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## TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

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# Learning to Tackle Conflict

As a child, whenever I had a conflict with my sisters, I could always run to my mom to plead my case. She would then handle the issue, talking to my sisters on my behalf. But, of course, I can't do that anymore. As an adult, I've had to learn to handle conflict in entirely different ways.

After college, I took a job that was over an hour away from where I lived, so I joined a carpool. I drove to work with three people, whom I'll call Dolores, Nancy, and Jag.

It was quite an experience. Dolores was friendly and fun, and I always looked forward to sitting in the passenger seat when she drove. Nancy, on the other hand, was a bit stern and always kept the air conditioning at full blast.

Rather than simply asking her to turn it down or adjust the vents, I would rush to claim a spot in the backseat to avoid the discomfort. Looking back, I can't help but laugh at how silly that was—why didn't I just speak up? If I had been part of Toastmasters back then, I would have had the confidence to make such a simple request.

Joining Toastmasters changed everything. Within six months, I began to see a transformation in myself. I remember a specific moment that reinforced this change. I was in a meeting with coworkers and a client. During the discussion, the client raised some concerns about delays on the project. One of

my coworkers, instead of taking responsibility, threw me under the bus, making it seem like I hadn't done my part.

I was furious but didn't want to escalate the situation in front of the client. Afterward, I vented to my boss, who encouraged me to address the issue directly. Summoning my newfound confidence, I spoke with my coworker and shared how I felt about what happened.

To my surprise, he admitted his mistake. What's more, our discussion helped us better understand each other's roles on the project, ultimately strengthening our working relationship.

Conflict is an inevitable part of life, but how we handle it makes all the difference. Rather than allowing issues to fester, it's far more effective to address them early through open and honest communication. When we cultivate the self-confidence to express ourselves clearly, we create opportunities to resolve misunderstandings and prevent unnecessary tension.

As our founder, Dr. Ralph Smedley, wisely observed, "Understanding comes through communication, and through communication, we find the way to peace."

Let's all embrace the opportunities Toastmasters provides, grow our confidence, and improve our lives.

**Radhi Spear, DTM**  
International President

Conflict is an inevitable part of life, but how we handle it makes all the difference.



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## Snapshot



Over 35 members and guests from the **Ningbo XMA Toastmasters Club**, **Star T.T.T. Toastmasters Club**, and **Ningbo No. 1 Toastmasters Club**, all from Ningbo, Zhejiang, China, gather for a centennial-themed meeting at Kowloon Lake in Ningbo, China.

## Traveling Toastmaster



Members of **Ceylinco Life Toastmasters Club** in Colombo, Sri Lanka, pose for a photo near the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during an overseas trip for a Toastmasters educational meeting.



**Mayuri Assudani, DTM**, of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, brings her *Toastmaster* magazine to a floating hut on the Loktak Lake in Manipur, India.

# Maximize Your Speech's Beginnings and Endings

Research reveals the most memorable parts of a message.

By Joel Schwartzberg

Have you ever been a spectator at a marathon? If so, you'll likely remember the anxious opening moments and the triumphant result. But the middle? Not so much. The start of a race is filled with anticipatory excitement as runners bounce and stretch, waiting for the sound of the starting gun. Then comes the long run, which may be less engrossing for an audience, but at the finish line, energy once again soars as racers sprint to the end.

What does this have to do with communication? It's actually a perfect metaphor for a critical—and critically analyzed—concept in human attention: the serial position effect.

Grounded in neuroscience, the serial position effect suggests that people tend to recall the first and last items in a series far better than they remember the middle items. The memorability of the start is called primacy, while the memorability of the end is called recency.

Like the start and finish of a marathon, the beginning and end of a presentation are typically the most memorable moments for the audience. The beginning is easily remembered because the speaker is sharing brand-new information. The ending is easily remembered because it is the most recent information the audience receives.

## Research on Recall

In 1962, psychologist Bennet Murdock presented test participants with dozens of words—one every few seconds—and then asked them to repeat those words. He found that the words presented early in the list and at the end of the list were the ones most often remembered, while words in the middle were

more frequently forgotten. Check out the sidebar to try this experiment yourself.

Some of the latest research on primacy and recency effects comes from a 2024 study by researchers Eva Rubínová and Heather L. Price, who tested participants' recall of four visual scenes. The first and last items were recognized more quickly than those in the middle, leading the researchers to conclude that primacy and recency effects can also apply to visual information, not just verbal content.

The presence of this phenomenon is remarkably broad. Studies compiled and conducted by The Vermont Legislative Research Shop found that candidates appearing first on a ballot captured statistically significant percentages of the vote in American elections in several states. Voters seemed to gravitate to the first name on the ballot containing multiple candidates—indicating primacy at work.

Primacy also influences how consumers choose clickable items on websites and emails. Research conducted by the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication finds that “the higher a link's position in a list of links, the greater the probability that visitors will click on that link.” For example, people searching for running shoes on Google are likely to click one of the first search results that appear rather than scroll to the bottom of the page or look at subsequent results pages.

Moving from ballots and online shopping back to you, the serial position effect has enormous implications for your presentation. Putting your most important points in areas where primacy and recency have the greatest effect will increase their memorability and impact. But all too often, presenters

squander those opportunities by filling those high-attention positions with far less important content, like extensive credentials, conference details, obligatory thanks, audience instructions, and final Q&A responses.

Here are several tactics to make the most of primacy and recency opportunities in your presentations.

## At the Start

Primacy takes fullest effect at your very first words. To make the most of them, use the “HOP” approach: Hello, Opening, Point.

**Hello:** One or two lines to welcome the audience.

Example: “Good morning, I'm Pam Presenter. Thanks for being here.”

**Opening:** An engaging but brief hook that sets up your point, such as a quick personal story, provocative question or metaphor, relevant statistic, or current events connection.

Example: “Did you know that only 25% of employees feel their opinions matter to the organization's leadership?”

**Point:** A clear and concise summary of your point—what you propose and why it matters.

Example: “I'm going to show you how to engage with your teams in ways that increase their trust and morale.”

Once you've concluded your HOP, share your credentials, acknowledgments, thanks, and whatever else you need to say at the start because these items will reside in the least potent moments of primacy.

## I Have A Dream

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon of hope to millions of slaves, who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the colored America is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the colored American is still sadly crippled by the manacle of segregation and the chains of discrimination.

## Minding the Middle

In addition to spotlighting the start and end of your presentation, the serial effect has important consequences for the middle: How do you maintain audience interest when you don't have the automatic advantage of primacy and recency? The good news is you can retain and, if necessary, regain your [audience's attention](#) by:

- Sharing a visually arresting slide
- Telling a personal story
- Pausing
- Raising or lowering your speaking volume
- Making a substantial transition (“Now that we understand the factors that diminish team trust, let's look at some ways to build it.”)
- Using attention drawing preview phrases like, “Here's the thing ...,” “The bottom line is ...,” and “This is what we learned ...”

These subtle change-ups will help keep your audience engaged from start to finish.

## At the End

Because recency is strongest at the very end of your presentation, concluding with housekeeping messages (“Here's how to get your parking validated!”), obligatory acknowledgments (“I'd like to thank the following 15 people.”), or your final response in a Q&A, is, again, discarding a golden opportunity to capture the audience's attention.

To take the greatest advantage of recency, start your concluding comments with the

least important information and end them by reinforcing your most valuable point, this time in a hopeful, future-focused context—what I call a “hope statement.” This is also a perfect time to add a call to action.

Example: “I hope this presentation will help you earn your team's trust and inspire them to do their best work. Next week, try some of the team-building strategies we discussed and see how they affect your team's participation and morale. Thank you, and good night.”

Finally, many presenters end with a Q&A, but few would want the last-answered question to be what audiences remember most as they leave. Reclaim the power of recency by following these steps to ensure the final word is yours.

1. End your presentation with a simple restatement of your key point.
2. Conduct the Q&A.
3. Deliver your hope statement and call to action.
4. Stop talking.

Remember that the serial position effect is only as powerful as the content in those positions. Insert your strongest points in the right places to ensure your points have impact long after you've finished speaking.

**Joel Schwartzberg** is a presentation coach, executive communication specialist, and author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team* and *Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on X @TheJoelTruth.

## Serial Position Effect in Action

To test the serial position effect yourself, read this list of items aloud to someone:

- Speaker
- Chairs
- Lectern
- Microphone
- Charts
- Applause

Now, ask them to repeat the terms back to you. If “speaker” came quickly, they were influenced by primacy. If “applause” came easily, that was recency at work.

# The Art of Discovery

How Toastmasters unveiled my creative potential.

By Rohit Reddy, DTM



My Toastmasters journey began in 2020, during my first year studying at the Institute of Engineering and Management (IEM) in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Joining the IEM Toastmasters Club marked my first step toward becoming a confident communicator and an effective leader. But while I anticipated growing my confidence and public speaking abilities, I never imagined this journey would also uncover a creative talent that had mostly been latent up to then.

It started with a simple request during one of our club's virtual meetings. We needed a flier designed to promote an upcoming joint meeting between IEM and another club. Designing was completely outside of my comfort zone, so I hesitated to take the task on myself. However, I had seen people use the online design tool Canva to create fliers before, and the supportive Toastmasters environment convinced me to give it a shot. This decision would transform my life.

The first poster I designed was far from perfect, but with constructive feedback and guidance from the other club members, it improved significantly. They introduced me to the [Toastmasters brand guidelines](#) and helped me refine the design through several rounds of edits. These collaborative efforts turned the piece into a polished and professional-looking flier. In Toastmasters, feedback isn't just about critiquing; it's about empowering. My fellow members appreciated my efforts and provided suggestions that encouraged me to keep improving.

A year after creating that first flier, I became the Area Director for District 41 (North India and Nepal). I supported my Division by managing design and public relations efforts, including handling flier designs, social media, and newsletter content. I also led the PR for unique initiatives such as "U Turn: Reverse Meeting" and "The Camp of Captains," a meeting hosting District leaders worldwide. I even hosted a podcast called *Konnect*.

With every new design—be it fliers, social media posts, or newsletters—I felt more confident and creative. As I became more comfortable with Canva, I decided to push myself further. I explored advanced tools like Photoshop, Adobe Spark, and After Effects, delving deeper into the art of visual storytelling.

I used these creative skills to craft compelling slides for my speeches. I also wrote blogs for various Pathways projects and ventured into video editing, creating the first video newsletter edition of District 41's *LiveWire*. These experiences allowed me to seamlessly integrate creativity into my presentations and communications to make them more engaging.

Today, I work at a Fortune 500 company as an IT analyst and am a certified Salesforce developer—thanks to the confidence and communication skills I sharpened in Toastmasters. I also freelance and volunteer to help others with their designs and PR requirements. Whether it's crafting visually engaging presentations or brainstorming marketing materials, the creative abilities I

Toastmasters didn't just help me find my voice—it helped me find my canvas.

honed at Toastmasters have become an integral part of my skills toolkit.

My journey is a testament to the fact that Toastmasters is much more than just a platform for public speaking and leadership. It's a space where members discover unexpected talents. For me, designing has become more than a skill—it's a passion.

What began as a club responsibility has turned into a source of personal and professional fulfillment. Toastmasters didn't just help me find my voice—it helped me find my canvas. It taught me that growth often comes from unexpected challenges and that every opportunity is a chance to learn.

**Rohit Reddy, DTM**, is a certified Salesforce developer and a two-time Distinguished Toastmaster. He is featured in the India Book of Records for being among the youngest Indians to achieve the DTM title in India. He has served as a President's Distinguished Area Director and President's Distinguished Division Director, and was chosen as the 2022–2023 Area Director of the Year for District 124.





## How to Connect With Your Online Audience

Solutions for your questions and queries.

By Bill Brown, DTM

When you give a speech, you want to connect with your audience and leave a lasting impression. There are many ways you can win your audience's attention, but it can be more difficult to engage with them online. And once you do captivate your audience, you want them to remember your message. In this month's column, I address two frequently asked questions, both centered around your audience.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** If you have a question for *The Answer Man*, email it to [magazine@toastmasters.org](mailto: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

### How do you connect with and captivate your audiences when you give speeches on Zoom?

While presenting on Zoom is different, it isn't as different as you might think. There are many similarities to an in-person speech. Yes, you lose some abilities, but you also gain some.

How do you prepare for your in-person speeches? First, you grab your audience's attention with your opening words. That could be a surprising statement, a powerful quotation, or a question. You want them to say, "Wow, I really need to hear this." Start your speech the same way on Zoom.

Next, you want to ensure your content is compelling, as that keeps their attention. This is the same online. Finally, how do you end your in-person speeches? With a strong conclusion and powerful ending line. Same with Zoom.

Your vocal expressiveness is also the same online. Yes, you lose a couple of key methods. Body language and use of the stage are difficult. But while they may not see your body online, they do see your face, which then becomes your stage. How can you use it to your advantage?

I am known for my expressiveness, not only with my body and my voice, but also with my facial expressions. I learned just how effective that is on Zoom after a couple of Toastmasters speeches. Both evaluators commented on the power of my facial expressions. Let your face work for you. It can work well in the in-person environment, but even more so on Zoom.

Lastly, recognize that, on Zoom, you are inside a box. What could you do to take advantage of the edges and other characteristics of the box to better communicate and illustrate your message? A small screen gives you a unique opportunity to literally and figuratively think outside the box. Let your imagination go wild.

### Should you thank your audience at the end of your speech?

This is a time-honored question in Toastmasters. And the same answer is typically put forth: "You shouldn't thank them. They should thank you."

I personally see the question and answer as focusing on the wrong area. They are focused on speech mechanics. Basically, a list of do's and don'ts. A list of rules to follow. As long as you follow the right protocol, you are thought to be fine.

What that doesn't take into consideration is the purpose and overall effectiveness of the speech. This, instead, should be our primary focus.

When you speak outside of your club, recognize that you have a specific purpose for speaking to your audience. The question I ask before writing a speech is: What do I want them to think, feel, and do differently when I am done?

That determines what you say. Are you wanting to persuade them to a particular belief or to take some action? Are you wanting to inspire them? Even if you are looking to instruct them, there is an end result that you want to achieve. What is it?

Executive speech coach Patricia Fripp has a great principle. She says, "Your last words linger." In other words, your audience will remember the last words you say.

If you want your audience to remember "thank you," end with "thank you." If you want them to take some sort of action, end with a call to action. If you want to inspire, end with an inspirational sentence. Use your last words to punctuate your message and change their life.

**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](http://billbrownspeechcoach.com).

# Resolve Conflicts With Less Conflict

Learn techniques for having difficult yet effective discussions.



By Alice Shikina

Although it's hard to believe, conflict in and of itself is not bad. It actually signals there is room to grow and for deeper understanding.

Easier said than done when you're in the midst of a serious disagreement. It's often tempting to argue, point fingers, or storm out the door, but you can bring problem-solving skills into play to diffuse the situation effectively.

All of us come into conflict at some point, and the skills to resolve those situations are by no means intuitive—they need to be learned and practiced. I'm a certified mediator, and have been helping people resolve their conflicts, whether at home, at work, or in a legal setting, for more than 11 years. I have worked through many complex cases and developed some techniques for the best ways people can approach discord in the most civil and effective manner. Here are some tips I've found to resolve conflict in a less conflicting manner.

## Prepare for Conflict

Yes, you can prepare for disagreements, friction, and arguments *before* they happen.

First, you need to understand your own triggers and notice how you feel when you get upset initially. Think about a time when someone made you angry. Think about how you felt physically.

Did your chest tighten?

Did you clamp your jaws?

Did your face flush?

Was there tightness in your shoulders?

Did tears well up in your eyes?

Once you understand how your body reacts to strong negative emotion, you can become aware the moment you feel it happening and prepare yourself to handle the situation appropriately. When you feel defensive, angry, frustrated or in some way upset, and sense your body reacting, the best course is to step away for a bit.

Some handy phrases to use when you need to take a moment include:

- "Hold that thought. I am going to run to the restroom and will be right back."
- "I need some time to think of my response. Let me get back to you."
- "I am a bit upset right now. Let me take a time out and then we can continue the conversation."

Having these phrases ready to go when you are feeling upset ensures that you don't get caught up in a discussion while feeling emotional, and prevents your body language from conveying your feelings.

Any time you are feeling negative emotions, the executive functioning part of your brain gets shut down. Right when you need your wits and thinking skills the most, they are the least available to you.

Luckily, there are effective strategies to calm yourself down. Deep breathing practices

are an excellent and effective way to calm your nervous system down.

Find a quiet space and take a slow, deep breath in on a count of four. Hold it for a count of five. Then, exhale slowly on a count of six. Hold for three counts. Then begin again. Do this for as long as you need to re-center yourself. You may find that it only takes two to three cycles to ground yourself again.

Once you calm your emotions down, you can either go back into the conversation or schedule a time when you feel you will be better prepared to resolve the conflict.

## Establish Guidelines

Once you are ready to have the difficult conversation, set yourself up for success by setting ground rules. Start by suggesting some and then ask the other person if there is anything they would like to add. Some effective guidelines include:

- ▶ No interrupting.
- ▶ If someone interrupts, and is called on it, they agree to stop interrupting.
- ▶ No name calling.
- ▶ No yelling.
- ▶ Instead of using words like "lie, liar, or lying," use the phrase "I have a different perspective."
- ▶ Keep your side of the dialogue to under five minutes.

I always recommend setting and agreeing upon some ground rules *before* you find yourself in a conflict. If you try to set them in the middle of a debate or argument, no one is going to have the wherewithal to abide by them. But if you set them prior to or at the beginning of any difficult conversation, it will help curb any bad behavior.

In a business setting, it is best to set these rules up as part of company culture, and make sure everyone is aware of them. This ensures that when conflicts do inevitably arise, everyone is already familiar with the ground rules.

## Mirror What You Hear

It is also important to set up the actual conversation dance. What does that mean? It means communicating in a way that ensures people are hearing one another accurately and are processing all the information being given to them.

Most conversations have one person speaking and the other person responding. However, that skips an important middle step, the step that confirms if people are engaged in active listening. Between one person speaking and the other responding, the second person should verify that they understood everything that the other person said.

This can sound something like this: “So let me make sure I understand what you said ...” Or “What I heard you say was ...” It’s important to set up and explain what you are doing. If you merely parrot back what you heard, you may get the indignant response, “I know what I said. Why are you parroting me?”

Once you confirm that you have understood everything, then you can respond. And once again, the other person should repeat back what you said before responding.

## Avoid Judgement

Establishing a few key rules also helps with difficult conversations. The first is to come to any conversation without judgment.

Judgment is felt immediately by the other person. It may not be conveyed in your words, but it is conveyed by your tone, attitude, facial expression, body language, and choice of words. So keeping this in mind, you may want to withhold judgment before going into any conflict.

Another helpful rule is to come to the conversation with curiosity. You want to hear what the other person has to say.

Ideally, you allow the person wanting to share feedback to speak first—the person who has brought the issue up for discussion. Then the other person can weigh in. This gives both sides a more complete picture of the conflict, something that ultimately helps with problem solving.

If you are playing the role of an informal mediator, instead of starting the conversation with, “Your manager says you are constantly leaving work early this week,” you might want to start with, “How have things been going for you this week? Your manager mentioned you are leaving early. Is everything okay?”

Can you see how the first attempt has some tone of judgement? The second attempt has more curiosity and support. If someone feels supported and cared about (as opposed to judged), they will be more open and vulnerable with you. This helps to move to the problem-solving phase much faster, ultimately leading to a resolution.

Finally, being honest and vulnerable about your own feelings helps connect you to the other person. It might be counterintuitive, but if you explain how their actions make you feel emotionally, you create connection

and empathy. In Marshall Rosenberg’s book, *Nonviolent Communication*, he outlines four steps that look something like this:

- State a neutral observation (“When you don’t answer my calls ...”)
- State how it makes you feel (“It makes me feel disregarded and disrespected.”)
- State your emotional need (“I need to feel respected.”)
- Make the request (“Could you please respond to my calls within 24 hours?”)

Conflicts are never fun. And difficult discussions are uncomfortable. You are not going to get it right every time. But when you start practicing and using these techniques regularly, you will feel more confident and less nervous confronting and resolving conflicts.

---

**Alice Shikina** is a professional mediator, negotiation/communication trainer, and an author. She was a speaker at the 2024 International Convention. She lives in Oakland, California and is the host of the podcast *Negotiation with Alice*. Learn more at [shikinamediation.com](http://shikinamediation.com).



# Hard Work

## Doesn't Always Pay Off

How slowing down can help you become your best self.

By Olya Amelina



I am tired of always working so hard," a client recently told me. "I always feel exhausted, and never have time for anything except catching up on tasks I haven't done yet. Hundreds of tasks on my to-do list feel never-ending. The worst part? The goals I set for myself aren't getting any closer, no matter how hard I work."

Working as a health and performance coach, I hear stories like this all the time. This client's response came after I asked about her struggles and what she wanted to change in her life.

People push themselves to the brink, proudly calling themselves "the hardest worker in the room." But what's the point of all that hard work when it doesn't bring satisfaction? When it leaves no time to truly live your life? And when, despite all that effort, you're barely making progress toward your goals?

### Hustle Culture Downside

Motivational speakers and success gurus frequently proclaim the same mantra: Be disciplined. Stay strong. Never give up.

But when I hear this, I can't help but wonder if the endgame for someone following this advice is to become a machine, or a soldier who blindly sticks to the plan, regardless of the cost.

This entire concept of hard work became deeply questionable to me after [I burned out](#). I had dedicated my life to work, sacrificing everything else, only to end up feeling wiped out, with damaged health and more questions than answers about the direction of my life.

Looking back, I see how much our environment—and the values it reinforces—shapes this mindset. In my case, I worked in

an office where colleagues survived on coffee and ambition. Almost no one prioritized their health; work-life balance meant nothing.

Proper nutrition, sleep, and rest were seen as luxuries nobody could afford. Working weekends and staying accessible during vacations were "normal."

### When Hard Work Fails

The hustle culture is so ingrained in us that some of my clients don't even remember what it feels like to be rested. I've heard the confession, "I don't even know how to rest, and when I try, I feel guilty for wasting time."

Even when people try to break free, they face resistance. One client, a psychotherapist juggling five to seven sessions a day, while also working on a scientific study, parenting, and training for two

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Without proper rest, we can't think creatively, solve problems, or stay focused. But when our battery is full, we can handle more.

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strenuous running events, felt utterly drained. When we discussed simple adjustments to their day, they pushed back, saying, "It won't work! My colleagues won't understand!"

And it's not just about work. Another client, an athlete, believed they could only achieve their dream of standing on the podium by isolating themselves and focusing solely on training. They pushed everyone out of their life, thinking sacrifice was the price of success.

But this perfectionist mindset left them feeling lonely and unsupported. Over time, their mental health began to deteriorate, and their gym performance suffered, making the podium even further out of reach. Hard work, in this case, didn't just fail to pay off—it actively undermined their goals.

## Breaking Free

With these clients, we eventually found solutions that didn't involve working harder but working smarter.

For the psychotherapist, we implemented scheduling small breaks that would help them recharge during the day regardless of what colleagues might say, as well as establishing reasonable boundaries. For the athlete, we focused on rebuilding their support system of friends and uncovering ways they could prioritize their mental health needs while still focusing on physical training.

When their stress and exhaustion decreased and energy levels increased, they started seeing a difference. The process became more enjoyable, and even challenging situations caused excitement rather than fear.

## Slowing Down to Speed Up

While recovering from my burnout, I eventually realized that when I allowed myself to slow down, I had more space to notice how I felt, as well as what worked for me and what didn't.

I began to understand that skipping meals or not getting enough sleep meant I simply didn't function at my best. Without proper rest, we can't think creatively, solve problems, or stay focused. But when our battery is full, we can handle more. I was able to stop procrastinating once I had the energy and clarity to dive into tasks.

Once I experienced what it felt like to be at the top of my performance, I didn't want to go back. Slowing down became essential because it allowed me to speed up in the ways that mattered most.

## A New Approach to Success

What I've learned—both through my own journey and with my clients—is that sometimes it's not enough to read a scientific study or hear someone say, "This works." You have to experience it for yourself.

You have to be curious enough to explore another way of achieving your goals. And you have to make a conscious decision to try. Even

if it feels counterintuitive or scary at first, the rewards of slowing down and prioritizing yourself are worth it.

Success isn't about how much you sacrifice—it's about how you sustain yourself along the way.

## Your Next Step

If you're feeling stuck in the grind, ask yourself: What would change if you prioritized your well-being? What if rest, joy, and balance weren't seen as luxuries but as essential parts of your success?

It's time to challenge the old rules that no longer serve us. Let's redefine success—not as exhaustion, but as thriving. Let's prove that slowing down doesn't mean giving up; it means showing up as your best, most focused, and most creative self.

Make just one small change today. Whether it's taking a real lunch break, saying no to one task, or simply going to bed earlier—start there.

When you work less hard, you might just find yourself working a whole lot better.

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**Olya Amelina** is a health and performance coach who helps athletes and business professionals develop daily routines that enable them to take control of their time, maintain high energy levels, and feel good while achieving their big goals. She lives in Germany. Learn more on [LinkedIn](#).



# Dance

INTO THE FUTURE WITH ANNE BONNEY

Keynote speaker for the 2025 International Convention encourages embracing change.

By Stephanie Darling

Have you ever wrestled with a decision, only to freeze because your head is flooded with doubt, leaving you torn between the safe choice and the untried option? That's because your brain is talking, trying to save you from one of life's biggest risks—change.

Give those doubts some “sassy backtalk,” says Anne Bonney, a National Speakers Association's Certified Speaking Professional, TEDx speaker, author, and expert in change management, who will give the keynote address at the 2025 International Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In her speech, “Ignite Your Next Move: Courageously Dancing Into the Future,” Bonney will share strategies that support her fervent belief that anyone, with a bit of bravery and an open mind, can master the challenges of change.

Bonney is an optimist, realist, and humorist who welcomes change as a lifelong growth opportunity,

not a place to fear or be trapped in. When you hear her colorful stories, you'll realize it can even be funny. It starts with some intentional brain talk on your part, she notes.

Bonney advises that you say, *Hey brain, I got this*, while reminding yourself of all the things you've overcome, figured out, and achieved in the past. “The ability to intentionally hit that voice of doubt with a little sassy backtalk is one of the abilities that builds mental toughness.” That toughness—which Bonney defines as a mix of resilience and confidence—is key to successful change.

Getting there takes grit. It calls for intentionally seeking unknown possibilities. When facing a problem, always ask yourself, *How else could I solve this?* It's likely to feel scary at first, which is why Bonney calls it “dancing with discomfort.” Yet the more you practice, the more confident you'll become at fielding life's curveballs.

**“It’s the hardest thing about being human—we never know if what we’re about to do is the right move. But if we’re not moving, we’re not learning anything.”**

**—Anne Bonney**



**REGISTER** FOR THE  
2025 INTERNATIONAL  
CONVENTION AND THE  
CHANCE TO SEE  
ANNE BONNEY’S KEYNOTE  
ON AUGUST 20!



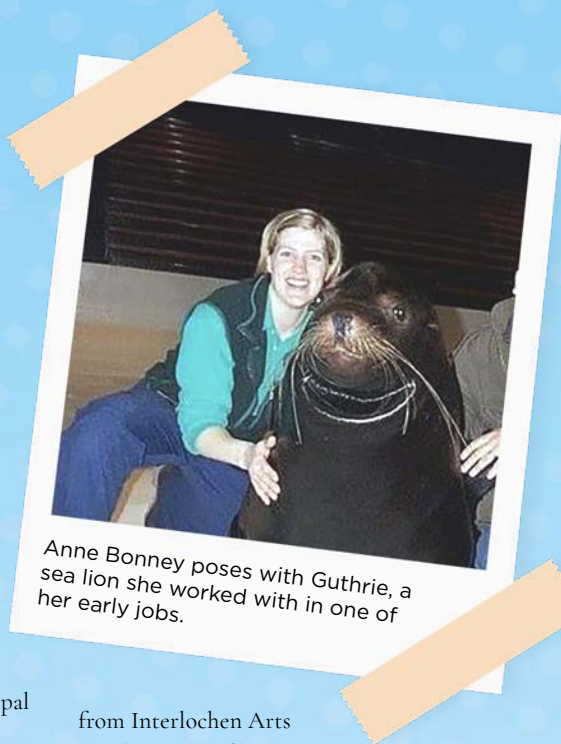
## A Lifelong Dance

Bonney began her own dance—with at least some discomfort—when she was 8 years old, and her family moved from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia (and later Egypt and Greece) for her father’s job. It was a whole new world, but Bonney was a bit of an adventurer and made friends easily. Her life was full of wonderful, healthy, safe change, which prepared her for a life of it, she says.

She happily learned to travel solo by bus in Athens, bargain with street vendors, and test her local language skills. It was exciting when her family hiked Nepal on vacation, rather than take the traditional trip to Disneyland that many American kids might prefer. “Nepal was closer—and cheaper!” Bonney laughs.

As Bonney grew older, her lively personality, easy congeniality, and love of performance brought opportunities to burnish the skills that eventually made her a dynamic communicator and public speaker.

“I grew up performing,” she says. “I was a singer, I was in all the shows. That gave me a ton of stage time and feedback.” She graduated



*Anne Bonney poses with Guthrie, a sea lion she worked with in one of her early jobs.*

from Interlochen Arts Academy, a performing arts high school in Michigan that has produced some notable names. The 1990s pop star Jewel was in her dance class. Bonney studied piano and opera. On campus, she was a ready participant in flash mobs (before they were cool, she laughs) and random performances.

## On the Move

After graduating from college, Bonney became an elementary school teacher for children with special needs. Again, her adaptability and ability to relate to others, often in uncomfortable situations, were essential to her work.

However, after a time, Bonney’s broad interests and desire for a multi-faceted career led her to leave teaching. She had five more careers, including corporate marketing and animal training. Working with sea lions, seals, and birds of prey was “one of the most fun jobs I ever had,” she says, even though as a trainer-entertainer, it was often tough to compete with the charm of her fellow performers.

Fast forward to today: Bonney has lived through 27 moves, attended 13 different schools, lived on four continents, and pursued diverse careers. She has run marathons on every continent and joined morale-building visits to U.S. troops in Iraq when she was a brand manager for an athletic gear company.

Bonney is a former Toastmaster and Rotarian. She says in fall of 2013, she walked into her first Toastmasters meeting because she was thinking of becoming a professional

Bonney performs an original song while serving as emcee of the National Speakers Association’s Thrive conference.







FOR MORE  
INFORMATION ON  
ANNE BONNEY,  
VISIT HER [WEBSITE](#)  
AND WATCH HER  
[TEDX TALK](#).

speaker. "Of course Toastmasters was the perfect place to start," Bonney explains. She was a member for about two years, overlapping with her Rotary membership.

"It's a big Bonney family thing," she says of following her grandfather, father, aunt, and uncle into Rotary.

While no longer a member, she's still active on the board of the Warm Hearts Foundation, a nonprofit that partners with several Rotary clubs on international humanitarian projects. She's also involved with Rotary District 6290's Life Leadership Conference, a youth leadership program the district (which spans part of Michigan and some of Ontario, Canada) has held for 75 years.

## Why Change Is So Hard

Bonney has been living and thriving in change for so long she's "pretty comfortable" with the unexpected. She loves sharing with audiences what she's learned over the years—the power of action over fear and doubt. The satisfaction of overriding the risk-averse brain and growing mentally stronger and more confident.

But she knows it's not easy.

"Change is hard because our brains like familiarity. If you're facing a problem, your brain will throw out a quick solution," she says. You might also welcome a quick fix but "that's not how life works."

She continues, "It's the hardest thing about being human—we never know if what we're about to do is the right move. But if we're not moving, we're not learning anything. There's power in action and feeling okay with discomfort. We might try something and if it doesn't work, we'll try something else. Taking that risk of action is what builds the mental toughness that allows us to

persevere through routine change or when we're 'ankle-deep' in dilemma."

Consider alternative ways of dealing with challenges. Bonney explains: "If you stick to your old way of dealing with things—your habits—you'll often miss important details. Pause in the discomfort of uncertainty just long enough to consider multiple options."

And lower your expectations when things don't go exactly as planned. They rarely do, so if you expect the unexpected, you'll have a much less terrible experience, she adds. "Loosen your grip on what you want and expect to happen." Following Plans B, C, or even D might well have you saying, *Oh, that wasn't so bad*. Or *Oh, it worked!* Or *Best day ever!*

Accepting the reality of temporary disruption relieves stress and keeps you going forward. This tactic works well, yet Bonney realizes it's counterintuitive. "Lower your expectations?" she laughs. "Who tells you that?"

Don't be afraid to challenge that discouraging inner voice. In fact, Bonney says she learned one of her most important lessons about negative self-talk from a fellow athlete. This seven-time competitor in the Double Ironman—an ultra-distance triathlon—had mastered supportive self-talk, while shutting out the alarm bells his brain was constantly clanging during grueling physical effort.

"He taught me to *talk* to myself, rather than *listen* to myself," Bonney explains.

The good news is

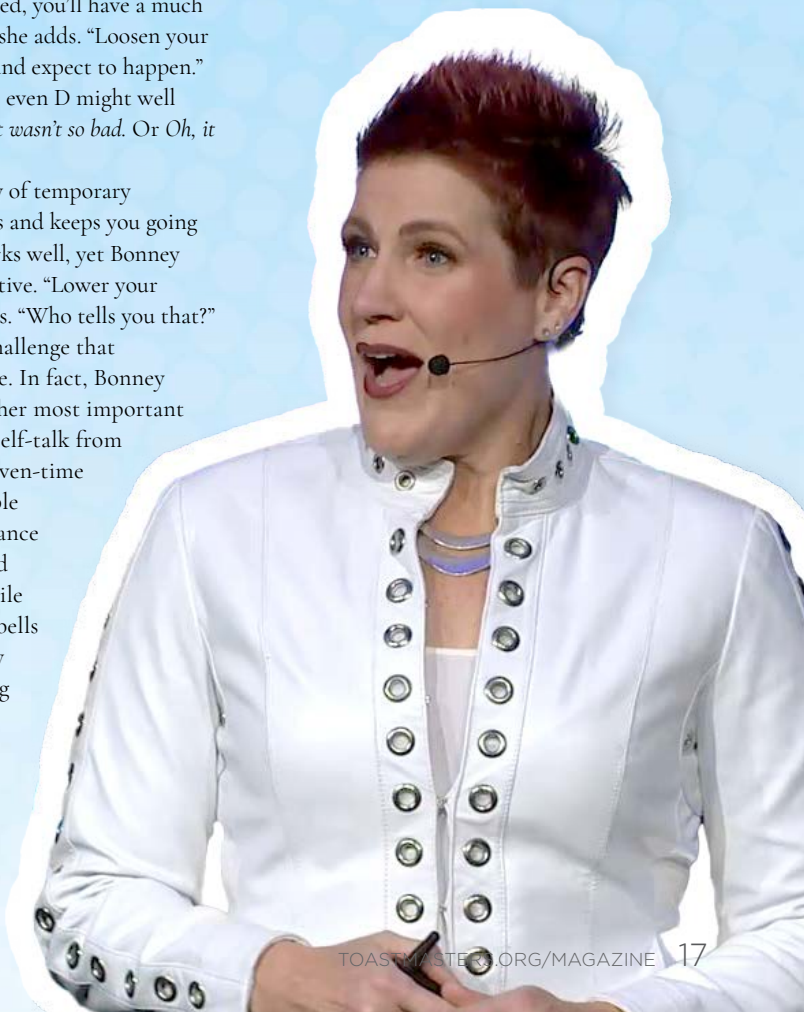
that challenging that voice—and moving from change discomfort to comfort—doesn't require big steps. Even the smallest, low-stakes efforts can steadily build self-confidence and a mindset that's motivated to action. Bonney shares succinct tips on how to do this in her two books, *Get Over It!* and *Get Them Over It!*

"Try a different dish at dinner, take a new route home from work. Take a meeting role, speak in your club, run for an officer position," she advises. Meet new people, read a book on a unique topic and learn that you unexpectedly liked it, invite a new friend to a new activity. The possibilities are endless, and the payoff is to co-exist in peace with change, aided by mental toughness and maybe some sassy backtalk.

As Bonney notes: "The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, 'The only constant in life is change.' We may as well get good at it."

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**Stephanie Darling** is a former senior editor of and frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



# What's Your PERSONAL BRAND?

How to define yourself, engage others, and build relationships.

By Kate McClare, DTM

How did you show up at your last networking event, business meeting, or social gathering? Did people see a confident, authoritative professional who couldn't wait to meet them or an uncertain person who couldn't wait to get out of there? How's your website, LinkedIn page, and social media? Do they communicate what you want people to know about you?

These are the elements that show the world who you are. If they're portraying someone even you don't recognize, it could be time to update your brand.

## Why Should You Create a Brand?

You're probably familiar with commercial branding, the process of creating a distinct identity that sets a business, product, or service apart from its competitors and appeals to a chosen audience. One of the clearest examples is Apple's "Get a Mac" ad campaign that ran from 2006 to 2009. It differentiated Apple from other computer companies by depicting itself as a hip young user and the PC as stodgy and out of touch. The message: Macs are cool! Who doesn't want to be cool?

Whether you call it your brand or your image, if you don't think about who you are and how to show your true self to the world, rest assured someone else will do it for you. And it may not be the self you think it is.

"You have to look at personal branding because people need to label you, and they will," says Michelle Balaun, DTM, a branding strategist and former member of Boca Raton Advanced Toastmasters in Delray Beach,

Florida. "They'll look at you and immediately say, 'Oh, this person's an athlete' or 'This person's an accountant' or whatever, so they can easily position you in their mind. And if you don't have a label, they're going to look you up and down and say, 'She's dressed old-fashioned, so she must have old-fashioned thinking.'"

What people see is what they think they get. And in a world where perception is often confused with reality, personal branding is a critical exercise.

"Even when you are just a cog in a giant wheel at a big firm, you need a brand because you are not recognizable on your own," Balaun says. "Unfortunately, our world is advertising. Everything is branded, so if you don't brand yourself, you become one of the gray masses that no one pays attention to."

## What's in a Brand?

Many people use technology and platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and personal or business websites to help create their brand. Video and podcasts have also become popular brand-building tools. Like a company brand, yours should be carefully planned around five elements:

- **Tagline or Mission Statement.** Craft a concise statement that defines your purpose or unique value. Think of this as a summary of your [elevator pitch](#).
- **Brand Voice and Messaging.** This includes the tone, language, and storytelling style that convey the brand's personality and values. Decide how you want to sound (e.g., approachable, authoritative, witty) and use it in all your communications.

- **Storytelling.** Share personal experiences and lessons that highlight your journey and values.
- **Visual Identity.** This includes the logo, colors, typography, and overall design that represents the brand visually. Use a professional headshot and choose a consistent set of colors and fonts.
- **Positioning.** Think about how you want to be perceived and what makes you unique. What do you do better than others? Why should people choose you?

Each of these elements, taken together, forms a cohesive and memorable impression and shapes how you're perceived by others.

## Creating and Sharing Your Brand

Creating a personal brand helps you understand your values, strengths, and unique qualities. It influences how people perceive you in various situations, from social gatherings to community involvement, and enables you to present a coherent image of yourself across different platforms and contexts.

With so many other voices competing to be heard, effectively sharing your brand requires taking a strategic approach. Try these tactics to be heard above the noise:

**Choose your best platform.** You don't have to be everywhere; go where your audience is and use the platforms that play to your strengths. For example, LinkedIn and Medium are best for writers, while Instagram is best for visual artists and YouTube is for video creators. Start small and expand as your audience and influence grow.

**Be consistent across platforms.** Use the same profile picture, tagline, bio, and color scheme everywhere to create a cohesive and memorable personal brand that stands out and attracts the right audience. Deliver consistent value in every interaction.

**Be responsive.** Reinforce trust and reliability in your engagements by delivering what your brand promises.

**Be authentic.** You're enhancing what's already there, not building an artificial image. Every façade falls eventually; start with the real you.

## Refining Your Brand

Branding was critical for Lindsey Williams, DTM, President of Keystone Toastmasters Club #3139 and Vice President Public Relations for Friends of Greenwood Toastmasters Club, both in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He realized he needed to define himself more clearly after leaving active duty in the military and taking a management position at the U.S. Postal Service while serving in the active reserves.

"I started to realize that I could not be the same person in both careers," he explains. "The military person had to carry himself and communicate one way. Working with civilians who had different skill sets, like IT teams and regular laborers, I learned that I had to be flexible, able to switch gears, and change my communication patterns. And I wanted to be more effective going into events to network."

Williams drilled deep into branding himself for business encounters, starting with his appearance: white shirt, blue suit and tie (blue is his [power color](#)), and a briefcase. "When I walk in, within the first 30 seconds I'm influencing what you think about me already."

As for the inner man, he didn't seek to change himself but to discover the qualities he already had. He then worked to bring them out so others could see them.

"I determined I was a person who can be around intellectual people, who's adaptable and resilient, and most of all can resolve situations quickly. My personal brand was what I wanted people to say about me when I wasn't around."

Toastmasters provided many of the tools Williams used to develop his brand. He shares these resources on his website where he offers public relations strategies for clubs. In his

post "[Rebrand Yourself Using Toastmasters](#)," Williams recommends 15 Pathways projects that can help you define your brand and develop skills for sharing it, including "Building a Social Media Presence," "Public Relations Strategies," and others.

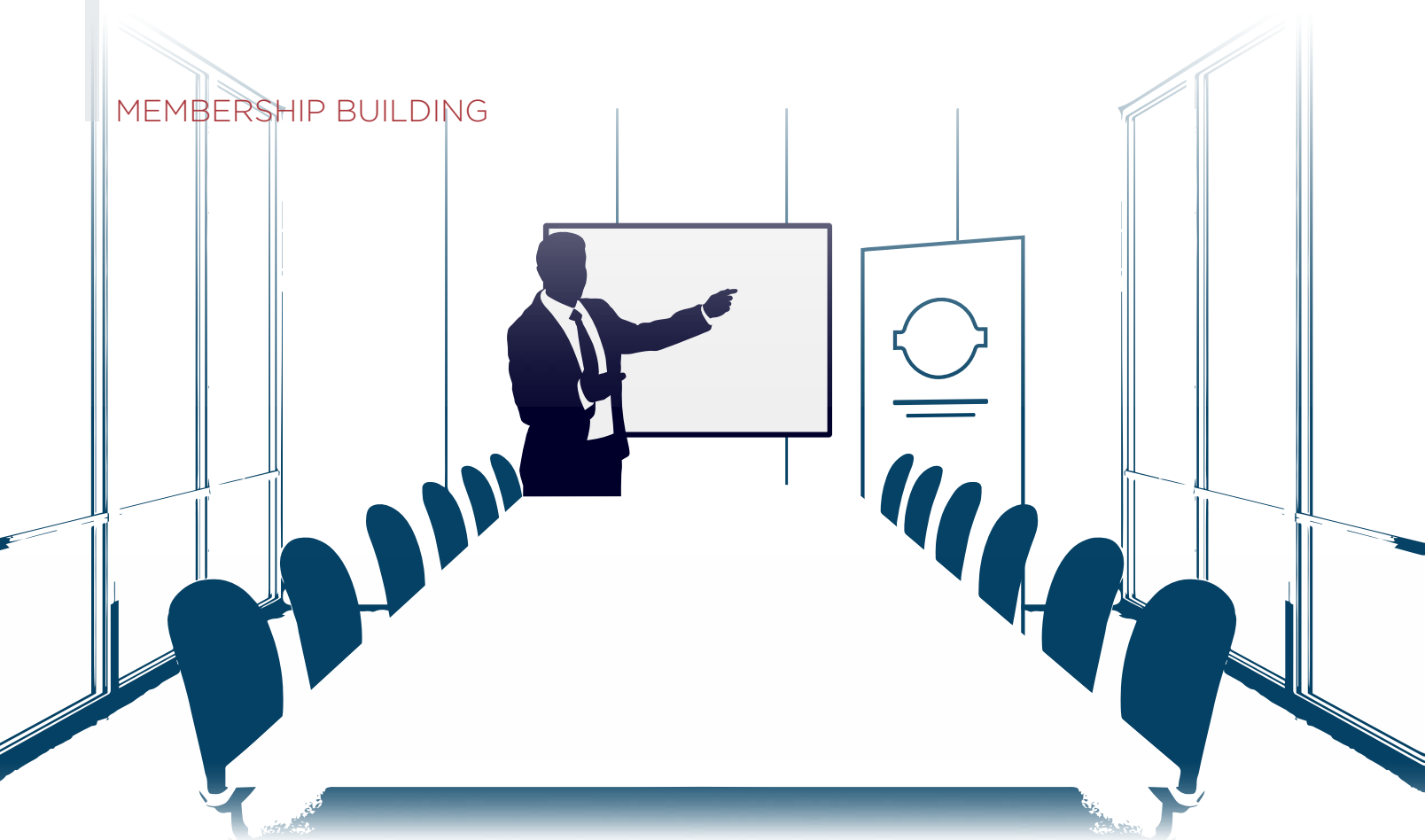
## Success Strategy

Crafting a strong personal brand will help you build trust and credibility, establish authority and influence, and attract new opportunities. It's a critical step, whether you want to find a new job, build a speaking career, or expand your social network. Don't shy away from it because it feels like self-promotion or puffing yourself up. It's an intentional way to identify your strengths, values, and impact on the world, and then communicate them to the people who matter.

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**Kate McClare, DTM,** is a professional writer and editor based in South Florida, where she is a member of Miami Advanced Toastmasters Club (CTM's) and Art of Speaking Toastmasters.





# You Can *Always* Return

What we can learn from members who rejoin Toastmasters.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Not everyone takes a linear path in Toastmasters. Some join for a year or two, some remain longer, some stay for decades. Others join the organization, leave because of a life change, and become members again later.

Members and clubs alike can learn a lot from people who take a more circuitous Toastmasters route. It's worth knowing why they leave, why they come back, and how to encourage them to return.

## Evolving Motivations

When Maureen Zappala, now a Distinguished Toastmaster and Accredited Speaker, first became a member in 1999, she wanted to network and grow her side business. She quickly learned Toastmasters was fun. She also got a taste of competing. Right after joining, Zappala participated in the club's Table Topics® Contest and won.

A few years later, she had a baby. Overwhelmed with having a newborn, she

ended her Toastmasters membership. Later, she had a second baby. However, once her two children were in school full time, Zappala rejoined the same club. This time, her motivation for joining was different. She wanted to improve her storytelling skills. She competed in other speech contests and advanced all the way to the final round of the International Speech Contest.

"Even in those years I was gone, some of the people were still the same, and that was a draw [to return]," says Zappala. "Some of my best friends came from Toastmasters."

After many years, she moved to a different state, leaving Toastmasters again. Even when she was no longer a member, she was a cheerleader

for Toastmasters. "I would tell people they need to join," she says. "I would tell them 'This will help you. You will meet amazing people, and you'll learn something.'"

She joined for a third time in 2023, becoming a member of Henderson Toasters in Henderson, Nevada. Zappala's goals were different once again. She had become a professional speaker and was focused on obtaining her [Accredited Speaker](#) credential.



Maureen Zappala

## Skills Regained

Mani Shrestha is another example of a recalibrated Toastmasters journey. Like Zappala, he had different motivations when rejoining the organization compared to when he

first started. He originally signed up in Nepal when his employer started a corporate club. At that point, he wanted to overcome his fear of public speaking.

Three years later, he left the company for a different job and had to leave his Toastmasters club. Unfortunately, the new organization didn't have a corporate club. It was also during the COVID pandemic. Shrestha wanted to focus on his in-person speaking skills, so he waited to continue his Toastmasters journey.

In 2024, he started a new job at an employer with a corporate club—WorldLink Toastmasters Club in Lalitpur, Nepal. The Club President urged him to join and help the club grow. Shrestha recognized he could help the club and himself. “Because of the break [in membership], I feel like I lost something,” he says of his speaking skills. He now serves as the club’s mentor and is spreading the word about Toastmasters’ benefits throughout the company.

## Found Purpose

Georgina Anum first started attending club meetings and events while studying at the University of Ghana. One of her lecturers was a Toastmasters Club President, and he encouraged her to participate in the club. She didn't know it was Toastmasters or what that meant. She just knew she enjoyed the process.

“My lecturer saw something in me that I didn't see myself,” says Anum. “He saw leadership in me.”

Eventually, she became an official member of the Accra Toastmasters Club in Ghana and then, with the encouragement of the same lecturer, she took on the Vice President Education role.



Mani Shrestha

After two years, Anum ended her membership. The exchange rate for the dollar was skyrocketing, so the cost of Toastmasters dues was increasing. She also needed to focus on academic work.

It didn't take long before she realized she was losing her confidence. Anum remembers thinking, “Now that I'm climbing the ladder of my career, I will rejoin to strengthen my communications and leadership skills and take advantage of all the Toastmasters benefits.” So she did.

This time, she knew what Toastmasters was and how it could benefit her. Like Shrestha, she is also helping build her club.

## New Perspective

Balázs Gergely, based in Budakalász, Hungary, joined Toastmasters to break out of his shell. “Walking into that room for the first time, I felt a mix of nerves and excitement, but I immediately knew I was in the right place,” he says.

Three years later, he became a father. Gergely left Toastmasters to be fully present for his growing family. Over time, he and his wife had a second child.

Years later, he got a job at a new company and attended an event with colleagues. He found himself sitting next to the corporate club's Vice President Membership, who convinced him to return to Toastmasters.

Gergely joined Helios Toastmasters in Budapest. This time, he fully embraced club leadership roles, including serving as Club President.

“Becoming a father during my time away gave me a deeper sense of responsibility and perspective,” he says. “When I returned, I felt more prepared to contribute meaningfully, not just as a member but as a leader within the club.”



Georgina Anum

## Lessons Learned

Clubs can learn a lot from members who leave and those who rejoin—whether they return to the same club or a different one. Consider these actions to help all your members and make your club stronger.

## When Members Leave

1. **Conduct exit interviews.** You may assume members leave because they don't value the Toastmasters experience or believe they can't gain anything more from it. But people leave for all kinds of reasons, and it's important for your club to understand why.

As Toastmasters, we know feedback is essential. Conduct exit interviews with members who are leaving—talk with them to learn why they're leaving, what their experience has been, what the club's strengths are, and any ideas they have to make the club experience better.

“We often tell ourselves a story as to why they left,” says Zappala. “An exit interview eliminates any misconceptions.”

Even if you know why a member is leaving, it's worth taking the time to ask the person for thoughts and ideas. “It's not that we're trying to lure them back in,” says Zappala. “We want to know—is it us or life circumstances?”

2. **Make changes based on feedback.** Similar to speakers who receive evaluations, once you have feedback from departing members, reflect on it. Consider how the club can apply that input. You could learn invaluable insights about how to address a challenge or receive an idea on how to make something good even better. Feedback helps speakers—and clubs—improve and grow.
3. **Maintain contact with former members.** Many members who leave and return note they felt cut off while they were away. Keep the connections alive and the door open for people to return. Share the link to the magazine. Send them the club or District

newsletter. Invite them to special events. Or just check in to see how they're doing.

"Many people leave Toastmasters not because they're dissatisfied, but because life takes them in a different direction," says Gergely. "A warm invitation to reconnect, coupled with reminders of the supportive community and personal growth opportunities, can reignite their interest."

Even if it's not possible for them to return to your club specifically, former members might be able to join another club or simply serve as advocates for the Toastmasters program. Think about how you heard of the organization and why you attended your first meeting—maybe even why you joined. Word of mouth and personal testimonials are powerful marketing tools.

4. **Create a scholarship fund.** Costs can be prohibitive for some people, whether related to the exchange rate, the fact that they're students or people who are not working, or myriad other reasons. Consider advocating for a District-level scholarship fund or start one in your club. You can also try to minimize any club fees above the required Toastmasters International dues.

## When Members Return

1. **Ask returning members what their goals and motivations are.** When Anum returned, no one asked her why. Recognize that returning members might have different and more specific goals. "Because we all have different reasons for joining Toastmasters, we should identify the members' needs," she says. "We can group members by their purposes, and we can get the right orientation and get them involved accordingly."
2. **Don't assume that returning members know, understand, or remember the Toastmasters program and your club's protocols and procedures.** When Zappala rejoined Toastmasters, she found a revised education system. Because she was a previous member, club members assumed she knew everything. But it took her a while to understand the new program.



Balázs Gergely

Assess returning members' understanding of Pathways and be ready to support them.

3. **Ask members for insights about their time away and their reentry.** Returning members offer important perspectives and experience. When they rejoin, they can see the member onboarding experience with a fresh, yet experienced, set of eyes. They can also talk about the value of Toastmasters and what they missed while they were gone.

Like Shrestha, if they participated in a different club in the past, returning members may offer ideas or best practices from a previous club that may strengthen the current one. They can also offer a different and maybe even stronger perspective to prospective members and corporate club sponsors about the value of Toastmasters, since they left and recognized what they were missing enough to return.

"My journey highlights the natural ebb and flow of a member's life," says Gergely. "I joined in my early 30s to advance my career, then stepped away to focus on family, and later returned when the time was right. Clubs can thrive by understanding these cycles and creating a welcoming environment that encourages returning members to pick up where they left off."

**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 [jenniferlblank.com](http://jenniferlblank.com).



**13%**  
of members temporarily leave and rejoin later.

*Statistic provided by the Research and Analysis Department*

# Craft a **Winning** Social Media Strategy

Grow your club—and your skills—by boosting your internet presence.

By Gia Abao



Establishing a social media presence isn't just crucial for content creators—it's an effective instrument for Toastmasters clubs to reach new audiences, attract potential members, and build a community. By deliberately leveraging social networking sites, clubs can share the immense value of the Toastmasters experience and encourage more people to join.

I first discovered this after an early quarter-life crisis at age 22 led me to launch my own business, Touchic, and join Toastmasters. At the time, I could not have known these actions would propel me into a journey of influence-building on social media.

In 2021, I joined Metro Manila Toastmasters Club and later took on the role of Vice President Public Relations (VPPR). At that point, I had no prior experience in content creation or strategy. I took digital marketing and content creation courses and embraced a hands-on learning approach, both of which helped me build a social media presence for my then club, and laid the foundation for my career as a content creator.

Through consistent and timely uploads, what began as a modest goal to amplify the club's message scaled my personal social media presence to over 2 million followers across different social media platforms. The skills I honed in Toastmasters, including communication, leadership, and creative thinking, became the pillars of building an online platform.

Here are five key lessons that I learned as a VPPR and content creator to help you transform your club's social media strategy.

## 1. Understand Your Membership

Building a social media presence isn't just about posting content—it's about providing real value to potential members by understanding their goals, challenges, and what they seek in a Toastmasters club.

Begin by gathering feedback from current members to gain insights into their motivations. Are they seeking to enhance their public speaking skills for professional growth? Are they young professionals preparing for future careers? Understanding these aspirations helps you craft a club brand that resonates with both current and prospective members.

## Tailor your content to their needs

Once you have a clear understanding of your ideal members, create content that directly addresses their challenges. If your members are professionals, post videos on presentation tips or workplace communication strategies. For students, focus on content that helps them build confidence and prepare for interviews.

## Dominate a niche

Focus on a specific niche that aligns with your members' core interests. For example, if your

club is known for leadership development, create content around that and aim to be the go-to club for aspiring leaders.

Once you've established a strong identity in one area, you can gradually expand to others, such as personal growth or professional development. This focused approach will help your club stand out in a crowded digital landscape and attract followers who are genuinely interested in your club.

## 2. Have Strong Branding

Your digital footprint is your identity. Creating a consistent type of content, with a consistent message and personality, is called branding. A strong brand helps people remember and trust you, and allows someone to understand and connect with your club in seconds.

## Shape your message

In Donald Miller's book *Building a StoryBrand*, he shares how the audience should be the hero and you serve as their guide. Shape your messaging on how you can guide your audience toward success. For instance, rather than saying, "Join our club to improve your public speaking skills," change the message to something more member-focused, such as, "We help aspiring public speakers build their confidence and manage speech anxiety." This subtle shift makes your content more audience-centric and relatable.



### Use Toastmasters branding

The key to building trust is consistency. Adhere to the [Toastmasters branding](#) across all platforms by using the proper color palette, fonts, and brand voice. A consistent brand helps your audience relate to you and recognize your content.

### 3. Use Research and Planning Tools

High-performing content doesn't happen by accident. It is driven by intentional research and strategic content planning.

#### Jump on trends

Participating in social media trends can help your club's content reach a wider audience. Trends can be recurring audio clips, hashtags, or video formats that many people are using. To find them, pay attention to what keeps appearing on your feed. If you repeatedly notice certain sounds, styles, or topics, that's a good indication of a current trend.

For example, if a renowned public figure stuttered during a speech and it's making headlines, use the clip as a hook and create a post highlighting how Toastmasters can help smooth out your speaking. You could pair catchy audio with a tip on building confidence before delivering a speech. Remember to tie your message into something familiar to your ideal members to make it more engaging and relevant.

#### Create a content calendar

A content calendar is a tool that helps you plan and organize your club's social media posts. It helps to ensure you're posting regularly, which maintains consistency and engagement with your audience.

To create a content calendar, start by identifying at least three key topics or "content pillars" that reflect your club's core values and the interests of your ideal members (for example, public speaking, leadership, and personal development). These topics will serve as the foundation for your content and guide what you post.

Once you have your content pillars, plan out the posts you'll create each week. For example, one week you could share tips on overcoming stage fright (public speaking), followed by a post on team-building strategies (leadership), and wrap up with advice on goal setting (personal development). You can use tools like Google Calendar or a spreadsheet to map out your posts for the month ahead.

Set aside a specific time each week to review your content calendar and prepare upcoming posts. This will give you time to adjust if something relevant comes up, like a new public speaking trend. Staying consistent ensures that your content is relevant, timely, and aligned with your goals.

### 4. Leverage Data Analytics to Refine Your Strategy

You'll want to learn how to leverage data analytics to monitor what content resonates with your audience. Use your channel insights to find out what posts get the most response. Then examine those posts and see if there are any trends, such as length of text, number of photos, or the type of information you are sharing. These analytics can help you refine your content strategy.

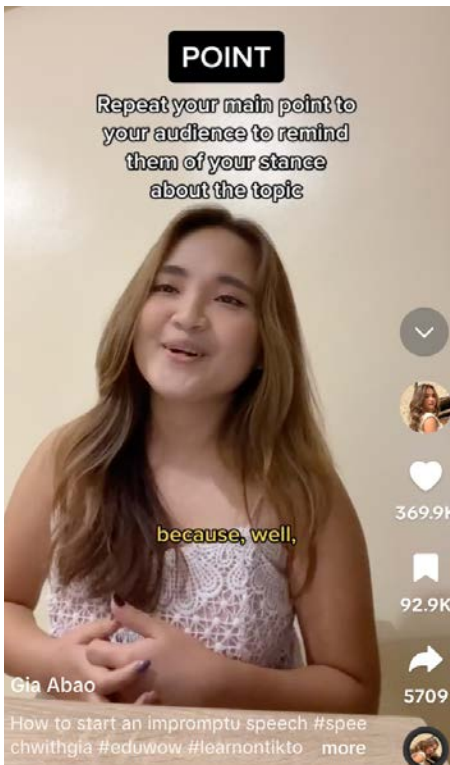
#### Build your strategy

It's important to set clear, realistic goals to track your progress. One helpful way to do this is by using SMART goals—goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. For instance, instead of aiming for exponential growth like gaining 1,000 followers in three months, focus on smaller, achievable goals like attracting 10 new followers per month.

To facilitate this, create content that resonates with your audience—post weekly tips on improving public speaking or document your club's activities. Offering value in your posts will encourage more people to follow and engage with your page.

You could create a short series of posts titled "Public Speaking Tips for Beginners" or "How Toastmasters Can Help You Lead," making sure





the titles are catchy and easy to remember. Over time, as you post consistently and interact with your audience, you'll see gradual growth in your social media presence.

### Use analytics to adapt your approach

All platforms offer analytics to help you track your content's performance, which helps you uncover the type of content your ideal audience wants to see. If instructional videos perform better than motivational videos, adjust your content strategy and focus on how-to videos. Assess what's working and double down on your efforts on videos that work.

## 5. Design Systems for Sustained Marketing Success

Steady social media growth demands effective systems. With sustainable processes, you can engage with your audience and avoid burnout in the process of building your platform.

### Build a strong PR team

Leverage the notion that Toastmasters attracts individuals focused on personal development and encourages members to improve skills beyond public speaking. In my club, many expressed their interest in improving their writing skills, so I had them write initial content for posts. Encourage members to join your team by highlighting how they can grow from the experience.

### Educate followers about Toastmasters

Create content that inspires and informs. Tell stories of how Toastmasters has impacted the lives of your members. Highlight the tangible benefits of becoming a Toastmaster to attract an audience that aligns with your club's values and mission.

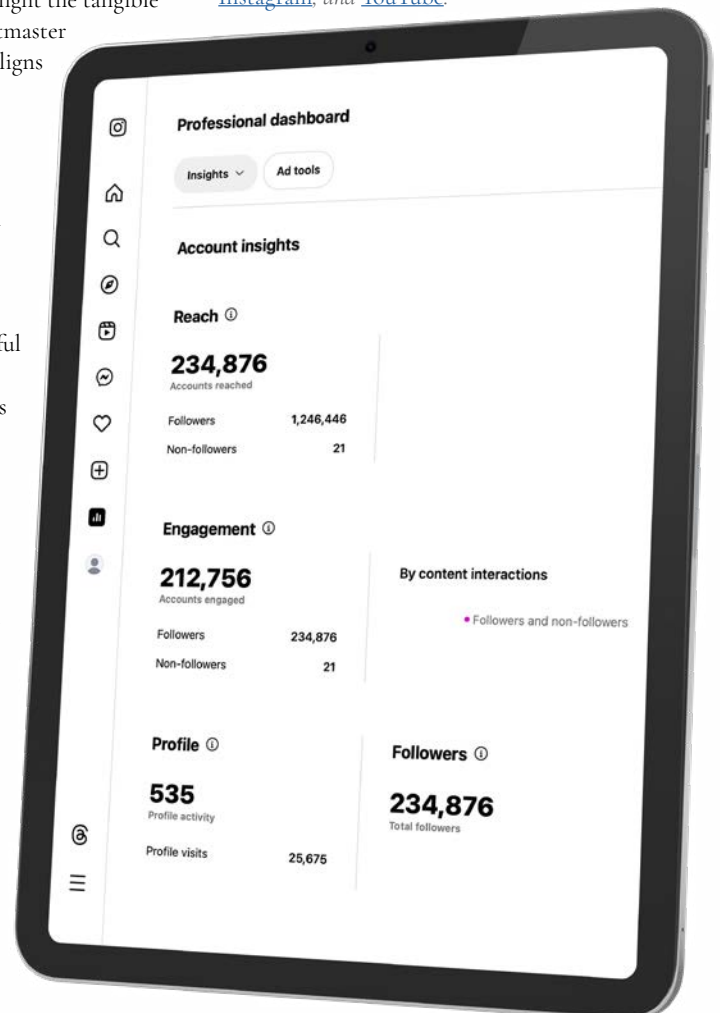
A compelling way to promote your club and its impact is by sharing personal testimonials. For example, through Toastmasters, I've learned impactful communication and purposeful leadership—skills that laid the foundation for my success as a content creator and entrepreneur.

To create an effective testimonial, I documented my Toastmasters journey by recording my practice sessions and showcasing my progress over time. This allowed others to witness my transformation, making it a credible and relatable testimonial to share online.

Ultimately, your testimonial should reflect your authentic journey with Toastmasters and highlight how it has empowered you, both personally and

professionally. This genuine representation will inspire others to see the value of Toastmasters in their own lives.

**Gia Abao** is a content creator and entrepreneur from the Philippines. Her posts focus on public speaking and research writing, as well as showcasing her entrepreneurial journey with Touchic, a hypoallergenic, all-weather accessories brand. She aspires to empower Filipinos to overcome their speech anxiety and build confidence. She is a professional speaker and presented at the 2024 International Convention. Follow her on [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).



Become a

# Continuous Learner

How enhancing your skill set can set you up for success.

By Greg Glasgow

Whether you're early in your career and looking to make yourself more marketable, an established worker interested in making a career change, or a longtime employee who wants to move up the ladder at your current company, you'll gain a leg up by finding ways to learn new skills—or enhance the ones you already have. And luckily, in 2025, there are lots of ways to expand your professional education.

"It's a cliché to say the world is changing rapidly, but it's true, and it really demands that we continue to keep our skills relevant to remain relevant in the workforce," says Chris Nicholson, associate dean of the College of Professional Studies at the University of Denver in Colorado. "I talk to employers who say, 'I like to see a resume that shows a job candidate is continually learning and acquiring new skills, because that demonstrates that they have a continuous growth mindset.'"

Consistently working toward increasing and improving your skill set is known as continuous learning. This process can help you stand out from others in today's competitive job market, set you up for success, and lead to new opportunities.

## Numerous Benefits

The benefits of continuous learning are endless—from keeping you engaged at work, to boosting your confidence, to keeping your mind sharp, and more. As a lifelong athlete, Nicholson likens the benefits to playing both offense and defense with your career.

"From an offensive perspective, it's career advancement," he says. "You need to continually update your skills and make sure your skills are relevant, because it gives you a competitive advantage within the marketplace. It's greater earning potential; it's positioning oneself for job promotions; it's improved marketability for you to move into positions outside your organization.



“Knowledge and skills are power, and people need to use that to their advantage.”

From the defensive perspective, Nicholson says, improving your skills and gaining new ones can increase your job security. “To the extent that greater skills and knowledge increase your job effectiveness, which I think they do, that just makes you a bit more indispensable to your organization,” he says.

Although being a continuous learner helps with professional development, it can also benefit the organization you work at. By encouraging your employees to gain new skills and knowledge, you can help boost employee retention, improve morale, and keep your team engaged at work.

## Three Types of Learning

Whether you want to take a class, read a book, or learn in a different way, there are many avenues for picking up new knowledge and skills. Experts point to three types of learning when it comes to being a continuous learner: formal, social, and self-directed.

- **Formal learning** happens in a structured program, like the ones offered at schools. Many colleges and universities around the world offer a variety of courses, certificates, and degree programs for workers looking to beef up their resumes.
- **Social learning** can happen in the workplace, or even in your Toastmasters club, by finding people in the line of work you are interested in. Talk to them and ask them for mentorship or career advice.
- **Self-directed learning** takes advantage of resources such as books, videos, and online courses through sites such as LinkedIn or Coursera. With this approach, individuals can set their own learning goals and fit the education into their own schedules.

“There are so many options now,” Nicholson says. “One isn’t necessarily better than the other, but it depends upon the individual and what’s best for them at the point they’re at in their career.”

To start the process, Nicholson says, take stock of your situation and what you want to learn. Do you have the time and money for a formal degree program, or would you rather take online classes on your own time?

Are there in-demand skills you want to be proficient at? Do you know someone you could ask to serve as your mentor? It never hurts to brush up on old skills as well.

## Consider Your Employer

One place to start on your path toward becoming a continuous learner might be your current employer. Many companies offer internal training opportunities, free access to LinkedIn Learning, or other online resources, and even tuition assistance for classes and degrees at local or online universities.

Don Bittick, DTM, of Franklin, Tennessee, took advantage of a program offered by the school district in which he was substitute teaching: The district paid for him to get a teaching license through a local university. With a few additional courses that Bittick paid for himself, he was able to earn a master’s degree in education as well.

Bittick, a Past International Director for Toastmasters, says of the teacher-licensing program, “A lot of the things in the classes were things I was already aware of, having been in the classroom as a sub, but what I liked about it was when we got into more topic-specific classes.” He took math and English classes and learned how to teach both subjects in the classroom. “I probably wouldn’t have done it had they not paid for it, but I thought, *Why not? If they’re going to pay for it, I’ll go for it.*”

## Learning Opportunities in Toastmasters

Another place to look for continuous learning opportunities? Your own Toastmasters club. Here you can take on new roles that help you learn new skills. Additionally, Toastmasters’ Pathways program offers many electives that allow members to gain knowledge in new areas.

Dotty Du, DTM, a Past International Director who owns and operates a food processing facility in Davao City, Philippines, says skills she learned through Pathways have translated to more success for her business.

“There are electives in Pathways that make use of technology and teach you things like the use of social media, which is a huge thing here in the Philippines,” Du notes. From the knowledge she gained, she created an online marketing strategy to help sell her product.

“We can take [Pathways] out of Toastmasters and use it in the real world,” she says.

Shirley Davis, Ph.D., a human resources consultant, LinkedIn Learning author, and Toastmasters Golden Gavel recipient, says that by simply being part of Toastmasters, members are gaining skills that will help them in the workplace.

“One of the things I love about Toastmasters is that they teach you the art of speaking—standing on your feet and communicating,” she says. “And communication skills are the key to success, to the trajectory of your career.”

Davis, a resident of Tampa, Florida, was in recruiting for 10 years and says the ability to communicate helped her interview, hire people, and promote employees. “Toastmasters gives us tools and frameworks for that, and I love the feedback and how you can think on your feet and communicate in a clear, concise, and compelling way.”

Whatever programs or tools you use to gain new skills or improve the ones you already have, stay sharp with continuous learning. Expanding your professional education will result in countless benefits and help you maintain an edge in the workplace.

**Greg Glasgow** is a Denver-based author and freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the Toastmaster. He is the co-author of *Disneyland on the Mountain: Walt, the Environmentalists, and the Ski Resort That Never Was.*





## Life Lesson Plans

Graduation speakers aim to inspire young people.

By Paul Sterman

I started brainstorming ideas for a column on graduation speeches when I remembered that, once, many years ago, I had given one myself.

It was not a college graduation speech. Not a high school one either. Younger. My junior high school is where I shared my distinguished remarks, as a graduation speaker at C. E. Utt Middle School in Tustin, California. As one of two student body presidents that school year, I was called on to dispense words of wisdom to the matriculating class of eighth-graders.

What hard-earned insights could I have offered my fellow 13-year-olds? The only struggle I had known up to then was sharing a bathroom with two younger sisters.

I have no recollection of what I spoke about that day, and the speech is nowhere to be found. Likely, I said something about the adventures, opportunities, and challenges awaiting us in the next path of life, the brave new world we were entering: high school.

In the coming months, May and June primarily, an assortment of speakers around the world will offer words of advice, hope, and inspiration to 2025's graduating students. It's a high-profile gig: Colleges recruit heavyweight figures from the fields of politics, entertainment, sports, and media. Even Oprah has been an orator for this annual rite of passage.

Sitting in their graduation gowns, eager to toss their mortarboards into the air, what does the restless group of youth want most from these prestigious speakers? Time-honored pearls of wisdom? Advice on navigating life's twists and turns? My bet is something more concrete—like a job offer.



Illustration by  
Jerry King

Film director Steven Spielberg had fun with his 2016 graduation speech at Harvard University. Recalling how he dropped out of college but then re-enrolled when he was in his 50s, he noted that the school graciously gave him course credit in paleontology—"for the work I did on *Jurassic Park*."

Other speakers mix the profound with the practical. Author Richard Russo urged students at Colby College, in Maine, to be bold and true and kind. Also: to "rotate your tires." Mary Schmich used her *Chicago Tribune* newspaper column to write a hypothetical commencement speech to the class of 1997. At the top of her list of life lessons: "Wear sunscreen."

If I could go back and address my fellow eighth-graders again, I would advise them to take more risks, to listen more, and to find a fulfilling career—and a good razor. That close, comfortable shave really is a difference maker.

A number of Toastmasters have been commencement speakers over the years. When Michael Notaro, DTM, was tapped to deliver a graduation speech as a senior at the University of California, Berkeley, he joined a local Toastmasters club to help him prepare. Good decision—in 2011, he became the International President of Toastmasters.

Oceanside, California, resident [Erica Alfaro](#) is the daughter of Mexican immigrants who never received an education. As a senior in college, she auditioned and was selected to give the graduation speech at California State University, San Marcos. Alfaro had joined Carlsbad-Oceanside Toastmasters, and the club helped lift her skills and her confidence.

Though she was nervous beyond belief, she said that delivering that graduation speech was a

Author Richard Russo urged students at Colby College, in Maine, to be bold and true and kind. Also: to "rotate your tires."

turning point in her life. Alfaro was subsequently asked to speak at other events, where she shared her motivational story of pushing past obstacles. (She had dropped out of high school at 15, became pregnant, and endured domestic abuse, before deciding to attend college.)

Alfaro now works full time as a professional speaker. She typically gives more than 50 keynotes a year, and has spoken at a number of California high schools and colleges, often at commencement events for Latino students.

"It's hard to describe, but I feel like I'm happy that I went through a lot of adversities, because that gave me a purpose, and finding Toastmasters gave me that voice," she told me.

"And that combination is what has allowed me to be a keynote speaker and go and speak to students ... and show them that they can succeed despite adversity. That's my life purpose."

Adds Alfaro: "It feels beautiful when you're following your purpose."

Perfect words for a graduation speech.

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