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The Gift of Fun and Friendship

One of the most precious gifts Toastmasters has given me is a global community of friends. Over the years, I've laughed, learned, and shared unforgettable moments with people I would never have met in my day-to-day life. These friends have become an extended family, scattered across the world but always close at heart.

Every time I meet another Toastmaster—whether at a club meeting, a District conference, or on the other side of the world—I'm reminded of the magic of connection. We may come from different cultures, speak different languages, and live in different time zones, but we share something powerful: the desire to grow ourselves and to help others do the same. That shared purpose creates an immediate bond, and before long, there are smiles, laughter, and often, new inside jokes that transcend borders.

Some of my most joyful Toastmasters memories are rooted in fun. Late-night rehearsals for District Council meetings that dissolved into laughter. Club meetings where creative Table Topics had us giggling for minutes. District events where the friendships mattered as much as the speeches. These moments remind me that growth doesn't have

to be serious all the time—it can be joyful, playful, and full of fun.

As our founder, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, wisely said, "We learn best in moments of enjoyment." Friendship and fun don't just make our Toastmasters experience richer—

they make our learning deeper and our growth more meaningful. This holiday season, I invite you to take a moment to celebrate the friends you've made on your Toastmasters journey. Reach out to them. Share a memory. Let them

know how much they mean to you. Send them warm wishes for the year ahead.

And perhaps most importantly—bring that spirit of fun and friendship into your next meeting. Smile more. Laugh together. Celebrate the simple joy of belonging to this extraordinary community.

Because when we weave friendship and fun into our learning, we create something lasting. We create bonds that carry us through challenges, brighten our journeys, and remind us that leadership, at its heart, is about people.

Here's to laughter, friendship, and the joy of learning together. Happy holidays!

Aletta Rochat, DTM
International President



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Snapshot



Members of the **Professionals Beyond Boundaries Toastmasters Club** in Galle, Sri Lanka, gather to celebrate their fifth club officer installation and new member induction ceremony.

Traveling Toastmaster



Vaibhav Zarkar of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, brings the digital *Toastmaster* magazine with him during a five-day hiking trip on the Hampta Pass Trek in Himachal Pradesh, India.



Meenalochini Gajendran of Doha, Qatar, shows off the Toastmasters logo at Jungfrauoch, also known as the Top of Europe, in the Alps of Switzerland.

In Memory of George C. Scott and Bennie Bough

Two Past International Presidents are remembered for their contributions to Toastmasters.

By Paul Sterman

In the last year and a half, Toastmasters has lost two Past International Presidents. George C. Scott, DTM, 1975–1976 International President, passed away in June 2024, at the age of 95. Bennie Bough, DTM, 1992–1993 International President, passed away in June 2025 at 96.



George C. Scott, DTM

In 1956, Scott joined the Chanticleers Toastmasters Club in Portland, Oregon. Remarkably, he remained

a member until the time of his death, 68 years later.

“George was an outstanding President—intelligent, articulate, caring,” recalls John Fauvel, DTM, 1987–1988 International President.

Fauvel, of Auckland, New Zealand—Toastmasters’ first International President from outside of North America—vividly remembers when Scott and his first wife, Elaine, visited his country during Scott’s term as International President, in 1976. Fauvel says it was the first official visit to either New Zealand or Australia by an International President.

Fauvel was impressed by how friendly and authentic Scott was, recalling that the then-President was genuinely interested in talking to and learning about local members, who in turn held the organization’s top-ranking officer “in awe.”

During the New Zealand trip, the Scotts were guests at a Saturday-night Toastmasters banquet, and when it was time for attendees to line up at the buffet line, the host Toastmaster forgot to call the Scotts first. “By the time George and Elaine got to the buffet table, only a few lettuce leaves remained!” Fauvel says. “Sunday morning they were as gracious as ever.”

Scott’s term as International President coincided with the year Terry McCann was selected as the organization’s new executive director, in 1975. Scott was part of a group that conducted a detailed search and interviewed McCann several times.

In an interview with 1999–2000 International President Tim Keck, DTM, Scott reflected on McCann’s 26-year tenure in the position: “He really did a lot of positive things for the organization for the many years he was with us.”

Scott also shared a story about having the same name as the famous actor George C. Scott, a stage and screen star, who won the 1971 Academy Award for Best Actor.

George C. Scott the Toastmaster viewed the coincidence with a playful perspective. He particularly enjoyed calling for a hotel or restaurant reservation and upon being asked his name, saying, “I’m George C. Scott.”

“I’d get a pause at the other end,” he continued, “and then I’d hear, ‘The George C. Scott?’ My reply was, ‘Well, certainly.’”



Bennie Bough, DTM

As a young man serving in the United States Navy, Bennie Bough was stationed in Taiwan in the late 1950s.

He had earlier joined a Toastmasters club at the San Diego Naval Training Center in San Diego, California, in 1953—and before he left Taiwan, he chartered the first Toastmasters club there, in 1958. It was a key step in the growth of Toastmasters in Asia.

Nearly 70 years later, the Taipei Toastmasters Club is still going strong, and District 67 in Taiwan has more than 170 clubs.

“Dr. Bough was not only an exceptional leader and mentor but also a wise and warm-

hearted friend whose legacy will continue to guide and inspire every member of District 67,” wrote then-District Director Ben Lin, DTM, in a Facebook post on the District 67 page after Bough passed away.

Through the years, Bough belonged to several Toastmasters clubs in his home state of Virginia. One club in Springfield, Virginia, was founded by a fellow member in 2002 and named the Bennie Bough Toastmasters Club in his honor.

George Yen, DTM, the first International President from Taiwan (2013–2014), had a special connection with Bough. They first met in 1998, when Bough went to Taipei to mark the Taipei Toastmasters Club’s 40th anniversary. Ten years later, Bough traveled there to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

“He came across as a very warm and caring person and seemed to have a special affinity for Asians, and the Taiwanese in particular,” says Yen.

Yen recalls that in 2013, when he became the first International President from Taiwan—the place where Bough had planted the seeds of Toastmasters more than half a century earlier—“Bennie was in tears when the result was announced.”

Bough, who had a Ph.D. in International Relations, grew up in Illinois, and both his parents were deaf. In an interview with Tim Keck, Bough said he benefited a great deal from mentors throughout his life and tried to give back as a leader in Toastmasters.

“I have mentored a lot of people, mostly on a one-to-one basis. The most powerful example of mentoring is encouragement, where you constantly encourage other people to take on leadership roles and are encouraging them that they can do better in their public speaking skills.”

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

Surviving Awkward Holiday Party Talk

Discover tips to enjoy conversations with others.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

If the thought of mingling at a party with people you barely know and trying to make conversations fills you with dread, you're not alone. Whether you're sipping a drink at a friend's home, sharing a holiday dinner with family, or attending an office party, Toastmasters experts offer six tips to help you have a more successful experience.

1 LOOK FOR A FRIENDLY FACE.

When arriving at the event or when you're feeling out of place, seek out the people you know and enjoy spending time with. Try to navigate toward people who are well-known and liked—they are often good communicators and will help you feel at ease.

2 WATCH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE. Be sure to face the individual who is speaking, make eye contact with them, and smile and nod to let them know you're paying attention and understanding what they are saying. And if nothing else, refrain from texting or checking your phone and give people your full attention.

3 CREATE A CONVERSATION RÉSUMÉ. Before you head to the party, think of a few things you've done recently that could help you jump into conversations easily, such as an exciting trip you took, an interesting book you read, or a new movie you watched. Compile a mental list of your interests and hobbies and review current events in the news and sports.

4 SHARE YOUR STORIES.

Tell a humorous and/or [happy holiday memory](#) or story. People enjoy sharing their own holiday experiences, so this topic can help jump-start conversations.

5 SET YOUR EXPECTATIONS.

Don't expect to have in-depth conversations at holiday gatherings; prepare for others to join in and even interrupt at times. Conversations will typically be brief, so this isn't the place to resolve any pressing business or personal matters.

6 KNOW WHEN AND HOW TO EXIT.

Before leaving the event, navigate your way around and try to say a brief hello to the people you haven't had the chance to converse with. Be sure to thank the hosts of the party. They likely put in a great deal of effort to make the event fun and enjoyable for everyone.

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

Finding My Different Voices

How Toastmasters has helped me through a variety of career paths.

By Krista Wells, Ph.D.



I initially joined Toastmasters when I was transitioning from counseling individual military spouses to delivering prepared speeches to larger groups on military bases across the United States. As a counselor, I relied on my listening skills, empathy, and analytical abilities—core competencies of my work. Yet, I struggled to communicate my ideas clearly and confidently in these larger military spouse settings. Even when I was sharing information in my areas of expertise, nervousness often trumped my preplanned messaging.

After years of speaking and participating at my club, I felt more calm, cool, and collected, even in front of hundreds of military spouses. I began communicating more effectively and was able to motivate others.

My speaking gigs grew and soon I was presenting on panels at the National Military Spouse Network, and speaking in front of hundreds at events like Heroes at Home and at a Marriage and Family conference. I even spoke in front of several thousand spouses at a Seventh-day Adventist conference, proving that with more practice you can impact more people.

I took a break from Toastmasters while my four children were busy with sports and activities, and during that time, I began writing fiction. When I started to think about publishing my first book, I realized I needed to learn how to share my work confidently with potential readers, connect with book clubs, and speak at libraries and book signings with ease. And with my communication often limited to the sidelines of sports fields and school events, even my casual conversations felt rusty.

As a thriller-fiction author, writing under the pen name Addison McKnight, my books delve into suspenseful, high-stakes worlds filled

with complex characters and unexpected twists. However, writing gripping stories is only half the battle. In the real world, my battle consists of moving the voice in my head to outwardly promoting the worlds I have created.

Toastmasters once again helped me find my voice and gave me the tools to engage with new audiences.

My lack of practice was particularly evident when I started practicing my book pitch for agents at a thriller-writers conference. I struggled, before remembering how much Toastmasters had helped me in the past. I remembered how practicing and receiving valuable feedback from other members improved my ability to be more concise and to present with more confidence, and I knew the supportive, structured environment would allow me to brush up the skills I needed to pitch and sell my fiction books. So I investigated rejoining, and my club was excited to have me back.

The more I attended club meetings—even if I didn't have a speaking role—the more consistently I was able to organize my thoughts. Toastmasters once again helped me find my voice and gave me the tools to engage with new audiences. Today, I'm a published author of two books, and whether I'm discussing a therapeutic technique, podcasting, or speaking to people

about publishing and the co-authoring process, the skills I've gained in Toastmasters have translated to my success.

There's always room for improvement, and I know that continuing to work on my speaking skills will enhance my professional effectiveness and open doors to more book deals and speaking engagements, and, since part of being a commercial fiction success is becoming more mediagenic, maybe even help land a movie adaptation.

Toastmasters continues to be an essential part of my journey, as a counselor and coach, as a speaker, and as an author who wants to reach more readers. It is a way for me to more comfortably promote my counseling work and my fiction writing with authenticity and confidence.

Toastmasters teaches so much more than public speaking—it's a lifelong learning lab where you can practice better listening and leading, and perhaps most importantly, it's a place where you can find your authentic voice. These skills are transferrable and scalable, and you can drop in at different stages throughout your career.

The payoff isn't just better speeches; it's being able to serve broader audiences than you can in private practice. Making the commitment to show up and participate, even slightly, at meetings will lead to you becoming the best version of yourself.

Krista Wells, Ph.D., is a licensed professional counselor and life coach and podcaster with a passion for working with women. She is the author of two novels under the pen name Addison McKnight: *An Imperfect Plan* and *The Vineyard Remains*. Learn more at kristawells.com.



Lessons From the Toastmaster

Discover what I have learned as a writer for the magazine.

By Bill Brown, DTM

It has been a pleasure communicating with you these past years through the magazine.



Illustration by
Jerry King

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said, “The only constant in life is change.” That is true for all of us, including the *Toastmaster* magazine. One of those changes is that my column has reached the end of its lifespan. So, this is the last monthly column I will write in this series.

With that, I thought it might be helpful to review what I have learned through this experience. After all, I have been writing for the magazine for over 10 years. Hopefully, I have gained something during that time.

The biggest lesson I have learned is to accept challenges. For example, early on in my Toastmasters career, I accepted the challenge to be my club’s Vice President Education (VPE). Several years later, in 2012, I accepted the challenge to become what is now called an Area Director.

During that time, I attended a District luncheon. I found an open seat and, as it turned out, the woman to my right, Jennie Harris, was a writer for the *Toastmaster* magazine. At one point, she asked me what I recommended for the best sequence in which to tackle advanced manuals in the education program at that time. Drawing on my experience as VPE, I explained what I suggested to other members and why. She was intrigued by my reasoning and, a few months later, emailed to ask if I was interested in writing an article on the topic.

That was a new challenge because I had never viewed myself as a good writer. My high school English teacher would wholeheartedly agree.

But, again, I accepted the challenge. The editors must have liked my work, because I received an invitation to write another one months later.

In 2017, after I had written a number of articles, the staff gave me the opportunity to write a monthly column focusing on Toastmasters advice. That opportunity lasted over eight years. What if I hadn’t accepted that first challenge? What experiences would I have missed?

This lesson is one you can apply to your own life. Accept the opportunities when they present themselves. You don’t know where they could lead.

Another lesson I learned was that I can write. Okay, I’m not going to win a Pulitzer Prize, but I can at least write coherently. This experience showed me I had a hidden skill, one which I will continue to pursue. What hidden skill might you have?

As a writer, I also gained a lot of experience editing. Each column had a limit of 750 words. My first drafts invariably came in at about 900. I had to do some serious surgery, but this taught me how to make my points succinctly. This is a skill we all need as speakers. Our speeches need to be clear and concise.

And, writing for an international audience, I needed to make my descriptions and references universal enough to be understood by all. I learned to think as a reader, not as a writer or speaker. This is another great skill for speakers.

So where do I go from here? The magazine staff tells me they still have plans for me. So you might see my name again down the line.

I also have plans to write outside of Toastmasters. I have several book ideas bouncing around in my head. Additionally, I will be rolling out a speech delivery training program soon. For more information, or to read my blog posts, you can [visit my website](#).

It has been a pleasure communicating with you these past years through the magazine. And I am curious what new challenges and opportunities await me. It will be fun to find out.

What about you? What challenges can you accept, be it as a club officer, an Area Director, or outside of the organization? Don’t be shy. Jump in with both feet. Let’s see where that takes you.

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

Celebrate With Table Topics

Ask these questions to review the year and look to the future.

By Mackenzie Eldred



The end of the year is the perfect time to reflect on your achievements and challenges, share fun memories with others, and start planning for the new year ahead. Include these questions during your next Table Topics® session to mix up your meeting and celebrate with your club.

Questions to Reflect on the Year:

1. What was your favorite Toastmasters memory from this past year?
2. What was the best speech you gave this year? Why was it the best?
3. What was the funniest speech you heard and why?
4. What was your favorite Table Topics question and why?
5. What is your current Pathways path and what have you learned so far?
6. Describe the most helpful piece of feedback you received on a speech this year and how you applied it later.
7. What was the most creative way you found a speech topic this year?
8. What was your favorite meeting theme this year? Why?
9. What is your favorite club meeting role? Why?
10. Describe your favorite club or District event.
11. If you were to compare yourself at the beginning of the year to where you are now, what are some of the biggest differences?
12. Share what your biggest accomplishment was from this past year.
13. What is something important you learned this year?
14. Describe one way you used your Toastmasters skills outside of the club this year.
15. What is something you are proud of from this past year?
16. What was your biggest challenge this year and how did you overcome it?
17. What is something you wish you could say to your past self?
18. Describe this past year in one word and explain why you chose that word.
19. What was your favorite *Toastmaster* magazine article this year?
20. If the *Toastmaster* magazine were to write an article about someone in your club, who should it be and why?
21. Describe some of the accomplishments the club has made over the last 12 months.
22. Who is one member you would like to recognize for their participation in the club? Why?
23. Describe how you would like to celebrate the end of the year with your fellow club members.





Questions for the New Year:

1. What are your Toastmasters goals for next year?
2. What steps will you take next year to ensure you accomplish your goals?
3. Where would you like to see yourself at the end of next year?
4. Imagine it's 12 months from now and you have achieved all of the goals you set. How are you going to celebrate?
5. What are you most excited about for next year?
6. What do you hope to learn next year?
7. What is something new you want to try doing in Toastmasters?
8. If our club were to create a new meeting role, what should it be and what should the role entail?
9. Describe a topic you would like to give a speech on in the future.
10. After completing your current Pathways path, what path will you try next and why?
11. What theme would you like to try for a future meeting? Describe what the meeting would look like.
12. What are some fun ideas you would like to try to mix up club meetings?
13. Many clubs host their meetings in unique locations. Where would you like the club to host a meeting next year?
14. Would you rather attend a club meeting that is in a cave or on a boat? Explain why.
15. A common topic among Toastmasters members is how to retain members and grow club membership. Share how you would attract guests and encourage them to become members.
16. Describe what your Toastmasters club looks like 12 months from now.
17. Describe what the organization looks like a year from now.
18. Imagine you are at the 2026 International Convention. Who are you with and what are you doing?
19. Dr. Ralph C. Smedley once said, "The past prepares us to meet the challenges of the future." Share how the challenges you faced this year have prepared you for next year.
20. Describe how you are going to use your Toastmasters skills in the future.
21. What do you want to say to your future self?
22. What advice would you give to club members to encourage them to keep pushing toward their goals?



Mackenzie Eldred is editorial coordinator for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

Build Your Speaking **CONFIDENCE**

How to feel at ease before, during, and after your speech.

By Joel Schwartzberg

Once coached a public speaking client who was plagued with self-doubt. As a financial executive, she was accustomed to working with concrete metrics. When it came time for her to present, she didn't feel she had those same definitive guidelines to determine if she effectively delivered her message. She was desperate for trustworthy indicators, and even my encouraging feedback wouldn't cut it.

Clients like this aren't alone in the desire to feel confident that they're speaking well and engaging their audience. The good news is that reliable indicators exist for all speakers. The bad news is that misleading clues and crutches also exist. Luckily, there are checks, assessments, and cautions you can use before, during, and after a presentation.

Before the Speech

Practice Out Loud

Practicing silently in your head or breezing through slides without fully vocalizing your points trains your brain but not your mouth. This passive practice can misdirect you because speaking involves different cognitive mechanisms than thinking and reading. Scientific studies show that the rate of "inner speech" is significantly faster than the rate of speaking aloud.

To work both muscles adequately, [practice out loud](#) with the same speed and emphasis you plan to use during the actual event.

As you commit to this dress rehearsal-like preparation, you'll discover complicated words to simplify, convoluted sections to condense, and clunky transitions to refine as your mouth and ears join the practice party.

Rely on your expertise,
preparation, notes, and the
feedback you've received
during practice to feel safe
and confident.

Don't Rely on Mirrors

No one looks at a mirror and thinks, *Am I making my point clearly?* That's because we're used to relying on [mirrors to assess our appearance](#). Therefore, looking in the mirror prioritizes the wrong things.

Instead of relying on your reflection, have colleagues, friends, or family observe your practice and share their thoughts.

Get Focused Feedback

When you rehearse in front of others, avoid asking vague questions like "How did I do?" (The response will likely be unhelpful, such as "You did great!")

Ask more focused, practical questions: What point do you think I was trying to convey? What did I say or do that helped make that point clear? Was anything I said confusing, distracting, or hard to follow?

This feedback will help you identify your most essential areas of improvement.

During the Speech

Don't Trust the Voice in Your Head

Even experienced speakers can hear inner voices of doubt, such as, *You're losing them*, *That joke failed*, or *They're not impressed*.

That voice is not a reliable guide. In fact, it's probably the voice of your fight-or-flight instinct, trying to get you to abandon an anxious experience. Don't give in to it. That anxiety only indicates that the task is important to you, not that it's inherently dangerous.

Instead of listening to that deceptive voice, rely on your expertise, preparation, notes, and the feedback you've received during practice to feel safe and confident. Research also shows that [saying, "I'm excited" before you begin](#) can help you transform nervous energy into excitement.

Don't Misread a Virtual Audience

When you present virtually, what you infer from the visual behavior of your online audience may not be accurate. For example, is Blake's distraction a sign of disengagement or an incoming email on another screen? Is Kelly yawning because she's bored by your speech or tired from being up most of the previous night? Is your boss's blank stare a sign of disapproval or heavy concentration?

Nonverbal reactions you *can* trust include a smile, which means someone is engaged; applause, which means someone is impressed; a head nod—the most powerful nonverbal reaction you could hope for—which means “What you said has value to me.”

After the Speech Use Surveys and Formal Feedback Tools

If you're speaking at a conference or event, ask the organizers if they'll send a survey to attendees or can otherwise solicit feedback about your presentation. Those responses are extremely valuable because they come directly from the people you were trying to influence.

Ask the Right Questions

Just like during rehearsal, ask your friends or colleagues in the audience if you successfully delivered a clear and valuable point.

Examples of productive questions:

- What did you take away from or remember most about the presentation?
- Was anything confusing? And if so, why?
- On a scale of 1-10, how confident did I seem?
- What did I do that helped me hold or caused me to lose the audience's attention?

If they're being honest and you're being humble, their answers should direct you to the right places for improvement in your next presentation. Speaking of which...

Your Next Speech

Every speech serves as invaluable practice for your next. Equipped with effective practice routines, practical feedback, and reliable self and audience assessment measures, you should be more prepared than ever to deliver your next presentation with one of the most powerful tools of all: confidence.

Joel Schwartzberg is a presentation coach, executive communication specialist, and author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team and Get to the Point! Simplify, Sharpen, and Sell Your Message*. Follow him on [LinkedIn](#).



Matt Abrahams, Toastmasters' 2025 Golden Gavel recipient, exemplifies confident speaking.

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Last Chance Centennial Sale

Grab and gift the limited-edition 100th anniversary print materials, club items, and souvenirs at a special member discount before they're gone forever!



Shop the sale at toastmasters.org/ShopLastChanceSale



Year-End Peace of Mind

Consider remembering the Smedley Fund in your will, adding it to your existing will, or making an honorary donation on behalf of a loved one that has recently passed.



Leave a legacy:
toastmasters.org/SmedleyFund

Build Better Relationships

Strengthen your social capital with the help of Toastmasters.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

Like most Toastmasters, I attended my first club meeting to develop my public speaking and leadership skills. I had no idea that in the process, I would also gain a network of friends and colleagues—social capital that continues to enhance my life today in incalculable ways.

Put simply, social capital is the network of relationships that enables us to flourish within our community or society. It's the social support and cohesion that comes from shared values, as well as mutual cooperation and trust. Doctors and social scientists say having these connections is vitally important for us to thrive in almost all areas of life, particularly in our physical and emotional health, and in our jobs and education. Having strong social capital floods the brain with dopamine, the “feel good” brain chemical that helps combat stress, long considered a boost to everything from proper immune system functioning to productivity.

Groups provide a place where people can gather, socialize, and develop relationships.

Social groups—such as members of a church, a sports team, a school class, and yes, clubs such as Toastmasters—are a prime opportunity for building social capital. Such groups provide a place where people can gather, socialize, and develop relationships. Due in part to the rise of the internet, the polarization of views, and other global challenges, like the COVID pandemic, people are more reluctant to join groups.

All of this has resulted in what is being called “an epidemic of loneliness.” In fact, in 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, issued an 82-page advisory entitled “Our

Pat Johnson, DTM, and Jana Barnhill, DTM, both Past International Presidents, have forged a friendship in Toastmasters over decades.



90% of members surveyed stated that their club provides new social connections and people to talk to.

Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation.” Calling social connection a “fundamental human need,” the report noted that the physical effect of isolation is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and may increase the risks of anxiety, depression, dementia, heart disease, and stroke, along with increasing susceptibility to respiratory illness and viruses.

Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam has bemoaned the lack of social groups primed for building social capital for decades. Putnam’s research is explored in a 2023 documentary, *Join or Die*, in which he makes the case for the value of joining clubs.

So how do we begin to form these self-healing relationships? That’s right. Toastmasters.

Toastmasters Social Capital in Action

According to Little Rock, Arkansas, psychiatrist Dr. Rhonda Mattox, DTM, Toastmasters is a natural cure for loneliness and isolation. Not only did she research the topic extensively, she knows it from personal experience.

“One of the many perks of my long tenure in Toastmasters,” Mattox writes on LinkedIn, “has not simply been the skill sets I learned that helped make me be a better ‘speakerpreneur,’ ‘docpreneur,’ employee, or mate, but the amazing group of lifelong learners and mentors that became like family in this phenomenal communication organization.” Mattox also gives a nod to Toastmasters in her list of 14 tips for self-care when encouraging followers to “Choose your tribe to support your vibe.”

During COVID lockdowns, Mattox found her Toastmasters club to be a lifeline. Even though the meetings were online, she came to rely on “that midweek dose of a little bit of normal with the people I had grown to love.” Maddox started inviting so many people to the meetings that in the span of a year, she was able to charter five more clubs expressly to combat the adverse effects of loneliness experienced by seniors, her fellow physicians, and her medical students.

And Mattox is not alone in her belief in the connection-making power of Toastmasters. Inspired by Putnam’s documentary and research, the Toastmasters International Research and Analysis Team conducted its own study of social capital among members. Of those surveyed, 64% of members said there are “multiple people in their club they can turn to when feeling lonely.” Moreover, 72% believe that they can ask fellow members for positive job references. What’s more, a whopping 90% stated that their club provides new social connections and people to talk to.

Taking It to the Next Level

While it’s wonderful that attending meetings can assuage loneliness, what if we seek a deeper connection?

Happiness expert and bestselling author Gretchen Rubin says, “Close relationships are a key—maybe *the* key—to a happy life.” In her article [“How to Turn Acquaintances Into Friends,”](#) Rubin distinguishes between friends and friendly acquaintances.



“With friends,” she writes, “we have close, long-term bonds; we can confide; we feel like we belong; we give and receive support; we trust.” In contrast, she notes, “With acquaintances, we may enjoy seeing them very much, but our relationship never progresses past the particular situation or moment that brings us together.” While Rubin underscores the importance of both types of relationships, she points out that friends are more valuable.

And, she says, it can be harder to make friends as an adult.

So how do we turn an acquaintance into a friend? Rubin suggests planning an activity together unrelated to how you know each other. If someone is a friend of a friend, send an individual text to the person outside of your group chat to get to know them better or invite them to do something with you.



As Toastmasters, it's easy to see how clubs offer a wealth of possibilities for developing close friendships. For instance, you could invite someone to get coffee or do something related to a speech they gave, such as visit a museum exhibit you think they would enjoy. "The key is to put in the time and effort. Prepare to be the one to reach out, to suggest plans, to make the first move toward friendship," Rubin says.

One of my own most important relationships was born out of attending a long-ago Toastmasters International Convention. It was held in my District, and I suggested another member and I carpool. In the car and over lunch, we launched our friendship.

My Toastmaster friend was born in France and grew up in Venezuela, while I was born in the U.S. At first glance, we had very little in common. Our close friendship was an example of what Putnam calls "bridging capital"—a term that describes the type of social capital that builds bridges between people from different groups or cultures. In a 2024 article in the *New York Times*, he says that in today's diverse society, we need to acquire a lot more bridging social capital.

As others besides me have experienced, Toastmasters is the perfect place to boost that type of connection. Sarah Khan, a Muslim former member of Toastmasters who moved from Bombay, India, to the U.S., is a speaker and trainer who shares her message of unity around the world.

In the video "[Toastmasters and Diversity](#)," she states that for her, "Toastmasters exemplifies unity and diversity." Indeed, in the same Toastmasters study cited earlier, participants noted that the organization helps them step outside their usual circles and engage with diverse perspectives.

A club meeting is an ideal place to build bridging social capital, because members are

encouraged to listen without passing judgment on the content of a speech, and to share the learning process with people whose perspectives may vary greatly from their own. This in turn promotes personal growth.

Building Stronger Relationships Through Toastmasters

Toastmasters is hard-wired for building close connections. After all, you see the same people week after week. You share the same frustrations and successes on your journey through the program. You learn together how to better formulate your thoughts into words. Still, it can be hard for some to make that jump from friendly acquaintance to friend.

"Close relationships are a key—maybe *the* key—to a happy life."

—GRETCHEN RUBIN



Here are some ideas to strengthen Toastmasters relationships:

- **Become an officer.** This allows you to work with a small group of equally committed members toward particular goals, getting to know each of them on a more individualized, intimate basis. What's more, you see these people outside of formal meetings, giving you opportunities for sharing even more time together socially.
- **Talk to your fellow members** about their most recent speech topic if it's something that resonates with you or that you share a common experience with.
- **Ask questions.** Alison Wood Brooks, associate professor at Harvard University and author of *TALK: The Science of Conversation and the Art of Being Ourselves*, says that people who [ask more questions](#), especially follow-up questions, are better liked by those they converse with than those who don't. After a club meeting, for example, you might walk out with an evaluator and ask about some of the points they made at the lectern.
- **Practice call-backs.** According to Brooks, a call-back is a reference to something a person said earlier. The author explains that we can show we're listening "by calling back to something that's been said before—repeating or re-contextualizing a catchphrase or idea from earlier in the conversation (or earlier in your relationship). This technique can be practiced in spoken and written

conversations, such as texts and emails." If someone mentioned in their Ice Breaker that they love animals, for example, you might "call back" to that when you're looking for advice before adopting a new pet.

- **Mentor another member.** Mentoring gives a special dynamic to a relationship, not only because you are giving the gift of your experience and expertise, but also because you are both interested in the same goal: helping the member grow. You are also spending valuable one-on-one time together.
- **Socialize after the club meeting.** Stopping for a drink or snack after a meeting is a natural way to keep the connection going.

The key to building a strong relationship, of course, is to bring our best, most authentic selves to any encounter. With Toastmasters, we have an excellent head start.

Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D.,

teaches, writes, and stockpiles social capital in Boca Raton, Florida. Visit her at carenneile.com.



How to Get Better at Get-Togethers

Have you ever been to, or worse yet thrown, a party that fizzled instead of sizzled? Priya Parker knows how to prevent that from happening again.

"Gatherings crackle and flourish," says Parker, a facilitator, strategic advisor, and author of *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*, "when real thought goes into them, when structure is baked into them, and when a host has the curiosity, willingness, and generosity of spirit to try."

Parker offers five rules for making any gathering more effective and fun:

- **Rule #1: Identify your purpose.** Why are you proposing this event? Who is it for? What are your and your guests' unique needs and abilities that will make this get-together truly great? Is this an old friends' reunion? A going-away party? An end-of-summer hurrah? It matters that people are clear about why they've been invited, in part because they know what to expect.
- **Rule #2: Clarify your purpose.** Once you've identified the answer to #1, you know what and who stays in and what and who does not. A family reunion, for example, may not be the best time to invite a new friend or neighbor, much as you'd like to have them at your home.
- **Rule #3: Design your invitation to persuade.** Most people simply put the what, where, why, and when into an invitation, with RSVP instructions. But what if you included a bit of a story, explaining why their presence is crucial, both for them and for the party? For example, a retirement party invitation may feature a few lines about the guest of honor's career.
- **Rule #4: Ditch etiquette for rules.** Make up some new one-time-only rules, such as not discussing kids or work or using phones. How would that change the vibe? Suddenly people would be forced to talk about interesting things they don't usually think about!
- **Rule #5: Close with intention.** How you end your event helps shape the emotions and memories your guests will take home with them. Put an end time on the invitation—close friends can always stay a bit later to "help clean up," if you wish—and then issue a last call a little before then. This winds up the party smoothly.
- You might also consider giving guests a token gift, like candy or a flower, on the way out. Hosts at children's birthday parties and fancy galas give goody bags all the time; why shouldn't people who throw house parties? It's also lovely to take a group photo and send it to everyone at the gathering, either by e-mail or text, or send a printed copy afterwards. Finally, by all means, walk your guests to the door. It shows people you care. And that, after all, is what it's all about.

Forming Friendships in Toastmasters

These ideas will help you build connections in your club.

By Mackenzie Eldred



Think back to playing at the park when you were a child. Chances are you could just say “hi” to someone, start playing together, and suddenly, you have a new friend. It was as easy as that. As an adult, however, it can be much harder to form connections. If you’re looking for friends or hoping to meet new people, have you considered Toastmasters as a place for that?

While most people join to improve their communication and leadership skills, Toastmasters also offers the perfect opportunity to form meaningful connections. After all, the club mission statement begins, “We provide a supportive and positive learning experience,” and that safe space results in members coming together to learn, have fun, and encourage each other. This atmosphere helps foster lifelong friendships, whether it’s with a fellow club member who lives nearby or with someone halfway across the world.

If you are hoping to form new friendships, here are 16 ideas to help you get started.

01 Ask open-ended questions. When you’re first getting to know someone, make sure your questions are engaging to encourage the speaker to open up to you. Avoid “yes” or “no” questions and instead ask about their life, their experiences, and what they are passionate about. Try to find something you have in common with them that you can connect on.

02 Be supportive of your club members. During a Toastmasters meeting, encourage speakers by cheering them on, offering positive feedback, and staying engaged during their speeches. By showing your fellow members that you care about them and want them to succeed, they’ll be more open to forming a relationship with you.



03 Plan an outing for your club. One of the best ways to get to know others is by spending time with them outside of a Toastmasters meeting. Host a fun get-together, such as bowling, a potluck, or a game night, or attend a District conference together. This provides you with the opportunity to interact with others on a more personal level and can help you feel more connected to your club. During the gathering, chat with your club members and ask questions to learn more about them.

04 Invite a club member to get coffee. Plan a casual outing so you can chat with someone. Talk about current events in your life, discuss shared interests, or recall a funny memory you have together from Toastmasters. Spending time getting to know each other one-on-one can help you form a strong connection.

05 Start a conversation with someone new. Do you find yourself sitting by the same people and talking to the same members after every meeting? Step outside of your comfort zone by introducing yourself to someone you haven’t talked to before. Make a good impression by making eye contact and smiling at them. At the end of the conversation, plan to catch up at the next meeting so they know you are interested in staying connected.

06 Give a compliment. Let a speaker know you enjoyed their speech, tell a club officer you admire their leadership skills, or tell a club member something you like about them. Not only does this show you are friendly but it’s also a great way to start a conversation with someone.

07 Plan a “get to know you” activity. At an upcoming meeting, encourage members to open up and interact with each other by participating in an icebreaker exercise. Display a list of fun questions, such as “What is your favorite movie or TV series?” or “What is the best

vacation you've ever been on?" Have members break off into pairs to discuss their answers and rotate partners every few minutes until everyone has had a chance to meet.

- 08** **Host a hobby-themed meeting.** Encourage speakers to share what their favorite pastimes are and prepare Table Topics® questions that ask members about what activities they enjoy doing. If someone has similar interests, or you want to know more about their hobbies, chat with them after the meeting. Plan a day to meet up and do the activity together.



- 09** **Ask your mentor to introduce you to other people.** Many experienced members who serve as mentors are well-connected within the Toastmasters community. Ask them if they know of anyone with similar interests that you might get along with. Set up a good time to meet and have your mentor join to acquaint you with each other and jumpstart the conversation.

- 10** **Plan a joint meeting with another club.** This is a fun way to meet new people and engage with them in a familiar setting. Introduce yourself to the other members and share interesting facts about yourself and your club. Ask questions to get to know them as well. At the end of the event, share your contact information so you can stay in touch.

- 11** **Talk to a guest.** Before the meeting starts, make the visitor feel welcome by

introducing yourself to them. Ask what brought them to Toastmasters and what their goals are and share interesting details about your own journey. After the meeting, invite them to come back. When they return, continue being friendly and build off the earlier conversation.

- 12** **Have every member bring a friend to a meeting.** This is a great way to not only share the benefits of Toastmasters and boost your club's membership, but also for you to meet people outside of the organization. Encourage members to bring guests who are also looking to form friendships or who have similar interests as other club members. During the meeting, set aside time to interact with the guests and get to know them.

- 13** **Reconnect with a former member.** Were you close to someone who had to leave your Toastmasters club? Reach out to them to catch up. Ask how they are doing, what's going on in their life, and how their new Toastmasters club is. Let them know you would like to stay connected and plan a time to follow up with them again, whether it's in person or online.

- 14** **Take on a club leadership role.** Many leaders in Toastmasters have become close friends with each other because of their shared love for the organization. As a club officer, you attend meetings with the club's Executive Committee to set goals and support members. This is an easy way to connect with a small group of people in an intimate setting, and as you work together to brainstorm and solve problems, you'll learn more about each other. In addition to bonding over your shared commitment to the club, plan fun outings so you can get to know each other beyond your Toastmasters responsibilities.

- 15** **Attend the Toastmasters International Convention.** Every year, members from around the world gather to listen to speakers, learn new skills, and network

with others. From social activities to meet-and-greets with speakers, there are plenty of opportunities to connect with others. Ask your club members if they are going and plan to meet up at the event, where you will create lasting memories with each other.

- 16** **Remember the conversations you have with others.** Think about the topics you discussed with a club member during your last interaction. For example, did they share their excitement for an upcoming trip, discuss their new job, or talk about a book they're reading? Consider what they spoke about in a recent speech as well. Did they share a fun fact about themselves or discuss something you are interested in? During your next conversation with them, bring up that topic again to show you were actively engaged with what they were saying and are interested in talking to them.



All friendships begin by forming an initial connection with someone. Once you've laid the foundation, strengthen that relationship by reaching out and staying connected.

Mackenzie Eldred is editorial coordinator for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

Family Ties in Toastmasters

Joining a club together strengthens bonds and boosts communication.

By Megan Preston Meyer

If you're hoping to find a way to spend more time with a family member, or want to encourage some friendly familial competition, take a look at Toastmasters. As the following members demonstrate, being in a club together can strengthen relationships and sharpen skills. Read on to see how family members of all ages have benefited—both in and outside of the club environment.

Bill, Edward, and Tania Moes: Intergenerational Success

Crest Toastmasters Club in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, has a unique bragging right: three generations of the same family in one club. Bill, Edward, and Tania Moes not only participate in club life together, they are all also active in the club's Executive Committee.

Father-and-daughter duo Edward and Tania joined Toastmasters in 2023. "I said to [Tania], 'This would be really good for you. You should go to Toastmasters, because it'll help you in your [university] work and in your business life afterward,'" remembers Edward.

"Bear in mind, I had never been a Toastmaster in my life, but I knew about the organization. I said, 'How about we join together?' So we joined together."

Bill, Edward's father, became a member about a year and a half later. When Edward and Tania first joined, Bill was living in an entirely different part of Australia. On one of Bill's visits to see his son, Edward

took him to a meeting of the Crest Toastmasters Club. "It was a nice club," says Bill, who eventually moved to Brisbane, and joined Edward and Tania in the club.

Being in the same club allows them to spend more time together. "We live in three different homes, so we don't get to see each other very much, except when we're at Toastmasters," says Edward. "It's brought us closer together."

Switching between family mode and club mode initially took a bit of getting used to. "The weird part at first was having to introduce them by their first names," says Tania. But having your father and grandfather as fellow members has its advantages, especially in Tania's role as the club's

Vice President Education. "I know I can always rely on [them] as my backup. I make the agendas at the moment, so, if need be, I can just slot [them] in anywhere."

There are other advantages, as well. "We have a breadth of experience and a breadth of ages in the club," says Edward. Because the Moes can relate to each other, they find themselves better able to communicate with other club members in different generations. "We've got a few [members] in their 20s, and it's no problem talking to them, because it's just like talking with Tania," Edward adds.

While having three generations in one club

might be a unique bragging right for the Crest Toastmasters Club now, the Moes hope that it won't always be. They'd like to set an example for other clubs and encourage them to look for members across all age ranges. It can even be a recruiting tactic. "Struggling to get members?" laughs Bill. "Bring your grandfather. It works!"



(From left) Bill Moes, granddaughter Tania Moes, and son Edward Moes.



Far left, Eden Medellin and her mother, Avi Greene; Janine Carver and her daughter, Lily.

California Club: Bring the Children

Intergenerational recruitment has certainly worked for the Aliso Viejo Toastmasters club, in Southern California. It was chartered in April 2024, and from the beginning, was a supportive environment for parents to bring their children.

Club members “not only gain the skills and the confidence for themselves, but when they [see] the impact that Toastmasters has on them, they’re like, ‘Okay, my kids need this,’” says District Director Ionut Breb, DTM. “All the parents in the club at one point have brought their kids.”

This is certainly true of Janine Carver and Avi Greene. Janine had heard of Toastmasters in the past, when her children were young, but never had the chance to join. When she heard about Aliso Viejo Toastmasters, she jumped at the opportunity.

“I was going to give my Ice Breaker, and I invited my best friend, Avi ... Actually, I didn’t invite her. She just showed up and surprised me, and then she fell in love with the club.” Avi joined not long after.

They both attended regularly for a bit, then Eden, Avi’s 19-year-old daughter, attended a meeting. “I might have tricked her into coming by asking her to come see my speech,” Avi laughs, “but when she did come, she was willing to stand up and participate in Table Topics.”

“I basically made it a house rule that, if you live here, you’re going to attend Toastmasters.”

—JANINE CARVER

Janine was leading Table Topics that evening, which helped Eden to feel comfortable. “Eden went silent for what felt like an eternity,” Avi remembers. “But then she spoke, and she gave a very beautiful, articulate, very vulnerable expression, and it was so well received that she was willing to continue to come.”

A few weeks after that, Janine’s older daughter Lily came, followed a few months later by her younger daughter Ruby. “I basically made it a house rule that, if you live here, you’re going to attend Toastmasters,” says Janine. “There’s just so much value. There is so much positivity and encouragement. ... I thought, *I need my kids to be part of this.*”

This positivity and encouragement goes both ways. Eden, Lily, and Ruby have not only gotten involved in club life, but have volunteered for District events as well. “They are a source of encouragement for our [older] demographic,” says Ionut. “When they see an 18-year-old or a 20-year-old go up and do stuff, it provides hope ... hope that we can connect those generations.”

That hope is strong among Ionut, Janine, Avi, and the rest of the club. “The dream that we have collectively is, at one point, for [the younger members] to take the lead and charter Young Aliso Viejo Toastmasters. They would make a great club,” says Ionut, “and they would probably have us as guests.”





Frank Tsuro (left) and brother Andrew.



Brothers Andrew and Frank Tsuro, dressed for success.



Frank and Andrew Tsuro: Brotherly Love

Encouraging leadership in the younger generation is a point of passion for Frank and Andrew Tsuro, both Distinguished Toastmasters. When Frank, who lives in Zimbabwe, became Director of District 74 (Southern Africa) at 27, he was apparently the youngest person to ever take on that position in the District. That is, until his younger brother Andrew broke his record.

Frank joined Toastmasters first, in 2012, after watching video clips of the World Championship of Public Speaking® on the internet. “I decided that I would join a club and participate in a contest,” he says. “And then I discovered [that] the interest in contests in Zimbabwe, at the time, was very low.”

Not to be deterred, he decided to plan a Toastmasters speech contest himself. After planning his own club’s contest, he ended up helping other clubs plan theirs, and organized the Area contest as well. “I think that’s what made me prominent enough to be appointed an Area Governor. ... I became established as a leader because of the way I planned contests.”

In 2015, as part of Frank’s Area leadership role, he wanted to charter a new club in the brothers’ home city of Bulawayo. “That’s when Andrew came into the picture, because we needed to make things happen.”

“[Frank] was based in the capital city, Harare, and I was in Bulawayo, and that’s how I got manipulated, or coerced, or ‘voluntold,’ as the elder brother would do, to help him set it up,” Andrew quips. He agreed to help, but, at that point, he didn’t know what all the Toastmasters fuss was about. “I thought I was just getting away from dishes duty at home,” he laughs.

But it didn’t take long for Andrew’s Toastmasters career to take off, and he followed in Frank’s footsteps through Area, Division, and District leadership roles.

The brothers use the skills they’ve learned in Toastmasters to support each other—and others—outside of the club setting as well. “One thing that we’ve made very intentional in our journeys is to focus on the transferable skills of the Toastmasters program,” says Andrew. “We say that ‘Toastmasters is where leaders are made,’ and we come from a country and a continent [where leadership] does not have a good image.”

Both Andrew and Frank are passionate about leadership development. “We are on a mission to [redefine leadership in Africa](#) by creating young, ethical, and smart leaders—we call them YES leaders—[to] contribute to developing the continent at grassroots levels,” says Andrew, now a resident of Centurion, South Africa.

“That’s really what keeps us in the organization,” adds Frank, who served as an International Director from 2023 to 2025. “Toastmasters is a beautiful platform to develop the leaders that we want to see on our continent.”



Connie and Tom Jameson enjoying a vacation in the Shetland Islands in Scotland.

Tom and Connie Jameson: Couple Has Long Loved Toastmasters

In 2024, as Toastmasters International celebrated its 100th anniversary, Tom and Connie Jameson also celebrated a milestone: Together, they had been in Toastmasters for a century.

Tom joined the Riverside Breakfast Club, in Riverside, California, in 1969 and has remained a club member ever since—56 years in all. Connie, meanwhile, is a 46-year member of the Burnt Toast club in Riverside. Both are Distinguished Toastmasters.

Their Toastmasters journey has changed since the early days. For one thing, their comfort level with public speaking has been transformed.

“I was required to take a speech class in college,” says Tom, “and never once was able to fall asleep the night before. I was so nervous.”

He started a new job, and his boss, who was the President of a Toastmasters club, suggested he join. “When you get a new job and your boss tells you to do something, what do you do? You say, ‘Yes, boss.’ And so I went ... [to the] last place in the world I wanted to be.” Once he was in, though, he loved it.

Eventually, he encouraged his wife to join Toastmasters, in part to overcome her shyness. Despite her initial hesitation, Connie quickly found her footing. “I joined in the spring, and by fall, I was already in my first speech contest,” she says. “It just amazes me—and I like to share that with people—how quickly it works. You gain the confidence that ‘I can do it,’ and then it’s just

onward and upward from there.”

They’ve belonged to multiple clubs over the years, sometimes together, sometimes separate. Tom and Connie, who have both served in numerous officer roles, say Toastmasters has positively impacted their family life: They help each other with speeches and other Toastmasters projects, have more awareness about their communication as a couple, and have shared their enthusiasm with their children as well.

“We took them to Toastmasters events, such as speech contests, at young ages,” says Connie. “They learned how to listen, behave appropriately, and interact with adults, providing them enhanced confidence and skills for school and other social situations.”

As much as Toastmasters itself resembles a family, there’s something unique about the



Tom and Connie Jameson pose with the captain of a ship on a vacation cruise.



Tom Jameson joined Toastmasters in 1969, while his wife, Connie, joined in 1979, and they've remained ever since—more than 100 years of combined membership.



Connie and Tom have belonged to a number of different clubs in Southern California.

organization. "Toastmasters is the only place that you will go where the goal of everyone in the room is to help you to become better and achieve your goals. That won't happen at a family reunion," says Tom. "To me, that's what [Toastmasters] is, and that's what it should be."

And that's what it has been for Connie and Tom for more than 100 combined years. "It's actually 102," laughs Tom, "but who's counting?"

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



A Father-Son Bond

Editor's Note: George Diamond and his son, Jason, were expected to be part of the article on family members in Toastmasters clubs. However, before the author was able to interview them, George passed away at 95.

By Paul Sterman

Toastmasters was a special part of the father-son connection between George and Jason Diamond. In 2024, the two men marked 25 years of membership in the organization. Over the years, they belonged to several clubs together, and both served as club officers numerous times.

"Celebrating our 25th anniversary in Toastmasters has been a wonderful achievement," says Jason.

They spent the longest time together in their first club: the Canterbury Hurlstone Park RSL Toastmasters Club, in Hurlstone Park, New South Wales, Australia, where they belonged for more than 20 years.

George had an interesting life story. He was born in Romania and immigrated to Australia with his family in 1950. George met his future wife, Shirley, on a 42-day cruise to Japan.

Jason, the couple's only child, is a past Area Governor and currently a member of the Riverwood Toastmasters Club in Sydney. George was serving as the club's President when he died.

George worked for the Australian Tax Office for 39 years. After he retired, he and Jason joined the Canterbury Hurlstone Park club, "which we thoroughly enjoyed," says Jason.

His dad had particular fun injecting humor into club meetings, he adds.

"He loved to record his jokes into a little book that he had and would volunteer for the role of Joke Master at every available opportunity."

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Jason Diamond (left) and his father, George.



Heading Toward the Goal Line

In December, may you find inspiration for your aspirations.

By Paul Sterman



It's that time of year again. Transition time, turning from the end of one year toward the beginning of the next.

We reflect on where we've been and what we've done, on changes and accomplishments. We wrap up year-end projects, celebrate the winter holidays, bask in the warmth of family gatherings, revel in the final day of the year—and then start worrying about the new one.

Which brings me to goal setting. The yearly ritual that's as familiar as gift giving and arguing politics with your belligerent uncle. At the end of the year, new goals must be set.

I have a tortured relationship with the process. Yes, it feels good to achieve what we set out to do. But it can be a grueling road to get there.

New Year's resolutions bring emotional whiplash. I start January burning with ambition, lose momentum by February, recommit in April, slip up in the summer, and then stumble home, making sharp revisions along the way.

Lose 20 pounds by the end of the year? Hmm, 10 is more realistic ... hey, what about four? Four's not bad!

Learn a new hobby? Well ... I learned to reprogram my phone. I did do that.

Of course, I know there are myriad benefits to establishing goals. By speaking your aspirations out loud, marking them down, and committing to them, you make them real. Creating a tangible timeline increases motivation. Certainly in Toastmasters we know the value of setting and achieving goals. Plan your path to success, one Pathways project at a time.

I've learned strategies along the way. At the top of the list: Set goals that are manageable and realistic. When you're sitting with your family listing New Year's resolutions, don't start promising dramatic changes in your personality and your pocketbook.

Now I just boil my goal setting down to this:
Be better. Period.

My goals tend to be along fairly conventional lines: Join a new group, organize my files, eat less, exercise more, clean out the garage, read more books. Also, going more broadly: Be a better husband, a better father, a better son, a better brother, and a better uncle. That's a lot of relationship ground to cover.

Now I just boil it down to this: Be better. Period. It streamlines the process and covers all your bases. Be better, and let's leave it at that.

The end of the year is also a good time to put those Toastmasters skills to practical use. To communicate more clearly, lead with grace and efficiency, and evaluate with insight. I speak, of course, of navigating the holiday office party. Get yourself ready to run an obstacle course of social protocols as you try not to embarrass yourself in front of the boss, or get cornered in a conversation with no exit point in sight.

I also can spot my internal Scrooge this time of year. He often appears in the aisles of retail

stores, where a bounty of irritations exist: the crowds, the missing food items, the noise.

Also, the greeting cards. Never has communication cost so much. You can spend less going to the movies than on an embroidered 12-word message wishing friends a Merry Christmas or Happy Hanukkah.

And with that, I'd like to wish Toastmasters around the globe a 2026 filled with good health, satisfying speeches, and joyful experiences. Never have the qualities of skillful speaking and listening—of civility and open-mindedness—been more vital to the world we live in.

As Toastmasters, we can set our own goals for the year ahead. In and outside of club meetings, we can show empathy, awareness, and encouragement. We can build on a year of success ... and also be better.

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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

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

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

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



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