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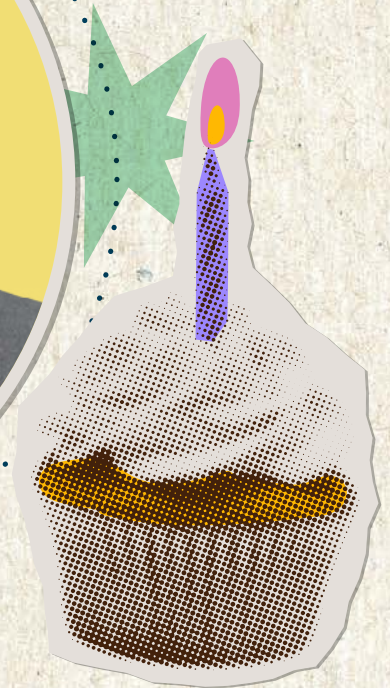
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Moments of Truth

I remember vividly when my home club, Cape Town Club in South Africa, began to struggle. We were in the midst of the pandemic—navigating shutdowns, uncertainty, and loss. Like so many clubs, we had adapted to online meetings. We kept going, but something was missing.

Members were coping with enormous personal challenges. Some had lost loved ones, others their income. And though we met regularly, we stopped attracting new members. Over time, engagement dropped—at one point it looked like only six members would renew.

I'll never forget the sinking feeling of seeing that number. Our club had been President's Distinguished every year for almost 20 years. That legacy mattered to me. It wasn't about maintaining a record for its own sake—it was about honoring those who built the foundation we were standing on.

So, we called a meeting. It became our Moment of Truth—a checkpoint and a choice point. We could quietly fade, or we could rally. Together, we chose to act. We each committed to bringing in new members, completing Pathways education levels, and contributing to the success of our club. We all focused on this goal and challenged ourselves to deliver.

We also changed back to fully in-person meetings as soon as we were able to. The moment we did that, our membership grew

dramatically. We rediscovered what makes Toastmasters powerful: shared purpose, teamwork, and belief that transformation is possible. We rebuilt our community.

That's why I'm so passionate about membership building and club growth. Every new member brings fresh ideas, and every engaged member strengthens the heart of the club. Growth happens when members feel connected, supported, and inspired to learn.

If your club is struggling, take a step back and see the bigger picture. Ask honest questions: Are members engaged? Are they progressing in Pathways? Do they feel heard and valued? These are your *Moments of Truth*—opportunities to listen, adjust, and reignite purpose. This is how we build a legacy that benefits others.

And if you belong to a strong club, reach out. Offer to mentor a struggling club. Arrange an open house. Become a club coach. We all share responsibility for helping each other thrive and for building our clubs, our communities.

Because when we help one club succeed, we strengthen every club. Growth isn't just about numbers—it's about renewing belief in what Toastmasters makes possible: transformation, connection, and community.

Every new member brings fresh ideas, and every engaged member strengthens the heart of the club.

Aletta Rochat, DTM
International President

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Snapshot



Members of the **Lumbini Toastmasters Club** in Butwal, Lumbini Province, Nepal, host an outdoor meeting at the Siddhartha Cable Car in Nepal. The theme of the meeting was “Defying All Odds.”

Traveling Toastmaster



Some **2025-2026 Region Advisors** share the *Toastmaster* magazine while visiting the Rocky Statue in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during the 2025 International Convention.



Ramalka Kasige, DTM, of Richmond, New South Wales, Australia, poses with the centennial edition of the *Toastmaster* magazine near the Tasman Glacier in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park in New Zealand.

CLUB EXPERIENCE

How to Make Your Club More INVITING

By Jesse Scinto, DTM

1. **Be flexible.** Toastmasters provides a simple framework for professional development, with defined roles, published agendas, and the Pathways learning experience. While traditions provide stability, it's important to avoid a rigid adherence to ceremony, which can make newcomers feel excluded. Toastmasters is a place for growth, not a secret society. Be willing to invent new traditions and try new technologies.
2. **Focus on commonality.** Toastmasters is an affinity group, where people come together out of a shared interest in public speaking and leadership. Avoid labels like "Gen Z" or "millennials." Also avoid jokes about generational differences. No one wants to be stereotyped.
3. **Be judicious in your feedback.** Young members benefit from hearing mature

perspectives. But experienced members shouldn't point out every last defect in a newcomer's speech. Try for two or three concrete areas for improvement. Avoid sweeping statements and instead use conditional phrases like "I typically ..." or "In similar situations ..." or "It may be useful to ..." Such phrases allow for the fact that there's more than one way of doing things.

4. **Highlight Toastmasters' mutually supportive environment.** Psychological safety is the foundation on which all learning takes place. Let prospective members know about your club's positive environment in your marketing materials. Welcome and reassure them when they walk in the door. Remember what it was like to attend your first

meeting. In Toastmasters we share each other's triumphs and challenges.

5. **Meet them where they are.** If your club has older members, consider doing promotion at local universities. Also explore social media, event-planning sites (such as Meetup), podcasts, and short videos as tools for reaching young people.

Finally, remember that in Toastmasters the benefits we receive are comparable to those we bestow. Andrew Tsuru, DTM, of South Africa, says, "The biggest thing that Toastmasters gave me has been to understand how service is fulfilling—just serving and seeing transformation in other people."

This article was originally published in the December 2022 Toastmaster magazine.

CARTOON



Cartoon by Jerry King

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The simple fact is that we grow or learn or work better when we **enjoy** what we are doing, and this is essentially the secret of success in Toastmasters.”

– Dr. Ralph C. Smedley,
founder of Toastmasters International

PROFILE

Toastmasters Siblings

How a younger brother followed in his sister's footsteps.

In 2023, Todd Bryant brought his [6-year-old daughter, Cambrie](#), to her first Toastmasters meeting, where she won the ribbon for best Table Topics® speaker. Two years later, Bryant's 6-year-old son, Colton, attended his first meeting and also won the best Table Topics ribbon.

"Lindsey [my wife] and I are extremely proud of both children for stepping out of their comfort zones to attend these meetings," Bryant says. "Not only did they attend, but they both voluntarily participated."

Bryant joined Toastmasters in 2017 to further his career, but his membership soon inspired his children. "They are both very competitive with each other," Bryant explains, and when Cambrie came home with her ribbon, Colton was motivated to attend and speak as

well. Although Bryant told Colton he needed to wait until he was 6 years old, he was ready when the time came.

Before the meeting, Bryant says he helped Colton prepare by discussing possible questions and answers and the importance of being brave and speaking loudly. Cambrie also explained what to expect and encouraged Colton not to be afraid. During Table Topics, the Topicsmaster asked Colton rapid-fire questions about going back to school and preparing for the first grade.

When asked how Colton felt when he won, Bryant said, "He felt great! Winning a ribbon is rewarding regardless of your age or years of experience."

Bryant thinks it's important to teach his children about public speaking early, and these



Colton Bryant with James Caviness, a member of the Citrus Toastmasters club in Orlando, Florida.

experiences in Toastmasters have helped boost Colton's and Cambrie's confidence.

He explains, "With screens and other devices being introduced at younger and younger ages, those who can get up in front of others and speak eloquently will be the leaders of their organizations and communities."

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Celebrate the Lunar NEW YEAR

Chinese New Year begins on February 17, 2026, and welcomes the Year of the Horse. The Spring Festival also begins on the New Year, and celebrations last more than two weeks.

In China, the New Year is a public holiday and a time for families to gather. People typically have about a week off from work, so families are able to travel to one another and celebrate. It is believed that what you do to begin the new year will play a role in your luck for the coming year.

To usher in good luck, people say, "Happy New Year," or "Xīnnián kuàilè," and give well wishes as the clock strikes midnight, as well as red envelopes filled with money to help cast away bad luck. The amount given never includes the number four because the pronunciation of "four" in Chinese sounds similar to the word for "death." However, other even numbers symbolize

good things coming in pairs, so the amount of money given is often an even number.

Traditions can vary across the country, but some include decorating homes with kumquat trees to symbolize wealth and good luck; wearing lucky colors, like yellow and red; and eating foods that are considered lucky—dumplings, noodles, walnut cookies, and fried flour-coated peanuts.

On the 15th day of celebrations, the Lantern Festival marks the end of the Spring Festival. This occurs on the first full moon of the new lunar year, and people light lanterns and set off fireworks. The lanterns symbolize releasing the past and welcoming the new year. During the Lantern Festival, there are also lion and dragon dances to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck to all.

Xīnnián kuàilè!



Paved by Pathways

How each path helped me build confidence, develop skills, and advance in my career.

By Gary Vaughn

I joined Toastmasters in 2019, just after the Pathways education program was introduced. It felt like a turning point for the organization. While some members embraced the new format with curiosity, others clung tightly to the familiar manuals in the traditional education program.

Personally, I saw opportunity in the change. I was stuck professionally, and Pathways gave me a path forward, pun intended! Looking back now, I can say that each learning path I have worked in has helped me in a different way and led to professional growth and success.

A Strategic Move

The benefits started with my first path, Strategic Relationships. I chose it for one reason: I needed to expand my network. At the time, I was deeply dissatisfied with my job. I spent countless hours scrolling through internal postings at my corporation, filling out applications, and daydreaming about interviews that never seemed to materialize.

But the apparent lack of opportunities wasn't the real problem. It was me. I didn't have the relationships, the visibility, or the credibility that opened doors.

Through Strategic Relationships, I built projects around how to create professional relationships, where to meet the right people, and how to join the "who's who" of my field. By the time I completed the path, I had reconnected with college contacts, reached out to industry leaders, and started applying for roles with a new level of confidence. I had shifted my mindset: I stopped seeing myself as someone begging for a seat at the table and started recognizing the value I brought to the table.

That momentum naturally carried me into my second path: Dynamic Leadership. I thought leadership was reserved for people with impressive titles, years of experience, or

a natural charisma I didn't believe I had. But I used Pathways projects to experiment with leadership styles, strengthen my interviewing skills, and refine how I presented myself as a potential leader—even in a field where I didn't yet have much direct experience.

Halfway through the Dynamic Leadership path—about a year after I started Toastmasters—I finally got a call from the right contact. I landed the interview, and soon after, I made the leap and left behind a 10-year career to start fresh in a role that matched my aspirations.

For the first time in years, I felt like my professional journey had direction and purpose.

Mastering the Skills

In my new role as lead trainer for a corporate IT department, I quickly realized that getting the job was only the beginning. I not only had to learn presentation and training skills, but I had to master the art of delivering information in a professional world. Plus, I was a remote worker, which brought a whole new set of challenges.

For the first time in years, I felt like my professional journey had direction and purpose.

My third path, Presentation Mastery, provided the key. It gave me the tools to break down the elements of an effective presentation: how much content to include on a slide, how to read a virtual room where no one's cameras are on, and how to deliver messages with clarity and impact even when separated by a screen.



After a year of practice, I was invited to deliver a lunch-and-learn for over 250 IT employees, a daunting audience that would have intimidated me in the past. Thanks to my club, and Pathways projects, I approached it with confidence and left knowing it was a success. One month before my second work anniversary, I was promoted to a senior role leading training initiatives.

Humor in the Workplace

Training sessions can be long, virtual, and let's face it ... kind of boring. To shake things up, I sought skills in the Engaging Humor path. The projects helped me identify styles of humor appropriate for professional environments, and I discovered how to effectively use humor in a corporate setting.

My club meetings became testing grounds. I learned to handle both laughter and silence. Feedback from evaluations helped me sharpen what worked—and cut what didn't.

I've completed several paths and am currently working through the Persuasive Influence and Motivational Strategies paths. Only Visionary Communication remains, and yes, I've already purchased it.

Why do I keep going? Pathways has not only helped me succeed, but it's helped me become who I was meant to be. I continue because I believe in planning my future, inspiring others, and influencing positive change. That's the power of Toastmasters. That's the power of Pathways.

Gary Vaughn is a member of several clubs in Illinois and a Past District Director of District 54. He is an automation enthusiast who credits Toastmasters for shaping his career in technology and leadership. Connect with him at [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/in/garyvaughn).

A Champion Comeback

How one member helped revive his once-empty club.

By Stephanie Darling



Many Toastmasters can claim being the oldest person in their club, or the one with the longest membership history. But how many could claim to be the *only* member consistently attending meetings?

That's the situation Keat Wei Yoong, a tech business owner and member of Bukit Gelugor Toastmasters Club, found himself facing in the 2018–2019 program year. He was President of the club, located in George Town, Penang, Malaysia.

In 2018, issues began to surface—a loss of meeting venue, member burnout, and low meeting attendance. By 2019, membership dropped from a base of 21 to nine, all of whom renewed their dues payments but stopped attending meetings.

Yoong, who has held club and District officer roles over the years, stepped forward to revive the club, although he admits that, until then, his natural inclination had always been to avoid big challenges.

"Honestly, I used to find excuses to give up [on projects.] But I gave myself 300 days to find solutions and not give up without trying. I reminded myself that every meeting was an opportunity," he says.

"Why not take the chance to do everything to reach more people like me, who need this platform? I realized we didn't need 100 solutions, just a few ways to inspire people to transition from guest, to member, to active member."

He organized a year-long reboot campaign and had plenty of support when he needed

it—including then-leaders Area Director Lye Yim Fong, DTM; Division Director KK Lim, DTM; and Program Quality Director Carmen Loo, DTM, as well as other District leaders, club coaches, and members from other clubs.

Yoong and his team identified young graduates and early-career professionals as their target audience, as they were the group most likely to be looking to boost English-language skills and leadership acumen.

Yoong made it his mission to talk with guests after meetings about what they wanted to learn, and why. Armed with those facts, he was sure the club could demonstrate how Toastmasters "could play a role in their lives and give them a platform to shine." It was a lesson he took from his own experience.

In his younger years Yoong says he tried Toastmasters but didn't join. Later, when he started his business, he quickly realized his communication skills were lacking.

"A business contact asked me questions and I went totally blank. I had the answers in my head, but didn't know how to communicate them," he notes. "I went back to Toastmasters to avoid ever having that blank again."

As Yoong and his team began recruiting, they found social media platforms were the most successful in reaching their target audience. To demonstrate what young guests could expect, Yoong made sure energetic Toastmasters from nearby clubs were at meetings to welcome newcomers and fill meeting roles, showcasing the traditional meeting format.

However, since most people join Toastmasters to improve speaking skills, Yoong also made sure everyone had the opportunity to practice the many nuances of public speaking, from word choice, to voice, gestures, and presence. The core experience—practice—was the focus.

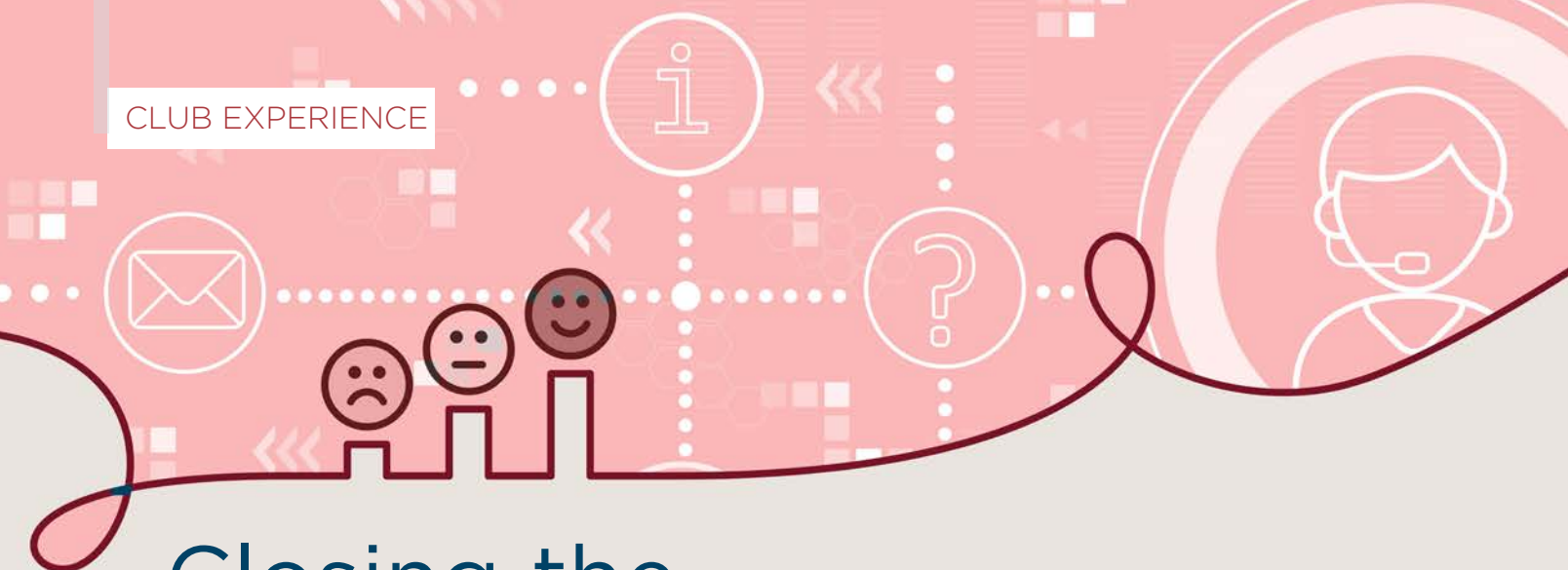
"When members grow, they stay and renew. And since their main purpose is to build communication skills, we focused on grooming them to be speakers," Yoong says. He likes to wait until someone feels comfortable in the club before asking them to be an officer or take on a big task. He respects every member's pace.

The revitalizing effort worked. "By October 2019, we'd managed to keep the club in good standing. Two previous members renewed but the others were all new and suddenly I was the oldest member in the club," Yoong laughs.

Today, the refreshed Bukit Gelugor Toastmasters Club has been President's Distinguished since the 2019–2020 program year. It has also turned more attention to leadership succession planning, having witnessed the impact of unwavering guidance during its own tough times.

"The club is still growing and hopefully, what we did, or challenges that we met in the past, can inspire more members to grow and become even better in this lifelong learning journey we're all on," Yoong says.

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



Closing the Feedback Loop

How to communicate and implement the change your members want.

By Greg Glasgow

When Victoria Hsueh became Club President of the PMIWDC #01 Toastmasters Club in McLean, Virginia, she wanted to get an immediate feel for what members liked and didn't like about the club.

"I created a survey, and I asked members what their pain points were, if they felt that the program was helpful, if they needed training, and if they felt that they were connecting," Hsueh says. "I also wanted to know what they felt about the club's culture."

Based on the results of the survey, Hsueh revamped the club's website and added more social and educational events to its calendar. She also continued to administer the survey every six months to adapt as needed. Just as important as collecting and acting on the feedback, she says, was letting members know that their voices were being heard.

"If people give me feedback, I immediately bring it back to the club and tell everybody, 'This is what's going on. This is what we're doing,'" she explains. "I'm very transparent with the message."

That's the idea behind the feedback loop—a cycle in which members are asked for feedback, the feedback is considered and acted on by leaders, and leaders let members know what changes were made in response to the feedback.

"Everyone in a club, especially officers, need to have a feedback loop so that they get the

ideas and opinions of the attendees, the members, or even the potential members—if someone comes as a guest, their feedback is very valuable," says Deniz Senelt Kalelioglu, DTM, a former Division Director in Turkey. "You can use all that to make the meetings better, make the organization better. If you don't do anything with the feedback, then it's a lost resource."

Gathering Feedback

There are many ways of collecting feedback, ranging from the informal to the formal, Kalelioglu says, though preserving anonymity often results in the most honest reactions.

"People might feel intimidated, or they might be afraid of hurting other people. The environment should feel safe for people to give honest feedback. Either let people give feedback without their names or assure them that it will be kept confidential."

When it comes to surveys, there are a mix of tools, from quick Zoom or online polls that take just a moment to longer surveys taken at regular intervals—quarterly or every six months—that provide a more comprehensive view. Kalelioglu recommends that surveys contain a mix of quantitative questions—questions that ask for yes/no answers or a 1-10 agree/disagree score—and open-ended, qualitative questions that provide more context and information.

Leaders can use artificial intelligence and other technology to quickly pull data and

trends from a set of quantitative questions, but the qualitative questions, she says, "give more information, and give more *real* information."

Surveys may provide long-term data that can be preserved, but leaders also can take advantage of the social aspects of a Toastmasters meeting to gather informal feedback in person. Members may be flattered to be asked for their opinion, leading to a thoughtful response, says Jocelyn Tyson, 2023 World Champion of Public Speaking and Vice President Public Relations for the Advancing Toastmasters Club in Arbutus, Maryland.

"Right before a meeting, I might say to someone, 'If you don't mind, I want to pick your brain about the open house,' or 'How's our website?' Especially somebody who's relatively new, so they're coming with a fresh perspective," she says. "You want to make sure you're building relationships before you start asking for a lot of feedback, so when you get that feedback, it's genuine and it can be helpful."

Closing the Loop

No matter what method you choose to gather feedback, Kalelioglu says, it's important to close the feedback loop. Letting people know that the feedback was received and how it was acted on helps to ensure that they remain invested in the feedback process.

"If people are asked to give feedback and nothing happens with that feedback, they're not

going to give it the second time around,” says Kalelioglu, who is a professional coach for CEOs and business leaders. “They will think, *I told you my thoughts before, and nothing happened, so why bother?*”

When leaders share the results of surveys and other feedback and how they plan to implement any resulting changes, it’s best to be specific, Tyson says. Adding numbers and dates makes members feel like their feedback was heard and a plan is being implemented because of it.

“That’s the pivotal piece,” the World Champion says. “You can say, ‘We did a survey, and it was determined that at a rating of three out of five, this area needs the most attention, and because of that, these are the top three things we’re working on. And we’re looking to see a change by this date in the first quarter.’”

Look for Consensus

Feedback is a valuable tool for assessing a club’s performance and making changes when necessary, but leaders should use discretion when looking at their evaluations, Hsueh, the Club President, says. Multiple people making the same observation may indicate a change is needed; one person offering negative feedback may not.

“It needs to come from many different sources,” she continues. “Maybe one person complains a lot—that’s not feedback. That’s somebody complaining. I don’t even consider some feedback, because I know the logistics, and I know how it would impact the entire club. You have to look at the entire picture—whether it impacts the majority of people or just benefits a few people.”

Future Planning

From her experience as a business coach, Kalelioglu says in the corporate world, feedback loops have grown in importance

in recent years as leaders realize the potential for learning and development. Many workers receive annual evaluations that result in action plans for the year to come, and 360-degree feedback considers opinions from an employee’s superiors and direct reports, as well as a self-evaluation, to create a holistic picture of their performance. Just as in organizational feedback, it’s important to act on the recommendations, whether it’s creating short-term or long-term change.

“It’s important to keep your ears open to whatever you hear,” Kalelioglu says. “Sometimes it’s easier to ignore it, or it would take too much time to implement it for the short term. But strategy and planning are important tools for success, and to make a strategy, you need to be thinking long-term. Feedback is about today, but it carries you to the future.”

Essential to Growth

The bottom line about feedback is to realize its importance and make it a priority. If a Toastmasters club struggles with retention, engagement, and attracting new members, it’s vital that leaders listen to what members tell them about how to make improvements—and follow through on the recommendations.

If you don’t do anything with the feedback, then it’s a lost resource.

—DENIZ SENELT
KALELIOGLU, DTM

“Feedback is essential to growth,” Tyson says. “When you don’t get that feedback, you’re not really sure how it’s going. You’re just basing things on your own assumptions. In Toastmasters, I can stand up and give a speech, then there’s the evaluation process. That’s what makes it a great learning experience. In leadership, it’s pivotal to implement that as well. You need to do your own evaluation process to know where you’re going as a club.”

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



HOW TO WRITE AND DELIVER

Your Wedding Vows

Try these tips when planning your expressions of love.

By Laura Yeager

Weddings bring people together—not only a couple, but family and friends. A special and personal touch is when the couple writes their own vows to share in front of loved ones. When you write your own vows, the sky is the limit as to what you can include. You can touch on anything from your religious beliefs to references to a favorite author, from a humorous memory to a difficult experience.

Writing wedding vows is not as difficult as it may seem, but why should a couple consider writing their own vows? For one, personalized vows can often be the best part of the wedding day. They provide insight into your relationship for your guests, whether that's highlighting your partner's generosity and great sense of humor or sharing the moment you knew you were in love. Additionally, they serve as a memento of your special day, just like photos. You will always be able to reread your vows anytime you like.

Over the years I have witnessed many wedding vows, delivered my own 28 years ago, and professionally wrote wedding speeches. I have a good sense of what should and shouldn't be included in a ceremony, and have helped couples make their big days exactly what they want them to be.

When you decide to write your own vows, there's a lot you could include, so where do you begin?

Getting Started

The first thing the couple needs is some quiet time, a few hours where they can get together and talk about their relationship and their future and take notes for their vows.

A good way to collect ideas is for each partner to answer the following questions.

1. How and where did you first meet?
2. What was your dating/engagement journey like?
3. Why do you love/admire your future spouse?
4. When did you know you wanted to spend your life with them?
5. What have you learned about life from your future spouse?
6. What do you wish to bring to the marriage?
7. What do you wish to receive from the marriage?
8. What do you want the foundation of your marriage to be?
9. What do you promise your future spouse?
10. What do you want to thank your future spouse for?

Go through your answers and highlight phrases or sentences you want to include in the vows. You don't have to use all the material you've collected; pick and choose from the ideas.

As you note what you want to share, consider your venue. If you are in a religious space, there may be certain language or stories you'd prefer to avoid or a religious passage you want to include. If you are having your ceremony outside, you might like to allude to the surrounding nature if you and your partner particularly enjoy being outside together, or maybe the space you will be in holds a special memory or meaning for the two of you—share that story in your vows.

Organize the Words

Each person's vows should be anywhere from two to three minutes in length, or approximately 200–300 words.

You can start chronologically from the time you first met to the present day. Divide up the

narrative, and take turns telling your “relationship story.” A good way to continue this kind of vow structure is to tell your family and friends what you promise to each other and/or on what you hope your marriage will be based.

For a different approach, base your vows on famous love quotes. A quote at the beginning of the vows can propel the complete vows forward to a logical ending.

For example, Willa Cather, an American author, said, “Where there is great love, there are always miracles.”

From this quote, the vows might proceed to one partner saying, “You are my miracle. Every day, you teach me to be a better person by your wonderful example.”

And then the other saying, “You are my miracle. Every moment, you teach me how to abide in joy.”

“I promise ...”

“I promise ...”

“Together we dedicate ourselves to each other.”

Using a quotation is a helpful guide, especially if you have a favorite quote about love.

Is there anything you shouldn't mention in your wedding vows? In general, avoid “bedroom” humor, jokes at another's expense, attacks on family members or friends, highly personal information, and long, rambling stories.

Practice, Practice, Practice

After you've written your wedding vows, read them out loud in front of people you trust and get feedback. If you want to keep the vows a surprise for your close friends and family, use your Toastmasters club. Practice at a club meeting and get feedback from members who may not be attending your wedding.

The Big Day

If you memorize the vows, your guests and your partner will be able to see your face and expressions a bit better. But writing your vows on notecards or in a small book is also perfectly fine if it eases your nerves. Just try to make occasional eye contact with your partner as you read.

To use a microphone or not to use a microphone? That's up to you. If you can project your voice without a mic, go for it. But if you need the microphone to be heard, use one.

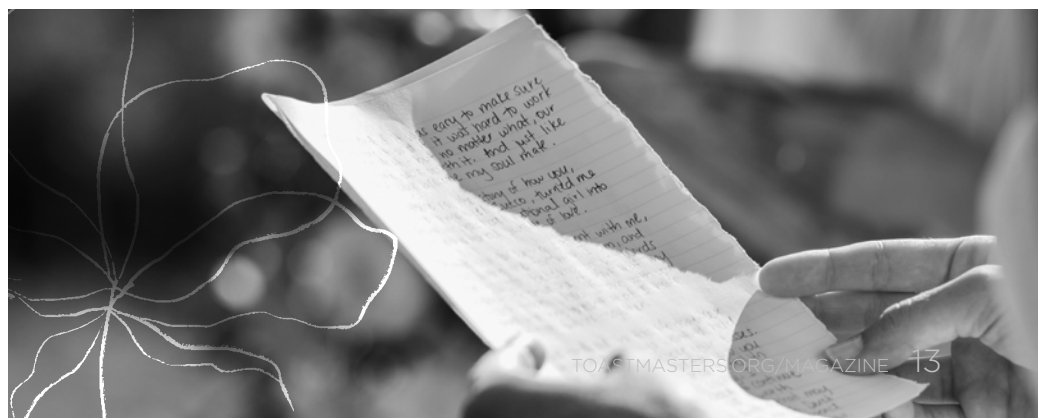
The venue may be a factor in this decision. If you're in a large church, they may have microphones ready to go, the same with an outdoor venue. However, a smaller synagogue or wedding hall may allow for your guests to be close enough to you that they can hear just fine if you speak at a standard volume.

Wherever you are, if you decide to use a handheld mic and aren't memorizing your speech, I recommend practicing while holding a microphone prop and your notes, so you aren't juggling.

If you lose your composure, take a few deep breaths and look at someone who settles your nerves (most likely your partner). If you break into tears, the experience can be all the more meaningful. Ask for a glass of water, which you can keep off to the side. It's okay to pause to collect yourself. It's your special day and your family, friends, and partner won't mind waiting to hear what you say next.

Writing and delivering your own vows can truly personalize your wedding. You'll come to know and love your partner even more through the words you choose and recite.

Laura Yeager is a writer and teaches writing at Kent State University at Stark, in Ohio, and online creative writing at Gotham Writers Workshop in New York. She is a cancer blogger at Cure Today, having survived two bouts of breast cancer. She previously worked as a wedding speechwriter.



Pull in Members With **SPEECHCRAFT**

It may be the best program your club isn't offering.

By Kate McClare, DTM

Since Bill Metrey, DTM, first joined Dan Patch Toastmasters Club in 2003, he has seen the club go from 50 members down to a low of 14, only to jump to 26 in a short period of time. What was the secret behind that rebound? Speechcraft—one of Toastmasters' most effective membership boosters and one of its best-kept secrets.

Speechcraft introduces non-members to the Toastmasters experience in a structured, multi-session format, often leading them to continue their communication and leadership journeys as members of the presenting club—with some projects in a Base Camp path already completed.

At the same time, members who help present the course find their own skills and confidence growing; for the program coordinator, it also satisfies a significant requirement toward achieving the Distinguished Toastmaster award.

Metrey, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, had never heard of Speechcraft when a fellow club member suggested it as a way to boost falling membership. Seventeen participants started in the program presented by Dan Patch Toastmasters Club, and when it ended, eight became members.

"It brought us over the 20-member mark [for Distinguished Club status], and today our club is thriving," says Metrey, who went on to become the Speechcraft coordinator for District 6 in 2024–2025.

That's not unusual, says his successor, Marvel Kummer, DTM, a member of Speakers After Hours near Minneapolis. "Not everyone joins a club after completing a Speechcraft," she says,

"but I have never been part of a Speechcraft without at least one person joining a club."

The benefits go far beyond numbers, however. "You get leadership training and mentorship training, and it builds bonds and enhances friendships within the club," Metrey says. "Just a myriad of things."

Implementing Speechcraft

Depending on available time, resources, and what the coordinator hopes to accomplish, the program is conducted in four, six, or eight sessions. Each session is organized like a traditional club meeting, but with a specific focus: choosing a topic, giving and receiving feedback, vocal variety, body language, and more. Members give presentations on the session's topic and mentor the Speechcrafters, who then deliver a speech at most of the sessions, incorporating what they've learned.

Club members run the program, but many Districts have Speechcraft chairs who give guidance and support. Kummer, for instance, offers District 6 members a slide deck running through the basics and pointing to resources like YouTube videos created by members.

"The [coordinator] has a lot of work," points out Juliana Kelly, Speechcraft chair for District 17 (Western Australia). "There are some real leadership challenges, and you have to know the material." Speechcrafters may get nervous and cancel or have spotty attendance. However, for Kelly, those concerns are far outweighed by the benefits to those participating.

Bill Metrey, DTM, past Speechcraft coordinator for District 6

Speechcraft has what's needed in uncertain economic times like these, appealing to the many unemployed professionals who need to get back into the workforce.

“People gain confidence they’ve never had, and with the confidence, they’re able to articulate their words,” she says.

Kelly has seen the program transform participants in prison-based Gavel Clubs, where women, especially, are empowered to tell their stories after a lifetime of being marginalized and discounted. “They come in with nothing, and have been put down all their lives, and come out motivated to do something of value for themselves and the people around them.”

It impacts the men as well. One incarcerated man’s story still sticks with Kelly.

“He said, ‘I just can’t believe that I don’t get in trouble with the guards anymore since Speechcraft.’ I said, ‘Patrick, it’s because you’re using words and not yelling at them anymore.’” He’s still in prison but has continued to work in the Speechcraft program with other men there.

Spreading the Word

Finding Speechcrafters isn’t a problem for clubs in District 17, which has scheduled programs well into 2026. Nor is it an issue for The Colombo Toastmasters Club in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which frequently gets calls from companies eager to have their employees learn better speaking and organizational skills.

Club President Purnima Gunasekera recalls a clothing manufacturer whose morning meetings were poorly attended by sectional (department) heads. “They would drag on for a few hours, which was a waste of time,” he explains. “After [employees participated in] the Speechcraft program, they implemented a round-robin format which helped them to finish their meetings in less than an hour, as each head got only five minutes to present their updates. It motivated the sectional heads to participate in morning meetings daily, which in turn improved the productivity of the company.”

“You have to understand the objectives of your Speechcrafters or the organization that has invited you,” he says. “What do they want to accomplish?” The company’s human resources department can help with that, as well as by publicizing the course to all employees.

Metrey also belongs to the V.A.M.C. Toastmasters Club, which meets in a large medical facility in Minneapolis, but uses all the marketing channels they can, from the center’s employee newsletter to social media, community bulletin boards, and word of mouth.

Positioned With Purpose

It’s because of Speechcraft that marketing executive Sheryl Roush is a Toastmaster. Nearly 40 years ago, she attended an introductory session to see if it could help sharpen her communication skills at work, and was hooked. Today, Roush is a Distinguished Toastmaster, an Accredited Speaker, and a passionate Speechcraft supporter. She has delivered numerous webinars and keynotes on Speechcraft. “I can attest—and advocate—to the power of the program, especially inside a club,” she says.

Roush believes Speechcraft coordinators need to think bigger when promoting the course. The program has what’s needed in uncertain economic times like these, appealing to the many unemployed professionals who need to get back into the workforce.

“We need to sell the benefits that the new member will get from Speechcraft and then from joining a club,” says Roush, of Binghamton, New York, a member of Professional Speakers in District 101 and AS We Speak in District 26.

The word “Speechcraft” must remain for branding purposes, but Roush recommends adding a concise description of the planned program and precisely what it offers. “Speechcraft: An 8-Week Communication Skills Workshop,” for instance, immediately captures attention.

Bring out the pain that potential participants are feeling and then show that Speechcraft is the solution, she says, “the ideal place to polish up those skills they need.”

Everyone has their own reasons for leading a Speechcraft program, and earning a DTM credit is as valid as any other. Yet for many, the motivation runs much deeper—often in ways they don’t realize until the journey is complete.

“It’s not just a DTM checkoff,” says Anne Golden, DTM, a member of What Exit? and a Speechcraft coordinator trainer in District 83 in Northern New Jersey.

“It’s about dedication and looking out for other people—and that ‘Aha!’ moment when it all comes together. It’s not about the finish line but what you learn.”

For Roush, it brings to life what Toastmasters founder, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, advised: “Let us share with others the benefits we have gained for ourselves.”

Kate McClare, DTM, is a marketing copywriter who joined Toastmasters in 2011. She is a member of three clubs in South Florida and an Area Director for District 47 (Southeast Florida and The Bahamas).



"I have never been part of a Speechcraft without at least one person joining a club."

—MARVEL KUMMER, DTM

Speechcraft Step-By-Step

1. Log in to the [Speechcraft Gateway](#) and select Create New Event. Use your Digital Bundle Order Number to set up your event. You don't need all event details finalized at this point but redeeming your bundle will allow you to view the Speechcraft materials on Base Camp.
2. From the Speechcraft Gateway, access the Speechcraft Portal on Base Camp and review the materials to determine whether it would be best for your needs to conduct a four-, six-, or eight-session Speechcraft.
3. As you review the materials, determine how many members you need to support your Speechcraft. Then, gather a team of experienced Toastmasters to serve as assistants, mentors, and/or presenters.
4. Once you determine the date, time, and location for your event, add that to the Speechcraft Gateway.
5. Advertise your event and recruit people to participate. As Speechcrafters join, add them on the Speechcraft Gateway. If you get more than five participants, simply purchase another Digital Bundle and add it on the Speechcraft Gateway.
6. Conduct your event and credit participants in the Speechcraft portal on Base Camp as they complete each assignment. When the program ends, invite them to continue their journey by joining your club. Speechcrafters who join your club will get credit in Pathways for any speeches they completed.



Juliana Kelly of District 17 presents a Speechcraft session.



Hieu Phung of District 97 talks to Speechcrafters about the benefits of joining Toastmasters.

NEXT-GEN

Communication

Use the Youth Leadership Program to help young people speak up and lead.

By Kate McClare, DTM

For Maureen McBeath, DTM, the value of the Toastmasters Youth Leadership Program (YLP) comes down to a girl named Genny.

She was a 10th-grade special-needs student in McBeath's YLP class in Sechelt, British Columbia, Canada, where McBeath has been leading the programs for more than a dozen years. On one session's first day, Genny stood up, defiantly announced, "I'm not doing this," and walked out.

But she came back, and kept coming back, until one day she stood again, pointed to McBeath and her teacher, and told the other students, "Like they said—just do it. It's not that

hard. I've done two presentations in my classes already this year." The lunch bell rang. The girl who had never said much before kept talking—and the class kept listening—for three more minutes.

Not only did Genny become a leader in the class, but she took what she'd learned outside. Already competing in the Special Olympics with her community's swim club, she began winning national titles and handled local media interviews like a pro. McBeath still cherishes the note Genny gave her in a card at the end of the program: "Toastmasters rocks," it said.

"Genny became somebody who could speak up for herself," McBeath says proudly. "You want to know if this changes kids' lives? In my mind, it does."

Developing Skills

Stories like that abound from those who've led YLP sessions, which take the Toastmasters experience to the next generation, specifically students ages 14–18.

The need for clear communication and strong leadership doesn't suddenly appear when

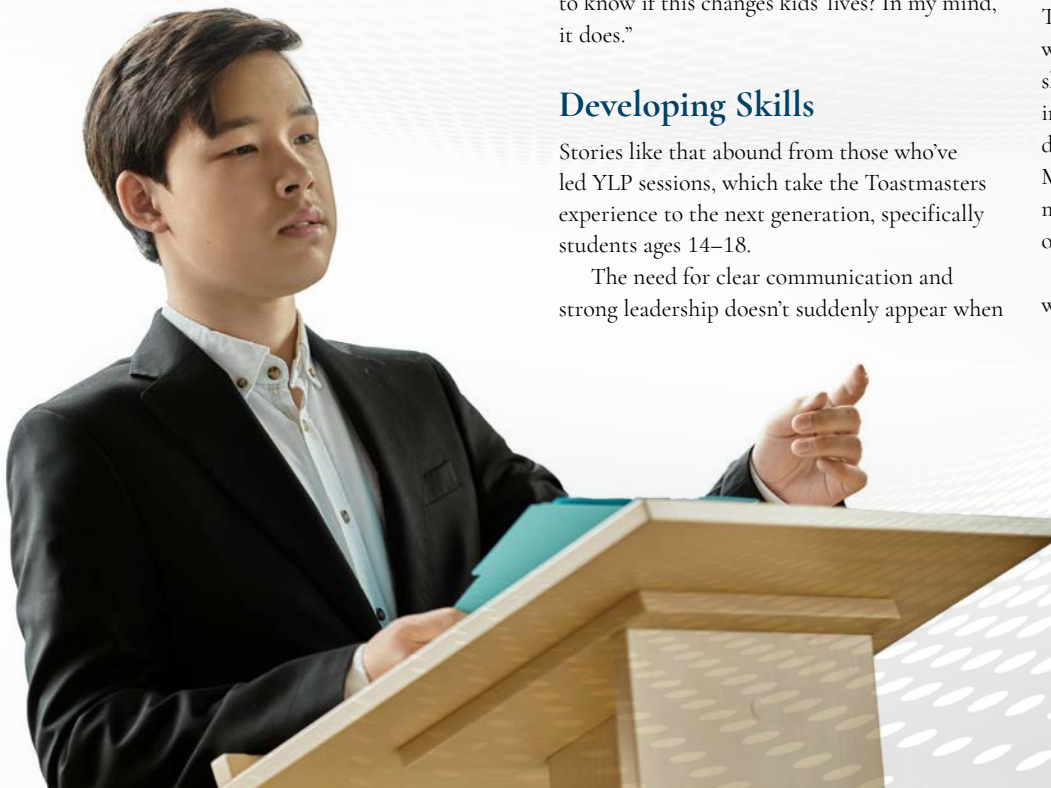
someone turns 18; success in school and in the community demands those skills years before adulthood.

It's not a recruitment tool to get club members, but is intended to help young people become better speakers and leaders now and in the future.

"Imagine if every child had people applauding them when they stood up to give a speech, and applauded them afterward. Then perhaps they wouldn't be so afraid of speaking in public," says McBeath, a member of Sunshine Toastmasters in Sechelt.

The program consists of eight sessions, each lasting one to two hours, offered by Toastmasters during or after school, or on weekends. The workshops teach a range of skills, including delivering prepared and impromptu speeches, controlling physical delivery, and giving and receiving feedback. Meetings are organized like Toastmasters club meetings, with a formal agenda and presiding officers elected to run the meetings.

Technical speaking skills may be the least of what they learn.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS



Participants and facilitators in a YLP program presented by Davie Toastmasters in Florida



Davie Toastmasters in Florida has held a Youth Leadership Program nearly every year since 2012.

“Imagine if every child had people applauding them when they stood up to give a speech, and applauded them afterward. Then perhaps they wouldn’t be so afraid of speaking in public.”

—MAUREEN MCBEATH, DTM

“They learn flexibility and creativity, develop more confidence, and they become secure in taking a risk,” says Linda Denton, DTM, YLP coordinator for the Founder’s District in Orange County, California, and a member of South Orange County Toastmasters. “The kids bond with each other and help each other, and they take turns being a leader.”

Just like adult Toastmasters, they get a safe learning environment where everyone supports each other and mistakes don’t matter.

“The kids get over their fear of public speaking—they learn that it is no big deal to get up in front of people and talk,” says Terry Spencer, DTM, a member of Davie Toastmasters in Davie, Florida, which has held a YLP almost every year since 2012. “That is a benefit that will last a lifetime. Some of our students have gone on to be members of their high school speech and debate teams. One girl gave a TEDxYouth talk and thanked us for the confidence we instilled in her.”

Rewards of Leading

The adults benefit as much as the students, says Spencer.

“First, it is so much fun working with the kids. They are delightful and they improve so

much over the eight weeks. And when you are teaching kids, you have to really think about the basics, so we reinforce our own knowledge as we pass it along to the kids. And it gives the members a good feeling, knowing we have helped children.”

Denton sees adults coming away with improved leadership, teamwork, and listening abilities; even better, they have the satisfaction of having a positive impact on society by educating the next generation, all of which helps raise emotional intelligence, she says.

“It really forces you to be organized,” says Mary Schoendorfer, DTM, Youth Leadership Chair for District 42 in Canada (Southern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan), and a member of Literally Speaking in Calgary, Alberta. “It asks you to own the program. We really encourage people to make it their own.”

McBeath agrees. She advises against being too strictly tied to the meeting agenda, especially in the beginning. “Starting the first meeting by electing officers, the kids aren’t going to go for that. That’s boring.” Instead, she gets them talking—about vacations, jobs, hobbies. They learn that “public speaking” needn’t be a big, formal project; it can be sharing stories about yourself with a few people in a classroom. The formalities can come later.

Overcoming Challenges

Running a YLP is as challenging as any other program, whether for adults or youth. From finding (and keeping) a meeting place to dealing with reluctant students, it’s not always easy.

“The biggest problem is getting facilitators,” Schoendorfer says. Many people are still at work in the after-school hours or are busy with their families on the weekends. Others are just “uncertain about working with kids.” McBeath has the same experience: “A lot of people are just scared to death of working with high school students.”

That’s why Schoendorfer recommends recruiting club members who believe in helping youth. She and her teams got involved, she says, because “we wanted to help kids get the skills we wanted to have when we were young.”

Whatever you do, remember that you don’t have to be perfect, Schoendorfer says. “Even a little Toastmasters is better than no Toastmasters.”

Kate McClare, DTM, is a marketing copywriter who joined Toastmasters in 2011. She is a member of three clubs in South Florida and an Area Director for District 47 (Southeast Florida and The Bahamas).

Coordinators' Tips for an Effective YLP

- Go into it with an open mind.
- Be patient; it may be difficult to coax the youths out of their comfort zones to get up to speak, but adults can be just as resistant.
- Get people on your team who are willing to get out of their comfort zone and give it a try.
- Get creative. Just get them talking; look for ways to connect with the teens' interests and activities. "At my first session, all I wanted was to get the kids on their feet," says Maureen McBeath, DTM, of Sunshine Toastmasters in Sechelt, British Columbia.
- Don't try to do it by yourself. Recruit at least one assistant and as many helpers as you can.
- Expect the unexpected: bad weather that keeps participants home, school closures that shut down your meeting place. "Plan all you want to, but be prepared to adapt," advises Mary Schoendorfer, DTM, Youth Leadership Chair for District 42.
- Recruiting participants can be difficult, so pair up with a group that can provide them: a community organization, church or synagogue, Scout troop, Boys and Girls Club, etc.
- Get a mix of members involved—men, women, young, old. That way, the kids can see that speaking is for everyone.
- Limit the sessions to one day a week. More than that is too much for both members and youth.

Getting Started

- Before doing any work with minors, ensure you research and adhere to local laws regarding governing volunteer work with minors.
- Visit the [Youth Programs](#) page for an overview of program requirements and processes.
- Read the [Youth Leadership Program Workbook](#) and [Youth Leadership Coordinator's Guide](#).
- Speak with your Club Executive Committee. It's their decision to start a YLP, and the coordinator must be appointed by the Club President. Be prepared to provide your club leadership with any relevant information to help them feel confident that you will be an effective and responsible coordinator for the program.

"The kids get over their fear of public speaking—they learn that it is no big deal to get up in front of people and talk."

—TERRY SPENCER, DTM



A student presents during a YLP session hosted by Davie Toastmasters.

The **win** **win** of the Club Coach Program

How struggling clubs—and their coaches—grow stronger together.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

Your club used to hum with energy. Guests visited, roles filled up fast, and laughter echoed after every Table Topics® response. But lately, attendance has slipped. The same few members take on multiple roles, and even the most loyal officer is feeling drained. If that sounds familiar, your club may not be in trouble; it may simply need support.

That's where the [Toastmasters Club Coach Program](#) comes in. Designed to help clubs rebuild membership and restore club quality, the program also offers an equally powerful benefit: It develops stronger, more empathetic leaders.

Whether you're leading a club that could use a boost or are thinking about becoming a club coach yourself, the program offers a win-win opportunity for everyone involved.

About the Program

When a club finds itself with fewer members or less energy than it once had, it often needs more than new ideas—it needs a partner. The Club Coach Program connects struggling clubs with an experienced Toastmaster who can help.

A club coach is not a fixer, but a collaborator. Coaches work alongside club leaders and members, offering perspective, structure, and encouragement as the club improves its practices and culture.

For the Takapuna Toasters Club in Auckland, New Zealand, “Having someone who had the knowledge, experience, and confidence

to work alongside us at each step to address areas of improvement” made all the difference, notes Club President Joey Poching.

Clubs eligible for coaching must have between three and 12 members, not be suspended or closed, have at least one officer who has completed the Club Coach Program Training module in Base Camp, and have no more than two coaches currently appointed.

A club coach's aim is to help the club build habits that continue long after the coaching term ends.

Coaching isn't about taking over; it's about helping the club take ownership of its own future.

How Clubs Benefit

When a coach partners effectively with a club, the impact can be felt quickly—in meeting energy, officer confidence, and member involvement. Many clubs rediscover their identity and purpose: who they serve, what they offer, and why members stay.

“Make sure the club has a clear understanding of who they are, their unique selling proposition, and their target audience,” emphasizes Colleen Marie Kelly, DTM, of the

Midday Mumbblers Club, in Chanhassen, Minnesota, who has coached several clubs over the years.

Clubs that rediscover their purpose often see a clear shift in energy and results. For the Takapuna Toasters, the program helped them not only rebuild but thrive. “Our club found it very rewarding,” says Poching. “We gained Distinguished in the DCP [Distinguished Club Program]—something that wasn't achieved for 10 years—and numbers are stable.” The club's officers also began seeking out additional education opportunities, inspired by the support they received.

Other clubs describe the experience as receiving a gentle but steady nudge—just enough structure and encouragement to rekindle momentum. Ryan Kelly, who coached the Talk the Talk Club in Fayetteville, New York, says of the club's dramatic improvement, “Seeing the growth of the club was like [seeing] a phoenix rising from the ashes.”

Even small improvements like creating a consistent agenda or greeting guests warmly can have a big impact. Members begin to feel valued again, and that sense of belonging becomes contagious.

What a Coach Does

Coaching begins with connection. Before suggesting any changes, a coach takes time to understand the club's culture and the individuals who make it up.

Successful club coaches tailor their support to each club's needs. That might mean leading a





[Moments of Truth](#) session, helping officers build a Club Success Plan, refreshing meeting structure, or modeling what an engaging, well-run meeting looks and feels like.

Some coaches focus on strengthening the club leadership team. Others help refine promotional strategies or build momentum through creative themes and consistent agendas. Many simply bring fresh eyes, something clubs often appreciate more than they expect.

Isabel Carter, DTM, coach for the Takapuna Toasters from late 2023 to mid-2025, found that taking time to work one-on-one with members made a meaningful difference for the club. She helped the officers understand Pathways, set goals, and feel more confident in their roles.

Lori Hull, coach for NW Arkansas Wordmasters, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 2024–2025, emphasizes the power of meeting quality and teamwork, noting that the turning point for this club was “focusing on consistent and planned quality meetings.” A Past Area Director in District 43, her leadership lens made the partnership even stronger: “Meet regularly as a team and work as a team,” she says. “You cannot step in and do the work for them.”

A club coach’s aim is to help the club build habits that continue long after the coaching term ends. Helpful guidance can be found in the step-by-step guide [How to Rebuild a Toastmasters Club](#).

Policy Updates

In the past, some members saw club coaching mainly as a requirement to meet for earning

the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award. Toastmasters International addressed this in the 2022–2023 coaching program updates, strengthening the program’s integrity and purpose. Coaches now earn credit only after serving at least six months and helping the club achieve Distinguished or better status in the DCP. If the club also reaches 20 members, the coach earns an additional DTM credit.

Coaching isn’t about taking over; it’s about helping the club take ownership of its own future.

These changes encourage deeper engagement, more consistent support, and a focus on sustainable success rather than quick fixes.

Club Coach Qualifications

Members who enjoy mentoring others and have foundational leadership experience may already be qualified to serve as a club coach. Coaches are often Area or Division Directors, but any qualified Toastmaster can apply through their District’s leadership team.

The best coaches share three traits: empathy, patience, and curiosity. They listen more than they talk. They meet clubs where they are in their journey. And they recognize that leadership growth comes from service, not status.

To qualify to be appointed as a club coach, a member must:

- Have completed Level 2 in any Pathways path, or hold an Advanced Communicator Bronze (ACB) or Advanced Leader Bronze (ALB) from the legacy education program.
- Have served as a club officer for a complete annual term.
- Not have been a member of the club in the past six months, and not join it during the appointment.
- Complete the Club Coach Program Training module in Base Camp.
- Coach only one club at a time.
- Sign a [Club Coach Agreement](#) outlining expectations.

These requirements help ensure a consistent, high-quality experience for clubs and coaches alike.

A coaching appointment lasts from six months up to two program years, giving the coach and club time for collaboration and steady progress. When a club needs more time to achieve Distinguished status and long-term, sustainable success, the appointment can be extended for up to two more years.

How Coaches Benefit

Clubs aren’t the only ones who grow—coaches often discover new attributes. Many coaches say the experience is unexpectedly transformative. It deepens leadership skills, expands communication styles, and builds empathy and confidence.

Carter, the Takapuna Toasters club coach, shares that the experience taught her to communicate more clearly, adapt more



thoughtfully, and understand team dynamics more deeply. She also appreciated seeing the club officers' confidence grow with each step forward.

Hull, the NW Arkansas Wordmasters coach, expresses a similar insight: "It's not easy, but it can become a fun team challenge, with the rewards of seeing steady progress." Working with a diverse group also strengthened her ability to lead with patience and understanding, she says.

Other coaches find that the experience helps them grow as mentors, facilitators, and motivators. Some, like Lisa Coppins, DTM, who coached the Avon Club in Christchurch, New Zealand, from late 2023 to mid-2024, describe the personal fulfillment of watching others thrive. "I've made lifelong friends by helping out at this club," she says. "It is such a special experience to be part of. I wish I did it sooner."

Even the challenges can refine leadership, as coaches learn to influence without authority

and navigate differing opinions.

Coaches who start their assignment seeking DTM credit often finish with something far more valuable: a deeper understanding of leadership, a renewed passion for service, and a story of growth—both for the club and for themselves. And when a club reaches Distinguished status, or simply regains its energy and direction, the success belongs to everyone.

Diane Windingland, DTM, is a communication coach from Spring, Texas, and a member of Frankly Speaking Toastmasters in Spring, Texas, and PowerTalk Toastmasters in Minnesota. Learn more at virtuallspeechcoach.com. She is also the author of the book *The Clarity Code: How to Communicate Complex Ideas with Simplicity and Power*.

How to Know Your Club Could Use a Coach

- Membership has dropped below 13.
- Meetings feel repetitive or unfinished.
- The same few people take on all the roles.
- Guests attend but rarely join.
- Officers are showing signs of burnout.

If this sounds familiar, reach out to your District's Club Growth Director. You don't have to go it alone—and the turnaround might come faster than you think.

Promoting Your Open House and Demo Meeting

Uncover tips to market your club's event.

By Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS

One of the best ways to boost membership is by sharing the benefits of the Toastmasters program with others. Whether you are looking to grow your club through an open house or build a new club through a demo meeting, it's important that you market the event well to attract guests. Here are eight ways to promote your event in your community.

1. **Promote a community kickoff meeting via word of mouth, personal invitation, and social media.** Post fliers in busy places, such as libraries, stores, university areas, gyms, cafes, and community bulletin boards. Use branded [templates for fliers](#) from the Toastmasters website.
2. **Post your event on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other social media channels.** Create a short promo video on YouTube and link to it in your posts. Use Meetup or other networking or event sites to promote the open house or demo meeting. Leverage your personal connections to spread the word. Use Eventbrite or other registration-tracking services to keep count of RSVPs.
3. **Invite past club members and visitors.** Connect with people who have large networks or strong influence. Encourage them to share the details of the event with others to reach more people.
4. **Use low/no-cost media outlets to market the event.** Reach out to smaller community publications, trade magazines, or local access television channels. Offer to do live interviews with a media outlet or podcaster.
5. **Enlist the human resources department or managers at your organization.** If you are marketing a corporate club, promote a kickoff meeting through the company's internal channels, such as a company-wide email, closed-circuit video, or by posting or distributing fliers.
6. **Use personal, heartfelt invitations.** Invite your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Mention the event at a party, church, school, gymnasium, community gathering, and while running errands.

7. **Repeat and layer as needed.** One post, email, or flier is not enough. Use multiple strategies to promote the open house or demo meeting. Make sure to space out when and how you will market the event so it doesn't become irritating or pushy.

8. **Use the club marketing resources from Toastmasters.**

- [Demonstration Meeting Sample Agenda](#)
- [Membership Application](#)
- [Open House Fliers](#)
- [Open House PowerPoint](#)
- [Membership Building Kit](#)

Adapted from an article in the July 2017 issue of the Toastmaster magazine.

Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS, is a former NASA propulsion engineer. Today she's a professional speaker, author, and presentation skills coach, as well as founder of High Altitude Strategies, a coaching and speaking service. Visit her [website](#) to learn more.



Visitors enjoy pizza at an open house presented by London Victorians Toastmasters club in the United Kingdom (see page 24). Photo by Diane Richardson, DTM, Past District 91 Director.

Full House

How our club brought in members with a successful open house.

By Florian Bay, DTM

Open houses are one of the best tools to build club membership. A successful one draws guests and awareness, and ultimately results in new members for the club.

Last year, our club, London Victorians, in the United Kingdom, hosted a highly successful open house. We produced six marketing videos, generated 2,600 views on LinkedIn, and drew 49 guests. After the evening event, 11 guests signed up as new members.

How did we do it?

Here are the key lessons, which every club can replicate.

Make It a Paid Ticketed Event

London Victorians had organized an open house a year earlier, attended by around 35 people, including club members. It was a successful event that led to some new members joining the club; however, out of 41 guests registered to attend, only 10 had turned up.

This time, we decided to charge attendees 5 pounds (\$6.50 USD) to ensure buy-in and commitment from them. In turn, we focused on producing an event that they would both enjoy and benefit from. The funds we collected would be used as club income, per Toastmasters policy.

A Big Event Needs a Big Team

All members of the club's leadership team helped out to varying degrees. Nick Roberts, our Vice President Membership at the time, spearheaded organizing the open house, and Sam Yates, our then-Vice President Public Relations, and I, then-Club Treasurer, supported Nick. We knew early on that more club members would also need to be involved, especially on the day of the event.

We filled the meeting agenda with excellent speakers, strong evaluators, and a fabulous Toastmaster of the Day to create an engaging show. Another member handled hospitality, signing in, registering, and mingling with guests.

In total, almost 20 club members played a part in making this event successful. It was truly driven by the whole club.

Set Goals Up Front and Plan Accordingly

We started planning the event's format seven weeks before the scheduled date. These were the key elements we settled on:

1. The theme would be public speaking essentials and tips, aimed at attendees looking to improve their skills in a professional yet friendly atmosphere.
2. We would hold a short, interactive 15-minute workshop about the essentials of public speaking (the Who, What, Why, How, and When questions to ask yourself before giving a speech) to kick off the event after introductions from the Club President and Toastmaster.
3. The agenda followed an [open house planning document](#) I wrote as District 91's Club Growth Director, including audience-led

interactive speaker evaluations facilitated by the Toastmaster.

4. We would ask a question for all attendees to answer while registering: "Tell us something unique, interesting, or fun about you." Then our Table Topics® session—with responses kept to one minute maximum—would be based on the most interesting answers, which would be pre-selected by the Table Topicsmaster.
5. To encourage people to join, we would wrap up the event with a club member sharing their Toastmasters journey.
6. After the event, we'd have networking over pizza.

The goal was to attract 80 people and fill all the seats in the meeting room.

Conduct a Big Marketing Push

Paid marketing was part of the project plan, and we created a series of one-minute marketing

As Vice President Membership, Nick Roberts led the effort by London Victorians to organize an open house. Photos by Diane Richardson, DTM, Past District 91 Director.



videos to entice people to attend. We knew we also needed to maximize use of the club's social media channels.

Content Creation – Nick, Sam, and I worked together to create professional-looking content to share across all marketing channels. Using the best photos at our disposal, we created a poster, a square image for social media, and the marketing videos, which featured our members encouraging people to attend the open house. We used Canva to edit these materials and iPhones to shoot the videos in our meeting venue.

Internal Promotion – Nick spoke about the event to club members during every meeting the month before, and he sent multiple WhatsApp messages in our group with the event poster included. Several members invited friends and colleagues to attend, and word of mouth likely brought in more registrations as well.

Eventbrite Marketing – Eventbrite promotes events to users according to their own interests, and you can advertise directly on the platform to attract more views and registration. We continually updated our event page throughout the pre-event period to make it more attractive, ultimately using features such as video headers and embedded agendas. We ran £30 (about \$40 USD) of paid advertising on Eventbrite the month before the scheduled event targeted at people living in London.

Out of 59 guests who registered to attend, 49 turned up, justifying the club's decision to charge for attendance.

LinkedIn Posts – Nick took the lead in sharing posts about the event in his profile and the club's profile, with members encouraged to reshare them. We also leveraged the videos we created into a campaign of five paid ads, which were viewed 2,600 times and brought in close to 100 visitors to our Eventbrite page.

Facebook Posts – We posted once or twice per week reminding people to attend the event, and we shared the images and videos we created. A short paid marketing campaign using an image also gathered 8,000 impressions and led to a spike in traffic to our Eventbrite page.

Past Guests and Newsletter – We promoted the event to all our past club members and guests via our newsletter, which led to a few familiar faces coming back to the club.

Business Networks – Nick reached out to the Victoria Business Improvement District and other similar networks in the area. Through grit and a few phone calls with the right people, he was able to get our event added to one of their websites and a promotional newsletter that went out to businesses in this part of London.

Making It Work

Executing this event properly was crucial and all meeting functionaries alongside the hospitality team were briefed beforehand regarding their tasks. Our Toastmaster for this meeting, Lucy Gray, made sure all contingencies were planned for so that nothing was left to chance.

In the end, everything went smoothly and QR codes were spread around the room encouraging attendees to join the club. Pizzas arrived on time, and everyone had something to eat.

Lucy Gray served as Toastmaster of the meeting for London Victorians' open house.

Photos by Diane Richardson, DTM, Past District 91 Director.

How Did We Do?

Out of 59 guests who registered to attend, 49 turned up, justifying

the club's decision to charge for attendance. What's more, we had a whopping 11 new members sign up after attending the event, no doubt prompted by a special offer to waive the usual fee to join our club. Ticket sales covered all marketing costs, and some of the cost of the pizza. By all accounts this was an amazingly successful event made possible by a great team!

Thea Mallorie, one of the people who joined our club after the event, says, "The things that stood out to me were: one, the real warmth and friendliness of the group; everyone seemed to be interesting and have genuine friendships together. Second was the quality of the speeches."

She adds that the two speakers addressed the topic of public-speaking nervousness, "and the contents of their speeches were inspiring and spoke to me personally."

Future Success

As successful as the event was, these following lessons will help us do even better next time:

- 1. Plan ahead even more** – In hindsight, locking everything in eight or even 10 weeks in advance would have given us a few weeks to shoot more marketing videos and create more content.
- 2. Read the fine print regarding videos** – Our marketing videos were successful but could have had far more power if we could have used them on Facebook. For some reason, Facebook rejected them for advertising purposes, and we lacked the time to research this further and make any claim. YouTube only accepted our videos as shorts once the background music was removed, despite it being copyright-free.
- 3. Have a bigger team** – We needed a fourth person on the organizing team, especially to support with marketing. There was a time a few weeks before the scheduled event when we all found ourselves stretched. Another team member could have helped with getting more content out.

Florian Bay, DTM, is a Past District 91 Director and a member of London Victorians Toastmasters in London, United Kingdom.

Untangling Cultural Knots

How to turn misunderstandings into bridges between cultures.

By Maria Garaitonandia

As I sat across from Pedro, a Mexican executive I was coaching for a new expat assignment in the United States, I could hear his anger rising as he recalled a recent encounter with Owen, an American colleague during a business trip in the Detroit office. My work as a leadership coach and communication strategist often involves helping executives like Pedro prepare for new roles abroad, where cultural misunderstandings can quickly derail trust and teamwork.

When an urgent matter needed Owen's sign-off, Pedro hurried to his office, only to find him on the phone. Pedro peeked in, but Owen didn't acknowledge him, so he walked in and interrupted Owen by signaling with his hand.

Taken aback, Owen interrupted his conversation and said to Pedro, "Can't you see I'm on the phone?" Pedro apologized and tried to explain, but Owen interrupted him and said, "When I'm finished, I'll take care of it," and promptly turned his back to Pedro.

At this point, you've probably made up your mind as to who was right and who was wrong. That's natural. We all see situations through our own cultural lens, shaped by the values and unwritten rules we grew up with. What feels respectful in one culture may look dismissive in another and what seems efficient in one workplace may come across as cold or inconsiderate elsewhere. These default perspectives may be in direct contrast to each other, which is why two people can walk away

from the same interaction with completely different stories about what happened.

Considering that most of us are interacting cross-culturally nowadays, it's more important than ever to be able to spot and bridge cultural gaps so as not to be paralyzed or stalled by cultural misunderstandings. Being able to peel back the layers of complexity can help us create simple processes to avoid throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water when it comes to intercultural communication.

The problem is, when we start attributing our cultural disconnects to personal slights, it can be very difficult to move forward with a conversation or focus on cooperation.

What Happened?

In our interactions with others, regardless of our intent, it's the impact that matters. It's easy to make assumptions based on our own frame of reference and to take things personally, like Pedro did.

The crux of the matter was that the two men had a very different concept of what "respect" looks like and what was expected of the other in a professional interaction. Pedro came from a culture where relationships form the foundation



We all see situations through our own cultural lens, shaped by the values and unwritten rules we grew up with.

of collaboration. In Mexico and much of Latin America, warmth, personal connection, and flexibility are considered essential to teamwork. In that context, Pedro's gesture was his way of saying, "This is important, please help me."

Owen, on the other hand, was guided by a different rulebook. In task-focused, monochronic cultures like the U.S., professionalism often means protecting people's time and space. Work is organized linearly: one task, meeting, or conversation at a time. Interruptions are considered disruptive, and respect is demonstrated through boundaries. To Owen, Pedro's entrance wasn't a sign of urgency, but rather a breach of courtesy.

Both men were following the rules of their own culture. But the rules were quite different, which made the rules of the game very unclear.

These differences illustrate task versus relationship orientation.

In task-focused cultures (like the U.S., Germany, or Switzerland), the priority is efficiency and results. Communication tends to be direct, concise, and explicit. Following schedules and procedures signals respect.

In relationship-focused cultures (like Mexico, Brazil, or the Middle East), trust and loyalty come first. Communication is contextual and layered, and schedules are often adjusted to accommodate people's needs. Respect is shown by being attentive and available.

That's why, in Mexico, for example, it's common for someone to pause a phone call briefly to respond to a colleague who enters the room. Interruptions aren't considered rude. In contrast, in task-focused cultures such as the U.S., those same interruptions can feel disrespectful because they break the flow of work and time boundaries.

You don't have to completely adopt another culture's style, but awareness makes a big difference. If you're task focused, allow time for connection when working with relationship cultures. If you're relationship focused, respect deadlines when working with task cultures. The goal is to show flexibility and invite the other person to do the same. Meeting in the middle is often the bridge.

How To Untangle Cultural Knots

In cross-cultural environments, there are simply things that we don't know. And often, we don't know that we don't know. Misunderstandings are bound to happen. We may misstep without realizing it, and we may react viscerally to someone else's behavior, but the key is to have the grace to give ourselves and others the benefit of the doubt and be capable of changing the narrative. Here are some ways to do it:

- 1. Acknowledge the cultural elephant in the room.** One of my favorite ways to keep cultural misunderstandings from spiraling is what I call the "disclaimer method." It's a simple practice that acknowledges, perhaps at the beginning of a project, that we may run into cultural differences in how we communicate and approach problems. Let's agree to see them as differences, not disrespect. Encourage others to signal when something feels off, so you can pause and clarify.
- 2. Clarify expectations up front.** In a cross-cultural environment it's easy to make assumptions, so it's even more important to set ground rules together. What's the best way to communicate urgent issues? How will interruptions be handled? What's the best way to move forward when things get stuck? What is meant by "open-door policy"? What isn't?
- 3. Separate behavior from intent.** When a cultural misstep happens, it's easy to jump to conclusions, attributing behavior to whatever we think it means, because we are filtering through our own cultural lens. It's important to assume good intent first. A simple mental shift like "they probably have a different way of seeing this" can make a huge difference.

4. Don't let first impressions be the last.

One bad moment shouldn't define the entire relationship. When we admit that we probably don't understand the context, motivation, or values behind certain behavior, we are opening ourselves up to learning something new, and that grace will probably be extended to us when we misstep.

Turn Misunderstandings Into Insight

Once Pedro was able to see the interaction from a different perspective, his attitude toward Owen softened. He realized his own behavior was probably misinterpreted, just as he had misread Owen's response. The shift opened the door to giving the relationship another chance when he relocated to Detroit. After all, Owen was a stakeholder he would need to collaborate with and writing him off entirely wasn't an option.

Cross-cultural misunderstandings like this are inevitable. The important thing is not to let those moments harden into judgment. By pausing, giving grace, and assuming positive intent, we can change the story we tell ourselves about what happened. And when we clarify expectations, acknowledge cultural differences, and separate behavior from intent, we untangle the knot before it tightens.

The next time you feel dismissed or offended by someone's reaction, resist the urge to label it as disrespect. Instead, take a breath and ask: *Could this be cultural rather than personal?* That simple question may shift your perspective and help you build the bridges required for collaboration.

Maria Garaitonandia is a speaker and communication strategist who helps leaders strengthen their communication, build trust, and collaborate more effectively. With over two decades of experience across the U.S. and Latin America, she brings real-world stories and tools to her audiences. She is the author of *Untangling Communication: How Leaders Can Strengthen Communication, Resolve Conflict, and Build High-Performing Teams*. Learn more at mariagaraitonandia.com.



The Magic of **SPEAKING** for Entrepreneurs

Want to start a new business? Toastmasters is for you.

By Katie Stoddart



Being an entrepreneur sounds glamorous—you spot an opportunity and develop it into a business, whether that's a product or service, then watch it grow into a financial success.

However, it takes a lot of long hours and serious work to become successful. You need to thoroughly understand everything about your product or service and have a grasp of the operations side, including the risks.

You also need communication skills. In fact, you need very strong communication skills that allow you to confidently pitch investors, give sales presentations, and maybe even speak at conferences and exhibits. You also need leadership skills, particularly as your business starts to scale. Being able to communicate and lead effectively gives you a sense of confidence that will carry over into all aspects of your business.

When I first started my own business, The Focus Bee, back in 2018, I quickly realized that communication was one of the key pillars of business: for sales, confidence building, innovative thinking, and so much more. Within the first six months of starting my own company, I signed up for Toastmasters to practice both communication and public speaking.

If you're creating a new business, Toastmasters is one of the best investments you can make to develop the communication skills, leadership experience, and confidence you need to tackle any challenge.

Hone Your Speaking Skills

Being an entrepreneur often involves wearing many different hats—you might be the founder, but chances are you'll also be acting as a salesperson, a marketing expert, a tech specialist, and/or a finance manager.

Whatever your title, you are the voice and face of your brand, and you need to be able to speak and present, both informally and formally, to groups of all sizes, from stakeholders and investors, to potential clients and customers, and to someone at a networking event.



Being able to communicate and lead effectively gives you a sense of confidence that will carry over into all aspects of your business.

Luckily, the best way to learn to speak clearly and persuasively comes with practice. The more often you practice communicating your ideas, the clearer your communication becomes.

That's where Toastmasters comes in. Your club offers an ideal opportunity to perfect your elevator speech, your sales pitch, or a presentation to investors.

Ask club members for specific feedback: Did the elevator speech make sense? Did the sales pitch have the right information and an effective persuasive tone? Was the data in your presentation clear and easy to understand?

You gain direct insights by asking club members these types of specific questions. This immediate feedback trains you to express your ideas in a concise way.

Melinda Muganzo, DTM, of Loma Linda, California, is a member of Entrepreneur Toastmasters, an online club. The club does a round-robin style evaluation, so members can provide meaningful feedback for four minutes after each speaker.

For her, the feedback has been invaluable. "With this feature, the entrepreneur receives diverse ideas to help facilitate their personal growth," she says.

Gain Leadership Skills

If you consider yourself an entrepreneur, then you're a leader. You are in charge of products, services, and ideas; you're introducing something new to the world. You need to be able to lead from any area of your new venture.

If leadership makes you uncomfortable, use your Toastmasters club to grow those skills. Club officer and club meeting roles both offer opportunities to lead a group of people, learn how to manage time and stress, and be proactive.

Club officer positions are the most effective way to really gain experience. If the financial end of the business is intimidating, try the Club Treasurer role. If you need to boost your PR and marketing skills, go for the Vice President Public Relations. In fact, any role on the Club Executive Committee offers opportunities to strengthen skills in areas like team building, project management, and conflict resolution.

Even meeting roles offer a short-term way to gain skills—the Toastmaster of the Day organizes the meeting and plans the agenda, both the evaluator and Ah-Counter roles strengthen active listening skills, and the grammarian and speaker of the day help you



polish your word choices. And when you take on a club meeting role, you also have the opportunity to practice speaking.

Build Your Confidence

While it's easy to feel a sense of confidence and invincibility when you're in the planning stages of your new business, that confidence can wane when you're faced with a barrage of questions or problems from investors or clients.

Luckily, confidence can also be built through practice. Think about what makes you the most nervous or where you feel the weakest in your new position. Then focus your energy on gaining confidence and experience in that area. Toastmasters offers the perfect opportunity to hold yourself accountable. Sign up regularly for club speeches, absorb the feedback from evaluations, and watch yourself become better at crafting clear messages.

You will also build your confidence by speaking vulnerably about your core ideas, your hopes and plans, and your concerns.

Your club is a place to try something new and see how it lands. That could mean trying to insert humor into your sales pitch or experimenting with a slide show presentation. You'll quickly learn what works and what doesn't work. Even if you decide not to use what you've practiced, the knowledge and insight you gain builds the inner confidence needed to take more bold actions.

"For entrepreneurs, having a safe and supportive space to practice public speaking, test their business value proposition, and strengthen leadership skills is essential," says Daniela Ignatova, a former member of the hybrid club Pitch Craft for Entrepreneurs Toastmasters in Luxembourg.

When I was starting out, I knew I needed to boost my confidence, so I decided to push myself in a different way. I used my Toastmasters club to boost my confidence. At one club meeting, I started my speech by singing a song a cappella in front of the whole group. Singing in public was totally out of my comfort zone, but Toastmasters supported me in trying something new and building my confidence.

Toastmasters: Entrepreneurship Incubator

Most entrepreneurs join Toastmasters to improve their speaking style, develop leadership skills, network, or grow professionally.

Randy Powell, DTM, of Temecula, California, and a member of Entrepreneur Toastmasters club puts it this way: "It's been my experience over the past 10 years or more that people's reasons [for joining Toastmasters] vary, but there tends to be a few universal reasons: master fear, language or dialect improvement, recommended by their companies, desire to be part of something larger, [improve] English as a second language, desire to speak publicly, and some want to become paid speakers."

When I first started my business, I happened to stumble upon Toastmasters. Learning the skills I needed for my business while simultaneously learning public speaking was transformational in my journey—I gained confidence, was able to better express myself, and understood how to constantly raise the bar on my own speaking.

In the following years, I took my speaking to the next level and became a professional speaker. Now speaking is one of the main aspects of my business. A couple of years after being part of Toastmasters, I launched my speaking business, in addition to my coaching practice. I continue to improve and work on my speaking, and enjoy both the speaking and coaching aspects of my business.

And there's no arguing that other entrepreneurs who belong to Toastmasters have seen the benefits.

Ignatova, the former member in Luxembourg, says, "At [Pitch Craft for Entrepreneurs Toastmasters], we have seen truly remarkable journeys. One of our newest members was part of the winning team at an international start-up event [Nexus Luxembourg Pitches: Women in Finance & Technology Program], whose pitch won among 140-plus others."

Whether you're in the boardroom or at a networking event, having communication and leadership skills, along with a healthy dose of confidence, gives you the edge you need to take your business to the next level.

Katie Stoddart is founder and CEO of *The Focus Bee*, a transformative leadership platform. 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](#) and [katiestoddart.com](#).



5 QUESTIONS WITH...

Radhi Spear, DTM

Club growth advice from an expert.



More about
Radhi

Hometown:

Piscataway, New Jersey

Number of years in Toastmasters:

≈25≈

Profession:

Retired software
engineer for AT&T



Hobbies:

Traveling the world,
swimming, bicycling,
reading, spending
time with grandson ♥♥

This month we're talking to Radhi Spear, DTM, Toastmasters' 2024-2025 International President, who has a wealth of knowledge about club excellence and growth. She believes strongly in touting the benefits of Toastmasters to others. To that end, Radhi championed the Plus One Pledge during her presidential term—a pledge drive asking each member to bring a guest to a club meeting.

Here are some of her insights on how to help your club excel—and grow.

What is your top tip to build club membership?

Advertise, advertise, advertise! Clubs must promote themselves constantly from the day they are chartered—and pair that with an enjoyable, high-quality meeting experience.

Promotion brings guests in, but what converts them into members is what they see and experience during the meeting. When guests feel genuinely welcomed, see a well-set-up room, and experience an organized meeting with active participation, they sense the energy, feel the camaraderie, and clearly see the value the club offers.

What are common elements of successful clubs?

Successful clubs fill meeting roles, keep to time, and invite guests to participate in Table Topics, usually after a member has modeled how it's done. These clubs make the guests feel included and demonstrate that the club is a supportive community, committed to helping one another succeed.

What is your favorite thing to see when you visit a club?

I love seeing the pride a club has in itself and its members. Especially when its banner is proudly displayed with ribbons that showcase its achievements. Clubs that take pride in their accomplishments invariably run great meetings, provide value to their members, and make you want to be part of that successful club!

What makes Toastmasters clubs so unique?

Toastmasters clubs help you develop essential communication and leadership skills—along with many other soft skills that are crucial for success in everyday life—in a truly supportive environment. This leads to greater self-confidence and personal growth. Toastmasters is unique because it blends learning, practice, and community in a way no other resource can.

Why do you feel it's particularly important for members to bring guests to meetings?

In my opinion, everyone needs Toastmasters. Our world faces numerous challenges, and somewhere out there are scientists, doctors, engineers, financial experts, and professionals in every field who hold the answers, yet some lack the communication skills to share their ideas effectively. They need Toastmasters, and we need them!

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