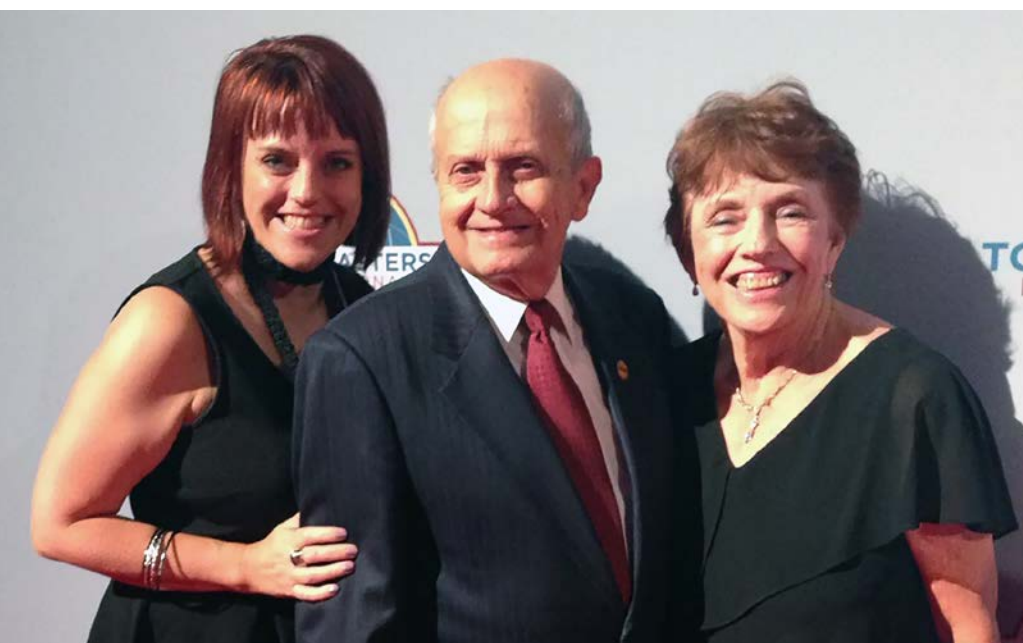
Toastmasters brought fun and fulfillment not only to Nowlin but to his entire family. His wife, Creda, 81, is also a Distinguished Toastmaster and a longtime member. She co-founded the Los Amigos Bilingual Club, in Oxnard, California, in 1982. Their daughter Sara was a member of two clubs in New York for a number of years, earning her DTM, while her sister, Mandi, attended Toastmasters meetings in Madrid, Spain, when she studied abroad as a college student.

When Sara and Mandi were children, social life for the family of four often revolved around Herb's and Creda's Toastmasters friends and activities. Trips to the International Convention meant annual family vacations in cities like Orlando, Florida; Palm Desert, California; and Toronto.

Nowlin says one of his favorite memories is seeing 10-year-old Sara and 4-year-old Mandi get up onstage and dance with famed rock 'n' roller Chubby Checker, the headline entertainer at the 1988 convention in Washington, D.C.

As a 5-year-old, Mandi beat out all the adults in a 1950s-themed hula hoop contest at the 1989 convention in Palm Desert. And a few years earlier, Sara did campaign duty at convention when her father was running for International Director.

"I made a sign, a campaign sign that I wore as a sandwich board," she recalls. "I still have it—it said, 'Vote for My Daddy.'"



Sara Nowlin, DTM, and her parents, Herb and Creda, at the 2016 Toastmasters International Convention in Washington, D.C.



Vietnam Days

The Vietnam War forged a searing chapter in Herb Nowlin's life. A U.S. Navy reconnaissance pilot, he gave a number of Toastmasters speeches on his experiences. His daughter Sara vividly remembers one she heard him deliver when she was in the seventh grade.

He spoke about a haunting incident when another pilot was selected instead of him for a particular mission. The man ended up being killed. His widow later unleashed her fury at Nowlin—essentially for surviving when her husband did not.

The speech made a powerful impression on Sara. "In seventh grade, you don't realize how close your parent was to not surviving," she says.

One of the more remarkable aspects of Toastmasters' history was a club formed by prisoners of war (POWs) in Vietnam. The men managed to meet secretly in the infamous "Hanoi Hotel" prison. The [Hanoi Hilton Toastmasters](#) later received a charter membership from Toastmasters International, and in 1986, Nowlin—then a member of the Toastmasters Board of Directors—and District Governor John Stark, DTM, presented a copy of that charter to Col. Ben Pollard, who had been part of the Hanoi Hilton club as a POW.

In a 2015 *Toastmaster* magazine article, Nowlin said the club was a testament to the power of Toastmasters even in the darkest of places. "Toastmasters was an important function in their lives," he said of the POWs. "They went to a lot of trouble to do it—if they got caught, they got tortured."

Asked recently about that presentation to the colonel, Nowlin said it was important to him to do that. The Vietnam veteran called the men of the Hanoi Hilton club his "brethren."

—Paul Sterman

Herb Nowlin and Don Ensched traveled to many Toastmasters conferences and events together, riding in Ensched's car—a vehicle Nowlin still remembers: "the orange Pinto."

Starting Up in Southern California

Nowlin, Sullivan, and the late Don Ensched, DTM, started the Sandpiper Toastmasters Club in Ventura (about an hour north of Los Angeles) in 1976. Ensched, who died in 2020, was the deep-voiced announcer for the International Convention for many years (as well as a Board member in the early 1980s). The three men would become best friends.

The gregarious Sullivan, still an active member of the Sandpiper Toastmasters Club and a Toastmaster for about 50 years, recalls those early days. "Herb was, I would say, more on the serious side, and I was more on the other side. And Don was more on the serious side too. I tried to even them out," he says playfully.

Nowlin and Ensched had their share of adventures. The two men traveled to many Toastmasters conferences and events together, riding in Ensched's car—a vehicle Nowlin still remembers: "the orange Pinto."

Their road trips included one memorable excursion from California to the 1980 International Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "That car had no air conditioning!" Nowlin said of the 1977 Ford Pinto, in a 2009 *Toastmaster* magazine article about Ensched. "We have gone tens of thousands of miles together for Toastmasters in that orange Pinto."

Not long after he joined Toastmasters, Nowlin became interested in parliamentary procedure. He pored over books on the topic, practiced in Toastmasters meetings, and soon mastered the myriad procedures, a skill that also benefitted him in his legal career. He also

held Toastmasters training sessions on the system of rules.

At the Annual Business Meetings, Nowlin provided counsel to the International President on parliamentary procedure. He also provided direction to delegates at times. Looking back at minutes of those business meetings, you see the same kind of sentence pop up time and again: "Parliamentarian Nowlin explained the procedural rules prescribed by the Board of Directors ..."

Nowlin says using the parliamentary system is a great benefit "because it allows you to keep order in what you're doing."

Sara says her dad loved serving as the organization's Parliamentarian all those years. He still has a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order*—the premier guide to parliamentary procedure—on his bookshelf.

Medical Issues

Health problems have taken their toll on Nowlin and his wife. He continues to battle dementia, while Creda has Alzheimer's disease. (She still occasionally attends a meeting of her Toastmasters club, assisted by her fellow members.) Several years ago, Sara and Mandi moved back into their parents' home to help care for them.

Herb is able to converse, and his friendly manner is still there, but he struggles to summon more than short answers. Some memories stand out—his daughters dancing with Chubby Checker—while others are lost to time.

He says serving on Toastmasters' Board of Directors in the 1980s was a rewarding



Past International Director Herb Nowlin, DTM, speaks at a Toastmasters event, circa the late 1980s.

experience “because it gave me an opportunity to think about other people and what was going on in the organization.”

Despite their health issues, Herb and Creda managed to attend the milestone con-

vention in Anaheim, California, last August commemorating the 100th anniversary of Toastmasters International. Sara and Mandi accompanied them. Though Herb was in a wheelchair due to a fall, he enjoyed the event, particularly programs connected to Toastmasters’ centennial, Sara notes. He also had the chance to reconnect with old friends like Past International Presidents Ted Cocoran, DTM, and Tim Keck, DTM, and Accredited Speaker Sheryl Roush, DTM.

Growing up, Sara and Mandi sometimes accompanied their parents to club meetings and speech contests. Sara remembers how her seri-

ous, studious father always “came alive” when he was participating in Toastmasters activities, whether giving speeches, leading meetings, or offering counsel at conventions.

“We never really got to experience [him that way] in any other setting,” she says. “So it was fun to watch, for sure.”

“I think it gave him a purpose,” she adds of Toastmasters. “I think it gave him a sense of meaning.”

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive & editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

A Golden Experience

One Toastmaster took his communication skills to reality television.

By **Laura Mishkind**

On the first episode of the hit TV show *The Golden Bachelorette*, America watched Toastmaster Bill Hernandez, DTM, and 23 other men step out of limos to meet Joan Vassos. “All I remember were the lights, the cameras, this angelic-looking woman waiting for me, and the wet driveway in front of the mansion,” he reflects on his experience on the dating TV show. “You only get a minute or so for that first greeting and I had to rehearse and practice what I was going to say beforehand. It is just so surreal.”

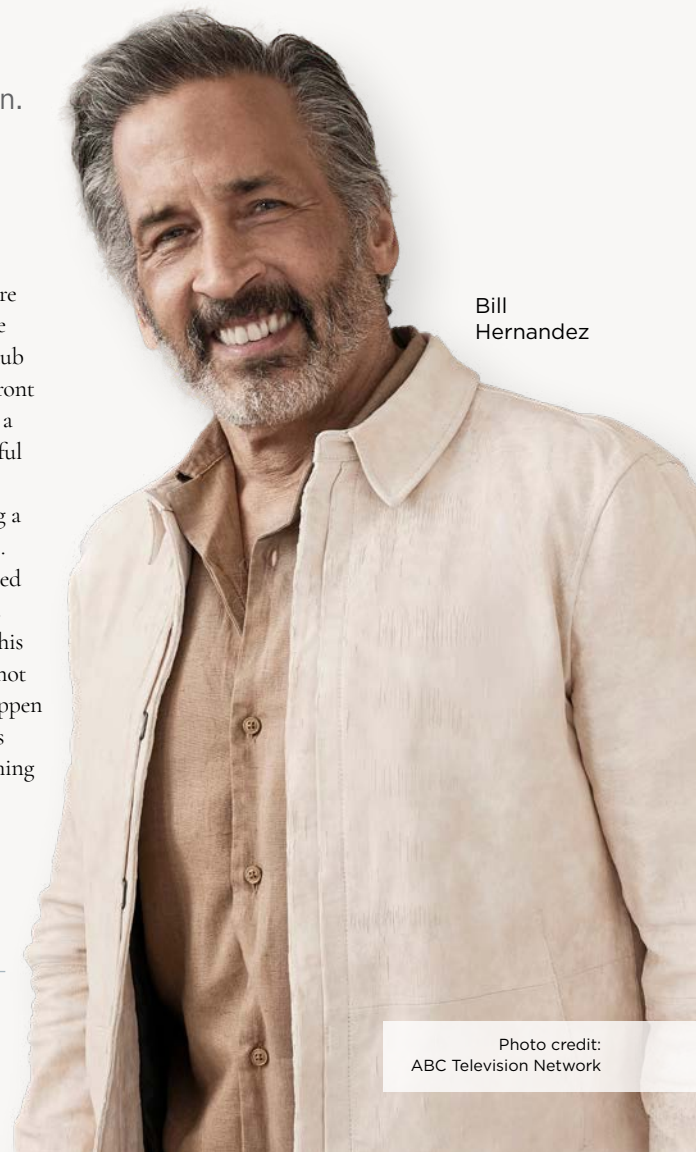
The reality dating show features contestants over the age of 55 who hope to become engaged to the lead by the end of the season and live out their “golden” years together. Each week, a few men are eliminated—if a man doesn’t receive a rose from the bachelorette, he returns home.

Hernandez, a member of Sporty Speakers and West Beaverton Club, both in Beaverton, Oregon, didn’t secure a rose on the first night, but he says the best moment of the experience came later. West Beaverton Club

hosted a viewing party, and members were disappointed to watch Hernandez be one of the six men sent home. “At our next club meeting our President called me to the front and every member came up and gave me a rose. It was such a beautiful and thoughtful gesture and really enforced the idea that Toastmasters is so much more than being a better public speaker and leader,” he says.

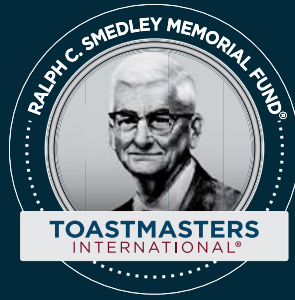
Of course, the skills Hernandez learned on his journey to be a better speaker and leader came in handy as he prepared for his foray into reality television. “You would not believe the amount of interviews that happen during the process!” he explains. “Months and months of pre-interviews before filming begins and a few hours more once you arrive. I am proud to say I had minimal *ahs* and *ums*. I think my Toastmasters experience gave me the ability to speak confidently and smoothly.”

Laura Mishkind is associate editor for the *Toastmaster magazine*.



Bill Hernandez

Photo credit:
ABC Television Network



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A Toast to My Father-of-the-Bride Toast

How Toastmasters helped me turn public speaking anxiety into a heartfelt performance.

By Mark Hall



Photo credit:
Evan Criscuolo

In December 2023, my daughter announced she was getting married. She and her fiancé set the wedding date for just six months away.

I was thrilled and excited, followed by an anxiety-producing revelation in the pit of my stomach: I would have to deliver a father-of-the-bride speech.

On top of a normal level of public speaking anxiety, I have an additional challenge as a lifelong stutterer. Although it has become less of a problem over the years, certain situations can trigger it back to its full-blown worst, and giving a prepared speech to 120 people qualified as one of those situations. I knew at a minimum I would have to say the necessary thank you's and give the bride and groom a toast. At first, that was my only goal.

However, I realized I needed to finally overcome my fear of public speaking. I had heard about Toastmasters and decided this was the perfect time to see if it could help me. With the wedding being so close, I jumped in and joined two clubs so I could double the practice.

Members of Hunterdon Speak Easy Club and Warren County Toastmasters (both in New Jersey) were welcoming and supportive of my goals. I took on as many speaking roles as I could, including delivering my Ice Breaker speech. Watching the other, more seasoned members taught me a lot, and their feedback was invaluable. My goal for the toast quickly shifted to delivering a full speech.

I scheduled a speaking slot close to the wedding date, so I could get final feedback. The insights I gained at that meeting altered the

speech for the better. I made some changes and committed it to memory.

The big day finally came. I practiced the speech one last time with a friend in the morning and then put it out of my mind and enjoyed the day's activities. This alone—the ability to relax and escape my anxiety for a bit—would not have been possible six months ago. Before the reception, I arranged to have my wedding toast be one of the first items on the agenda, so I could be done and enjoy my meal.

The moment was just about here. Music was playing and guests were loudly chattering as they took their seats. I tried to run through each paragraph of the speech in my head, but I found that I could not think with all the noise. I could not remember any of it!

I quickly stepped outside and pulled out an emergency copy of the speech. I may as well have been looking at a page of Arabic or Chinese, as none of it was registering. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. I remembered the first and second paragraphs were about thanking people, and the first line to my daughter was, “Allie, you and I have been on an incredible ride.” After five minutes of stalling, I went back in.

I somehow felt strangely confident. I folded my speech up and put it away. I decided just to go up there and enjoy it. Whatever happened would be fine.

The result? As soon as I picked up the microphone and started speaking, the speech came back to me. But it was not exactly as I had memorized—it was better. I was saying the same



Mark Hall

Toastmasters taught me that there is so much more to public speaking than just “getting through it.”

thing but with different words, and it seemed more natural and spontaneous.

I forgot some small bits but added a few others in. I was relaxed and confident. I would even say I was having a good time. My simple goal of “thank you's and a toast” had turned into a relaxed, funny, and heartfelt eight-minute speech delivered without notes.

I cannot tell you how impossible this would have seemed just six months earlier. The unexpected cherry on top was that I had several close friends and family members tell me it was the best father-of-the-bride speech they had ever heard!

Toastmasters taught me that there is so much more to public speaking than just “getting through it.” Even though I have a lot to learn, the awareness of what makes a good public speaker shifted my focus from the words to the message and how to deliver it.

Mark Hall is a photographer living in New Jersey. Born and raised in Yorkshire, England, he left in 1989 to travel the world before settling in New Jersey with his wife, Kristie. When he's not taking pictures, he's likely either chopping wood for the wood stove or practicing Brazilian jiu-jitsu.



Become a Performer to Enhance Your Speeches

Solutions for your questions and queries.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Having a performance mindset makes a big difference in how you speak and how you are perceived.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you have a question for The Answer Man, email it to magazine@toastmasters.org for a chance to be featured in an upcoming column.

Questions are occasionally edited for clarity and brevity.



Illustration by Jerry King

When you first start your speaking journey, you are focused on giving a speech. But at some point you should transition from giving a speech to giving a performance. And, I believe, you should look at yourself in that vein.

For example, if you are in the corporate arena, you want to put forth the image that you are a leader. If you are in a freelance capacity, you want to look and sound like an expert. If you have your own business, you want to come across as someone who commands attention. And that, in my opinion, involves thinking of yourself as a performer.

How can you advance from simply giving a speech to having a performance mindset?

You want to make your presentation smooth, confident, and professional looking. This can be challenging, but in Toastmasters there are simple techniques that you can develop at the club level that start you on that road.

- 1. Set up your presentation.** Make sure the stage is set up the way you need it before you are introduced. Maybe you need to move a lectern out of the way. Maybe you have props to set up. Maybe you are using PowerPoint that needs to be booted up on the computer. I have seen all of these and more.
- 2. Hone your introduction.** Your introduction should orient your listeners, whether that is about the specific project you are working on, or if there is important information the audience needs to know. The key is to build excitement for your speech through your introduction. You want your audience to think, *I can't wait to hear what they are going to say.*

- 3. Stand to the side of the stage before you are introduced.** This emphasizes the professionalism of your speech. Many speakers stay in their seat while their introduction is read. Meandering to the front of the room to begin speaking causes the audience to lose that anticipation factor.

When I speak, I wait to the side until the introduction is over, then I confidently stride to the lectern, shake hands with my introducer, face the audience, and begin my speech. This allows me to command the stage.

- 4. Finally, remember your facial expressions.** Don't forget to smile. The speech doesn't start with your first words. It starts when your audience first sees you, so smile as you walk to the podium.

I once evaluated a member who was preparing for a speech contest. At the side of the stage, she was frowning, and she didn't smile until she was at the center of the stage. That did not send a positive message.

Remember, you are onstage even before you are introduced.

I know that performance is not what you think of when you are getting ready to speak, but I believe it makes a big difference in how you speak and how you are perceived.

When you walk onstage, think, *It's showtime!* Then show them what you've got.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at billbrown-speechcoach.com.

Navigating Feedback on Your Speeches

How to effectively use your evaluations.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM



On the journey to becoming the 2018 World Champion of Public Speaking, Ramona J. Smith received a lot of feedback on her speeches. She welcomed it. “I wouldn’t be the speaker I am without feedback,” she says.

Smith, a member of Post Oak Toastmasters, an online club, says it’s vital for all speakers to receive feedback. “It’s just like when you sing in the shower and you think you sound like Mariah Carey, but you really sound like Mariah Scary,” she says. “Others can see things we might not see.”

Feedback on the content and delivery of your speeches is essential to speaker growth. It can help you strengthen your skills, increase self-awareness, and gain ideas for making a greater impact.

Setting Yourself Up for Success

Speaker feedback is fundamental to the Toastmasters program. There’s an evaluation for every prepared speech in Pathways and a Level 1 “Evaluation and Feedback” project in each path. The Level 1 assignment helps speakers identify effective feedback and learn how to apply it. Some clubs even offer evaluations on Table Topics®.

Before you give a speech, it’s important to set yourself up for success to receive the best feedback to help you improve. As a speaker, here are five ways you can set the stage for an effective evaluation:

1. Know your goal. Like Smith, Mariana Dachova, DTM, from Silver & Wiser Toastmasters, an online club, finds feedback essential for speaker growth. She advocates starting with your speech’s goal. “Speeches always need to have a purpose,” she says.

Do you want to entertain, persuade, educate, or inspire? What is your core message? How would you like the audience to feel and what are you hoping they do after your speech? Knowing your speech’s goals can help you focus on the type of feedback that will be helpful to achieve them.

2. Welcome feedback. Dachova receives evaluations with an open mind and heart. “I always assume the person evaluating me is doing so with the intent to help me grow,” she says.

Cat Kipling, DTM, from Berkeley Square Speakers Toastmasters Club in London, says, “A past member used to say, ‘Feedback is a gift.’ Of course, we don’t always get gifts we want.”

Yet sometimes those same gifts are what we need. When speaking, it’s important to be open, grateful for, and accepting of people’s opinions, even if you don’t agree with them. “Look at it as an opportunity to reflect,” Kipling says.

3. Pay attention to the positive. Dale Anne Clark (formerly Rees-Bevan), DTM, AS, is also a fan of feedback. She believes speakers need to pay more attention to the positive feedback they receive.

“For me, 90% of my growth and leveling up has come from people saying ‘Do you realize you did this? That’s the sort of thing you need to do more of. That’s where you’re really hitting it with the audience,’” says Clark, a member of Dural Toastmasters Club in Sydney, Australia. Oftentimes speakers aren’t aware of their strengths or

“I wouldn’t be the speaker I am without feedback.”

—RAMONA J. SMITH

effective tactics they’ve used. They may not continue using certain approaches if they don’t understand how effective they are.

Clark believes focusing on positive feedback can be more meaningful—not just because it’s encouraging, but also because it’s specific to the speaker. “I think it’s powerful because quite often our strengths and the positive things we’re doing are individual, whereas the points for building are generic,” she says.

4. Talk with your evaluator. You can also maximize your evaluation experience by talking with your evaluator before speaking. Ask for concrete examples about your speech’s positive achievements, including what worked and why. Share the areas you’re working on and ask the evaluator to provide specific feedback on those too. If several people are evaluating you, Clark recommends asking for general feedback.

“If I ask a specific question to a group, they spend more time than needed on that and miss other things, like what’s landing or what’s being missed,” she says.

Don’t hesitate to follow up with your evaluator after the meeting to clarify anything confusing or gain more insights.

If you feel the evaluation missed the point, ask other Toastmasters for feedback to see if they have a similar perspective.

It can also help to review your past evaluations. Are the recommendations consistent? Check for common themes and trends that can help you.

Deciding What to Incorporate

Once you've set the stage and given your presentation, it's time to review your evaluation. Here are a few tips to help you decide what feedback you should incorporate into future speeches.

Make an impact. Sometimes you know right away that you'll use an evaluator's suggestion. For her World Championship speech, Smith's Toastmasters mentors suggested she use the phrases "mirror of defeat" and "window of possibilities." "When I heard them say that, I felt an 'Aha!' moment. Those words would make a strong impact," says Smith.

Consider the fit. What suggestions will help you achieve your speech goals? What aligns with your vision and style? "There are certain values and traits of my personality I want to respect," says Dachova. Her speeches are often about serious and informative topics. When she receives suggestions to add more humor, it doesn't feel right to her. If feedback is in conflict with the core aspects of your speech or approach, don't use it.

If you're still figuring out your speaking style, then check your gut instinct. Do the recommendations feel right?

Navigate conflicting feedback. When you receive contradictory feedback from different members, think about message alignment, self-awareness, and what your gut is saying. The better you know yourself and your speech goals, the easier it will be to navigate opposing advice.

In 2017, when Clark was a World Championship of Public Speaking semi-finalist, she went wild with practice. She visited many clubs to fine-tune her speech, and each offered roundtable evaluation sessions involving all meeting attendees. Throughout, she received conflicting feedback.

"The message was there if I had been a mature enough speaker to sort it out," Clark says. "Hindsight tells me I should have heard warning bells that something was not working."

Today, she's an Accredited Speaker and would advise her past self to tighten the speech's messaging and communicate it more succinctly.

For Smith, if the suggestion doesn't feel right, she won't implement it. She knows her style and what is authentic for her.

For example, she describes herself as being extremely animated. Some people have said she moves too much. Others have said, "Do your thing." Smith says, "I'm not a speaker who will stick to the podium. I like to move. I might do a karate kick in the middle of my speech if I feel like it."

On the other hand, Kipling, the London Toastmaster, considers herself to be a grounded speaker—someone who often stays in one place when speaking. Some evaluators have recommended she "use the stage" more. She says, "When the situation is right, I do. But I think it's appropriate to match it with the content. For me, it's more important to be grounded and use that power."

Strengthen your evaluation skills. When you're a better evaluator, you can evaluate yourself—and feedback—better. Smith recommends participating in evaluation contests.

You can also learn from other speakers' evaluations. What did the evaluator focus on and how did it differ from your experience of the speech? What can you learn from that difference and how might it apply to your own speaking style? Noticing there's a difference can also be a helpful reminder that an evaluation is just one person's opinion.

Test it. Once you decide on the feedback you want to use, try it in your next speech. Kipling acts on feedback as quickly as possible. She notes it's impossible to work on too many things at once and recommends focusing on what will make the greatest impact.

"I'm a fan of quick wins, but they're not necessarily quick fixes," says Kipling. "They may take a bit of time and be new habits to put in place."

The better you know yourself and can create an environment for the most effective and meaningful feedback, the greater your self-confidence and speaking success will be. As Kipling says, "With feedback, we can all learn and grow."

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of 5-Star Toastmasters Club in Arlington, Virginia, and AAMC Toastmasters in Washington, D.C., and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at jenniferblanck.com.

TOASTMASTERS
Evaluation Resource
TOASTMASTERS PATHWAYS
learning experience

Member Name _____
Evaluator _____
Speech Title _____
Date _____
Speech Length: 5-7 minutes

Purpose Statement
The purpose of this speech is defined by the member. The member may present a well-organized, well-supported speech on any topic.

Notes for the Evaluator
The member completing this speech may be presenting on any topic. They may be speaking to fulfill a Pathways project or about a topic outside of the Pathways learning experience.

- ▶ The member will present a well-organized, well-delivered speech.
- ▶ The speech may be humorous, informational or any style the member chooses. The speech content and style should work well together.
- ▶ This speech should not be a report on the content of any Pathways project.

General Comments
You excelled at: _____
You may want to work on: _____
To challenge yourself: _____

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Speaking on the Spot

How to prepare for an impromptu speech.

By Cathey Armillas, DTM

The night before delivering the opening keynote at a national conference, one of my clients—a highly accomplished leader—was blindsided. The event organizer called with an urgent update: The hosting organization’s CEO wanted her to speak on an entirely different topic than the one she had spent weeks preparing for.

This wasn’t a minor tweak. It was completely different, and the keynote was first thing in the morning. There was no time for a rework. No time to practice. She called me in full-on panic mode.

“What am I supposed to do, just wing it?” she said.

“Nope, you’re not winging it; this is just an impromptu speech now!” I said.

The next morning, she stepped onto the stage and delivered a completely new keynote with confidence and the clarity of someone more prepared than she actually was.

How did she do it? We used my Idea-Emotion-Outcome framework, giving her a quick way to prepare for an on-the-spot situation. This was simple but powerful and allowed her to organize her thoughts quickly and connect with her audience in a meaningful way. This is exactly what it means to speak smart when you’re put on the spot.

You’re Already Speaking Spontaneously

Being put on the spot is something that happens at varying levels every single day. You give impromptu speeches all the time—when someone asks how your weekend was, why you



Cathey Armillas (on the right) gives an impromptu speech during her Storytelling Adventure Experience, a program she runs to teach clients the art of storytelling.

Impromptu speaking is never about being perfect in the moment—it’s about making the most of the moment.

love your favorite show, or why you choose to order your pizza with pineapple as a topping. In so many situations, you think on your feet and respond.

What you’re doing is shaping ideas in the moment, adding some personality, and sharing them in a way that connects.

The only difference between those moments and stepping on a stage? The stakes feel higher. But the skill is the same. Impromptu speaking is never about being perfect in the moment—it’s about making the most of the moment.

The Idea-Emotion-Outcome Framework

When you’re put on the spot to speak, your brain can go into overdrive, trying to come up with the “perfect” thing to say. This often leads to one of two common issues: either freezing up because you’re looking for the right words or rambling because you’re throwing out every thought that pops into your head.

This is where the Idea-Emotion-Outcome framework can help. It provides a clear, simple structure to organize your thoughts quickly

and deliver a message that resonates, whether that’s for a response about why pineapple is a good pizza topping or you have to give an unexpected keynote.

Here’s how it works:

- 1. Find the idea.** Starting with the idea is the foundation of this framework and of what you’re going to say. It’s the one thing you want people to walk away and remember. Sticking to one idea keeps your mind and words focused. It prevents you from going all over the place with your thoughts.

For example, at a wedding, the idea might be, “Love is found in the little moments.” In a business meeting, it could be, “Focus on why before we focus on when.” If you’re clear on your idea, it gives your audience a clear path to follow—and it keeps you grounded as you speak.

- 2. Add the emotion.** Once you have your idea, you need to give your audience a reason to care about it. This is where emotion comes in. Emotion creates connection. It helps people feel why your idea matters to them.

You can do this by sharing a quick, personal story that relates to your idea and your audience; bringing them into a specific moment; and tapping into universal feelings like love, joy, hope, or even vulnerability.

For instance, at a wedding, you could share a short story about a sweet moment between the couple that illustrates the idea of love in small moments. In a meeting, you might give an example of how the strategy of finding out people's why will help you figure out what you should do and when.

The best stories, speeches, songs, poems, and movies get us to feel something. That wasn't done by accident. It was done on purpose. Intentionally inject the emotion you want us to feel.

3. End with the outcome. The outcome is everything. This is where your idea has an action. What do you want your audience to think, feel, or do after you've spoken? The outcome ties everything together and gives your audience direction.

For example, at a wedding, the outcome could be a toast celebrating the couple's future. In a meeting, it might be a call to action like, "Let's share our whys and make this happen!"

The outcome leaves people with clarity about your message and a sense of purpose or inspiration.

By following this framework, you avoid the pitfalls of freezing or rambling because you always know:

- What you want to say (**idea**)
- Why it matters (**emotion**)
- How to wrap it up (**outcome**)

It's simple, clear, and effective—and it ensures that even if you're caught off guard, you can deliver a message that makes an impact.

When the Framework Works, It Works Well

I worked with another client, Kathryn Madison, CEO of Dye Candy. She had to sit on a panel at a big New York conference. The organizers gave her questions to prepare for. We went through them using the Idea-Emotion-Outcome

framework. She nailed her ideas, added personal stories, and practiced closing strong. Then I threw her curveballs: random questions to see how she handled surprises. Good thing we did. At the event, the moderator went off-script, and most of the questions were unplanned.

Afterward, she told me, "That framework saved my butt! I felt ready for any question she asked."

That's the power of having a plan you can trust even when you don't have all the answers.

Read the Room

When you're using this framework for impromptu situations, keep in mind that not every moment calls for the same tone. Before you speak, take a second to check the vibe:

- Is it a casual or formal event?
- Who's listening?
- What does the moment need? Humor? Inspiration? Comfort?

At a wedding, humor works. In a business meeting, stick to clarity and professionalism but with some wittiness and energy. At a memorial, it's about respect and reflection.

When in doubt, stay sincere. People appreciate honesty over polish.

How to Pull It Together Fast

Finally, if you find yourself in a spot where you're put on the spot, here's a great way to ground yourself:

- 1. Pause.** Take a deep breath. Even a two-second pause helps.
- 2. Think in keywords.** Write a word or two to guide your thoughts: your idea, emotion, and outcome.
- 3. Practice quickly.** If you can, run it through in your head or say it quietly to yourself.
- 4. Keep it short.** Don't overdo it. A simple but strong idea lands better than rambling.

Get Better at Speaking Smart

Practice is key. Use small, everyday moments to get comfortable. When someone asks about your weekend, think in Idea-Emotion-Outcome.

Have a back-pocket story ready, whether it's a lesson you learned, a funny moment, or a

quick example you can adapt to different situations. These can save you when you're caught off guard and own the moment!

Remember, impromptu speaking is never about being perfect in the moment—it's about making the most of the moment.

Cathey Armillas, DTM, is a TED coach, 20-year-plus Toastmaster, and co-founder of Speaker Skills Academy, a unique and innovative online community that focuses on speaking skills through interactive drills, empowering speakers worldwide.



Kathryn Madison, CEO of Dye Candy, speaks on a panel at a New York conference.



THE POWER OF **DIGITAL**

Storytelling

The art of telling stories moves from the stage to the computer screen.

By Dave Zielinski

Most Toastmasters understand the power of telling stories from the stage. Storytelling helps engage audiences, evokes emotion, and makes messages more relatable and memorable than simply using data or statistics to make a point. But as more of the world's communications and interactions continue to move online, the need for effective storytelling has extended to the computer screen.

The ability to persuade, inform, and educate others through digital storytelling has emerged as a skill Toastmasters across geographic boundaries need to understand and often master for success in their professional and personal lives.

Digital storytelling involves the use of media, including video, audio, text, images, music, animation, and other elements to tell a story in an online setting. The technique is commonly used on platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, Instagram, company websites, and other online venues to educate or influence viewers, to sell products, to raise money, or simply to create personal narratives to capture life-changing events or experiences.

While speaking in person to audiences will always be a vital communication skill, experts say there are compelling reasons for Toastmasters to become familiar with the art of digital storytelling—even if they

don't work in professions like marketing, corporate communications, journalism, or nonprofit fundraising, fields where learning this technique is often required.

"Digital media is the primary way younger generations consume information and that will only continue to grow in the future," says Nancy Duarte, chief executive officer of Duarte Inc., an organization that specializes in teaching presentation and communication skills. (Duarte gave a [TEDx talk on storytelling](#) that received more than 3 million views.) "To get and keep people's attention online you have to apply techniques used by the best digital storytellers."

The Skills to Learn

Aman Chopra, a public speaking coach and comedian in New York City who pioneered the use of artificial intelligence in stand-up comedy, believes Toastmasters of many stripes can benefit from learning digital storytelling skills.

“The people who think they need it the least often need it the most,” Chopra says. “For example, for someone who works in a technical field like information technology, the sciences, or accounting, part of their job is to help make what they do more understandable to coworkers in other departments, to explain complicated matters. Digital storytelling is a good way to do that by communicating messages in more compelling ways.”

Bryan Alexander, author of the book *The New Digital Storytelling: Creating Narratives With New Media*, cites the example of a chemist who created a 4-minute digital story on the process of lipid separation in fluids. That’s a potentially dry topic to many, but it proved engaging to both non-technical and technical viewers alike. “The voice-over in the story was warm and inviting, and the visuals were interesting and compelling,” Alexander says.

David F. Carr, DTM, the 2014–2015 Area Director for District 47, who is based in Coral Springs, Florida, says digital storytelling also can be used on Toastmasters club websites as a way to market to and recruit new members.

“Digital stories and especially video are a good way to capture the attention of someone learning about Toastmasters for the first time,” Carr notes. “We often need more than just pictures of club members holding certificates to get that attention. Digital stories of members that dramatize the benefits they’ve gained from being in the club, and how certain clubs might be different from others, can be persuasive.”

Strong Online Storytelling

Shifting a storytelling approach from the stage to online platforms doesn’t mean abandoning the time-honored tenets of telling effective stories. But experts say it does require understanding how different media tools best work in harmony to create maximum impact on a viewing audience.

Daniel Weinshenker, a former longtime program director for StoryCenter, a Berkeley, California-based organization that teaches the art of digital storytelling, says it’s important to understand the interplay between the various

“Digital stories and especially video are a good way to capture the attention of someone learning about Toastmasters for the first time.”

—DAVID F. CARR, DTM

elements of digital narratives like video, voice-overs, images, and music. Digital storytellers should know, for example, how the layers of visual and audio narratives can work together within the overarching structure of a story.

“We think of digital storytelling as a form of symphony, with different instruments playing in harmony but each of those instruments may take center stage at given times,” says Weinshenker, who is now the director of both EchoStory and Nurstory, international digital-storytelling organizations. “At one point [with music] it might be the violins, the horns, or the drums rising above others. It’s the same process when you’re creating a digital story. In planning a story, it’s important to think through where you want voice-over, visuals, or other media elements to be the ‘loudest’ at certain moments, and how they’ll interact with other multimedia.”

For example, a quality voice-over can do much of the heavy lifting in guiding audiences through

a digital story—but there are also times where a well-chosen photograph or infographic can communicate more to viewers than mere words.

“Someone’s voice as well as a soundtrack can be very influential in digital storytelling,” Alexander says. “The voice-over in particular is the linchpin of digital storytelling and helps to organize other media elements.”

But the voice-over also can be the most challenging part of the process to master, Alexander adds—and not for the reasons you might think.

“Technically the process of recording and editing audio is fairly easy to master but can be emotionally challenging for many people,” he says. “People can be embarrassed to hear their own recorded voices. But whenever I do workshops, the same thing happens again and again: Students get nervous about recording their voices, but when everyone else hears it, they typically love it.”

“The personal touch in digital stories can make all the difference.”



Sound and Pictures

Ambient sounds connected to important moments in digital stories—such as traffic, the sounds of nature, or voices—can also be powerful in helping to create a sense of place for online audiences.

“Maybe there’s a part of someone’s story about how important it was for them to go on walks in nature with their parents to talk about sensitive topics,” Weinshenker says. “As part of that, a storyteller might play the sound of feet walking on leaves. It transports viewers right there alongside the narrator in the moment.”

Choosing the right visuals also is key. “Visuals can often be their own story without the need for a single word,” Alexander says.

Telling a good digital narrative requires thinking through the relationship between audio and visuals, Weinshenker says. “If you’ll be using a certain photo or image, you need to determine what you *don’t* need to say in a voice-over to let that visual tell the story,” he says. “It’s about understanding what text or words you need to omit to let the image carry the message.”

The technology platform you choose to deliver a digital story also should influence the use of media tools, Alexander says.

“With use of video, for example, you want a slower pace in voice-overs because those watching are also processing the visuals,” he says. “Speaking quickly can detract from attention

Digital storytelling involves the use of media, including video, audio, text, images, music, animation, and other elements to tell a story in an online setting.

spans. Whereas a digital story delivered through a blog or a Facebook post is different because you’re primarily using text.”

Breathing Life Into Digital Stories

Just like stories a Toastmaster tells from the stage, stories told in digital form are more memorable and relatable when they involve personal experiences or real-life challenges, experts say.

“This can be tricky for many people,” Alexander says. “When they approach the digital world it can feel more impersonal, since the audience isn’t sitting right in front of them and can be unknown. There are fears about revealing too much or not being accepted. But it’s those authentic stories that center on overcoming a problem or crisis that often prove most engaging to online audiences.”

Transforming the theoretical or abstract to real-world experiences and emotions makes for more impactful stories, says Weinshenker. “People don’t quit smoking simply because they

know it causes cancer,” he says. “They quit after they’ve sat in a hospital next to their aunt who is trying to breathe through a tracheal tube because she is dying of emphysema. Those kinds of personal experiences can carry great weight when expressed in digital stories.”

Disclosing personal information has a cultural component as well. Toastmasters in some cultures may be less inclined to share personal or emotionally honest content in a digital story than those in other cultures. Experts say it’s important for storytellers to be familiar with the codes and clues within their own communities.

Use an Element of Mystery

Alexander says the best digital stories also contain some element of mystery or surprise. In other words, don’t give away too much information all at once.

“I don’t mean mystery just in the sense of a crime thriller, but rather, when you start a digital story there should be something hidden or veiled that the audience doesn’t know,” he says. “If it’s a story about the struggle of someone migrating to the United States, for example, maybe the surprise or mystery is the family they’re reuniting with there isn’t who the migrating person once thought it was.

“If everything is known upfront, an audience often won’t have motivation to stick with it and will click away to something else.”

Demonstrate in Club Meetings

Experts say one good way to introduce digital storytelling in Toastmasters club meetings is to show examples of the technique in action, then ask club members to discuss the story’s impact and the interplay of different media elements like audio, video, images, and music. Good examples of digital stories can be found on the [StoryCenter](#) website.

Alexander also stresses that the digital stories you show don’t need to be perfect or of



Jesse Temple-Trujillo (left) and Daniel Weinshenker work on recording Temple-Trujillo’s voiceover for her digital story.

professional quality. “Don’t be afraid to show stories that are clearly done by amateurs but are still effective or powerful.”

He cites the example of a low-budget digital story created by a graduate student at a New York City university. The story is about the challenges faced by students with cognitive disabilities.

“As this student began her research on the project, she was informed her son was diagnosed with autism,” Alexander says. “So she created a digital story on the broader topic that also included him. Some of the images weren’t high quality and at times she spoke too quickly in her voice-over. But the story received a standing ovation after it was presented.

“Her personal narrative, authenticity, and the emotional impact it made overcame any technical flaws.”

Dave Zielinski is a freelance writer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



Tools to Help Create Digital Stories

A host of user-friendly software tools are available to help Toastmasters get started creating digital stories. Experts in digital storytelling and Toastmasters who use digital storytelling recommend the following tools, many of which have free as well as paid versions.



Web publishing tools. [Shorthand](#) is a design platform for web publishing, typically used to publish digital magazines, internal communications, and other digital stories via web browsers accessed on laptops or mobile phones. Shorthand features user-friendly “drag and drop” tools, and its website has many good examples of digital stories.



Audio tools. The free audio recording and editing app [Audacity](#) creates voice-overs and podcasts, edits music, and more.

The software also allows digital storytellers to capture and edit the ambient sounds of environments, birds, animals, and more. Audacity runs on all major operating systems.



Video creation and editing. One of the most popular tools for creating and editing video is [iMovie](#), which allows users to create storytelling video including transitions, photos, audio, music, and more. The software includes storyboards, pre-made video templates that guide novices through the movie-making process. There also are special effects like

split screen, audio fade, and an ability to slow down or speed up action shots. [Describe](#) is an AI-powered video editor. Users can type text to generate words in their own voice using an AI speech tool, arrange visuals like a slide deck, and easily collaborate on video creation. The software also features AI-based translation to convert content to different languages.



AI-powered image and text creation. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technology is now commonly being used by digital storytellers for creating images and videos as well as text.

One such GenAI tool is [Mid Journey](#), which uses algorithms to convert text into high-quality images. You simply use

a text prompt to describe the kind of image you want, be it artwork, graphics, or a logo, and the tool delivers the images right to you.

[Dalle-3](#) is another AI-driven image generator that’s relatively easy for novices to learn. Created by Open AI, the maker of ChatGPT, the tool generates a wide range of vivid images from text descriptions.

Manage Your Speaking Time

Sticking to time limits is a signal of discipline and respect.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

Imagine you've just finished delivering what you believe is a championship-winning speech. The audience erupts in applause. You know you nailed the judging criteria, and you're on the edge of your seat waiting for the results—only to find out you didn't place.

The assumed reason? You went over time. This scenario is all too real. Two competitors in the 2024 World Championship of Public Speaking® were disqualified for exceeding the time limit.

One of the championship contestants, Fursey Gotuaco, believes he had gone over time and feels it's likely he was one of the two disqualified. (Disqualified competitors in the World Championship are not identified.) Of going over time, he says, "I know I'm the only one who could have prevented it. And I should have done something about it," he says.

Gotuaco, of Bangkok, Thailand, says he underestimated factors like audience laughter and missed the moment the timing light turned red.

His experience highlights a key lesson for all speakers: Mastering time limits is crucial, not just in contests but in every speaking opportunity. Fortunately, there are plenty of chances to practice in Toastmasters.

Why We Have Time Limits

Toastmasters International emphasizes strict time limits for good reason. It's not just about following rules; it's about respect—respect for the audience's time, respect for fellow speakers, and respect for meeting agendas. Managing time well ensures meetings run efficiently and helps speakers practice delivering concise, impactful messages.

If a speaker exceeds their time limit, other meeting elements may need to be cut short, often

affecting the Table Topics® portion of the meeting. Cutting Table Topics reduces member participation and practice in impromptu speaking.

Below are the most common timing guidelines for Toastmasters. (All but Table Topics speeches include a 30-second grace period either under or over the timing marks to give speakers flexibility.)

- Table Topics: 1–2 minutes (1-minute minimum to 2 minutes and 30 seconds maximum)
- Prepared speeches: typically 5–7 minutes (4 minutes and 30 seconds minimum to 7 minutes and 30 seconds maximum)
- Evaluations: 2–3 minutes (1 minute and 30 seconds minimum to 3 minutes and 30 seconds maximum)

Ending your speech either under time or over time in a contest means automatic disqualification.

For non-contest speeches at Toastmasters meetings, if you anticipate going longer than the usual time limits, it's a good idea to check with your Vice President Education (VPE) to see if the agenda can accommodate a longer speech.

How to Keep on Time

So, how can you ensure your speech stays within time? The key lies in practice and preparation.

"Practice, practice, practice," advises Caroline Cyr, a member of the Club Toastmasters Lemoyne de Candiac in Montreal. "Practice not in your head, but practice out loud because it's the way you will give the speech."

Cyr, who won first place in the 2023 District 61 French Speech Contest, relies on word count for pacing: "I know exactly how many words I need for a 5–7-minute speech. I highlight sentences in my script to help me stay on track."



"Don't let the audience's enjoyment of your speech put you at risk" for going over time.

—DAVID BROOKS, DTM

Mark Reynolds, DTM, a member of the Aldinga Toastmasters Club in Adelaide, South Australia, shares a similar strategy. "For me, managing time is even more challenging due to my Tourette's (facial twitches and head movements) and stuttering. I aim for about 700 words for a 7-minute speech and review my script meticulously to ensure I don't run over."

Creating a shorter speech is another common-sense method for ensuring that your speech doesn't go too long. Falk Kyser, DTM, of Beaconsfield Toastmasters Club in Montreal, practices with a stopwatch and plans for a shorter speech. He says, "I limit my speech to a maximum length of 6 minutes 45 seconds."

Crafting a shorter speech can be challenging for contest speeches. Gotuaco reflects on the challenge of time management at the highest level. Rounds of feedback often lead to adding more content rather than trimming it. "Everyone told me what they'd rather have in, but no one suggested what to cut," says Gotuaco of the

speech he later delivered in the championship. “I added one or two lines back in that I had previously cut out. And I tweaked the ending.”

This extra content, combined with unanticipated laughter time, contributed to him likely going over time in the championship. “I budgeted for laughter but didn’t anticipate 1,700 people laughing.”

David Brooks, DTM, the 1990 World Champion of Public Speaking, advises factoring in audience reactions. “Don’t let the audience’s enjoyment of your speech put you at risk,” he says. “A chuckle in a big room is going to be two seconds. A decent laugh that is barely registered in a small group, if it is in a big group is going to be four seconds. A big laugh is going to be six or more seconds.

“So, go through your speech, rate your laughter, and put pauses in the margin: ‘plus 2, plus 4, plus 6, plus 8.’ As you’re practicing, stop and force yourself with a stopwatch to pause for that length of time before you resume.”

If you notice your speech is running long as you are speaking, having pre-planned content to cut can save you. Skipping a story or jumping to your conclusion can be effective strategies. Kyser, the member from Canada, prepares alternative shorter endings.

On the flip side, if you’re falling short on time because of speaking too fast or forgetting content, having an extra story or example ready can help fill the gap.

Another key to staying on track is paying attention to timing signals. Gotuaco admits that during his championship speech, he missed the moment the light turned red, leaving him unsure of how much time he had left. “I saw it turn yellow but missed when it turned red,” he recalls. Knowing where the timing signals are in the room and making frequent eye contact with the timer (and thus seeing the lights) give you a better chance of seeing the timing-signal changes.

Time Management in Professional Settings

Toastmasters isn’t just training speakers—it’s preparing professionals to deliver succinct, impactful messages. “Practicing time management in Toastmasters speeches has taught me to get to the point,” says Mildred Thill of Brownlee’s Best Club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

When a speaker goes over time, “That’s all I notice. I don’t hear them speaking anymore.”

—MILDRED THILL

A speech that’s too long detracts from its overall message. As Thill observes, when a speaker goes over time, “That’s all I notice. I don’t hear them speaking anymore.” Respecting your audience’s time is crucial, whether in a Toastmasters meeting or at a professional conference.

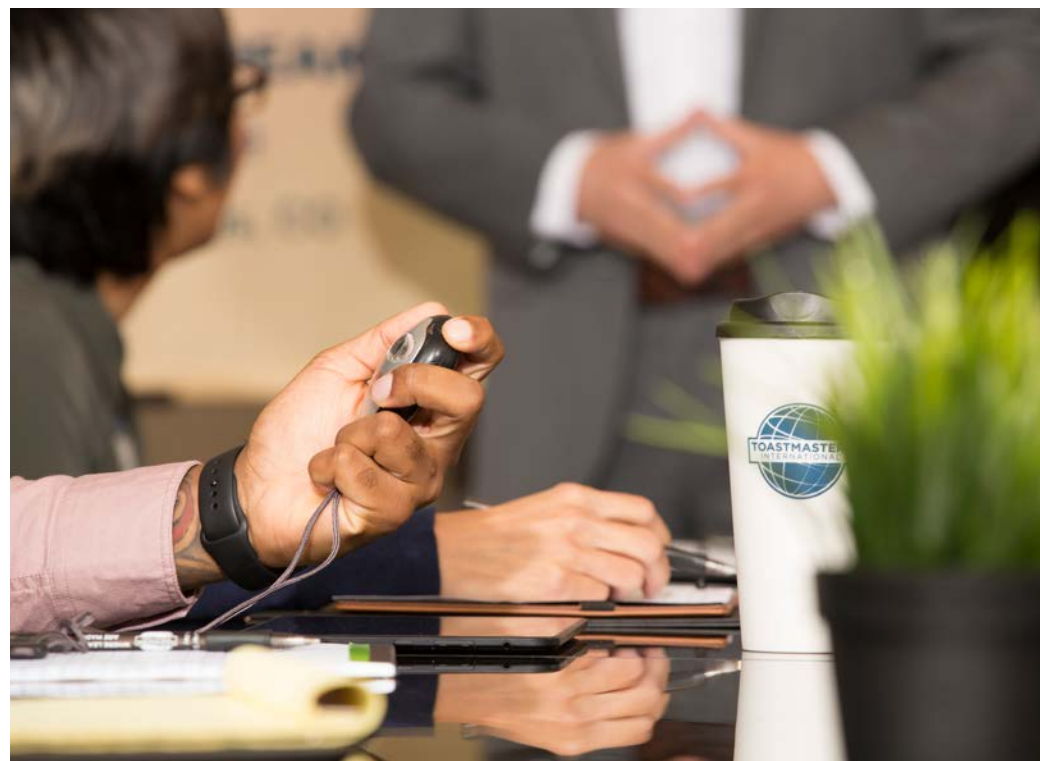
In professional settings, the focus isn’t always on how much time you’re allotted but rather on finishing by a specific time. For example, I once had a one-hour speaking slot before lunch, following the keynote speaker, who ran 20 minutes over. Instead of taking my full time, I cut my content to finish on schedule. It wasn’t my fault that the keynote speaker spoke long, but it would have been my fault to speak past the start of the lunch break.

To keep myself on track, I time myself using a clock app, Big Clock HD (iOS), which

simply tells the time in large digits without the screen going dark.

Mastering timing rules isn’t just about winning contests; it’s about mastering effective communication. Whether you’re speaking at a Toastmasters meeting, a conference, or a job interview, your ability to deliver a clear, concise message within the allotted time reflects respect and professionalism. In today’s fast-paced world, staying on time makes you a more skillful and respected communicator.

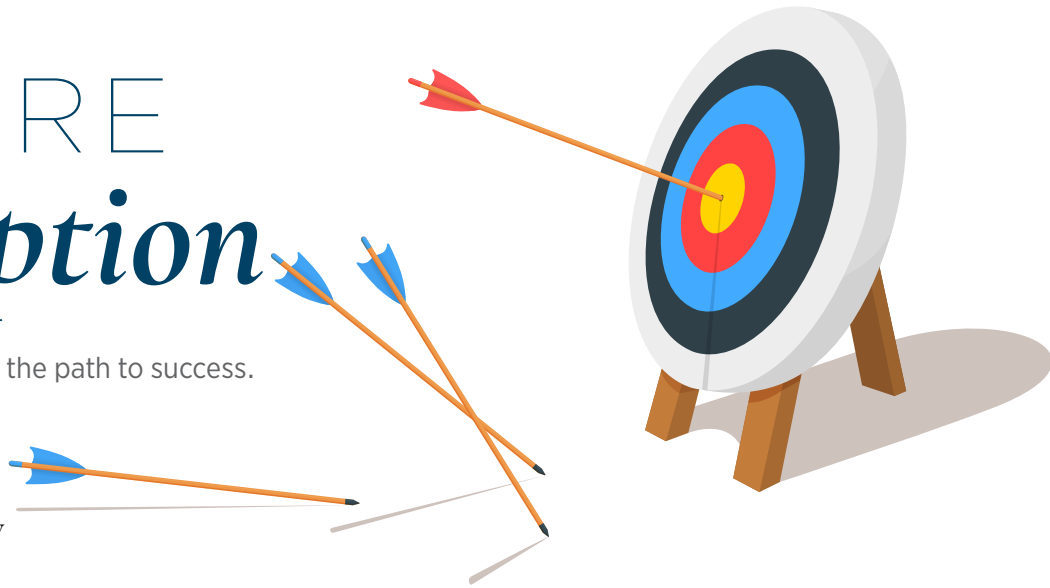
Diane Windingland, DTM, is a communication coach from Spring, Texas, and a member of two clubs: Frankly Speaking Toastmasters in Spring, Texas, and the online PowerTalk Toastmasters club. Learn more at virtuallanguagecoach.com.



FAILURE *Is an Option*

A setback may be the first step on the path to success.

By Greg Glasgow



Plagued by shyness and anxiety, renowned classical pianist and musical educator Yelena Balabanova, DTM, AS, twice failed her audition to the national music conservatory in her home country of Russia. This rejection forced her to wait three years to continue her studies despite finishing at her prior academy near the top of her class.

Amy Edmondson, the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School, suffered a similar setback in 1993, when she joined a new Harvard doctorate program in organizational behavior. As part of a team conducting studies on medication errors at Harvard Medical School, she was devastated when her hypothesis—that better-functioning teams would make fewer errors—was proven to be completely wrong.

“Soon I would find myself thinking, not for the first time, that maybe I wasn’t cut out for a

“Having confidence in a plan is much more important than having a dream of some high achievement.”

—YELENA BALABANOVA, DTM, AS

Ph.D. program,” Edmondson later recalled.

As daunting as those early failures were, both women now say they may not have achieved their current success without them. Failure can be heartbreaking, they say, but if you use it as a tool for learning and reflection, it can be invaluable.

“It’s hard to think of a worthwhile activity that you can excel in and be accomplished in that doesn’t require some failures,” Edmondson says. “Sports, science, cooking—if you want to be great at something hard, then you must be willing to fail at it. Even the best athletes on earth are winning just slightly more than half of their matches. We lie to ourselves when we think that we have to get it right the first time.”

Everyone experiences failure at some point in their life, whether it’s not landing a client, delivering a speech in less-than-stellar fashion, or not being offered the job you applied for. Although failure can be discouraging, it’s important to reflect on the experience and learn from it. There is a lot to be gained even if at first you don’t succeed.

Fear Factor

Why are we so afraid of failure? Simple: It’s embarrassing, it’s discouraging, and in a world

where the efforts of a collective are often emphasized, a failure feels very personal, triggering deep fears of being unliked or not accepted.

Balabanova emphasizes one key thing about failure: You soon get over it, so don’t let the fear of failure stop you from trying.

“Failure itself is not that big of an issue,” she says. “We get upset for a few days, maybe a month, but over time, you recover. The bigger issue is that we don’t even try, or don’t set a goal because of the fear of failure. If you really want to do something, you need to make a plan and follow your plan. It takes time, but having confidence in a plan is much more important than having a dream of some high achievement, but being scared that it won’t happen. That’s almost a guarantee that it won’t happen.”

Another guarantee is that everyone will fail at some point. That’s why it’s key to think about failure in advance and have a plan for what you’ll do when it happens.

In her work teaching piano to elementary school-age students and training them for competitions, Balabanova says, “I tell my students, ‘It happens to everyone sooner or later; this is what to expect, and this is what we will do about it.’”



“If you want to be great at something hard, then you must be willing to fail at it.”

—AMY EDMONDSON

Three Types of Failure

In her book *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well*, Edmondson separates failure into three categories. A *basic failure* is one with a single cause—you were scheduled to give a speech, and you neglected to prepare. A *complex failure* has multiple causes—the speaker before you ran over time, the computer you were using for your PowerPoint stopped working, or you got an emergency call from your kids’ school minutes before you were scheduled to start. Basic failures are typically preventable; complex failures may not be, but they don’t provide a lot of learning opportunities either. *Intelligent failures*, on the other hand, are the failures that provide the greatest lessons that can lead to future success.

“An intelligent failure is the undesired result of a thoughtful foray into new territory,” Edmondson says. “Maybe you’re giving your first talk in front of a real audience, you’ve prepared a lot, you’re a little nervous, then you get out there, and it falls flat. The things you thought would be funny weren’t funny.”

“[Intelligent failure] is a failure, but it’s a different type of failure from a basic or complex failure,” she continues. “You can think of it as an experiment or a first effort in new territory. And it’s a given that often the first effort in new territory will come up short.”

Tell the Story

The important thing about any failure, but especially intelligent failures, is to learn from them, Edmondson says. In the case of an intelligent failure, going into the task knowing you’re likely to fail removes a lot of the sting. Focus instead on what you can learn for your next attempt.

What’s the best way to begin the process of learning from failure?

“The most important question is ‘What happened?’” Edmondson says. “Tell the story as dispassionately as possible. Describe the series of events. We tend to jump to explanation or blame—we think we understand what went wrong. It’s important to start not with ‘why,’ but with ‘what.’ If you’re careful and thoughtful about going over what happened, you will see new things and things that you might have otherwise missed.”

Once you have the story straight, Edmondson says, “the next question is, what were some of the things I did that contributed to the failure? What did I do right, and what didn’t I do right?” Recognizing areas where you can improve will likely make things go more smoothly next time.

Experts say other important components of learning from failure include forgiving yourself, recognizing that failure is a part of life, giving yourself credit for trying, and realizing that other people are so wrapped up in their own lives that they aren’t likely to register—let alone remember—what might feel to you like the end of the world.

Hey, You Tried!

When the inevitable failure does come, Balabanova says, it’s important to celebrate the fact that you prepared and were brave enough to try, even if the outcome isn’t the one you wanted.

“You still have to reward yourself,” she says. “You still have to celebrate, because you played or performed or spoke or produced at a very high level, and you have grown tremendously through the preparation. It’s important to have the confidence that you did everything you could, that you had a plan and you actually fulfilled your plan. Then you will never fail, because what you learned and what you achieved is an enormous growth process that stays with you. It’s a win-win.”

Greg Glasgow is a Denver-based author and freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster*. His debut nonfiction book, *Disneyland on the Mountain: Walt, the Environmentalists, and the Ski Resort That Never Was*, was published in September 2023.





A Reel Celebration of Love

How romance-tinged speeches can light up the movie screen.

By Paul Sterman

My dad's favorite movie was *Casablanca*. He always smiled when he talked about the iconic ending of that 1942 film—the foggy scene at the airport where Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman gaze intently into each other's eyes.

When it comes to speeches on celluloid, you can't beat Bogie's passionate words about love, loyalty, and fighting Nazis, as he exhorts Bergman's character, Ilsa, to join her husband on a plane bound for Lisbon and freedom.

The lines he delivers to the radiant Swedish actress have become part of film legend. "We'll always have Paris." "The problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world." And that heart-melter at the end: "Here's looking at you, kid."

This month's Valentine's Day holiday got me thinking: What are some other well-known film speeches centered around love?

When I say "speech," I'm referring more to a monologue, or a lengthy passage within a zesty chunk of dialogue. It would be hard to stick a 5-7-minute presentation into a fast-moving rom-com. Instead, think Tom Cruise making his romantic living-room pitch to Renée Zellweger in the 1996 film *Jerry Maguire*, the scene culminating with his character's famous "You complete me" line—and her equally famed response, "You had me at hello."

Or the angsty emotion Julia Stiles brings to her reading of a poem in *10 Things I Hate About You*. Her character, Kat, wrote it about her classmate Patrick, played by Heath Ledger. "I hate it when you're not around and the

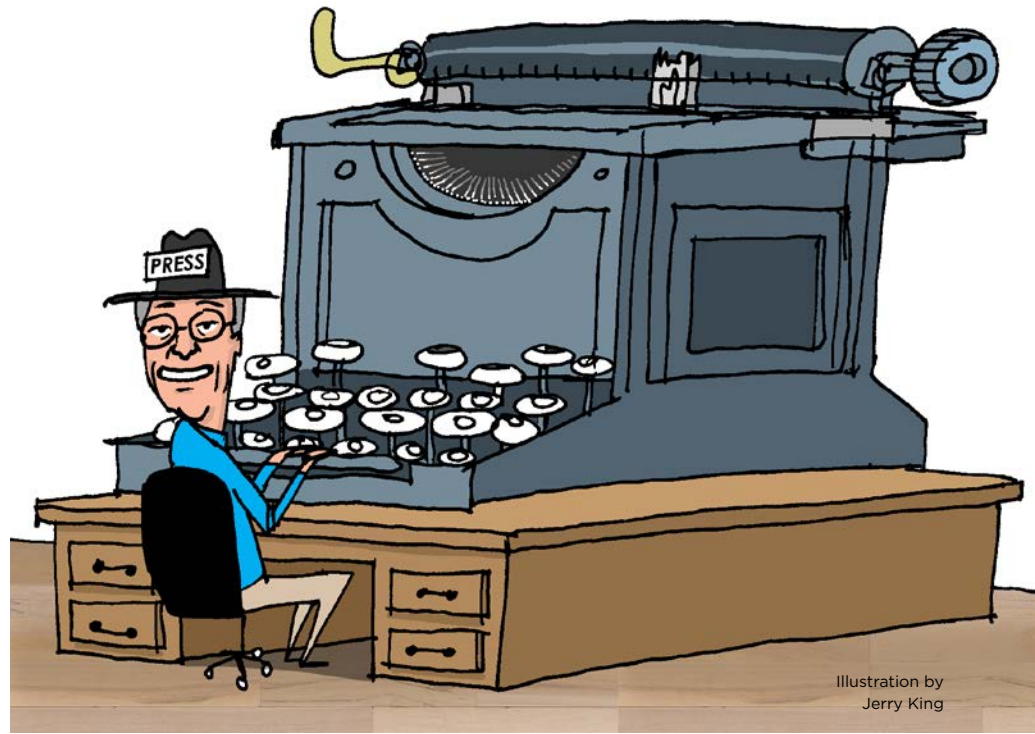


Illustration by
Jerry King

fact that you didn't call/But mostly I hate the way I don't hate you/Not even close/Not even a little bit/Not even at all."

As with any speech, when emoting about love there is power in specifics. Look at the details Billy Crystal reels off to Meg Ryan when his character confesses he's in love with her at the end of *When Harry Met Sally*:

I love that you get cold when it's 71 degrees out. I love that it takes you an hour and a half to order a sandwich. I love that you get a little crinkle above your nose when you're looking at me like I'm nuts. I love that after I spend a day with you, I can still smell your perfume on my clothes. And I love that you are the last person I want to talk to before I go to sleep at night.

I asked Past International President Morag Mathieson, DTM, for examples of the non-North American variety. Mathieson grew up in Scotland and now resides in Möhrendorf, Bavaria, Germany. She points to something different: an amusing exchange between buddies Gregory and Steve in *Gregory's Girl*, a 1981 Scottish coming-of-age romantic comedy.

In the film, the two characters are talking about falling in love. Asked when he fell in love, Gregory answers, "Bout half an hour ago. It's great. I feel restless and I'm dizzy. ... Bet I don't get any sleep tonight."

To which Steve replies, "That sounds more like indigestion."

What makes a love-themed monologue tug

Like strong public speakers, actors wring expressiveness out of a line, hit their message hard, and engage their audience.

effectively at the heartstrings? Leah Aldridge, a film professor in Southern California, sums it up quite nicely. Such a speech works, she told me, when the object of the speaker's words "feels precious, special, seen, valued, appreciated, adored; and it is communicated and expressed with sincerity."

Gifted actors, from Denzel Washington to Meryl Streep to Michelle Yeoh, put their own spin on a film speech. Like strong public speakers, they wring expressiveness out of a line, hit their message hard, and engage their audience. Of course, they're also aided by cinematic conventions like soft lighting, beautiful scenery (and people), swelling music, and savvy screenwriting.

There are so many more winning romantic monologues onscreen than I have the room to mention. What are some of your favorites, and why? Write me and let me know.

Here's looking at you, Toastmasters.

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM



You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

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