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Just Say Yes

Before you instinctively say no to something, pause a moment and consider challenging yourself to say yes. You may be opening the door to something unexpectedly rewarding.

When I was a brand-new Club President, the Area Governor told me—incorrectly, as I later found out—that he only had one contestant for the upcoming Area speech contest and needed at least two to conduct it. I knew we didn't have time to host a club-level speech contest, so we would have to nominate someone to speak at the Area competition. I called every member of my club to ask if they'd step up to compete. No one agreed. I realized that if I wanted to help this Area Governor, I would have to lead by example—so I volunteered myself.

The moment I committed, panic set in. I would be speaking in front of members outside my own club, and I didn't want to embarrass myself. But something changed. I threw myself into preparation with an energy I didn't know I had. To my surprise, I won—and advanced through the Division all the way to the District Humorous Speech Contest finals. That one “yes” introduced me to the world beyond my club. I never would have imagined it.

Opportunities like that are all around us, but we often lose out by saying no before giving them a chance.

My nephew Anand recently reminded me of the joy of seizing opportunities with low-

risk stakes. He was visiting for the weekend, and my husband's band was practicing in the basement. Anand jumped in and sang a song with them. He has no singing background and could barely hold a tune—but when I asked him about it, he grinned and said, “It was so much fun—where else would I get the chance?” He felt safe, and he made the most of it. It reminded me of what Toastmasters offers us: a supportive space to try new things, even if we're unsure or unpolished.

Sometimes an opportunity comes in the form of a challenge. Years ago, I was sitting at a District business meeting as an unopposed candidate for Division

Governor—until someone was nominated from the floor. A fellow member leaned over and said I could withdraw and avoid the extra work. It was tempting, but I'm so grateful I didn't. That decision became a turning point that set me on a path of growth, leadership, and purpose.

If we keep doing the same things and expect different results, we'll stay stuck. So next time someone asks you to volunteer or take on a challenge—pause, breathe, and just say yes. It might be the best decision you ever make.

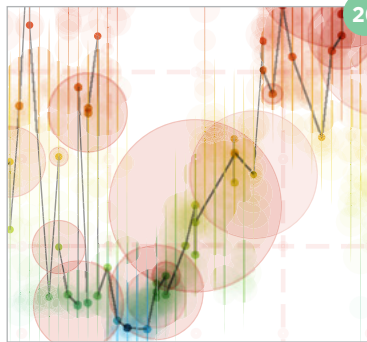
Radhi Spear, DTM
International President



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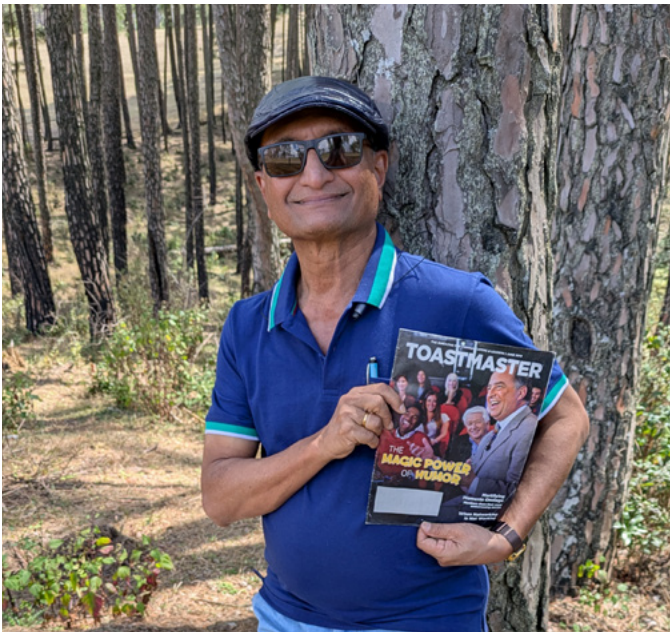
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Snapshot



Members of the **Ha Ha He He Ho Ho Toastmasters** club in Muscat, Oman, gather for a trek at Wadi Shab, a canyon located near the Gulf of Oman.

Traveling Toastmaster



Suhas Gundale of Thane, Maharashtra, India, poses with the *Toastmaster* magazine while at the Ranikhet Golf Course in Uttarakhand, India.



Stephanie Kowalyk, DTM, of Chicago, Illinois, visits Copper Canyon in Chihuahua, Mexico.

From Helicopters to Hummingbirds

How one Toastmaster used his skills on camera, underwater, and beyond.

By Megan Preston Meyer

With over 1.7 million views on YouTube, the documentary *The Bird in My Backyard* opens with slow-motion footage of hummingbirds, their iridescent neck feathers shimmering fuchsia against a backdrop of falling snow. But the documentary is not about hummingbirds, not entirely; it's about the man who captures them on camera.

Eric Pittman, a Toastmaster from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, has been filming hummingbirds for more than 15 years. He first discovered a hummingbird making nests in his backyard in 2009. "I started filming her, and she just kept having nests, one after another. She had six nests in one year."

He was hooked, and so were others. "Facebook was coming in at that time, so I started a Facebook page called Hummingbirds Up Close. Lots of people started following it, so I just kept doing it."

Pittman has followed 120 hummingbirds from egg to flight—and not just in his own garden. "I started to get calls from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] for their wildlife films. I've been on a couple expeditions with them ... and I get called for hummingbird footage from places all over the world," he says.

The birds in his backyard have taken him well beyond its bounds. The 20-minute film, which follows Pittman as he documents two hummingbirds and their chicks, was nominated for Best Short Documentary at the 2025 Canadian Screen Awards.

Pittman, a member of Thunderbird Toastmasters Club, has had a remarkable journey, made possible by his curiosity, passion, and willingness to try something new—characteristics that have stuck with him throughout his life.

Early Career

Pittman started his career as a helicopter bush pilot in Saskatchewan, Canada. "The owner [of the company] told me, 'There are three wrecked helicopters behind the hangar. If you can build one, you can fly it all summer. Here are the books and here are the wrenches. Go for it.' And I did."

As a bush pilot, Pittman flew geologists to isolated sites, fought forest fires, transported jade and other minerals, and did logging—the process of using helicopters to remove logs from difficult-to-reach sites.

"It was the helicopter logging that made me quit, because it was really too dangerous," he says. One afternoon, after a near-miss, Pittman realized that he was taking too many chances. "There's a saying with pilots: There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots."

Pittman left the flying behind, but not the boldness and curiosity. He took a job installing architectural glass blocks, and that launched another idea. "I found out that nobody made glass blocks in Canada, so I thought, well, we should make glass blocks."

He raised money and started a glass foundry. "We built the whole thing right from the ground up. At one point we had four furnaces going."

Pittman and a partner ran the foundry for 10 years. In addition to the glass blocks, they also made art glass, such as trophies and decorative pieces. "We were successful, but the things that occurred were not in our favor, like energy costs going up," he explains. "As you can imagine, a glass foundry uses a lot of energy." Pittman decided to pull the plug and focus his energy elsewhere.



Breaking World Records

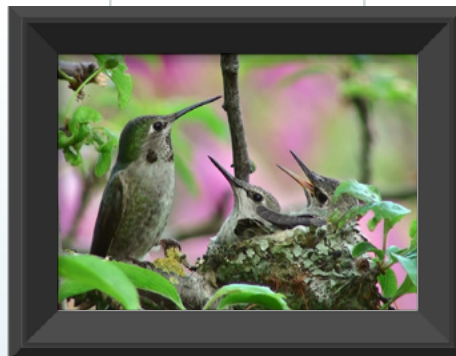
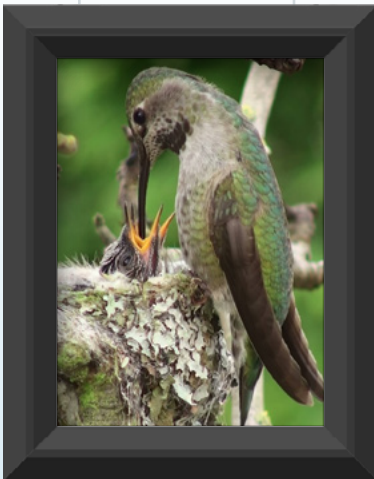
One area that he focused on ended up landing him in the *Guinness World Records* book. Pittman had written a book and wanted to make a splash with its launch. "I looked on the Guinness Book of Records website and I found one that I thought I could do," he says.

The world's largest underwater press conference—at that point—had been attended by only 12 journalists, and Pittman was sure he could beat that. He reserved a pool, had a local brewery sponsor the after-conference refreshments, prepared a puppet show, and organized an internet livestream. But there was another important task he needed to do on his way to breaking the world record: "I learned how to scuba dive."

Most people who didn't already know how to scuba dive would have flipped the page to find a more accessible world record to break, but Pittman is not most people. He knew what he wanted to achieve, and with that goal in mind, he put in the work to make it happen.



All photographs by Eric Pittman.



“I’ve been on a couple expeditions with [the BBC] ... and I get called for hummingbird footage from places all over the world.”

—ERIC PITTMAN

Pittman beat the record for the largest underwater press conference in 2006 with 61 journalists in attendance who dived to a depth of more than 32 feet.

Environmental Causes and Toastmasters

Pittman’s drive and dedication are also evident in his passion for nature and his work for environmental causes. In addition to filming hummingbirds, he co-founded the Canadian Orca Rescue Society. In an effort to bring recognition to the declining orca population, Pittman and the Society taught themselves to design and sew life-size orcas out of ripstop nylon—based on actual orcas that had been identified and tracked—which they inflated like balloons and brought with them to rallies.

His commitment to this cause and his determination to make an impact led him to Toastmasters. “[Toastmasters] has been essential ... because I do so much public speaking in this role,” Pittman says. “We go to many

environmental marches and things like that, and often we get up in front of the crowd and talk to people about it ... Without the confidence to speak to them, it would be really difficult.”

He first joined Toastmasters in 2008. After taking a break in 2013, he returned recently as part of his preparation for *The Bird in My Backyard* documentary. “I decided to brush up on the skills because I knew that doing an interview for a film would be difficult, and I didn’t want to have those ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’ and all the bad things that come along with not recognizing the importance of what you’re saying.” As the documentary proves, Pittman does recognize the importance of what he’s saying, and says it well.

Of course, Toastmasters is about more than just technical skill; it’s about camaraderie. “Most people in Toastmasters are intelligent, and I like that,” Pittman says. “I like being in a room full of smart people. I just feel like it helps me mentally.”

Pittman is an asset to his club. Lynn Goodacre, a fellow member in the Thunderbird Toastmasters Club, has known him for about a year. “Eric contributes to the club’s atmosphere and culture with his sense of humor and spontaneity,” she says. That sense of humor runs throughout the club. “We know

his passion is hummingbirds, so we tease him about ‘trying’ to talk about [other] topics, as well!” Goodacre adds.

Pittman’s drive, determination, and willingness to learn have helped him along his journey. “I didn’t know how to fly before I started to fly, and I didn’t know how to have a glass foundry until I had a glass foundry,” he says. “There’s never been any fear of starting something new.” This collection of new beginnings have linked together to form a fascinating life. From hummingbirds to helicopters, from orcas to underwater press conferences, his boldness, inquisitive spirit, and enthusiasm have served him well.

“There may not be old, bold pilots,” he laughs, “but there are certainly old, bold environmentalists.”

Megan Preston Meyer is the author of *Max Entropy & the Avalanche*, as well as *Firebrand: A Corporate Elements Mystery* and *the Supply Jane* and *Fifo Adventures*. She lives in Switzerland and is a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at entropycottage.com/max.

Lessons from World Champions

How I discovered the power of silence and movement in public speaking.

By Akash D K, DTM



When I joined Toastmasters, I believed great speakers were those who commanded the room with strong words, compelling arguments, and boundless energy. After hearing of the title “World Champion of Public Speaking,” I searched the internet and discovered a treasure trove of inspiring speeches from past champions. I watched Ramona J. Smith deliver a speech with deliberate pauses, calculated movements, and authoritative silence, and I learned something incredible: Sometimes, the most impactful moments in a speech are those that are wordless.

I used to think that an excellent speech equated to never having any “dead air.” If I needed a word and forgot it, I used filler words to bridge the gap. Inspired by Ramona’s use of silence, I became curious—was this a common trait among other World Champions? I watched more championship speeches, including those of Darren LaCroix, AS, and Dananjaya Hettiarachchi. As I studied their delivery, I noticed a pattern. They, too, embraced silence, using well-timed pauses to heighten engagement and emotion. Their mastery of pacing and intentional pauses made their speeches even more impactful.

Beyond the power of silence, I realized another critical lesson—intentional movement. The champions’ gestures, steps, and even stillness were never random. Each movement was deliberate, reinforcing their message rather than distracting from it.

In his winning speech, Manoj Vasudevan, DTM, used strategic pacing and controlled gestures to command attention, making his message visually compelling. Similarly, Aaron Beverly mastered precision in his storytelling, using measured hand movements and purposeful pacing to strengthen his delivery.

Cyril Junior Dim’s synchronized gestures enhanced his speech’s rhythm, making every movement feel intentional and natural. Ramona used boxing moves in her speech, and each jab emphasized a phrase.

Observing these champions made me rethink my own approach. I realized that movement should never be accidental; it should always serve the speech. Whether it’s a step forward to emphasize a key point or a pause in motion to let an idea sink in, calculated movements can elevate a speech from ordinary to unforgettable.

Sometimes, the most impactful moments in a speech are those that are wordless.

Inspired, I decided to apply these lessons to my own speeches. I began by first practicing how to pause. During a Toastmasters club meeting, I spoke about overcoming self-doubt and employed purposeful pauses. Following a strong point, I paused and allowed the gravity of what I was saying to land in the room. Prior to delivering my punchline, I held back a couple of seconds so the crowd would be eager to hear what I was going to say. At emotive moments, I allowed silence to create intimacy.

At first, pausing felt unnatural—I had to fight the urge to fill the silence. I took two deep breaths before continuing. This small action gave me a moment to collect my thoughts and embrace the pause, rather than fear it.

The payoff? The audience responded differently. I noticed shifts in their reactions—more nodding, leaning forward, and moments of complete silence as they absorbed my words. Unlike my previous speeches, where people would sometimes glance around or react immediately, this time, they took a moment before responding, as if the message had truly set in.

After the speech, a fellow Toastmaster approached me to share that my pauses made the speech more powerful. That was when I knew silence isn’t just a gap between words; it’s a tool that made my message resonate deeper.

The next time you go onstage, fight the temptation to hurry. Instead, take a moment, breathe, and let your silence be heard just as powerfully as your words. Instead of pacing aimlessly, plant your feet before delivering your next line. Because sometimes, what you *don’t* say is what really speaks.

Akash D K, DTM, is a member of TCS Maitree Chennai Toastmasters Club in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.



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Emphasize and Express Your Words

Solutions for your questions and queries.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Our questions this month focus on emphasis and expressiveness. I love these questions because they help us identify several key elements of speech delivery.

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 ways you can be more expressive when giving a speech?

When I first joined Toastmasters, I thought about every detail in my speech delivery. I am an engineer, after all. But as time went on, I became more organic and expressive. I let it happen naturally. When you think about every detail, you have too much going on in your head.

Expressiveness includes vocal variety, body language, and facial expressions. However, expressiveness is more a mindset than a collection of skills. It is a willingness to be bigger than you might be comfortable with.

For example, at a recent club meeting, a woman spoke about driving through Montana on a slushy winter's day. Traffic was slow, but a truck driver behind her wasn't paying attention and almost rear-ended her. Her speeches are usually fine, but on that day, she was electric. As she described looking in the rearview mirror, it was obvious she was reliving the experience in her mind. And because of that, we were living it with her.

Now, you might be thinking, "How can I be more expressive through my body language?" In my experience, your voice and your body are tied together. If you are expressive with your voice, your body will follow. And vice versa. If it doesn't, you aren't expressive enough.

"But, Bill, I'm not that expressive."

We are all expressive. And we let that out when we are ourselves in casual conversation. It is only when we give a speech that we become controlled. Give yourself permission to be expressive. If you have a sense of humor, let it out, too. Think of yourself as a performer, not a speaker. And push your performance to the next level.

How do you know which words and phrases to emphasize when delivering a speech?

Just like expressiveness, we know what to emphasize in casual conversation. It is only when we are giving a speech that we forget how to do it.

We emphasize words to make our communication clear to our listeners. Emphasis is essentially

using contrast to make a point. Vocal variety, body language, and facial expressions all have ways of doing this.

To figure out what words and phrases to emphasize, I suggest the following procedure.

First, write out your speech. Second, consider each sentence. Which words and phrases are important to your message? Which ones are important for your audience members to understand or notice? Underline them. And finally, decide how to emphasize those words and phrases.

Let me give you some examples.

If I am cleaning up a mess in the house, I might ask my wife for a wet paper towel. The most important word is "wet." So I would emphasize that.

Let's say that my wife and I are visiting a museum. We might be told to look for a guide with a bright red jacket if we need any assistance. In this case, the most important words are "bright red jacket."

Lastly, maybe I want to indicate a change. I am a big fan of the Indianapolis 500 auto race. If a driver won for the first time, I would say he is now an Indy 500 winner. The key word is "winner," and I would stress that.

Hopefully that gives you an idea of which words and phrases to emphasize. Another tip is to put yourself into the minds of your listeners. Where might they be confused? Where might they completely misunderstand your words? Clarify those points with emphasis. You want them to walk away understanding exactly what you said.

Ultimately, your goal is to get to the point where you rely on your natural emphatic skill and not overthink it. We all emphasize key words and phrases in our casual conversation. Work on it long enough and you will get there when delivering speeches too.

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.

6 Recognition Pitfalls to Avoid

Step up your praise while remaining authentic.

By Lauren Parsons, DTM, AS

Gina started as a waitress in a restaurant chain. As a new member of the team, she lacked self-confidence but focused on acknowledging what her colleagues did well. She started making a point of thanking her workmates and writing them little notes, sharing what she genuinely appreciated about them.

About a year later, the company's senior managers visited the restaurant. They wanted to discover why this outlet's results were consistently significantly better than others in the chain.

After investigation, all the indicators pointed to one waitress—Gina. Her positivity and sincere regard for her colleagues had a major impact on team morale. It created

an uplifting atmosphere among the team, which flowed through to the ambience in the restaurant. Customers noticed and came back more often. They also brought their friends, which meant more bookings and higher earnings for the restaurant.

Gina ended up with a promotion, and leadership started looking at how they could foster the same culture in their other restaurants.

Why Recognition Matters

Psychology shows us that people perform at their best when they feel valued, acknowledged, appreciated, and respected. Staff or team members who receive regular

praise are happier, more loyal, spend less time worrying, and are quicker to clarify instructions when needed. Giving immediate, specific feedback is one of the best leadership, parenting, and relationship strategies available because of its power to reinforce behavior and boost motivation.

Rather than nagging people about what hasn't been done or pointing out mistakes, highlighting positives makes people want to go the extra mile. You can use this principle to enhance relationships in any area of your life.

There are, however, some pitfalls to avoid. Here are six of them:

1

Inauthentic Praise

People can sense insincere praise a mile off. While regular recognition is the ideal, forcing it can backfire; people will doubt your integrity if you give inauthentic feedback. This is by far the most important pitfall to avoid.

According to a Gallup State of the American Workplace report, leaders can improve work quality by 24% and lower absenteeism by 27% simply by doubling the number of times they recognize employees. Sounds easy right? The caveat is that the praise needs to be authentic. Ensure the nice things you say are merited and well deserved.

When choosing between frequency of praise and sincerity, always opt for higher-quality, genuine compliments over contrived attempts at flattery. Avoid over-embellishing. It will only undermine trust and make people less likely to value your opinion in the future.

To excel at giving sincere praise, make an effort to notice what people are doing. Pay attention to the big and small things people do that add to success, so you're ready with examples of things to acknowledge.

2

Praising Only Star Performers

Sometimes it's easiest to thank and reward the person who brings back the signed contract, launches the product, or wins the award, when really it was a team effort to achieve that goal. Much like giving all the praise to the player who scores the touchdown, this can demotivate everyone else who contributed in vital ways. Avoid breeding apathy and discontent by celebrating team success and being careful to include everyone involved.



3 Non-Specific Praise

I'll always remember the parenting advice to avoid phrases like "good girl" or "good boy." These generic statements don't carry a lot of meaning. In the same vein, if you say "well done" or "great job," it doesn't have much weight. People will easily forget these vague phrases.

Skilled leaders know how to deliver powerful, specific praise that people might remember weeks, months, and even years later. The sort of feedback that inspires and drives people on to greater heights.

It's important to specifically state *what* was good. For example, "I really liked the way you kept the meeting on track today. You did an impressive job of refocusing the conversation despite so many people trying to take us in different directions." This lets the person know what they did well.

It can be even more powerful when you tie your praise to a character trait you admire in that person. For example, "You're such a great listener. I always admire how you're able to make people feel heard and build them up, while being able to redirect the conversation and keep things moving. It's a valuable skill!"

4 Comparison Praise

One thing we often hear people say is "You were my favorite," or "You were the best." This isn't as helpful as you might think. Being told "You gave the best presentation today!" can actually demotivate people. At a subconscious level, we all know we can't be "the best" every time, which can create future worry. Ironically, telling someone they're better than others can stop them from striving to perform at their best.

It's much more effective to applaud people's effort, skill, and progress. For example, "You spoke so clearly today and made great eye contact with everyone. I really liked how you closed with an emotive story. I could see you put a lot of effort into crafting that. It felt very natural and was really captivating."

5 Only Leader-Led Praise

If people feel that showing appreciation at work is something only managers need to (or can) do, they miss opportunities for collegial appreciation and a culture of gratitude. There are lots of ways to foster a culture of appreciation in the workplace.

While formal recognition, such as employee of the year awards, is often management-led, informal recognition at a team level can be just as motivating. Examples include sharing positive feedback about someone in a team meeting, emailing congratulations and copying someone's manager, or leaving a positive note on someone's desk.

Some workplaces facilitate staff-led praise by having thank you cards available in the staff room, "high five moments" in meetings when anyone can speak up with words of thanks, or a monthly award with team member nominations. In the last instance, the nominators receive coffee vouchers or a premier office parking spot as a small thank you, a great example of rewarding the behaviors you want to reinforce in your team culture.

6 Goal-Focused Praise

Yes, achieving the end goal is a fantastic thing to applaud. Too often, however, we miss the opportunities to praise *toward* the goal.

Ironman athletes, who complete a 2.4 mile (3.86 km) swim, 112 mile (180 km) cycle, and 26.2 mile (42.2 km) run, train themselves to celebrate each milestone along the way—each buoy they circle in the water, each cone they go past. This self-praise maintains motivation toward the end goal and ultimately helps them reach the finish line.

Applaud the smaller wins on the way toward the bigger ones. This builds confidence and sets the tone for success.

Always remember, people do more of what they're praised for. Whether it's at work, with your loved ones, or within your Toastmasters club, focus on giving specific, authentic praise whenever possible and see the positive ripple you create.

Lauren Parsons, DTM, AS, is an award-winning wellbeing specialist, New Zealand's Keynote Speaker of the Year and Educator of the Year 2023, TEDx speaker, author of *Thriving Leaders*, *Thriving Teams*, and host of the *Thrive TV Show*. She is a sought-after speaker who helps organizations create a positive, energized team culture where people thrive. Visit laurenparsonswellbeing.com.

Growth
Moment

Projecting Executive Presence

Learn tactics to inspire confidence and trust from others.

By Joel Schwartzberg

One of the biggest buzzwords in leadership is “executive presence,” which refers to a leader’s ability to earn the trust and respect of their colleagues, staff, and audiences. Powered by that support, people with executive presence typically enjoy more authority and freedom in their work.

Like most leadership qualities, executive presence is perceived through verbal communications, like speeches and conversations, as well as nonverbal communication cues, including active listening and body language.

Anyone in leadership—whether you’re running a company, committee, or club—can develop executive presence. And in modern times, the opportunities to convey executive presence are more frequent and diverse than ever.

“Executive presence can be conveyed in almost every business interaction,” says Marti Fischer, executive coach and principal of Marti Fischer Group. “From town hall speeches to performance reviews to all-staff emails, leaders have multiple opportunities to build confidence, trust, and morale.”

Let’s examine the definition of executive presence, break down its traits and benefits, and review some of the most effective tactics to elevate and leverage your own abilities, regardless of your level or profession.

Defining Executive Presence

Is there an established definition of executive presence? It depends on who you ask.

Gerry Valentine, founder of Vision Executive Coaching, writes in a *Forbes* magazine article, “In its simplest terms, executive presence is about your ability to inspire confidence—inspiring confidence in your subordinates that

you’re the leader they want to follow, inspiring confidence among peers that you’re capable and reliable, and, most importantly, inspiring confidence among senior leaders that you have the potential for great achievements.”

Sue Rosen, executive coach, explains that executive presence is “the ability to inspire the trust and confidence of others in your ability to deliver results.”

In both of these definitions, two values recur more than any other: confidence and trustworthiness.

Confidence Is Critical

One executive presence quality that has stood the test of time is confidence. In fact, in 2012 and 2022, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an economist and author of *Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success*, conducted surveys of U.S. business executives in various industries, asking them to rank the importance of dozens of leadership traits. In both surveys, “confidence” took the top spot decisively.

When leaders demonstrate confidence, they inspire trust from their teams, making it easier for those leaders to establish buy-in and make executive decisions. “Confidence is the foundation on which executive presence is built,” writes Jennifer A. Garrett, founder of *The Executive Edge* newsletter. “It enables you to make bold decisions, communicate effectively, and assertively lead in high-stakes situations.” Research has even shown that being around confident people increases our reassurance in our own actions.

A Matter of Trust

Trustworthiness is another important leadership quality. In a 2022 online survey of 7,000 global employees, the Edelman Trust

Barometer found that when employees trust their employers, good things happen, including increases in their desire to stay with the organization and improve it.

“When you exhibit executive presence, people trust and follow you,” says Deepali Vyas, global head of the data & AI sector at ZRG Partners. “People lean in and take you seriously, whether you’re leading a room or sitting silently in it.”

Communicating Executive Presence

Exuding confidence and trustworthiness doesn’t happen by chance or magic. Professionals cultivate these perceptions through the ways they write, speak, listen, respond, and reveal themselves to others.

Try these eight communication tactics to demonstrate confidence and inspire trust.

- 1. Get Louder:** I often run an exercise in my workshops where I ask clients to speak deliberately—even uncomfortably—louder. I then ask their classmates to describe how their impression of that speaker changed as a result of the increase in volume. Every time, the speakers are seen as more confident, assertive, and authoritative, which inspires trust. Audiences also perceive louder speakers as more energetic, knowledgeable, and committed. There’s no question that executives who seem inspired and energetic inspire and energize others.
- 2. Be clear.** “Clarity earns trust by removing guesswork,” says Vyas. “When leaders communicate with precision—not fluff—people stop wondering what they meant and start aligning with their vision.” Attributes of clarity include brevity,



“Conveying executive presence is not about being someone else; it’s about showing up most effectively for your team or organization’s needs.”

—MARIE-JEANNE JULLIAND

specificity, an emphasis on key points, and a practical call to action. Prepare your points in advance, just like you would with presentations, to avoid rambling.

3. Make eye contact. Maintaining eye contact is the ultimate demonstration of engagement. In a virtual meeting, eye contact requires looking into the camera, not at the faces of your colleagues, so position the camera at eye level, either by adjusting your camera, chair, or computer.

4. Be authentic. Trust also requires authenticity. Emphasize your authenticity by avoiding scripted content, using your own words, embracing imperfections, and sharing personal stories to illustrate your points.

Pay close attention to the difference between what merely feels awkward and what feels completely alien. You want to be [presenting, not performing](#).

Global executive coach Marie-Jeanne Juilland discourages her clients from thinking about executive presence as portraying a character or stereotype. “Conveying executive presence is not about being someone else; it’s about showing up most effectively for your team or organization’s needs,” Juilland says. “Knowing and sticking to your values, trying to see yourself as others do, and shifting your focus from your comfort to your team’s needs will help you come across as genuinely present and powerful.”

5. Be empathic. During challenging periods, executive presence can diminish if you don’t demonstrate adequate empathy. For example, avoid sharing how difficult a tough decision was for you. Instead,

empathize with your team about the consequences on them.

“People with executive presence project a strong degree of humility that allows them to bring compassion into their conversations. This inspires others to engage,” Rosen says.

6. Listen to learn. When you [listen to learn](#)—versus simply listening to hear—you receive more complete information and demonstrate a trust-building commitment to the speaker’s points.

Listening to learn is demonstrated by actions like eye contact, nodding, refraining from interrupting, and following up with supportive questions such as “How did you come up with that idea?” and “How can I help?”

Avoid asking challenging, potentially shaming, or skeptical questions like, “Do we have enough money in the budget for this?” Leaders with executive presence don’t put staff members on the spot; they find the appropriate time and place for tough questions.

7. Show appreciation and acknowledgment. Giving regular kudos to your team helps them feel more confident and demonstrates that you’re aware of and support their work. Be specific about the people or teams you are praising, the efforts they made, and why the impact of their work merits recognition.

8. Keep your whole body in executive presence mode. What you do with your body can strongly affect how you are perceived. According to Christine Clapp, DTM, founder and president of the presentation-skills consultancy Spoken with Authority, standing up as you communicate

increases your executive presence. She also recommends making deliberate gestures and avoiding distracting movements like clicking a pen, swaying, twisting in your chair, and playing with your hair.

Other signs of executive posturing include leaning slightly forward in your chair (versus sitting back) and avoiding closed gestures like crossing your arms and making fists.

The benefits of executive presence are tangible, including more efficient teamwork, more effective meetings, and making a strong case for professional promotion.

“At any level of an organization, people with executive presence are seen as trustworthy collaborators and colleagues,” Fischer says. “That impression fosters cohesive teamwork and can even help emerging leaders become executive leaders.”

But most importantly, leaders who earn the trust and confidence of others—and have trust and confidence in themselves—are in the best position to drive progress and change. If an organizational goal is your North Star, executive presence is your steady hand at the helm.

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](#).

KEEP THAT MOMENTUM!

How to stay motivated on long-term projects.

By Katie Stoddart

Whether it's a new year, a refocus at a changing season, or for Toastmasters, a new program year, we've all experienced that fresh-start effect: a new beginning, a blank slate, a time to set goals. You feel excited, you believe in the journey ahead, and you have a boost of confidence ... until a few weeks later. While that initial surge is wonderful, the truth is that this empowered and motivated feeling doesn't last.

How can you keep that momentum? How can you ensure that you don't run out of steam a few weeks after getting started and keep your goals and plans in mind as you progress through the year?

As a high-performance coach and trainer, I've worked with corporate executives, entrepreneurs, and managers, and observed that they start with great enthusiasm and ambition, but often their motivation falls away as the weeks and months go by.

Luckily, there is a lot of research on the psychology of momentum, as well as tips and strategies to help you stay on track and build sustainable performance over time.

The Psychology of Momentum

In physics, the definition of momentum is the mass of an object times its velocity. Translated into psychological terms, the more energy and motivation (velocity) you feel and the more actions you take (mass), the greater momentum you will have.

Momentum differs from motivation. The initial push to do something is motivation, it is the *why* behind taking action; whereas momentum is the *how*: the actions you take that build up over time.

You gain momentum by seeing progress in your projects. The more progress you make, the greater momentum you will generate. However,

sometimes it takes a while to see progress, and this is the time when people falter, slow down, or abandon their goals.

Author and strategic planner Dan Sullivan describes this time of discouragement as “the gap.” As he explains in his book *The Gap and the Gain*, when you focus on the gap—thinking about how much further you still need to go—you become discouraged.

However, when you focus on the gain—noticing how far you've come—you create momentum. Keeping this in mind throughout your journey is key, because the second you pivot and focus on the gap, you lose motivation and momentum.

You might start strong and have the best intentions, but within six months, you are on autopilot, doing the minimum amount of work.

Find Your Support System

One of the greatest assets for momentum is leverage, and to get leverage, you need to find people who will help you along your journey. That might be a mentor or coach, an accountability partner, a coworker, or anyone in your peer group.

Equally, you lean on your own strengths and skills as leverage for the different projects you are working on. If you are focusing on something you're good at and enjoy, and if you often find yourself working in a state of flow (and within your [Zone of Genius](#)), you are more likely to generate momentum.

Strategies for Staying on Track

From a psychological perspective, the ability to stay focused on any long-term project comes down to having a clear *why* (i.e., understanding your motivation), taking action, focusing on the gain, and finding leverage. Let's break down what this looks like in terms of tangible strategies:

- **Set quarterly goals and regular milestones.** “One way to keep momentum going is to have constantly greater goals,” says author and editor Michael Korda. Setting goals that are both ambitious *and* realistic is what ignites the initial fire. To keep them front of mind, you can set what productivity expert Ali Abdaal calls “quarterly quests”—goals you set for each quarter of the year. Whether you set quarterly quests or yearly goals, break them down into monthly objectives—the clearer and more tangible the objectives are, the easier they will be to reach.
- **Block off your calendar and review regularly.** Simply setting goals isn't enough, however, because they often get forgotten as time goes by. You need to have a way to remind yourself of them. You might start strong and have the best intentions, but within six months, you are on autopilot, doing the minimum amount of work.

To hold yourself accountable, start by marking down the deadline for finishing your goal, then work backward to schedule time on a regular basis to work on the goals and tasks. The simplest method is to set a reminder on your phone or in your calendar app. And look for tools that can help. One of my favorites is [time blocking](#). This involves thinking of your day in terms of chunks



Momentum comes down to three core ingredients: establishing a powerful vision and a clear why, having regular check-ins, and taking action.

of time rather than breaking it down into minutes of tasks. By blocking off a chunk of time (for instance, three hours twice a week to focus on a long-term project), you prioritize the project and give yourself time to move it forward.

“One way to keep momentum going is to have constantly greater goals.”

—MICHAEL KORDA

If you're the leader of a team, schedule a set time each month for people to report on their progress and any setbacks.

You can even create rituals in your Toastmasters meeting by having members take a few minutes to share how they are progressing. If you're a club officer, make sure you're regularly referring to your [Club Success Plan](#) and staying on track.

When groups have a regular check-in time, not only are they more accountable toward their progress but they also have the opportunity to share setbacks, both of which contribute to a more dynamic environment in your group.

- **Find strategies to cope with low momentum.** Most of us start a project strongly motivated to see it through. But as time goes on, that motivation often dwindles, and we end up losing our momentum. Here are a few core tactics if you feel that you are slowing off the path:

- ▶ **Break the cycle.** If you find yourself in a downward spiral with low motivation and action, try changing things up: Seek inspiration from other people you look up to whom you haven't reached out to before, attend a new training or class, read a great book, or listen to a podcast on motivation.

- ▶ **Hold yourself accountable.** Find an accountability partner, either someone on your team or a mentor or coworker, who can help you get back on track.

- ▶ **Anticipate.** Know that there will be times when you might feel [discouraged and bored](#). And that's okay. As James Clear points out in his book *Atomic Habits*, boredom is a fundamental aspect of the high performer journey. In fact, you should expect it. Just don't let those phases of boredom stop you; instead, overcome your resistance by changing things up or holding yourself accountable in some ways.

Just remember, the more often you give up, the harder it will be to achieve your goals.

Building Sustainable Performance

Consistent momentum comes from building a sustainable performance routine that doesn't cause you to burn out. But sometimes you get in a slump. When that happens, find some practices to renew your focus and keep that energy strong.

- **Examine your vision and why.** If your motivation hits rock bottom, it can be because the vision wasn't clear, or your why wasn't strong enough. Set yourself up at the

start by making sure you have a strong why, a solid understanding of your goal, and a clear direction for achieving it.

- **Increase your check-in cadence.**

The more often you measure and check in with yourself and the group, the more likely you are to stay on track. Checking in is the simplest way to ensure that you remember your goals over time, and that you and the team stay aligned with your goals. It also provides you an opportunity to revisit and redefine your goals as you progress.

- **Prioritize self-care.**

When you experience those inevitable phases of lower motivation, take a step back to reset and renew your energy. See if you can delegate some tasks for a while. Consider if you need to take time to check that your goals are aligned with your vision and core values.

Take a tip from elite athletes who know that [prioritizing rest and rejuvenation](#) is as important as training to ensure high performance. Make sure you are periodically slowing down and taking a break from the pressures and constant tasks.

- **Focus on process not goals.**

If you are goal-oriented, you might struggle to focus on the journey. Yet, that's where the magic lies. Author Clear points out that when you think of your [end-goals as a means of guiding you](#), not as the final result, you'll often find that you fall in love with the systems and the process.

When you allow yourself to enjoy the process, you aren't just focusing on the end results, you're opening yourself up to making new discoveries, which helps ensure your motivation stays high.

- **Celebrate wins and learnings.**

A powerful way to ensure that you are enjoying the process is to [celebrate wins](#) and learnings. When you do your weekly check-ins with an accountability partner or your team, why not take a few minutes to acknowledge the accomplishments of the past week? If you're doing a self-check-in, write down your progress so you can see the strides that you've made.

In a team meeting, invite each person to reflect and share one or two wins. This gives a great dopamine hit and helps to feel excited about the journey and process.

- **Notice your pattern of success.**

Think back on your past experiences. When did you have great momentum and progress? What were some of the tools and strategies that supported you? In contrast, when did you totally lose both motivation and momentum? What were you doing differently then?

Simply setting goals isn't enough, because they often get forgotten as time goes by. You need to have a way to remind yourself of them.

We learn most through experimenting and noticing our own patterns. Maybe you're somebody who loves to track streaks (a stride of consistent days/weeks maintaining a habit), or who works best with an accountability partner. Perhaps you get a fresh dose of inspiration through reading or attending a training course. Or maybe, you feel most motivated after a phase of rest and reset. Whatever works for you: Learn, and repeat!

Momentum comes down to three core ingredients: establishing a powerful vision and a clear why, having regular check-ins, and taking action. Combine these ingredients and you have the perfect recipe for reaching your goals.

If you feel yourself going off track, re-examine your vision and why, re-establish regular check-ins, and find a strategy to get you re-motivated.

With that fresh dose of clarity, you can see what is causing a block in your momentum, and you can break out of your low cycle, get back on track, and enjoy the journey toward reaching your goals.

Katie Stoddart is the founder and CEO of *The Focus Bee*, a high-performance organization. She is an award-winning transformative coach and leadership facilitator; the host of the weekly podcast [The Focus Bee Show](#), and the author of *The Magic of Focus*. She lives in Stockholm, Sweden. Learn more at: [linkedin.com/in/katiestoddart](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katiestoddart) and [katiestoddart.com](https://www.katiestoddart.com).

PREPARING FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION



Make the most of your experience by planning ahead.

By Mackenzie Eldred

One of Toastmasters' most anticipated events of the year—the International Convention—is almost here! This year's convention will be a hybrid event hosted in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and it offers attendees the opportunity to learn new skills and network with others.

Whether you are attending in person or watching online, you're about to experience an inspiring event where you will make connections, have fun, learn new skills, and create memories with a global community of Toastmasters.

Planning ahead for this expansive event, to be held August 20–23, allows you to focus on your goals, increase your learning opportunities, and fully enjoy the experience.

Take these nine steps to make the most of convention.

Determine your goals.

From networking opportunities, to having fun, to supporting a contestant in the final rounds of the International Speech Contest, there are many reasons to attend the convention. Think about why you are attending and what you hope to gain from the experience. Is there a particular skill you want to learn or a speaker you want to listen to? Write down each goal and be specific about what you want to accomplish.

Identifying your goals before the event helps you decide what sessions to attend, who to connect with, and even what to bring. During the convention, review your goals periodically to check your progress and make adjustments to your itinerary.

Plan what sessions to attend.

Once you are clear on your goals, plan your schedule. The [convention agenda](#) is packed with important information about events, speakers, times, and more. There are education sessions, workshops, social activities, the World Championship, the Annual Business Meeting, and so much more. Many sessions are concurrent so identify ahead of time which events interest you and align with your objectives.



Decide who you want to network with.

From social activities to meet-and-greets with speakers, the International Convention is the perfect opportunity to network with others. Before the event, identify who you want to connect with. Research the different speakers, ask your fellow club members if they are attending, and visit social media platforms to see if anyone has posted about going. Find someone who works in your desired career field or someone who has similar interests and consider sending them a message to introduce yourself beforehand.

And make it easy for people to connect with you. Ensure your LinkedIn profile, website, and any other platform you use are up-to-date so others can learn more about you. Use the hashtag #Toastmasters2025 online so other attendees can easily see your posts.

Prepare an elevator pitch.

Before any networking event, it is helpful to craft a brief, 30-second speech (i.e., an [elevator pitch](#)) to introduce yourself to others, and explain who you are, what you do,

and what your key strengths are.

Depending on your goals, you might want to prepare several elevator pitches, each tailored to a different audience. For example, if you want to meet someone in a specific career, highlight your interest in their field and any relevant skills you possess. If you want to make new friends, focus on your interests and hobbies.

Once you have crafted your wording, practice introducing yourself to others so you can jump into conversations with confidence.

Review your conversation résumé.

In addition to crafting an elevator pitch, plan a [conversation résumé](#). Unlike a typical résumé where you list your job experience, education, and skills, a conversation résumé is a mental note to yourself of potential talking points should you need a conversation starter. Think about a recent vacation you took, or an interesting current event, or a favorite movie or TV show. Anything that might spark conversation is good to include. Review your list before attending an event so the topics are fresh in your mind.



Research the area.

If you are attending in person, research what's around the Pennsylvania Convention Center. From historical sites to art scenes to famous cuisines, Philadelphia has something for everyone. Get some inspiration from World Champion and Philadelphia native [Aaron Beverly's recommendations](#). When you arrive onsite, look for the Customer Service/Hospitality Host Committee Chair near the registration desk—they're available to assist with city-specific questions, such as where to eat, what sites to visit, and how to navigate public transit.



Review the convention details.

At least one week before the event, you will receive a “Know Before You Go” email, which will include details on what to bring, the dress code, weather, and where to find the registration desk.

You will also receive information on how to download and access the convention mobile app, where you’ll find the agenda and an interactive digital map. Be sure to download the app, set your personal schedule, and familiarize yourself with the meeting space before you arrive.

Gather the essentials.

As you start packing, don’t forget basic items, such as your passport and identification card (ID), flight information,



and hotel details. Ensure you have access to your convention confirmation for a smooth registration process upon arrival to the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

Review your plans and determine any other items to bring—a favorite notebook and pen, business cards, or small souvenirs to trade. If you plan to attend the Annual Business Meeting, bring an electronic device to vote with during the event. (Remember to pack your chargers too!)

If you are streaming the available convention sessions online, rather than watching in person, prepare your workspace beforehand and gather any materials you may need. Log in to the digital platform before the session and become familiar with the video player. Set up a calendar reminder for the sessions you want to watch live so you do not miss the events, and remember to take notes.



Do a post-convention review.

Once the event is over, don’t forget one of the most meaningful steps: reflection. How many of your goals

did you accomplish? What are your biggest takeaways from the experience? Did you learn any new skills? Do you have a new enthusiasm or inspiration for your Toastmasters club? Who did you connect with and how will you reach out to them to keep the connection alive?

Keep those memories, connections, and inspirations with you as you head into the new program year!

Mackenzie Eldred is editorial coordinator for the Toastmaster magazine.

Trust Me

Start with yourself and others will follow.

By Stephanie Darling

Who or what can you trust these days, in a world beset with fake news and artificial intelligence? It's a bewildering question for many.

However, there's one source you can learn to always trust—yourself.

Self-trust is one of the most important life skills you can attain, experts say. It's not about being perfect or a know-it-all. Self-trust means you're reasonably confident you can solve problems or resolve situations that come your way. One reason why is because you choose to consistently align your values with your words and actions in all you do.

"Self-trust is our fundamental belief in our judgment, abilities, and values—it's our internal GPS for navigating challenges," notes Clara Rispler, Ph.D., a lecturer at Max Stern Yezreel Valley College who studies the effects of technology and trust on organizations and people. "Just as we need a solid foundation to build a house, self-trust is the bedrock of all other forms of trust."

In uncertain times, self-trust is a "21st century necessity," notes author Nan Russell in a *Psychology Today* article. It's a self-curated journey to finding the best in yourself. "How can you offer the best of who you are to the world if you're not offering the best of who you are to yourself?" she asks.

Toastmasters Equation

Introspection, vulnerability, feedback. Sound familiar? Toastmasters has provided individuals with trust-muscle training for just over 100 years.

Jesse Scinto, DTM, a longtime Toastmaster and deputy program director of strategic communication at Columbia University in New York City, says that Toastmasters clubs are an ideal place to help individuals learn to speak as

self-trusting, reliable communicators, whether inside or outside the workplace.

Local club speaking practice "reinforces the link between action and outcome," Scinto says. "We come to believe if we prepare properly, we'll speak effectively. As our perceived self-efficacy [the belief in our own abilities] grows, we begin to trust ourselves."

Lisa Qu, DTM, says her self-trust journey began when she joined Toastmasters in 2010 and was asked to take a club leadership role right away. She was shocked but said yes.

According to Qu, the entire Toastmasters experience taught her the tenets of self-trust. "I learned that if I wasn't able to be consistent and honor my word, I wouldn't be able to accomplish anything," says Qu, a former District 119 Director and member of Advanced Public Speakers in New York City and six other clubs.

"You have to know who you are and what you stand for," she says. "I've learned to trust myself to help build results, be vulnerable, to listen, be honest and open-minded, and to own my responsibilities and learn from my mistakes." It's an ongoing practice, she adds.

"It's not a 24/7 belief. There's no guarantee of success every time for you or your team or your club. A challenging situation can rock your world. What I do trust is my ability to sit down, zoom out on my perspective, and rebuild from within," Qu explains.

Self-Trust in Practice

Like Qu, Rispler says self-efficacy is an ongoing, deliberate practice. Here are some steps to implement:

- **Just Start:** Begin with a personal mission statement, based on the values that matter most to you. Greater assertiveness? Better decision-making? Write them down.

Now you have a distinct roadmap to test, practice, learn, and adjust your thinking as you grow in self-awareness.

- **Start Small:** Try journaling—maybe not daily but often. Track your emotions, reflect on actions and attitudes, and write about the "how" and "why" of your decisions.
- **Develop Your Trust Muscle:** Developing self-trust is "like strengthening any capability," Rispler notes. Take on an assignment that scares you a little. Ask for feedback from people you admire. Assess the outcomes of your actions—evaluating successes and setbacks will leave you ready to do it again.
- **Revisit Your Values:** No matter how stout your values, review them and make changes if called for. "Maintaining an open mindset and balancing confidence with humility are essential steps in the process," Rispler says. Listen carefully to others but stand up for your decisions, even under pressure.
- **Lead with Learning:** Competency breeds self-confidence. Think of skills you'd like to master; create a plan to learn them. Once you've demonstrated an ability to do something well, then you trust yourself to handle tasks when they come up.

Self-trust, says Qu, "has to be reaffirmed every single day. It's in the little things: keeping promises, showing up when you say you will, and being honest even when it's hard. These small actions reinforce the foundation of trust, brick by brick."

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

5 TIPS FOR DEPICTING DATA

How to use numbers and graphs to create a compelling story.

By Florian Bay, DTM

At one point or another, you have probably seen a confusing data presentation. These typically include graphs that take too much time to understand. Or pie charts that are slivered down, making the smallest data all but impossible to read. Or a line chart that tries to include too many figures, ranges, and colors.

I train aspiring data analysts and scientists, and I see these mistakes all the time. Something I consistently emphasize is that data and numbers are a means to enhance a message or explain a complex situation. Data-driven insights can lead to powerful decisions and strategies in any organization.

Yet presenting numbers and data is a facet of public speaking that is often ignored. Just like words, numbers and graphs can be woven into compelling narratives to wow audiences and add serious logical weight to arguments.

Here are five principles to help you transform numbers into stories. I have used data from London's main airport—Heathrow—and UNESCO to provide examples.

1. Be Clear on Your Purpose

A good speech should have one purpose, either to inform, persuade, entertain, or inspire. The same is true of a strong graph or visual in a slide or report. Therefore, before you begin, ask yourself this crucial question: *What am I using numbers for?*

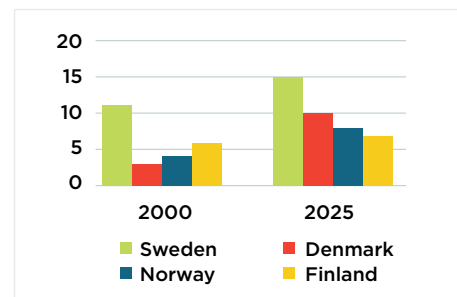
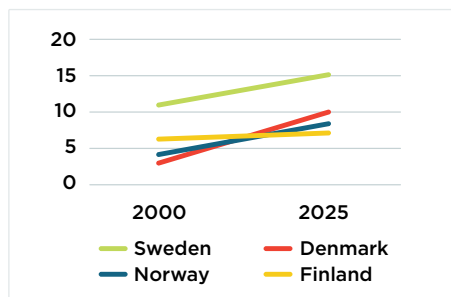
Are you providing specific information to your audience? Or do you have a call to action that requires persuading them? Or do you want to inspire them and raise awareness of an issue?

If your purpose is to inform, simple graphs may be sufficient. However, if you are looking to persuade or inspire, your visual must complement your message and leave no room for misunderstanding. Being able to genuinely move people requires knowing how to use the tools in the weird, wonderful, and colorful science of data visualization.

2. Select the Right Visual

You can use a wide variety of methods to represent data visually. The three most common ones are pie charts, line charts, and bar charts. However, visuals are not necessarily interchangeable and can convey very different meanings with the same data. Consider the example below, showing UNESCO sites by country from 2000 through 2025.

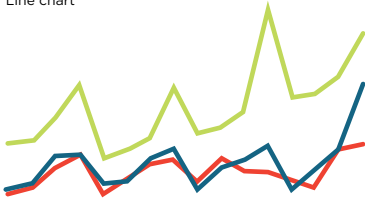
The two charts depict the same data but present it differently. The main message of the *line chart* below (on the left) is that Denmark went from having the lowest to second-highest number of World Heritage sites between 2000 and 2025. But by using a *column chart* (on the right), the takeaway becomes that every country saw an increase in sites during that time frame.



Here are some helpful guidelines to help you determine what type of visuals to choose.

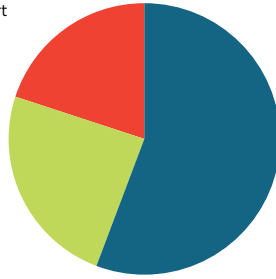
Want to chart time? Then use a *line chart*, which is best for showing trends.

Line chart



Visualizing proportions? Then use a *pie chart*, but only if you've got two or three slices to share; any more than that and the proportions get hard to interpret. *Stacked bar charts* can also be useful.

Pie chart

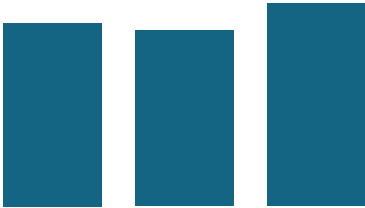


Stacked bar chart



Comparing categories? Then your best friends are charts with *vertical columns* or *horizontal bars*. If your categories are geographical, then *filled maps* (which use shading or tinting to display the value belonging to a region) can be immensely useful.

Vertical column

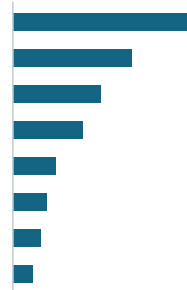


Filled map



You can see below how a *bar chart* is much easier to interpret than a *pie chart* when comparing a large variety of data.

EU
North America
Asia / Pacific
Middle East
Non-EU Europe
UK
Africa
Latin America



■ EU
■ Asia / Pacific
■ Non-EU Europe
■ Africa
■ North America
■ Middle East
■ UK
■ Latin America

Feb 2025 Traffic by Destination - London Heathrow Airport

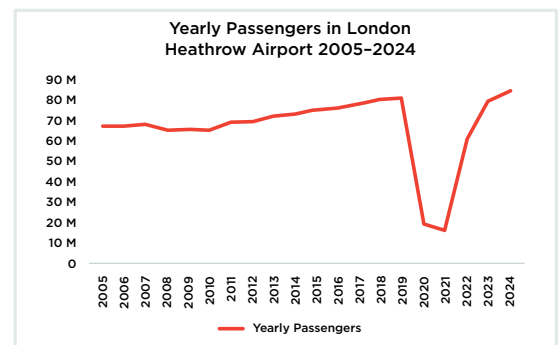
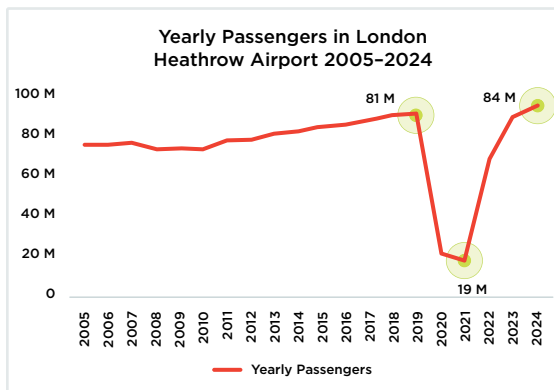
3. Remove the Clutter

The most common mistake I see people make when presenting numbers is to use the default functions of their software tool. The automatically generated axes, values, colors, and lines often result in clutter and unimpactful graphs.

Do you need to keep horizontal lines? So many 000s? To label every data point? Do you even need to keep axes on your graph, especially if you're adding labels to your chart? The graphs on the right show a few of the ways you can make the data easier to interpret and understand.

The second graph is easier to understand because the long numbers on the left column are simplified, with an "M" representing "million."

To make it even easier to interpret, you can add some elements back to emphasize your point. In the example below, I've added the figures directly on the lines, so people can easily see that this airport's passenger traffic is now back to pre-pandemic levels.

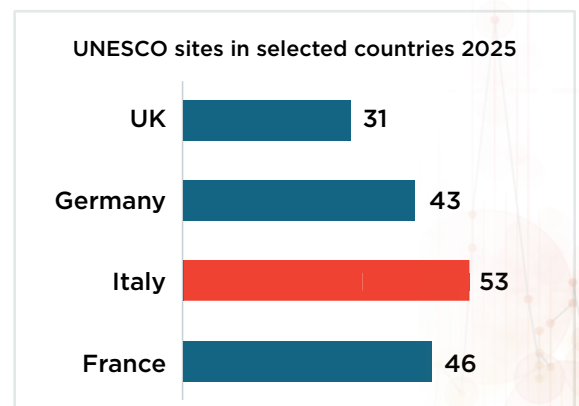
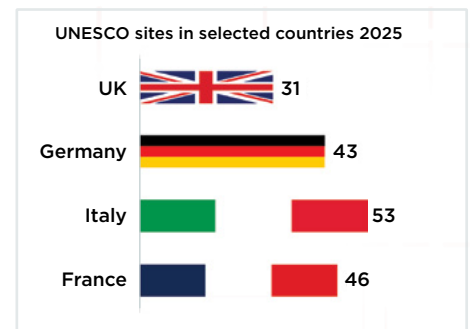
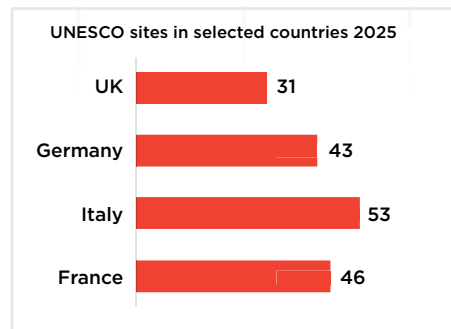


4. Engage With Colors but Don't Create Rainbows

Colors can make a piece of data visualization more engaging, but a graph needs to strike the right balance between beauty and function. There is no need to color every bar in a bar chart differently, especially when they are labelled individually.

In the graphs above right, you can see how adding color and images to a simple bar chart makes it more difficult to interpret. Storytelling with numbers is not about creating rainbows!

That said, color can play an important role in emphasizing what information could be of interest to the viewers. The information needed for comparison can be pushed to the background, with color used to highlight the interesting points. For instance, a quick glance at the chart to the right shows that Italy is the country with the most World Heritage sites.



5. Use Text to Guide Your Viewers

The last ingredient of data storytelling is using text itself to guide viewers and emphasize a clear message. This can be done either by adding text directly into your visuals, or by using a narrative-driven title to tell a story. In the example to the right, I also leveraged color to emphasize a time frame relevant to the narrative used in the title. Finally, I added numbers above the graph to further emphasize the message.

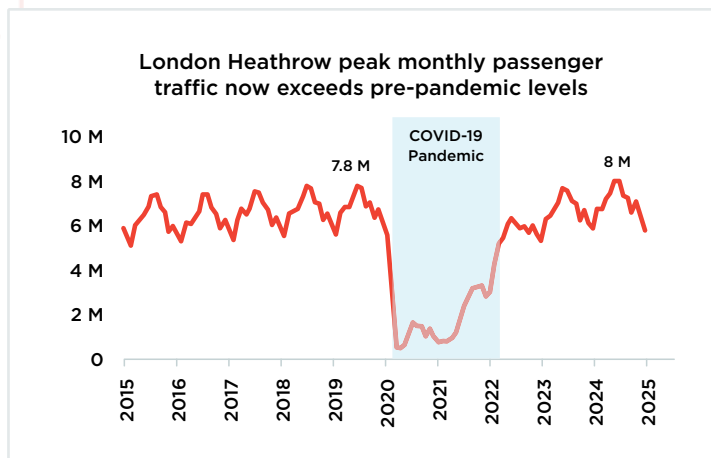
Can you see how it's more engaging to show the information visually than to simply say, "Monthly passenger traffic in London Heathrow went down dramatically during the pandemic, but now exceeds pre-pandemic levels"?

So, the next time you need to present data, consider the best way to depict it.

You have abundant options—from line charts to pie charts, bar charts, and many more. Pick the one that best underscores your point and that conveys your message quickly and in an interesting manner.

Data doesn't need to be boring! And it shouldn't be hard to interpret. Graphs and charts break up a presentation or large chunk of text. It's much easier to grasp something presented visually than to read or listen to a long explanation.

Florian Bay, DTM, is a data science and analysis instructor/coach for Multiverse, an education technology company. He has been a member of Toastmasters since 2013, was the 2019–2020 District 91 Director, and belongs to the London Victorians club. He resides in Beckenham, United Kingdom.



“

Just like words, numbers and graphs can be woven into compelling narratives to wow audiences and add serious logical weight to arguments.

”

Make Your DATA PRESENTATIONS Come to Life

Avoid these 4 missteps to ensure your audience stays engaged.

By Charlene Phua

When you see a data-presentation meeting on your calendar, do you automatically prepare for a good nap? Do you know someone whose number-laden speeches guarantee you some sleep?

As a sustainability communications consultant and Toastmaster, I spend a large part of my time giving and listening to presentations. When I'm in the audience, I often find myself dozing off for the data-focused ones, struggling to concentrate, and not retaining the information.

You spend hours fine-tuning your words and slides to make sure your presentation is memorable and impactful. The good news is that when done right, data-heavy presentations can be highly engaging, containing information that resonates with, and influences, your audience.

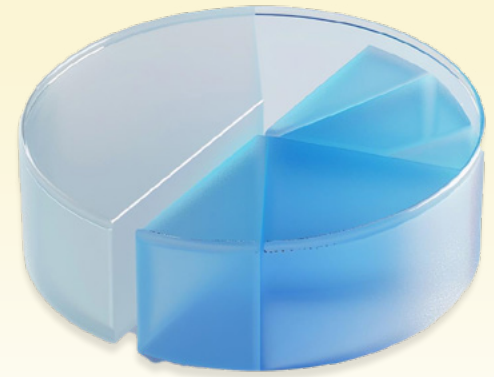
Here are four common missteps I frequently observe presenters make, along with tips on how to fix them.

Misstep #1:

Including data that isn't relevant to topic or audience

Let's say you are giving a presentation on climate change and the harmful effects it has on our planet. You have an abundance of facts, figures, and statistics—from greenhouse gas emissions to drastically changing global weather conditions—to support your position.

However, having plenty of research doesn't mean you should include all of it. When faced with a constant influx of information, audiences often experience cognitive overload, with the input of information becoming greater than what their minds can process. Presenting all your findings also makes it difficult to discern what is truly important, leading listeners to grow disengaged.



Misstep #2:

Having an inaccurate gauge of your audience's understanding

Determining which facts to include often depends on who you will be presenting to. If you're talking to a group of climate scientists, the information you include will be vastly different than if you are presenting to a community group.

Find out as much as possible about your audience before compiling your data. Do they have a similar level of understanding of the topic, or do they lack foundational knowledge? Will using industry jargon show your grasp of the subject, or will that lose them? Are you covering what your audience wants, or expects, to hear?

If you're presenting to a group with limited knowledge of your subject, consider giving your speech to members of your Toastmasters club and getting their perspective. Ask for candid feedback on what worked and what didn't, and what they felt was the key takeaway.



Misstep #3:

Providing data with no context or comparison

Even with well-chosen facts and figures, if your audience is unclear of the scope of the numbers, you're going to lose their attention. To keep them engaged, provide a relatable reference, rather than purely letting the numbers do the talking.

For example, when talking to a group of non-experts about how global carbon emissions are on the rise, you might be tempted to say that humans dumped XX billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2024. But that doesn't mean anything if someone doesn't have a concept of what an ideal amount of carbon dioxide should be.

Instead, try focusing on a fact that puts the result into an understandable context—for example, the percentage likelihood that global warming will exceed the warming target set by the Paris Agreement within a certain number of years.

The second example sets context, which enhances understanding and gives your statistics meaning and relevance.

When done right, data can be a powerful tool, with the potential to engage, inspire, and leave a lasting impression.

Misstep #4:

Neglecting other aspects of your performance

Even with the right amount of data, presented in a relatable manner, and based on the audience's level of understanding, your speech still might not be engaging. You need to focus not only on what you're saying, but also on how you're saying it. Incorporate techniques to elevate your delivery. Use vocal variety to emphasize key points. Adjust your body language so you aren't just staring at your slides or reading your script. Use the stage space to engage all sections of the audience.

Luckily, all Pathways projects focus on ways to ensure your delivery is as effective as your words. Review your past projects and evaluations and look for new projects that address elements you need enhanced.

A data-heavy presentation shouldn't be a snoozer. When done right, data can be a powerful tool, with the potential to engage, inspire, and leave a lasting impression.



Make your message not just heard but also felt, and transform dry statistics into a compelling narrative.

Charlene Phua is a sustainability communications consultant based in Singapore and is passionate about bringing annual and sustainability reports to life through the power of storytelling. She is a member of the Anchorvale CC club and The Speakers Toastmasters Club, both in Singapore.



When the Thrill Is Gone

How to reignite your passion for Toastmasters.

By Kate McClare, DTM

There comes a time in almost every Toastmaster's journey when the road gets a little rocky or even a little too smooth, and you have to decide if you want to continue. Meetings can feel dull and routine, projects seem more like chores, officers get demanding.

It happens. But it doesn't have to mean the end of your Toastmasters career. You can rekindle your interest and re-engage—not just for your own sake but for the good of your club as well. Each member supplies part of the energy that creates a meaningful experience for everyone. The longer you continue to go through the motions, the longer you'll have to

put up with a less engaging club experience.

Once you realize your interest has waned, the first step in re-energizing is to examine what might be happening to lower your enthusiasm. The reasons usually fall into one of three buckets: personal matters, club dynamics, or burnout. Here's how some Toastmasters shook things up to reignite their passion.

Personal Matters

Life gets busy. Work and family obligations always take precedence, and you don't have time to give Toastmasters the attention you'd like.

It's okay to walk away. You can always come back when things calm down. According to a study from the World Headquarters Research and Analysis Department, 13% of members leave, but ultimately return later.

However, to try to maintain involvement, some members pay their dues but attend meetings occasionally, or they attend but don't take a speaking role or a more involved meeting role.

Mike Diggins, a three-time Distinguished Toastmaster, has been a member since 1998 and is active in four clubs, including the Maungakiekie Club in Auckland, New Zealand. He lives by the motto "Give it a go." Whether asked to take on an officer role or lead a special project, he usually jumps in with a "Let's give it a go."

Why not give it a go and try attending fewer meetings or only take a role on occasion? Be sure everyone understands this is your plan, and if someone ignores your wishes and asks you to do more, don't be afraid to say no. Sometimes maintaining some involvement is more pleasant than feeling obligated to always attend when too much is going on at home. You never know what might happen in your club.

13%

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Diggins looks at it this way: "If I left today, who's going to walk in the door tomorrow? If that person walks in and I'm not there to at least try and help, what was the whole point of having membership in the first place?"

Club Dynamics

Membership is dwindling and club officers have to scramble to put an agenda together. Or they lack imagination and are churning out the same meeting week after week.

For Danielle Barrett, DTM, of The Battlefords Club in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada, the thrill began fading when membership fell during the COVID pandemic. Only seven or eight people regularly attended meetings. Then, in September 2023, the club lost three pivotal members with more than a century of combined Toastmasters experience.

Two retired their memberships after a combined total of 84 years. The third, a beloved officer active for over 25 years, passed away from terminal cancer. By the end of the 2023–2024 program year, the club had as few as three members consistently participating in club meetings.

"I thought, *Why am I doing this? Why do I want to continue to give two hours of my week to this?*" recalls Barrett, who joined the club in 2014. "You get [to the meeting] and you see that there are three people there and you immediately feel demotivated."

She and the remaining members refused to give up. "I can't speak for the others," she says, "but for me it was, quite truly, guilt. Our recently deceased member would roll in her grave if we let the club fail, and I didn't want to be part of the group that couldn't find a way to succeed."



Instead, they made several practical changes to their meeting format. They eliminated some roles so members wouldn't have to take multiple roles. Some weeks, they didn't have prepared speeches but extended Table Topics®, watched Pathways tutorials, or studied videos of the World Championships of Public Speaking.

Meanwhile, Barrett decided to visit a different online club every day. While still attending her in-person club's meetings, she virtually visited clubs in every Toastmasters region and every province in Canada. Setting a goal to visit at least 55 clubs, Barrett visited 76 between early October and late December 2024. She learned new ways to make meetings fun and was inspired to host an open house to attract new members and perspectives.

Battlefords had an open house in January 2025 and enrolled eight new members. As of April 2025, it had 17 members and had achieved Distinguished status for the first time since 2020.

"We have a lot of youthful enthusiasm now at our meetings," Barrett says. "We have new people to teach and learn from, and everybody's just right back to being enthusiastic and passionate."

Burnout

You've accomplished your initial goal of gaining confidence, improving public speaking skills, or finding your voice at work. It feels like there's nothing left for you to achieve.

Diggins, the New Zealand Toastmaster, began to feel burnout when a company requested a Speechcraft program for 40 employees. Originally planning a single program for about 10 participants, Maungakiekie Club members conducted four—all at once. Diggins was disappointed in the program he and his overburdened team delivered.

"I was going to go off and lick my wounds, but then I thought, well, we gave it a go," he says.

Instead, Diggins pushed through his disappointment and realized that he still gained valuable experience from the program. It's all about changing your perspective and finding the opportunity in the challenge.

Another way to help shift your perspective is by finding a mentor who can help you set new goals. Or help another member achieve

their goals by becoming a mentor yourself. Shifting the way you approach your role as a club member can help banish burnout.

Of course, taking a break or creating space for more fun is also an option when battling burnout.

Keep It Fun

If any members of Bishopstown Toastmasters feel unmotivated, it's probably not for lack of trying by the club. Leaders make sure to keep meetings and events fun and engaging.

"We like to mix up the meetings from time to time," says Conor Donovan, a member of the club in Cork, Ireland. They have a special meeting in December with holiday-themed poems and music. They also have joint meetings with neighboring Powdermills Club to strengthen bonds, and they keep things fresh by occasionally meeting in different venues. In September 2024, they met at the local university and received a guided tour before the meeting.

"These activities foster a strong sense of community," Donovan says. "This really helps to retain engagement and enthusiasm."

Shaking things up can benefit all members and renew your enthusiasm. Invite a new friend to a meeting, volunteer for a more creative role, or pick a fun meeting theme next time you serve as Toastmaster of the Day. Get creative to re-engage, whether you're managing challenges at home, feeling discouraged by the monotony of your regular meetings, or simply running out of steam.

When faced with low enthusiasm or lack of motivation, Diggins likes to quote Helen Blanchard, DTM, the first woman to serve as Toastmasters International President: "If you get out of Toastmasters all that there is to get out of Toastmasters, you'll never get out of Toastmasters."

Kate McClare, DTM, is a writer and a member of Miami Advanced Toastmasters Club in Miami, Florida. She has been a member of Toastmasters since 2011.



Ask More, Better Questions

Improve your conversations, relationships, and life through question-asking.

By Alison Wood Brooks



Imagine walking up to a microphone to address a room full of people. Now, imagine meeting one person in the crowd for a meal or coffee later. Though both scenarios require that you speak effectively, intimate conversation is strikingly different compared to speaking to an audience, where onlookers mostly don't talk back.

Conversations—in coffee shops, board rooms, or around kitchen tables—ask us to take turns speaking and listening in an unfolding cascade. It's a coordination game filled with challenges and opportunities alike, and mastering the game is the key to achieving nearly everything we want in life.

To tap the power of back-and-forth dialogue, one of the most powerful tools in your conversational toolkit is question-asking. As a scientist, teacher, and practitioner of conversation, I've learned that the ability to ask questions is a singular evolutionary gift. Captive primates, like bonobos, have learned to communicate with humans surprisingly well using symbols called lexigrams that represent human words. Bonobos can often answer questions, but even the most highly trained primates are unable to ask.

Meanwhile, human children ask their first questions in their babbling months, initiating requests for milk, food, and objects by pointing

and making sounds with that recognizable upward-turning questioning intonation, long before they start using phrases or sentences.

Question-asking is a fundamentally human approach to conversation. It reflects our interest in others' minds. It's what makes human conversation possible—and remarkable.

Ask More

People don't always think of the role questions will play in a conversation, perhaps because they sense that they need to know what to say—and think they need to assert statements to show they are knowledgeable and interesting.

But in my research, I've seen that asking more questions—on speed dates, sales calls, entrepreneurial pitches, and job interviews—correlates with all kinds of positive outcomes. The most obvious benefit is that question askers learn more information. When you ask, people answer, and you know something you didn't know before.

Asking more questions increases information exchange, but it also has a less obvious, and more important, benefit: It improves the relationship. People who ask more questions are better liked.

In one study, my colleagues and I brought together pairs of strangers and asked them to get to know each other in 15-minute

conversations. We observed their natural question-asking behavior. Each talker tended to ask six and a half questions on average. Then we ran an experiment with a separate group of strangers.

Before they began their conversations, we gave them instructions. For half the pairs, we told one talker to ask a lot of questions (more than nine questions in 15 minutes), and for the other half, we told one talker to ask very few questions (fewer than four questions in 15 minutes). We didn't tell them what kinds of questions to ask or give them any other instructions—they could talk about whatever they wanted, however they wanted, to maximize enjoyment.

We found those who asked a lot of questions were significantly better liked by their partner than were those who asked few.

In cooperative conversations—like romantic dates or hanging with friends—and conflictual conversations—like sales calls and negotiations—alike, asking more questions leads to better outcomes (like more second dates, more fun, and more money). People who ask more questions are better liked by their partners, and they learn more information.

The rewards of asking questions are so powerful that it's difficult to ask too many questions—and often impossible. Researchers



suspect that in cooperative conversations, it may be impossible to ask too many questions because people have so much to learn about each other's lives and perspectives.

Even in conflictual conversations, the tipping point where “many questions” becomes “too many” is quite extreme (four questions per minute). This extremely high level of question-asking is still better than asking too few.

The Dreaded Zero Questioner

Though question-asking increases learning, enjoyment, and likability, research shows most people don't do nearly enough of it. Even in contexts that are designed for probing for information—meetings, dates, job interviews, office hours—people often ask very few questions.

Professional matchmaker Rachel Greenwald calls the worst offenders “ZQs”—those who ask zero questions. Greenwald's seen it all. She makes her livelihood from arranging, studying, and mentoring thousands of daters.

You don't need to be a professional to understand the problem with ZQs, she says. We've all encountered them: the woman who talks endlessly about her kids; the old man who perpetually tells stories about his life; the boss who runs a meeting just to talk at his employees; the date who doesn't so much as ask, “How was your day?” At one point during these conversations, it may dawn on you that the person hasn't asked you a single question, and then the conversation becomes a potentially frustrating or distracting game to see if they will.

In Greenwald's words, “People say curiosity killed the cat. But when it comes to dating, curiosity is king: It's the ZQs that killed the date. Zero questions means zero second dates.”

Thankfully, most of us aren't ZQs. But don't breathe easy just yet—we're probably closer than we realize. People vastly overestimate

how many questions they ask during their conversations. Negotiators, for example, estimated that more than 50% of the times they spoke they asked a question. In reality, less than 10% of their turns included a question. We've found the same pattern in conversations between friends and on first dates, too.

If you find it difficult to ask lots of questions, you can aim lower—just don't be a ZQ. You should never leave a conversation having asked no questions at all. Easy questions include “What was that like for you?” or “Was that hard?” or “What did you like about that?” or “What are you excited about these days?”

Question-asking
is a fundamentally
human approach to
conversation.

Asking Better Questions

When it comes to asking questions in conversation, it's not just about asking more, but also better, questions. One superhero question type is follow-ups—questions that probe for more information based on something your partner has already said. They show that you've listened to your partner, care about them, and want to know more. Even quick phrases like “Can you say more about that?” or “How does that make you feel?” will almost always make the conversation better.

Similarly, open-ended questions that start with the word “what,” as in, “What's on your mind today?” or “What did you have for breakfast?” or “What do you think about cell phones these days?” often strike a good balance

between drawing information out of your partner to learn about them and intimidating them or making them feel like you're going to judge them for their answer. On the other hand, “why” questions (such as “Why do you eat cereal?” or “Why do you like soccer?”), though also open-ended, can feel more accusatory.

In our quest to ask great questions like follow-ups and open-ended “what” questions, we should beware of a common pattern of question-asking I call “boomerasking,” named after the outgoing and returning arc of a boomerang. This is when you ask a question, let the other person answer, and then immediately bring the conversation back to yourself: “How was your weekend?” ... (partner answers) ... “Well, I met Amy Poehler this weekend!”

Sharing information about ourselves is important to maintain the ping-ponginess of good conversation, but the key is in the timing. Before sharing your own brag, complaint, or neutral disclosure, if your partner has shared something with you, you should follow up with them first—to show you're not just asking to ask, but because you actually want to hear their answers.

Use the superpower of genuine question-asking in your next one-on-one conversation. Of course, a conversation should allow both participants to speak, but asking more questions of your partner will benefit you both. You'll learn more about them and they'll have a positive impression of you. Across all the conversations in your life and career, these rewards add up. Are you ready to reap the rewards of asking more, and better, questions? Enough throat-clearing then. Get asking!

Alison Wood Brooks is a Harvard associate professor and author of *TALK: The science of conversation and the art of being ourselves*.

What Recognition Updates Mean

Changes made to enhance the Distinguished Club and Distinguished Recognition programs.

By Paul Sterman



For the first time, Toastmasters clubs can aim for achieving Smedley Distinguished, the fourth and highest level of recognition, allowing clubs the same recognition levels as Districts. The Board of Directors added the Smedley level to the [Distinguished Club Program](#) (DCP) starting with the 2025–2026 program year, which began July 1.

The Board also made other changes to the DCP and the [Distinguished Recognition Program](#) (DRP)—for Districts—to improve the programs. Board members said their objective for updating the DCP was to challenge clubs to reach for higher goals, to make recognition more accessible for clubs at all stages, and to encourage more clubs to participate in the program.

The addition of the Smedley level, which already exists in the DRP, provides a new and exciting challenge for clubs around the world who are already high performing, say Toastmasters leaders. That can lead to even higher achievement, and in turn, more benefits to members.

“When clubs set higher targets, members get chances to take on roles, develop skills, and be part of something a bit more ambitious,” says Toastmasters International President-Elect Aletta Rochat, DTM, who chaired a Board committee that studied how to strengthen the

two recognition programs. “It helps build a sense of pride and keeps people motivated.”

That kind of spirit and effort translates into “quicker growth, stronger connections, and a more supportive environment where everyone pushes each other a little more,” notes Rochat, of Cape Town, South Africa.

Mark of Distinction

Clubs achieve Distinguished or higher status if they meet up to 10 goals (a combination of education, membership, training, and administration) in the DCP. The more goals achieved, the higher level of Distinguished. The four levels are Distinguished, Select Distinguished, President’s Distinguished, and Smedley Distinguished.

Clubs who had peaked at the President’s Distinguished level can now shoot for something higher. To reach Smedley Distinguished, clubs need to maintain at least 25 members and accomplish all 10 DCP goals.

“This higher bar encourages clubs to not just meet expectations, but to exceed them—resulting in stronger meetings and deeper engagement,” says International Director Violetta Rios, DTM, of Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, who is also a member of the Recognition Committee.

The Role of Recognition

Recognition has always been a touchstone of the Toastmasters experience. [Strong recognition programs](#) celebrate member achievement, motivating Toastmasters by reinforcing their progress.

“Especially in a volunteer-led organization, celebrating even small wins keeps energy high and members engaged,” says Rios. “I’ve seen people grow simply because someone said, ‘I see you—you’re doing great.’”

Other changes to the DCP include the qualifying requirements.

- Clubs must now complete and submit a [Club Success Plan](#) to World Headquarters by September 30 to qualify to participate in the DCP. The success plan—which is something clubs have always been encouraged but not required to do—is a roadmap to guide the club’s activities and measure its success through the program year.
- The qualifying requirement for membership has also changed. Previously, there was only one membership requirement for all levels of Distinguished—that clubs needed to have 20 paid members or a net growth of five new, dual, or reinstating members by the end of the program year. Now it is different depending on the level:



“The new levels of Distinguished allow clubs of different sizes to strive and achieve.”

—BENJAMIN MCCORMICK, DTM

1. To achieve Distinguished status, clubs must have 20 paid members or a net growth of three new, dual, or reinstating members by the program year's end.
2. To achieve Select Distinguished, clubs must have 20 paid members or a net growth of five new, dual, or reinstating members.
3. For President's Distinguished, clubs must have 20 paid members.

The changes are meant to benefit clubs wherever they are in their developmental journey. Past International Director Benjamin McCormick, DTM, of Springfield, Queensland, Australia, another member of the Recognition Committee, points out that the lower net growth requirement to be Distinguished “should make the entry level of Distinguished easier to achieve.” At the same time, the Board increased the qualification numbers for the highest levels of Distinguished, to spur clubs to stretch themselves.

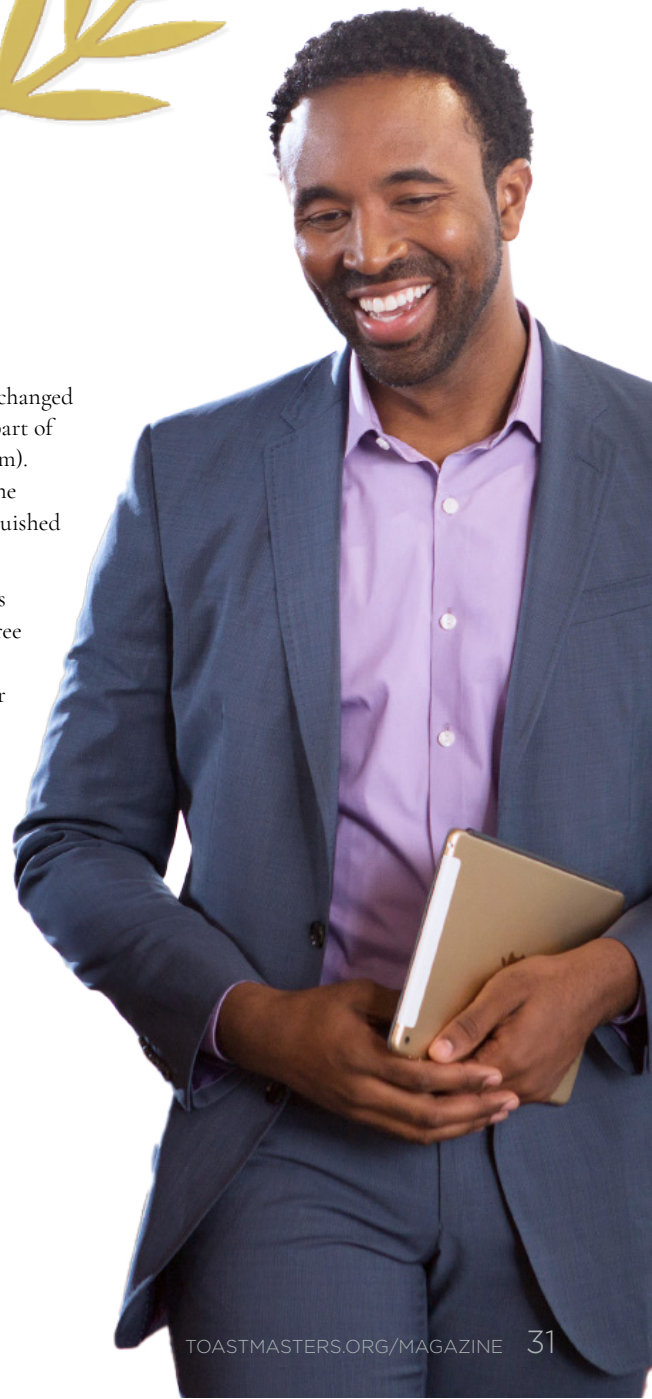
The result is that “the new levels of Distinguished allow clubs of different sizes to strive and achieve,” says McCormick, a Board member from 2022 to 2024.

Updates to District Recognition

Some qualifying requirements have also changed in the [Distinguished District Program](#) (part of the broader District Recognition Program).

- To be Distinguished, at least 45% of the District's base must consist of Distinguished clubs—an increase from 40%.
- The percentage of Distinguished clubs required also rose 5% for the other three levels (45–50% for Select, 50–55% for President's Distinguished, and 60% for the Smedley level).
- A District must also show at least 1% net club growth to earn Distinguished status, whereas it used to be simply no net club loss.

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for Toastmasters International. Reach him at pssterman@toastmasters.org.





Speaking at Length

Toastmasters have set world records for speech endurance.

By Paul Sterman

Earlier this year, United States Senator Cory Booker set an unusual record: He spoke on the Senate floor for 25 hours and five minutes straight. That's right—one continual stream of speechifying, a marathon meant to highlight opposition to the policies of U.S. President Donald Trump. Booker eclipsed the previous Senate record for speaking longevity by nearly an hour.

Whether or not you agree with the New Jersey senator's politics, you have to appreciate his oratorical endurance, from a physical standpoint if nothing else. During that entire span, Booker never once left the Senate floor, not even for a bathroom break.

His headline-making display got me wondering: Have any Toastmasters been involved with prodigious feats of speaking stamina?

The answer to that is a resounding yes. In fact, Toastmasters have carved out their own distinct spot in the *Guinness World Records*, holding two different marks. In 2019, Toastmasters from New Zealand established the record for longest speech marathon by a team. One by one, 171 members stepped up to give 381 consecutive speeches (some gave multiple speeches), always in front of an audience, for 127 hours, 31 minutes, and 43 seconds.

Imagine: speeches around the clock for more than five full days.

"Finding people who were willing (and able) to be there between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. was very difficult," says Alun Chisholm, DTM, a 31-year Toastmaster from Auckland.

In 2023, Patrick O'Mara, a Toastmaster in Hoover, Alabama, set the Guinness record for most speeches by an individual during a

24-hour period. He gave 33 of them (although officially only credited for 32), all at least 10 minutes long. The previous record was 30.

A member of Go Pro Speakers, a hybrid club in Canada, O'Mara presented to audiences at 33 different locations, starting at 5 a.m., ending around 9:30 p.m.

"It was a day, let me tell you," he says.

I don't know about you, but when I finish one 5-minute speech, I'm ready for a nap. I felt exhausted just learning about the lengths to which these Toastmasters went in their record-breaking odysseys.

While O'Mara's marathon was a long day's journey into night, the New Zealand event was nearly a week's worth of collective persistence. As members from 72 different clubs spoke at an Auckland hotel, at least 10 people were required to be in the audience at all times, an especially daunting task in the beyond-midnight hours.

"When someone needed to go to the restroom at 4 a.m., you had to count twice and make sure there would be enough people left in the room," notes Chisholm. But the team forged ahead.

All of them had to speak for at least 5 minutes. Some spoke for the minimum amount; others went more than an hour. The team was part of New Zealand's recently formed District 112. Rob Wightman, DTM, Public Relations Manager at the time, said the new District was looking to do something big to announce its arrival. What better than attempting a Guinness World Record?

The District promoted the audacious quest at various events, aiming to recruit participants. Wightman says a comment by one member, Nico Lumanglas, was typical of the reaction:

"This is insane—count me in!!"

Back to O'Mara, the solo record breaker. He decided to improvise his 30-plus speeches, crediting his Table Topics® training. To mix things up, he had an idea: fortune cookies! He would give spontaneous speeches by expounding on the fortune he pulled out of each cookie.

To train for the endeavor, O'Mara went to a Chinese restaurant and purchased big boxes of cookies. For months, he practiced two or three times a day, until he could reel off about 20 fortune-fueled improvisational talks.

The logistical challenges were stressful. O'Mara had to line up 30-plus speaking venues, and at least 10 different audience members had to be at each when he spoke.

Both the New Zealanders and O'Mara said they benefited from lots of support. District 112 leaders lent a great deal of help, says Wightman. O'Mara had assistance from local college students.

Guinness is rigorous about its requirements. These speech marathons had to have witnesses, rule keepers, timekeepers, and videographers who had to shoot hours of footage. It took months to submit the necessary items to Guinness and then hear back for confirmation of the world records.

O'Mara remembers his reaction when he read the email saying he had indeed set the new mark in his category.

"It was like, *Okay, it's real. I can finally celebrate!*"

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Illustration by
Jerry King

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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

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

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

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