

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MARCH 2025

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INSIDE:

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Webinar



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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL*

9127 S. Jamaica St. #400, Englewood, CO, USA 80112
+1 720-439-5050

toastmasters.org

CONTACTING WORLD HEADQUARTERS

For information on joining or building a club, visit:

toastmasters.org/membership

Article submission:

submissions@toastmasters.org

Letters to the Editor:

letters@toastmasters.org

For general magazine questions:

magazine@toastmasters.org

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Build Membership With Small, Steady Steps

Toastmasters isn't a spectator sport. Watching and reading are helpful, but true growth only comes from active participation.

to participate in Table Topics after members have spoken. While some guests may initially feel hesitant, we never force them. Most often, they leave feeling included and excited to come back.

One critical point to remember: No matter how many members your club has, always run strong, engaging, and fun meetings. Guests won't join a club that doesn't feel well-organized or dynamic. Let's make our clubs places people want to be—a place of growth, support, and camaraderie.

Encourage others to visit your meetings. I don't see inviting people to join Toastmasters as "selling" a product—it's sharing a life-changing gift. Guests not only benefit themselves but also enrich our clubs with fresh perspectives and energy.

Have you taken the [Plus One Pledge](#)? If not, it's not too late. Invite a friend, colleague, or family member to your next meeting. Together, we can make our meetings more rewarding, vibrant, and impactful for everyone.

Radhi Spear, DTM
International President

Membership building is something we need to focus on from the moment a club is chartered. Does that sound unusual? You might wonder, *Why start so soon?* The answer is simple: Building and sustaining a strong membership base is key to a thriving club.

You don't need to rely solely on frequent open houses to draw new members, even though they can be effective. Simple, passive advertising can also make a big impact. For example, you could post a flier outside your company cafeteria, on a library bulletin board, or in any space with heavy foot traffic. Sharing club information in an electronic newsletter or displaying it on closed-circuit TVs in your office complex are also easy ways to spread the word. Small, consistent efforts like these can go a long way toward attracting new members.

If you check the [Statistics and Data Hub](#) on the Toastmasters International website, you'll see that the main reasons members leave Toastmasters are often out of our control—they change jobs, relocate, or experience life circumstances that prevent attendance. However, what we can control is ensuring our club stays vibrant and engaging, attracting new members to keep the energy alive.

Think about when our meetings are most fun. It's when we have a full house, and all participants are actively involved—fulfilling their meeting roles, delivering speeches from Pathways projects, and following Toastmasters' guidelines. Toastmasters isn't a spectator sport. Watching and reading are helpful, but true growth only comes from active participation.

Every club operates similarly, but the little differences are what make each unique. In my home club, for example, we encourage visitors

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Seen and Heard

Snapshot



Members of HNB Toastmasters Club in Colombo, Sri Lanka, visit an underground mine about 1,562 feet (476 meters) below the surface at Bogala Graphite Lanka PLC, a manufacturer and mining company based in Sri Lanka.

Traveling Toastmaster



Cristina Scoble, DTM, and Curtis Helt, DTM, both of Las Vegas, Nevada, show off their Toastmasters spirit while visiting the Sundial Bridge in Redding, California.



Anju Chhatwani of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, stops for a photo with some Toastmasters material while bicycling in Amsterdam.

COST-EFFECTIVE Marketing Techniques

Stay budget conscious while increasing your club's visibility.

By Laura Mishkind

Gaining new members is vital not only for clubs to thrive and expand but also to challenge and engage current members. Marketing your club doesn't need to be costly, so if your funds are on the low end, try a few of these low-cost techniques to attract new members.



Display your spirit.

Encourage questions by regularly using items from the [Toastmasters store](#)—slip on a shirt or jacket, don a hat, sip from a water bottle, display the centennial book or commemorative magazine, or wear a pin.



Host a potluck.

A simple incentive is offering food at a meeting. Keep costs low and ask every member to bring a dish to share. Advertise the event to entice guests to come see what Toastmasters is about while enjoying a tasty, free meal.



Use social media.

Social media platforms are one of the easiest ways to market your content for free! Yes, there are paid advertising options, but begin with generating organic traffic. Post frequently on your club's pages and share photos of members participating in meetings. Add photos and updates of your own progress to your personal pages too!



Embrace the Rotary alliance.

Connect with your local Rotary clubs to see if you can present about Toastmasters at one of their meetings, or consider creating a club for members of both organizations to join.



Follow up with guests.

Send a [follow-up email](#) or make a call to everyone who visits your club. Getting them in the door may be the first step, but you want to keep them coming back—it's essentially continuous marketing.



Emphasize membership benefits.

Talk up Toastmasters whenever you can! This can be speaking with a potential member or simply a friend. Tell them how Toastmasters helped you as an individual.



Host a Table Topics to brainstorm recruitment tactics.

Ask club members to share their ideas for recruiting new members in a special Table Topics session. This could make the meeting more fun and give members the opportunity to share their ideas or play off something someone else said.



Start a member referral program.

Ask every member to invite a friend to a meeting. Challenge everyone to bring a guest at some point during the year, similar to Toastmasters' [Plus One Pledge](#).



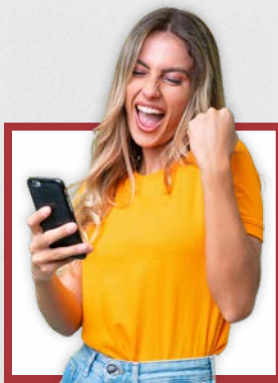
Host an open house.

Showcase all Toastmasters has to offer with an open house event. Advertise it in your community and online. Toastmasters International has [templates for fliers](#) that can be printed out at low cost or shared on social media.



Build community engagement.

Create connections in your community by attending local events, such as a farmers market or a university club fair. Look into setting up an informational booth and garner attention with items from the [Toastmasters Store](#), such as balloons.



Respond to Find A Club inquiries.

The new [Prospective Membership Management](#) page allows all club officers to see Find A Club contacts, review when someone has scheduled a visit, and assign an officer to reach out to each contact to ensure no one is missed. Take advantage of this tool and connect with prospective members. The [Prospective Member Conversion Guide](#) has all the resources you need, including an email template!



Add testimonials to your website.

Take the opportunity to lean on [digital storytelling](#) through videos and pictures. Record a few members explaining why they joined Toastmasters and what they have gained from being part of the club and post them on your club's website. Encourage members to share on their social media, and send to friends and coworkers who might be interested.

Rising to the Occasion

Connections between baking and communication skills.

By Sam Hughes

On a quiet night, with bread dough rising on my counter, I logged in to my first Toastmasters meeting. I find comfort in the patient process of baking, and was struck by how similar it felt to step into this new environment. Both endeavors require structure, care, and a willingness to try, even when success isn't guaranteed.

Baking has been a passion of mine for years. While I mostly bake as a hobby, I have also worked in bakery settings. Bread is my true love in baking, and the process of making it helped me see how similar it was to communication.

Attending a Toastmasters meeting was the perfect way to begin my journey to improve my communication skills. I visited the Portland Club in Portland, Oregon, and noticed the inclusive and supportive atmosphere. The space emphasized exploration, allowing members to find what resonates and grow in their own time.

Preparing the Ingredients: Building a Foundation

Baking isn't just about throwing ingredients together—it's about understanding the why behind each step. Allowing dough to rest gives it time to rise, while folding butter into pastry dough creates flaky layers. Mastery comes from repetition and thoughtful adjustments, building confidence over time.

Similarly, being involved in Toastmasters allows you to follow a carefully crafted program that provides a reliable foundation for experimentation. The different meeting roles provide a variety of ways for members to practice and refine their communication skills. This structured yet flexible approach mirrors the precision of baking where following the

recipe provides consistency, but creativity allows for personal flair. Like a well-tested recipe, Toastmasters' structure creates a sense of safety, making it easier for participants to try, learn, and grow.

Letting the Dough Rise: Practicing Patience

Great bakers know the importance of catering to their audience. A child's birthday calls for cheerful cupcakes; a dinner party might demand a rustic sourdough loaf. Communication is no different—it's about learning who your audience is and understanding what resonates with them.

This principle comes alive during Toastmasters speeches. For example, humor and storytelling allow you to connect with your audience on a deeper level, and, like baking, they take time to learn and perfect.

Perfecting the Bake: Timing and Precision

In baking, timing can mean the difference between a perfectly golden loaf and a burnt crust. The dough can't be rushed. It needs time to rise and bake to perfection.

Toastmasters mirrors this principle. Members practice giving speeches within specific timeframes, which helps them perfect their speaking skills and develop discipline in communication. Managing time, whether in baking or communication, is about finding harmony between preparation and execution.

Sharing the Loaf: Connecting With Your Audience

Effective communication isn't just about



Sam Hughes

speaking—it's about listening deeply and truly hearing others. From giving a speech evaluation to performing a meeting role like grammarian or Ah-Counter, members learn how to engage actively and attentively.

The Portland Club has a Listener role. Tasked with taking notes throughout the session and quizzing participants at the end, the Listener ensures that everyone stays engaged. Just as breaking bread brings people together, sharing your message with an audience creates a bond—a moment of connection and understanding that lingers long after the speech ends.

Learning From the Burnt Batches: Embracing Growth

As I shaped my risen dough that evening, I reflected on the lessons I learned from both baking and Toastmasters. Both demand patience, practice, and intention. Just as every baker faces a loaf that doesn't rise or a batch that comes out burnt, communicators encounter missteps and moments that deviate from the plan.

These "burnt batches" hold the most valuable lessons, teaching us to adjust, refine, and try again with newfound insight. Whether it's a speech that missed the mark or a loaf that didn't turn out as hoped, the journey of learning, improving, and sharing unites us—through a freshly baked loaf of bread or a heartfelt message crafted over time.

Sam Hughes is a Portland-based writer and baker who has been kneading dough and perfecting recipes for over 15 years. When not experimenting in the kitchen, Sam finds inspiration in community building and lifelong learning.



Turning Guests Into Members

Solutions for your questions and queries.

By Bill Brown, DTM

One of the biggest challenges for Toastmasters clubs is recruiting new members. In fact, it's one of the most common questions I hear. There are many reasons guests might not join, but luckily, there are also many ways to combat that challenge and grow your club.

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

What are some factors stopping guests from becoming members?

People join Toastmasters for their own reasons. If someone doesn't join, they most likely don't see how they can achieve their goals within the Toastmasters program.

Interestingly enough, some people don't want to join because they lack confidence. Of course, Toastmasters is a program that helps you get over that, but not everyone sees where the program can help, and some lack the confidence to even start. Other visitors may not come back because they are not motivated to improve. They may say that they are, but deep down inside, they aren't all that motivated.

Another common reason is that people don't think they have time to devote to the program. Let's face it: If you want to get maximum benefit from the Toastmasters system, you have to put in the time. Writing out a quick script the night before and then reading it at your meeting is not as beneficial as spending time studying the particular Pathways lesson, crafting a speech, and then practicing it. If someone is busy, they might not think they have time for the program.

Schedules are another big factor. One reason people don't want to visit my club is that we meet at 6:30 in the morning. That is either not convenient for them or they have other responsibilities at that time of the day, like getting kids ready for school.

Lastly, some guests may not come back because they don't fit well with the personality of the group. Each club is unique. Perhaps a different club would be better for them. Encourage guests to use the [Find a Club](#) feature to explore other options. And the good news for you is that there are people out there who do want what your club has to offer. Just keep inviting and you will find them.

How can you encourage guests to become members?

In my experience, there is not one easy technique that can quickly turn most guests into members. I think the key is to find out why a visitor took time out of their day to attend your meeting.

My club meets early in the morning. There must be a reason why a guest dragged themselves to a meeting. Can you show them how they can satisfy that reason within the Toastmasters program?

Why might someone seek out Toastmasters? One common reason is to gain confidence in front of a group. Another reason is that some folks recognize that they need better speaking skills for their job. I was in a club once where a member was in danger of losing her job and needed to join Toastmasters. Needless to say, she joined.

There are many reasons why someone might seek out Toastmasters. But how do you uncover that for a particular guest?

Here is the method I employed when I was a Club President: At the beginning of each meeting, I asked any guest to stand and share their name, what they did for work, and what brought them there that day. That last component is their reason for attending. And all members, especially the Vice President Membership, should pay attention to that answer.

As the meeting was ending, I asked each guest to stand and tell the group how they liked it. After a meeting, talk with any guests about how the club can help them. If they are not quite ready to join, invite them back. You will soon find out if they are interested. Those are the members that you want.

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

Leadership Skills at the Top

How Toastmasters roles shaped four women on the Executive Committee.

By Laura Amann

Women play an interesting role in Toastmasters leadership. Although women were not admitted as members until 1973 (with the first female International President taking office in 1985), they are

quickly making up time—in 2025, four of the five top Board of Directors members (the Executive Committee) are women. And none were born in North America.

2023–2024 International President Morag Mathieson, DTM, was followed by 2024–2025 International President

Radhi Spear, DTM. Aletta Rochat, DTM, is the International President-Elect, and Gauri Seshadri, DTM, is the Second Vice President.

Their leadership experiences have changed their lives in ways they could have never anticipated, and often in ways that are unique to women.



Reasons for Joining

There are many reasons people join Toastmasters, but it's safe to say that no one goes to their first club meeting with the goal of being International President someday.

Although it's hard to imagine now, Seshadri and Spear, who are both from India, joined Toastmasters to become more comfortable speaking in front of people and gain confidence. Both joined after they moved to the United States and were conscious of the fact that Americans spoke more directly than they were used to.

"While my English is good, I knew I had to be more confident, more assertive," says Seshadri, who now lives in Bangalore, India. "I was missing opportunities at work. I realized I was the biggest obstacle in my own path of success."

Spear, who lives in Piscataway, New Jersey, also felt she needed to gain confidence in communicating, particularly as a woman in the male-dominant telecommunications field.

For Mathieson, of Möhrendorf, Germany, and Rochat, of Cape Town, South Africa, the reasons were different.

They didn't have any fear of public speaking—in fact, both were attracted to Toastmasters because they enjoyed communicating and wanted to find people with the same interest.

Mathieson had relocated from England to Germany, and wanted to meet new people and network with others.

Rochat went to her first meeting after years of being home raising her children. "It was just a fun evening out," Rochat recalls. "But when I got there, I was just blown away. They were so articulate, so funny. I knew I could learn; I knew it was the place for me."

Breaking Down Barriers

While all four women admit they see themselves as leaders first, rather than women leaders, they also all recognize the significance of their role, especially because none of them were born in North America.

"As a woman, I find many women come to me, and say 'because you're doing this we know it's possible.' This is especially true as a woman from outside North America," says Mathieson.

"When you look back [at life], you're not likely to regret trying and failing but far more likely to regret never even trying."

RADHI SPEAR, DTM

2024-2025 INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT



Takeaways on Leadership:

- Everyone's leadership journey is different; there is no "right" way to do it.
- Even people who initially join Toastmasters with a fear of public speaking can one day be International President.
- Don't be afraid to say yes to opportunities, particularly if someone is encouraging you.
- Impostor syndrome can appear at any level, but growth doesn't happen if you don't challenge yourself.
- Toastmasters allows you to practice challenging leadership skills and experiment with new approaches in a safe space.



Rochat will be the first International President from Africa, something she finds incredibly exciting and hopes will encourage others to see international leadership as a possibility.

Seshadri admits that for years she was reluctant to participate in anything too women-centric, such as International Women's Day celebrations—preferring to be seen as a leader, rather than a woman leader. But she now realizes the value of stepping up.

"If I come forward there might be other people in India or Asia who look at me and think *If Gauri can do it, so can I*. If I could help at least one person, that would be amazing."

Life-Changing Impact of Their Leadership Journey

Mathieson, Spear, and Rochat all quickly jumped into club leadership roles, but it took Seshadri four years before she felt confident enough to do so.

The ascension from club officer to Executive Committee member looks different for everyone. Regardless of

the path, the impact of the leadership roles—the skills gained, the people met, the experiences—has enhanced each of their lives.

All four women say that unquestionably they would not be where they are today in all areas of their lives without having been in a Toastmasters leadership position.

Mathieson, who was a longtime manager and executive in the pharmacy industry, became involved in a charity in Germany and served as chair of their board, something she says she never would have dared to do before her experience as a Toastmasters leader.

"I put myself in front of things in a way I wouldn't have before. The confidence kind of creeps up on you—you don't realize it's happening."

Spear, who works in the electrical engineering field, used the communication and leadership skills, as well as the confidence she gained through Toastmasters leadership, to advance her career, allowing her to become involved in resolving more critical challenges and be recognized as a subject-matter expert.

"In America, people speak with such confidence," she says. "And sometimes you know they're wrong, but they're so confident. And a lot of women, including

"It all starts with putting your hand up. If you don't do that, you don't get that growth; you have to do that zone of discomfort."

ALETTA ROCHAT, DTM

2024–2025 INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT-ELECT



me, sell themselves short. For me, it was cultural as well as my personality.”

For Rochat and Seshadri, their journey in leadership led them to completely new careers.

When Rochat joined Toastmasters, she was raising her children, having left her career in marketing management. Within a year, she was coaching clients on public speaking skills. She soon established her own business as a coach and trainer, helping clients build executive presence, as well as communication and leadership skills.

“None of those things would have happened without Toastmasters,” she says. “I even got my first client through a connection at my club.”

Like Spear, Seshadri was also in the engineering field and working in the U.S. when she joined. She has since moved back to India and changed career paths a few times, with each change being due to a connection she made in Toastmasters.

Her current industry is game-based training, and the company she works for is not only run by former Toastmasters but the founder used to be her mentee. He had been encouraging her to go into the training field for years.

“Toastmasters gave me the confidence,” she says. “But it also gave me skills like motivation, teamwork, strategic planning, thinking, and an understanding of diverse cultures.”

Encouraging Others

To anyone who is thinking about leadership, or is being “voluntold” or encouraged to be a leader, Mathieson states, “Think about saying yes before you say no. *What would it mean if I said yes? What doors would open?*”

“What [leadership] did for me was grow my confidence and belief in myself. In the beginning, I wasn’t putting my hand up. I was happy to do things. But I

always felt there was someone out there better than me. I realize now it’s necessary for us to put our hand up. There’s room for everyone at the table.”

Spear notes that members receive training for every role, and leaders practice those skills in Toastmasters’ safe, supportive environment. She encourages everyone to embrace the opportunity.

“In life, it’s easy to doubt yourself—feeling not good enough, smart enough, knowledgeable enough, or fast enough—and let that fear hold you back,” she states. “But when you look back, you’re not likely to regret trying and failing but far more likely to regret never even trying.”

Rochat’s philosophy has always been to simply make herself available, taking the attitude of: If I’m elected, I’ll do the role, if not, that’s okay.

“It all starts with putting your hand up,” she says. “If you don’t do that, you don’t get that growth; you have to do that zone of discomfort. None of [my leadership experience] was planned, and none of it would have happened if I hadn’t said yes.

“The journey you take at Toastmasters puts you on a journey to meet new people and experience new things. It’s incredibly enriching to be part of this organization, to interface with people all over the world.”

As Seshadri says, “When you interact with our global membership, you deepen your understanding of adapting your communication and leadership skills to diverse audiences. You learn how you work across different cultures.

“Toastmasters gives you a safe space to practice the skills. That gave me confidence, opened doors, created new opportunities for me. I was able to jump into roles and experiment with what I wanted to do outside of Toastmasters.”

Laura Amann is managing editor of the *Toastmaster magazine*.

“Toastmasters gives you a safe space to practice the skills. That gave me confidence, opened doors, created new opportunities for me.”

GAURI SESHADRI, DTM

2024–2025 SECOND VICE
PRESIDENT



“The confidence kind of creeps up on you—you don’t realize it’s happening.”

MORAG MATHIESON, DTM

2023–2024 INTERNATIONAL
PRESIDENT



Build a **Rock Star** **Mentoring Program**

Having strong mentors helps clubs and members grow and stay vibrant.

By Marty Dickinson

Is your Toastmasters club struggling to attract visitors and convert guests to new members? Are your established members losing their enthusiasm for attending meetings?

The dilemma of club growth has been a challenge since Toastmasters began. However, the solution has been with us nearly as long: having a rock star-level mentoring program.

People want to join clubs that are growing, that positively impact the lives of their members, and that retain their members. Good mentoring makes all three of those elements possible—it is, in fact, the very glue that holds them in place.

New members benefit from good mentoring by knowing they're not alone in their

personal growth pursuit. They quickly gain confidence when they realize someone can help them overcome challenges they once faced. Additionally, mentees who feel like they are part of a supportive family from day one are more likely to continue their membership for years instead of only a few months.

Current members benefit from mentoring new members, finding a sense of gratitude and satisfaction as their mentees progress in skills and confidence over months and even years. And mentoring is an important skill in the workplace too, helping companies improve employee engagement, have more productive teams, and harness people's potential.

Tips for a Strong Mentor Program

It's never too late to start or revive a mentor program in your club. Over the years, I have mentored hundreds of new members and mentors. When I became the Vice President Membership (VPM) of the Professional Presenters Toastmasters club in Denver, Colorado, in July 2020, our club had recently, and nervously, reinstated our in-person meetings. We had only 12 members but within two years, we had more than doubled our membership.

What was the magic dust that brought us results? A renovated mentoring program. I encourage all clubs to take these three steps to develop a strong mentor program.

Step 1: Appoint a Coordinator

No one person needs to shoulder all the work to start or revitalize your mentoring program. However, at least one person needs to make

a total commitment to the project, and to getting everyone excited. It should be someone who has inspirational energy, as in: "Let's do this! We're going to grow this club starting today and the key is deploying a rock star mentoring program!"

The VPM role is the most likely one to oversee a club mentoring program, since that position already has the responsibility of inspiring visitors to join and current members to stay, and a mentor program aligns with that mission. However, if there's someone in your club who loves to help members support each other and has a gift for recognizing people's talents, consider appointing them as your member-mentor coordinator.

Step 2: Choose Your Mentors Carefully

Of course, you need people who will be mentors in addition to a person who coordinates

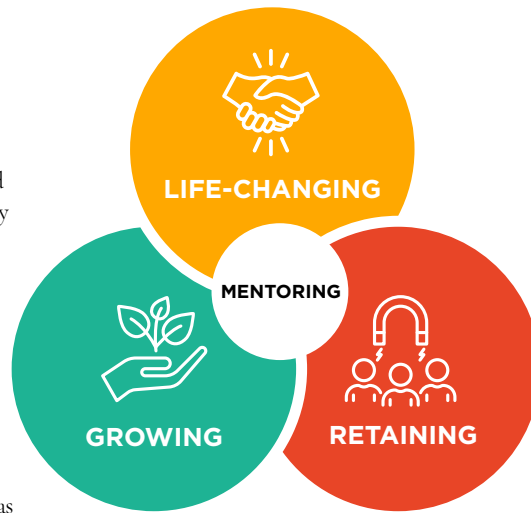
the program. In my education session at the 2024 International Convention in Anaheim, California, I shared how one member in our club jumped at the opportunity to serve as a mentor. Regrettably, he envisioned meetings with his assigned mentees as an opportunity to force-date our female members. Of course, he was promptly asked to leave the club. Mentors should be carefully vetted and selected.

Look for potential candidates possessing the following traits:

- **Understanding of mentoring responsibility.** Mentoring a new member is an important responsibility that should not be taken lightly. A mentoring arrangement gone bad can cause the new member to disengage and leave the club. Conversely, a good mentor can inspire an otherwise skeptical member to push through their initial fears and anxiety and continue to grow in their skills for years to come.



- **Adherence to your club's culture.** Good mentor candidates consistently perform meeting roles and observe protocols in line with how the club operates. They show up early to meetings and are seen answering the questions of new members and guests. Recruit members who produce energetic and fun meetings to be your mentors, so that they encourage other members to do the same.
- **Matches well with member.** The right mentor-member match could be life-changing for both people when they share a common interest, background, or challenge. For example, someone who experiences debilitating nervousness when public speaking might benefit from a mentor who once experienced the same anxiety but has since developed strategies to manage it. A new member who has recently been promoted to a sales position at work would find it helpful to be paired with a mentor who improved their sales skills through Toastmasters.
- **Willingness to invest their time to benefit others.** Possibly the most important trait for good mentors is *wanting* to serve as a



The Perfect Club

mentor. A mentor who's forced or guilted into the role will probably fall short of expectations and neglect their mentee. Good mentors look forward to spending time with those they are guiding.

Step 3: Train Your Mentors and Monitor Progress

Nobody told me I even had a mentor when I joined my first Toastmasters club in 1991. When it came time for me to mentor someone else, I had no clue how to do it right. I had to ask others and formulate my own plan. Avoid letting new mentors figure out what to do on their own. Their role in helping other members is too important.

Here are tips on how to train your mentors:

- **Write a checklist.** Compile a checklist of what the mentor should cover with their mentee. A cloud-based storage platform, such as Google Drive or Dropbox, makes it easy to continually add to the list and allow it to be shared with others. This creates a set of consistent expectations for all mentors and members.

Some of my favorite areas to include in the checklist are: scheduling a first meeting; discovering the new member's reasons for joining; explaining how club meetings function; helping them choose a Pathways path; scheduling the Ice Breaker speech early; and sitting next to them the first time they perform major roles.
- **Create a timeline.** Divide your checklist into phases of a member's Toastmasters journey, from the first get-to-know-you meeting to first club meetings, meeting roles, and speeches. One idea is to challenge new members to attend every meeting for at least a full year, because that's how long it takes for speaking to become part of you.
- **Define your expectations.** Ensure your mentors know to anticipate that all mentees will need initial handholding. Personally, I will typically invite my mentee out to lunch or coffee so that we really get to know each other. I'll even buy!

After the initial meeting, encourage mentors to be proactive in their communications for several meetings and then to simply be available for questions once the new member has performed all roles. If a new member doesn't think they need a mentor, use the term "onboarding partner," a person who gives short-term assistance for transitioning into the club smoothly.



- **Provide support and inspiration.** One of the most important actions you can take as a mentor trainer is to provide assurance to your new mentors that they can learn to be great at this. Make it a point to check in with your mentors to see how they feel their relationship is progressing with the mentee. How are they getting along with each other? Is the mentee receptive to suggestions provided by the mentor? A good VPM should be occasionally asking similar questions of the new member.

The power of a strong Toastmasters mentoring

program extends far beyond meeting roles and Ice Breakers. Good mentoring permeates every aspect of a member's tenure from the moment they see your club listing on your club website to members receiving their DTM and beyond.

Become the catalyst today for your club's mentoring program. Assure mentors are carefully selected and well trained. You will see the rewards almost immediately as more visitors want to join your club. And they'll be in good hands after they join.

Some day they, too, will use what they learned in Toastmasters to serve as a mentor

to others. Now that's a rock star member-mentoring program!

Marty Dickinson is a member of Professional Presenters Toastmasters in Denver, Colorado, and speaks professionally to business owners. He is also the founder of *Speakers Speak LIVE*, a weekly event for professional speakers on Zoom, and the author of *Lions Always Win: How to Spot What You Want in Your Professional Speaking Business and Life... and Get It Too*. Connect with Marty on [LinkedIn](#) and request his complete mentoring checklist.



For more inspiration, check out the Toastmasters [Mentoring](#) manual.



4

Influencers of Membership Retention

Knowing what your members value is the key to a vibrant club.

By Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM

Do you remember what you came looking for at your very first Toastmasters meeting? Think back to when you didn't know what to expect. How did you feel?

Reflecting on your Toastmasters experience since, did you find what you were looking for? Do you know someone who did not?

Making sure members are able to achieve their goals and get the fulfillment they need out of their Toastmasters journey is key to clubs being able to keep members for many years.

A Positive Start

I vividly remember going to my first meeting—it was also the first meeting of Twinspirations Toastmasters Club, a hybrid club in Ohio that was just chartering and would become my home club. And I was the first speaker at that first meeting! My palms were cold and moist, my voice trembled, and my heart drummed against my ribs as I shared my love of gardening in my Ice Breaker speech, “A Place of My Own.”

Afterward, I received a surprise bigger than the positive encouragement people gave me—a fellow member, 80-year-old Barb Baumgartner, asked me to be her mentor. “I want to stay young, and I know you can help me be just that!” she told me. Her words transformed my perception of who I was, and why I thought people joined Toastmasters.

Robin Walshesky joined Progressive Messengers, a corporate club in Ohio, in 2016.

Despite describing herself as a “loud, outgoing, talkative person,” she needed to find a way to overcome the fear that enveloped her every time she got up to speak, especially in a formal setting. Through the support and mentorship from club members, she earned a promotion, became an ordained minister, and officiated two weddings—all in one year.

Maurice “Mo” Holloway, also a member of Progressive Messengers, returned to Toastmasters after eight years away to refine his presentation skills, but stayed because he enjoyed being part of an incredible group “where support and encouragement were almost unbelievable—magical,” he says. He loved the vulnerable stories members shared about themselves, allowing them to build trust and comfort with one another over time.

Why People Join Toastmasters

Barb, Robin, Mo, and I joined for different reasons, and we all invested time and effort to achieve our goals. But we also all found something well beyond our expectations, and much of that was due to supportive club environments and enriching educational and growth experiences.

People join a club for a variety of reasons—some are looking for opportunities to grow their communication or leadership skills; some want to learn something new; some are looking for a group of people with similar interests.

When members decide not to renew, it

may be because they already accomplished their goals or found the club, or program, not aligned with their expectations; however, the majority do so for a reason out of the club's control: Their schedule has changed, they have a new life circumstance, or they felt it was too much work.

While club leaders cannot control unexpected events, they can ensure members are committed to their goals, understand the resources available, and receive encouragement along the way.

What Members Want and Need

Over the years I have studied what makes people stay in their clubs, a topic I spoke about at the 2024 Toastmasters International Convention. I have compiled four of what I call “key influencers” that affect the value and success of each member. If clubs and leaders can tap into these areas, they can positively influence the experience of every member.

- **Education** – helping members learn and grow through Pathways
- **Environment** – ensuring everyone feels welcomed and has a sense of belonging
- **Enrichment** – including programming for members to learn from people outside of their club

- **Empowerment** – providing opportunities for members to continue to grow after achieving their original goals

Let's look at these four influencers to better understand what club leaders and members can do to make their club strong, healthy, and vibrant—one that people want to join and stay with.

Education

People join Toastmasters to enhance their communication and leadership skills. There are many ways this happens, so make sure guests and new members know about the opportunities.

- **Pathways** – Toastmasters' education program offers a variety of paths and projects, and is fully customizable. In addition to its expansive content, Pathways is a self-paced, structured program, allowing each member to learn at their own pace to achieve their individualized goals.
- **Experiential learning** – Toastmasters learn by doing, without teachers or trainers. We grow not only through delivering speeches but also through evaluations—which enrich

our active listening skills and help us focus on what makes an impactful speech—and club meeting roles.

- **Leadership opportunities** – Anyone can be a club officer, and Toastmasters provides resources to help you understand how to successfully navigate these positions. [The Club Success Plan](#), [Distinguished Club Program](#), and a variety of other resources help you understand your members' needs, and how to create a quality club. Don't forget to use them!

Environment

A Toastmasters club isn't just about learning, it's also about feeling and belonging. When a guest or a new member attends, they probably feel slightly anxious, but if they are welcomed warmly and have meaningful interactions with other members, they will feel encouraged and comfortable. It's nearly impossible to learn and grow if you are in an environment where you don't feel welcomed or valued.

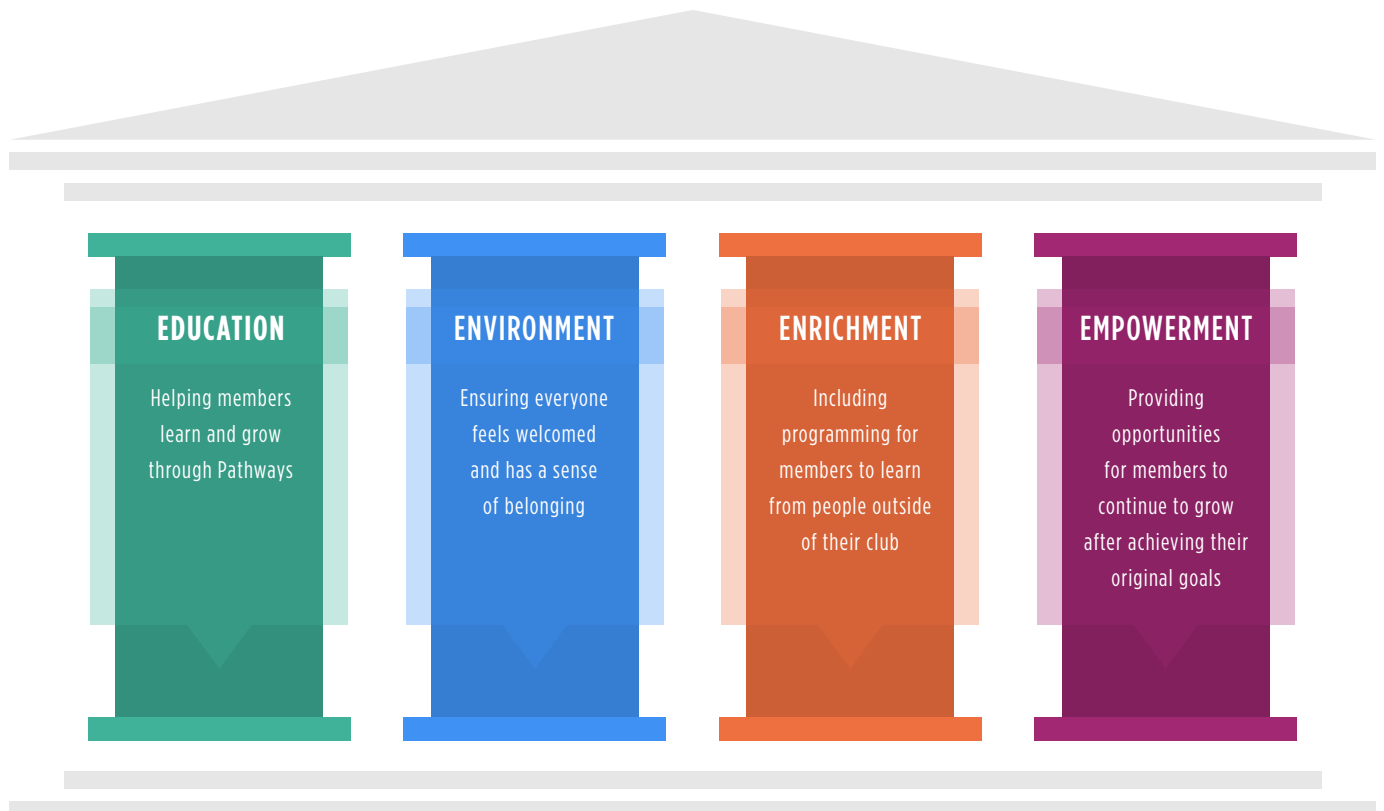
- **Physical** – The location, accessibility, seating, audio/visual resources—all of these make

your first impressions that much more impactful. If it's hard to find the meeting location or link, or there aren't enough seats, or there is no way for someone in a wheelchair or walker to access your space, people are likely to be turned off.

- **Social** – Consider how you greet people. Is there a warm welcome? Are there meaningful interactions between members? Are you helping guests and new members find a place to sit and introducing them to others? Are you extending the same warmth in virtual environments?
- **Cultural** – We need to have a respect for diversity in all its forms and make a conscious effort at being inclusive. The cultural aspect of our environment is vitally important; you want guests and members to feel like they belong at your meeting, as persons. And we all grow from hearing stories from other cultures.

As an immigrant, non-native speaker of English in the United States, I have found members in my online Speak to Lead Toastmasters club to be kindred spirits—

Key Influencers for Membership Longevity



members such as Sundari Chilukuri, Srilata Mootha, Tazul Shaik, and Umesh Yalavarthy. They say the same. We have similar barriers to overcome and goals to achieve.

Since joining the club, these members have found freedom from self-doubt, made close friends, and felt an impact on their lives. Some enjoy the structure and support, some the momentum of growth and learning, and others the professional skills they have gained.

Enrichment

Some members want a little more than what the club and club meetings have to offer, or the meetings and members need to be energized differently. How do you make that happen?

- **Special events** – Invite a guest speaker, host an open house, have a joint club meeting. Allow your members to be exposed to new people and new ways of thinking and doing.
- **Field trips** – Go outside your club. If we are only confined to our meeting rooms, we are limiting the fundamental aspect of Toastmasters—experiential learning. We are influencers and we are leaders, and opportunities to equip ourselves for life are all around us.
- **Celebrations** – Celebrating events or occasions is so enriching! Recognizing achievements and milestones is a golden approach to enhancing morale.
- **Mentorship** – A strong mentor program is enormously beneficial, both for the mentors

and the mentees. Both groups gain important skills and perspectives and grow through the mentor-mentee relationship. I know I have reached this level of progress because of so many mentors who believed in me.

“I initially joined Toastmasters to enhance my ability to organize my thoughts and communicate clearly,” says Stephanie Hill, Vice President Education of the online club Diversity 4 Success Toastmasters. “Over time, my purpose has evolved. Now I am driven by a desire to help others grow and discover their own voices.”

Empowerment

How are we helping our members continue to grow and get more out of Toastmasters? Challenging opportunities like these can be the answer.

- **Stretch assignments** – Speechcraft, the Youth Leadership Program, and *Interpersonal Communication* are great ways for experienced members to help non-members learn valuable communication skills.
- **Leadership** – Look beyond the club level for many opportunities to hone leadership skills—Areas, Divisions, and Districts offer many ways for members to get valuable experience in a variety of skills. Equally important are testimonials where members bring back stories of how they applied their Toastmasters learning outside of the meeting room.

When a seasoned member feels their personal, professional, and social goals are being met, they are likely to step out of their comfort zone, try something new, and thus grow in unexpected ways.

“I loved writing and delivering speeches, but that was secondary to learning how to inspire, motivate, and lead people,” says Wendi Polman, DTM, a former Division N Director in Ohio. “I found that leading at a club level was different than at an Area, Division, or District. Each level brought new learnings and experiences that I incorporated into all aspects of my life.”

Applying These Concepts

Think about your club in terms of these four areas. How are you measuring up? Opportunities abound within each of these key influencers.

- Find what you are already doing in your club, and what you might want to try.
- Match activities, programs, and resources to member needs and talents.
- Create avenues for engagement and involvement.
- Appreciate authenticity. Recognize effort.
- Ask for feedback, formally and informally.
- Define, refine, and evolve—pivot to adapt to new ways of thinking, doing, and being.

Paying attention to the four areas of influence brings extraordinary value to our Toastmasters experience. When guests or new members come to a meeting, we need them to be engaged and excited about the potential—the potential of the program, of the club, of their ability to reach their goals and gain self-confidence. Through our efforts, we help them visualize a future where the skills and competencies they learn at the club unfold in powerful ways.

Success is the sum of small iterative efforts on a continuum. Use these building blocks to design the Toastmasters experience of choice for yourself and your club members.

Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM, is a Past District 10 Director and has earned the Distinguished Toastmaster award four times. She is a member of six clubs, and having completed all 11 paths in Pathways, she is currently working on a second round of the program. She is an IT leader; a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) ambassador; an advocate for lean management principles; and a mentor. She lives in Aurora, Ohio.



Club Marketing Resources

Use this helpful guide to grow your membership.



Looking to attract guests but don't know where to start? World Headquarters has a bevy of helpful resources to get you going—from email templates to PowerPoints to corporate brochures.

The online [Club Marketing Guide](#) has a roundup of all the helpful resources for membership building. Here are a few to get your wheels turning.

Share Your Meeting Info

Looking for a flier to hang in the office or at the library? Print or email the [Prospective Member Flier](#) to easily explain the benefits of Toastmasters and share your meeting information.

Learn the Steps for Converting Guests

Unsure of how to guide potential members to visit a club and join? This step-by-step [Prospective Member Conversion Guide](#) explains what to do at each point in the process.

Send an Overview to a Nonmember

Send this interactive [Why Toastmasters?](#) webpage to prospective members and guests to help answer any questions they may have about how Toastmasters works and the benefits of being a member.

Leave a Brochure

Distribute the [All About Toastmasters](#) brochure in doctors' waiting rooms or in your office lunchroom to show how Toastmasters works and the benefits of becoming a member.

Orient New Members

Help new members get off to a strong start! This fully customizable [New Member Orientation PowerPoint](#) is perfect for orienting new members to Pathways and getting started in Toastmasters.

Make Your Open Houses More Useful

If you're hosting an Open House, this customizable [Open House PowerPoint](#) is all you need to provide guests an overview of Toastmasters and club meetings.

Share Corporate Club Information

Hand out this [Corporate Clubs Soft Skills Flier](#) to the person in your office (or any organization) to clearly show the benefits companies can gain by sponsoring a Toastmasters club for their employees.



Check Your Club Culture

Take this quiz to ensure your club is helping your members succeed.

By Laura Mishkind

When you walk into a Toastmasters meeting anywhere in the world, you will likely recognize the overall structure of the meeting—prepared speeches, evaluations, Table Topics®, and functionary roles. While all clubs endeavor to provide a supportive and positive learning experience, every club has its own unique culture based on its members.

Take this quiz to discover what culture description best fits your club and then get some recommendations on how you can help your members succeed.

Which best describes your meeting space?

- A. A community room with tables, chairs, and an AV system
- B. A coffee shop, bar, or restaurant
- C. A conference room with tech support

What is a speech you're likely to hear in your club?

- A. A lesson on a topic many club members are unfamiliar with
- B. A humorous speech about a family outing
- C. A story about a mentor, with a strong lesson on how to be better in the workforce

A guest attends a meeting. How are they greeted?

- A. The Vice President Membership and President say hello and help them find a seat after getting their contact information and sharing meeting details.
- B. Someone says hi and they chat with that member.
- C. Club officers do a formal greeting and then members make sure the guest feels comfortable chatting before the meeting starts.

What are the primary goals of the members in your club?

- A. Improve speaking skills and find leadership opportunities
- B. Get to know people and have a good time learning to tell stories
- C. Network with fellow members and improve their stage presence

If your club were to plan an outing beyond a club meeting, what would members be most interested in doing?

- A. Getting dinner
- B. Visiting an amusement park or arcade
- C. Members wouldn't be interested

What is a common challenge for your club?

- A. Members have said meetings are too routine.
- B. Meetings tend to run over time because of chatting.
- C. The same few people take roles consistently.

What is one of your club's greatest strengths?

- A. Time management
- B. Strong friendships and camaraderie
- C. Filling meeting roles

Which method of communication works best for your club members?

- A. WhatsApp or another messaging app
- B. Social media posts
- C. Email

CALCULATE YOUR SCORE!

If you answered mostly A ...

Culture A: Traditional

Traditional clubs are deliberate in all they do. Meetings are well-planned and stick to the agenda; members can trust the meetings won't exceed the allotted time. Often these clubs meet Distinguished Club Program (DCP) requirements and are Distinguished or President's Distinguished—a great accomplishment! But DCP isn't everything. Are members enjoying the predictability of the club or are they looking for an occasional shake-up?

There's nothing wrong with mixing things up. Try a backward meeting where evaluations are presented first and then speakers present their speeches, aiming to incorporate whatever the evaluators concoct. While consistency is helpful for guests, members might benefit from a new challenge. Simply explain the change to the routine so both members and guests can understand and enjoy.

If you answered mostly B ...

Culture B: Fun-Focused

In a fun-focused club, members can expect just that—fun! Your club may have time for potlucks and chatting during meeting times. Your members get along well with one another and enjoy having time to socialize. Everyone feels loved and supported, which is wonderful. However, remember to push members as well. Are members receiving constructive feedback in speech evaluations? The key to Toastmasters programming improving members' abilities is for them to garner strong feedback and advice on what to work on. Without that advice, speakers may become stagnant. Encourage evaluators to compliment what a speaker did well, but to also dig deep for tangible advice on things that can be improved.

The club culture can still be focused on fun and connection, but there is always room for professional and personal development in between all the memory making. An emphasis on Toastmasters education and speaking tips will help newer members stay engaged with the group and strive to reach the goals they joined to achieve.

If you answered mostly C ...

Culture C: Stable

In a stable club culture, members can rely on solid leadership. Club officers know what their roles are, and they work hard to meet the DCP criteria. In addition, members are quick to sign up for meeting roles and fill speaking slots in advance. While consistency and participation are important for club health, if the same few members are jumping up to the stage, other club members will miss out on opportunities for growth. Be careful to diversify your slate of speakers and leaders or members will seek out another club with more opportunity.

For example, when it comes time to fill roles for the next meeting, directly reach out to those who don't often participate. Meanwhile, ask the more involved members to wait a day or two to see if the roles get filled before signing up. Encourage them to stay involved but to focus on mentoring other members for a while instead of speaking every week.

Stable clubs will benefit most from building out their membership base. Members of these clubs may be goal-oriented professionals who know exactly what they want to get from the club or are focusing on specific skills. This is where enlisting those eager participants as mentors can be a great help. Set up a mentoring program to help all club members reach their goals and expand their networks.

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

PUT OFF

PROCRASTINATING

If you're avoiding doing something, try these tactics to get yourself going.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

Before I finally sat down to write this article, I cleaned the kitchen, refreshed the cat litter, and wrote a thank-you note. Chances are that you, too, get a lot of things done *other* than the specific thing you should be doing. If so, don't feel bad.

Procrastination is not about laziness or poor time management. In fact, experts say the reason many of us put off till tomorrow what we should do today is tied to our emotional life.

In her writings and presentations, Fuschia Sirois, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Durham University in England, explains that procrastination is not simply an ordinary, garden-variety delay of action. Rather, it's often a sign that the task we are putting off is either boring, anxiety- or stress-producing, or otherwise unpleasant. Maybe you're a perfectionist and don't want to make a mistake. Maybe you resent the person who expects you to complete the work. Or, you could be a self-sabotager or a people pleaser who says "yes" to every request and, thus, spreads yourself too thin.

When we procrastinate, we tend to take what feels like the easy way out: avoiding whatever it is that causes us short-term

displeasure in favor of long-term guilt. Unfortunately, that can cause problems down the road. Piers Steel, Ph.D., professor of organizational behavior and human resources at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, has called it "a form of self-harm."

Think about what happens when you put off preparing for a speech. You're either up all night doing the work you could have done at a more leisurely pace and a more convenient time when you might have done it better; or you cancel the speech at the last minute, letting

down your club members; or you stand in front of your club unprepared and try to wing it.

Any of these approaches could lead to potential stress and shame. But because we humans tend to be concerned more with how

we feel in the present than how we will feel in the future, about 1 out of 5 of us tend to procrastinate like this on a regular basis, research shows.

And that, Sirois notes, can lead to symptoms of depression and even chronic illness such as hypertension and heart disease.

How to Deal With Procrastination

Fortunately, you can do many things to address the issue. Consider these following tactics to combat the problem.

- **Diagnose correctly.** Are you sure you're procrastinating? Many of us solve problems in our heads while we're taking a walk, playing an instrument, or even meditating. It's possible that when you do get to work, you'll be able to complete the project quickly and effectively.
- **Practice forgiveness.** Simply showing ourselves compassion and forgiving ourselves for procrastinating goes a long way toward helping us shrug off the negative emotions associated with a task.



Procrastination is not about laziness or poor time management.

- **Question yourself.** Why are you putting off this job? What makes one particular task so difficult for you? Sometimes just dealing with the root causes of the behavior can make it easier to work through.
- **Avoid temptation.** Step away from the television. Move the phone from your desk. Take your laptop to a cafe so you won't be tempted to do household chores.
- **Imagine starting.** According to Tim Pychyl, Ph.D., a retired psychology professor from Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, imagining what you would do if you were going to start the project can be helpful. Not only is this a good way to break down the job into bite-sized pieces, but like all visualization, it also tricks your brain into believing that you've actually done what you've imagined, so it's not so hard to begin for real.
- **Just do it.** Don't wait until you're in the mood, Pychyl says. You may find that the toughest part of the assignment was simply sitting down to start.
- **Make the task as pleasant as possible.** Do you prefer working in your pajamas? Would music help, or even something as simple as chewing gum or drinking a cup of coffee? Can you talk to a friend on speaker phone while you're cleaning out the shed?
- **Plan your reward.** Sometimes, that slice of pizza waiting for you in the fridge can do the trick. Personally, I bring the chocolate right to my desk, so I can enjoy my reward in advance while I'm doing the unwanted task.
- **Indulge in pride.** Someone is counting on you to do a good job. By taking pride in yourself and in your work, you might find that extra motivation to get it done.

Another Question to Ask

When all else fails in your effort to stop avoiding a task, you might ask: If I procrastinate

again and again over the same thing, maybe this is something I shouldn't be doing. Am I cut out for this volunteer work? Have I bitten off more than I can chew with this assignment?

A couple more tips that can help:

- **Delegate when possible.** One person's problem can be another person's joy. While you may clean the kitchen instead of doing the gardening, someone else in your life may prefer to garden rather than tackle the pots and pans. Note: This isn't a good strategy for homework!
- **Buddy up and be accountable.** If you can't delegate the task, you can always enlist a "task buddy." Is a friend or acquaintance working on a similar project? Either sit down together to work or make yourself accountable to each other on a daily or even hourly basis. Even if your buddy doesn't face a similar task, they might check in on you, or you could text to tell them how much you've accomplished in a given time period.

Case in point: My niece regularly sends me excerpts from the novel she's writing. She has asked me not to open the files; she just wants to know that I'm expecting something from her.

Practice in Toastmasters

Toastmasters is a great place for you to practice not procrastinating. Here are a few strategies to try.

1. **Work through your speech ideas with a mentor or other club member.** If you and that person get along well, the task can become automatically more pleasurable.
2. **Reexamine your speech topic.** If you're feeling stuck and avoiding working on your speech, try tackling your chosen topic in a different way, using other examples or stories, or a completely new approach.
3. **Maybe it's the targeted skill itself, such as storytelling or body language, that is causing you to procrastinate.** Consider moving on to a different skill and circling back at a later time.

When Is Procrastination Okay?

For some of us, that last-minute burst of adrenaline is exactly what the doctor ordered to make a project succeed. If you work best under

pressure, accept that about yourself—as long as the pressure doesn't bring on its own set of problems, and as long as you can still bring your "A" game to the job.

If that's the case, incidentally, you're in good company. Famous procrastinators include the Nobel Prize-winning spiritual leader Dalai Lama, the iconic architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the acclaimed author Herman Melville, and none other than the painter of the world-famous Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci. And look what they managed to accomplish!

Above all, listen to what your procrastination is telling you. It can be a useful tool for getting you back on track.

Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D., is the author of seven books and was a presenter at three Toastmasters International Conventions. Don't put off writing to her at cneile@fau.edu.





For the Love of Language

Grammar—and grammar celebrations—make their mark.

By Paul Sterman

We open today with a quiz question. The topic: grammar. Dull and excruciating, or challenging and exciting?

My vote is for the latter. This may not come as a surprise, given my career as an editor. And, okay, “exciting” may be a bit of stretch. But it is ... stimulating. In the same way that, say, a puzzle is. You rack your brain to find those last pieces of the puzzle on the table. You exult when you find the right fit. That’s grammar at its essence: finding the right pieces to fit your sentence.

As for grammar being dull and dry, have you ever witnessed a group of editors debating the merits of the Oxford comma? Or grappling over the use, or abuse, of semicolons? It’s not pretty.

Grammar is indeed complicated and crazy-making at times. I’ve spent countless hours scouring grammar stylebooks, searching for edicts on comma placement, the correct tenses of “lie” (lie, lay, lain, lying ... whew!), and answers to the eternal question: to hyphenate or not to hyphenate?

Which brings me to [National Grammar Day](#). It is held annually on March 4. (Why that day? Sound out the date and you get a declarative sentence: March forth.) Established in 2008 by author and teacher Martha Brockenbrough, it’s a day to “celebrate good grammar in both our written and spoken communication.” The “national” in the name refers to the United States, but certainly any country can join in the fun; after all, grammar is universally relevant.

Toastmasters know that. That’s why we have the grammarian role. The grammarian points out positive examples of language use as



Illustration by Jerry King

If grammar provides the rules for language use,
poetry supplies its music.

well as suggested areas of improvement. Good grammar makes our words and meanings clear, and as speakers, we always want our message to be understood.

At this month’s club meetings, especially if you meet on or around March 4, give some extra love to language use. I’m not talking about passing out worksheets—no need to trigger nightmares of diagramming sentences in school. But perhaps the Toastmaster of the Day could offer some language-related humor, or fun facts (“e” is the most frequently used letter in English!), or the grammarian could talk about common grammar mistakes and offer a particularly lively Word of the Day.

Like an endangered species, good grammar has groups dedicated to its preservation: the Apostrophe Protection Society, the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar, and the Society for the Preservation of the Oxford Comma. (I told you people are passionate about this punctuation mark.)

If grammar provides the rules for language use, poetry supplies its music. There’s a day in March dedicated to that too: [World Poetry Day](#), on March 21. This event was started in 1999 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Poetry is a rich source for Toastmasters. It reflects the rhythms, beats, and sparkling imagery of language. Reading or writing poems

can help us enliven our speechwriting, and quoting a pertinent poem in a speech is a strong way to make a point.

Consider these evocative lines from “All That’s Past” by English poet Walter de la Mare.

Very old are the woods;
And the buds that break
Out of the brier’s boughs,
When March winds wake,
So old with their beauty are ...

Some clubs even incorporate literature with the meeting role of Poetmaster. This person often opens a meeting by reading a piece of verse—theirs or someone else’s. It starts the session on a reflective note.

On March 21, take a plunge into the realm of poetry. Open your imagination to the work of poets around the world, including Tracy K. Smith, Anna Akhmatova, Pablo Neruda, Indran Amirthanayagam, Emily Dickinson, Billy Collins, Chinua Achebe, and so many more.

As poet Aine O’Neill, a Toastmaster in Dublin, Ireland, wrote in a 2022 [Toastmaster article on poetry](#), “Poems sharpen our senses, put words on our emotions, and help us savor the world through the light of the poet’s eyes.”

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive & editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*. Reach him at psterman@toastmasters.org.

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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.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

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