

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MAY 2026

# TOASTMASTER®

**Jennifer Moss**  
Toastmasters' 2026  
Golden Gavel Honoree



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# Because of Toastmasters

When I think about the many Toastmasters I've met over the years, one phrase appears again and again:

*"Because of Toastmasters ..."*

Or just as often, *"Thanks to Toastmasters ..."*

Because of Toastmasters, they spoke up in a meeting for the first time.

Because of Toastmasters, they earned a promotion.

Because of Toastmasters, they finally had the confidence to present their ideas to senior leadership.

The stories are different, but the theme is always the same: transformation. I've heard members describe how they moved from hesitant to confident; from rambling presentations to clear, structured messages; from feeling intimidated by senior management to confidently persuading them to support a project. These are not small changes. They are life-changing shifts in confidence and competence.

What inspires me most is that this transformation doesn't stay inside the club meeting. It ripples outward—into our workplaces, our families, our communities, and our careers.

I clearly remember the day I stood my ground in a difficult conversation. Before becoming a Toastmaster, I often avoided conflict, sometimes to my own detriment. But that day, I remained calm, confident, and fair. I held someone accountable while still treating them with respect. As the conversation ended, one thought stood out clearly: *Because of Toastmasters, I can stand up for what is important to me—and do it professionally and clearly.*

On a personal level, I've been astonished at how my experiences in Toastmasters have changed my view of what is possible for me. Each time I stepped into the unknown, learned a new skill, or asked a mentor for feedback, new opportunities appeared. With every step forward, I could see a little further.

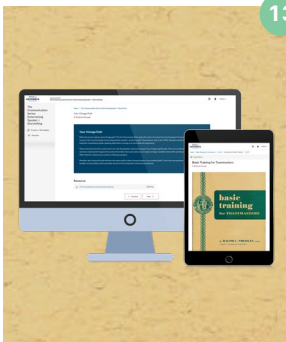
That is the true power of Toastmasters. It doesn't just teach you how to speak. It helps you see new possibilities—and then gives you the skills and support to pursue them.

When we talk to potential members, these are the stories we should share.

Because every new member carries the potential for a story that begins, *"Because of Toastmasters ..."*

Toastmasters  
doesn't just  
teach you how  
to speak. It helps  
you see new  
possibilities.

**Aletta Rochat, DTM**  
International President



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## Snapshot



Members of the **Bangalore Toastmasters Club** in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, celebrate the club's 1,500th meeting in November 2025. The club chartered in 1997, and its diverse membership includes students, young professionals, entrepreneurs, senior executives, and retirees.

## Traveling Toastmaster



**Sampath Narayana Pilla** of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India, scuba dives 30 feet deep inside the Bay of Bengal.



**Shehnaz Mirza** of Doha, Qatar, enjoys the view at the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Quick NETWORKING Tips

How to calm your nerves before connecting with others.

By Matt Abrahams

If you're searching for a new career, attending a conference, or trying to build your connections, networking can help you reach your professional goals. Whether you're excited to meet others or anxious about the opportunity, use these tips to calm your nerves when communicating.

## 1. Reduce the pressure.

High expectations can make spontaneous speaking more difficult by increasing performance anxiety. Networking can feel awkward and unnatural, but you can lessen the stress by reminding yourself that other people are there for the same reason you are. Reducing pressure

frees you to communicate in a more relaxed and authentic manner.

## 2. Focus on the physical.

Before you speak, take deep belly breaths, filling your lower abdomen, making sure to exhale twice as long as the inhale. Next, channel your natural adrenaline by using big, broad gestures, and step forward toward your audience. Third, hold something cold in the palm of your hand to reduce your elevated body temperature. Try invoking a mantra before you speak that reminds you that your message has value.

## 3. Take time to listen.

Networking is a time to meet new people and learn from them. If

you're constantly selling yourself, you're missing the opportunity to talk to people you may not have met otherwise. Use the time to share insights with other people in your industry. Ask relevant questions to understand different companies and teams.

To listen in a more focused manner, slow down and become more present. Take a deep breath and get into a mental state where you can be engaged and curious. This shifts you from defensive to receptive, leading to better understanding.

*Adapted from an August 2024 Toastmaster magazine article*

## TABLE TOPICS

# Family, Friends, and Fast Thinking

May 15 marks the International Day of Families. Celebrate your biological, chosen, and Toastmasters families with these Table Topics® questions.

- Who in your family has influenced you the most, and how?
- Who do you consider to be part of your family, and why?
- What does the word "family" mean to you?
- Tell us about your favorite family tradition.
- What are the three words you would use to describe your family, and why?
- How does your family show love without using words?
- What meal reminds you of your family?
- What habit of a family member's makes you smile, even if it occasionally annoys you?
- What does "home" mean to you?
- What is something you appreciate more about your family now than you did previously?
- What advice from an older family member sticks with you or guides you today?
- What makes your family unique?
- What is a family story that gets told over and over?
- What is the most important value your family has taught you?
- Is there someone in your Toastmasters family who is a consistent source of encouragement?
- What's the best piece of advice you've received from a fellow member?
- Tell us about a friend or friends who are part of your family.
- What quality or moment turns a friendship into a family-level bond?
- How do your closest friends support you like family does?
- What makes friendships an important part of the modern family?

## PRESENTATION SKILLS

# Acing the GRADUATION speech

A tennis great holds court on a college campus.

In May and June, throngs of young people will be graduating from colleges and universities. Which means, of course, that scores of graduation speeches will be given.

The commencement speech is an annual ritual. Eager to draw attention to their campus, schools recruit big names to fill the role, including government leaders, high-profile CEOs, actors, athletes, authors, media figures, and others.

Though many speakers hit on the same themes year after year—“pursue your dreams,” “stay true to your values,” “you are the future and the change”—some have stood out for their refreshing insights and entertaining messages.

One noteworthy speaker is tennis legend Roger Federer, who drew widespread attention and praise for his 2024 commencement address at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Within a day, [his speech had gone viral](#), with millions viewing video of it. How did the Swiss star score so big?

Well, for one, he made his story relatable. Though Federer is considered one of the greatest tennis players of all time—the winner of almost 80% of his more than 1,500 singles matches—he struck a chord with this surprising statistic:

“What percentage of points do you think I won in those matches?” he asked the audience.

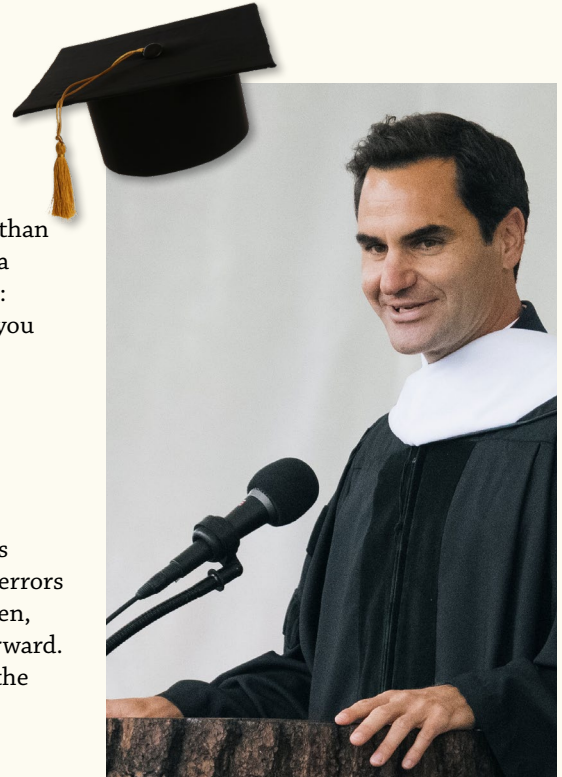
“Only 54%.”

Federer had lost nearly half of the total points he played in his storied career.

His message to the students was about mindset: You can’t dwell on errors or setbacks in life. Once they happen, put them behind you and move forward.

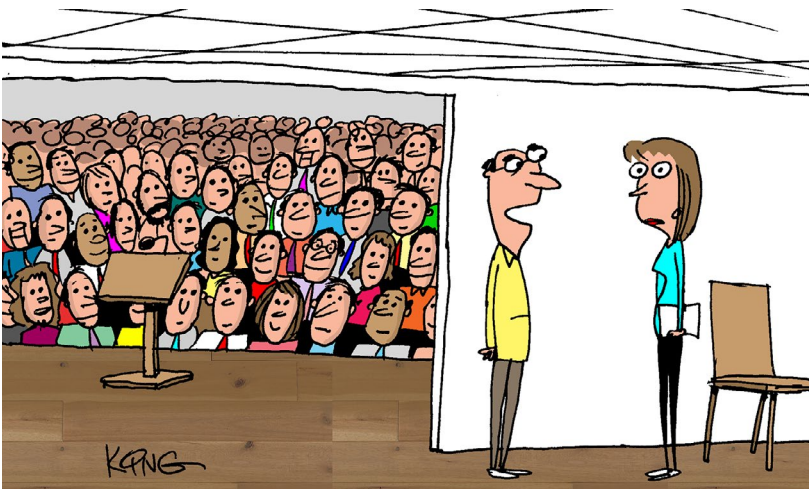
*The New York Times* wrote that the thoughtful speech is “the sporting equivalent” of Steve Jobs’ famed [graduation address](#) at Stanford University in 2005.

So the question is: Which speaker will make their mark on the school stage this year?



Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer drew high praise for his graduation speech at Dartmouth College. Photo by Eli Burakian/Dartmouth.

## CARTOON



## WORD OF THE MONTH

## Perseverance

[pur-suh-veer-uhns]

(rhymes with disappearance)

### Noun

**Definition:** Continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

**Synonyms:** steadfastness, doggedness

**Examples of use:** His perseverance was rewarded when, after many attempts, he eloquently answered a Table Topics® question. It takes perseverance to successfully deliver a 5-7-minute speech in an engaging fashion and without notes.

“Aside from the microphone, lights, and screen not working, you should be fine.”

# Coding Your Confidence

What developers can learn from Toastmasters.

By Bhargav Trivedi



When I first joined Toastmasters, my days were filled with architecture diagrams, integrations, and performance tuning, not speeches. As a software developer, I was definitely more comfortable inside an integrated development environment (IDE) than standing at a lectern.

I could build complex systems, but explaining them clearly, especially to non-technical audiences, was harder than it should have been. Project reviews dragged on. Stakeholders nodded politely but looked unconvinced. I knew my ideas were solid, but my delivery was getting in the way.

That realization is what led me to my first Toastmasters meeting. I did not expect how much it would change the way I communicate as a developer.

Early on in Toastmasters, something small but powerful clicked for me: awareness.

After listening to more experienced members and receiving gentle evaluations, I started noticing my own filler words. I hadn't realized how often I leaned on them until someone else pointed them out. These crutch words reminded me of what programmers call "code smells"—they worked on some level, but would eventually lead to greater errors. And once you see them, you can't unsee them.

That awareness quickly carried over into my work life. I became more intentional about how I explained technical concepts. Instead of diving straight into jargon, I began anchoring explanations in everyday examples.

One of my favorite analogies to use at work came from a Table Topics session where we had to pick a number that led to a concept, and we then had to explain the concept with examples. Now, when I discuss how to integrate a modern SaaS platform into a legacy system, I describe it as installing a brand-new Mercedes electronics system into a 2000 Honda Accord. It gets a laugh, but more importantly, it creates instant understanding. Suddenly, everyone in the room is aligned.

By practicing clarity, storytelling, and structure, I learned how to make my technical contributions visible without overselling them.

Developers thrive on [feedback loops](#). Code reviews make us better. Toastmasters works the same way.

After every speech or impromptu response, I received specific, actionable feedback. Not just what worked, but what could be improved. Was my message clear? Did the structure make sense? Was my conclusion memorable?

That kind of feedback is rare in the workplace, especially around communication. Toastmasters gave me

a safe environment to experiment, fail, and improve quickly. Over time, I noticed that my explanations at work were landing better, and meetings felt less draining and more productive.

Before Toastmasters, I often assumed that good work would speak for itself. In reality, work only creates impact when others understand it.

By practicing clarity, storytelling, and structure, I learned how to make my technical contributions visible without overselling them. I became more effective in mentoring, leading discussions, and advocating for better solutions. Presenting architecture decisions to leadership no longer felt intimidating. Explaining trade-offs in cross-functional meetings felt natural. Situations that once caused anxiety began to feel routine.

My technical skills didn't change, but my ability to communicate them did, and that made all the difference. Toastmasters didn't turn me into a performer—it helped me find my voice, one that allows my ideas to be understood, trusted, and acted upon.

Learning to code was a turning point in my career. Learning to communicate well amplified everything that came after.

**Bhargav Trivedi** is a solutions architect with over 14 years of experience driving enterprise-scale digital transformations and AI-powered commerce strategies for leading retail brands and a member of Gahanna Club in Gahanna, Ohio.

# Company Warms to Fireside Chats

Corporate Recognition awardee champions Toastmasters principles.

By **Stephanie Darling**

In its company values, Genworth Financial, a financial and senior services company, states: “We learn from the world and each other.”

Genworth backs that value with action, dedicating company time and resources to sponsor two Toastmasters clubs: the Expressions club, based in Lynchburg, Virginia, and Generally Speaking Toastmasters at the company’s home office in Richmond, Virginia.

In 2025, Genworth received the [Toastmasters Corporate Recognition Award](#). Every year, the Toastmasters Board of Directors and District leadership recognizes companies that integrate Toastmasters principles into their business operations and training. Genworth and its clubs have a unique approach to this: fireside chats.

The chats’ informal setting (held via Teams) allows leaders to share how communication skills have impacted their careers. The idea began with Deannea Dameron, former President of the Expressions club.

Dameron and her fellow club members believed authentic talks would benefit everyone, regardless of position or title.

“People were hooked from the beginning. Since then, we’ve had a broad range of speakers, from senior managers to our president and CEO,” says Dameron.

The quarterly event regularly attracts 100 attendees. There’s a waiting list for corporate leaders who want to speak.

Jenilee Taylor, DTM, Region 6 International Director, who was present when the Corporate Recognition Award was presented, is an ardent chat supporter.

“The fireside chats create space for mentorship, storytelling, and connection,” she says. “The leaders aren’t formal Toastmaster members, but they serve as internal influencers, helping visibility and credibility for the clubs.”

Dameron moderates the chats, asking each guest about their personal experiences and life lessons. Time is set aside for audience questions and comments.

“We’ve had stories ranging from terrified public speakers early in their careers to those who can and do speak regularly yet don’t particularly enjoy it,” Venus Wilmer, DTM, the Expression Club Treasurer, says. “They encourage everyone to learn and do it anyway.”

Karen Huffman, the Expression club’s Vice President Membership, says it’s been eye-opening to hear leaders share personal speaking challenges.

“One thing that keeps coming up is that even guest speakers get nervous,” Huffman says. “But they always share the value of practice and preparation, just as Toastmasters does. I’ve picked up tips from each guest and use them daily.”

The clubs actively promote the chats through Genworth’s internal communications channels. The company’s publication regularly

runs a chat-related article, and a recording of each event is posted to the company website.

Both Dameron and Wilmer emphasize the chats are not Toastmasters recruitment events.

“This isn’t a pitch meeting,” says Wilmer. “The focus is hearing personal stories from leadership. However, we usually end chat sessions with why the speaker would recommend Toastmasters training.”

The club does make a courtesy appeal through email after the event. Chat attendees are added to a prospect list and receive an invitation to visit either of the Genworth clubs. The invitations do draw visitors; several usually join each quarter, Wilmer says.

The chats offer a “steady stream of interest, engagement, and new members. [They] demonstrate what’s possible when the company sees Toastmasters not just as a speaking club but as a leadership pipeline,” Taylor explains.

Dameron encourages other Toastmasters clubs to try an employee-leadership chat as a one-time or an ongoing event.

“You miss the opportunities you don’t take!” she notes. “So ask leaders to come speak and you’ll be amazed at how responsive and honored they are to be a part of fireside chats.”



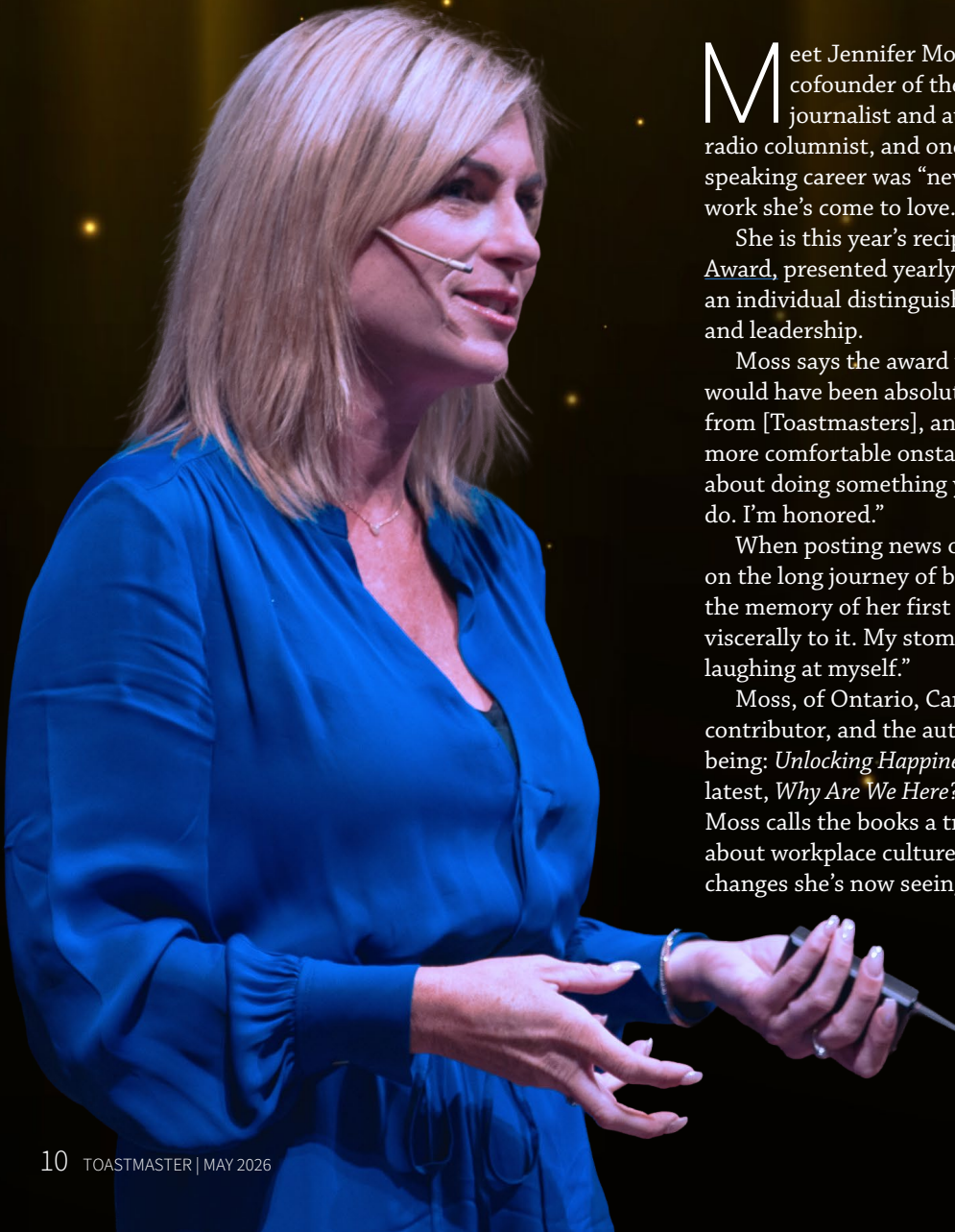
International Director Jenilee Taylor (left), club members, and Genworth leadership accept Toastmasters Corporate Recognition Award.

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

# Golden Gavel Recipient Jennifer Moss Champions Workplace Well-Being

2026 honoree highlights hope and gratitude as life essentials.

By Stephanie Darling



Meet Jennifer Moss—a workplace culture strategist, cofounder of the Work Better Institute, award-winning journalist and author, tech entrepreneur, syndicated radio columnist, and once, long ago, a terrified public speaker. A speaking career was “never on the radar for me,” she says of the work she’s come to love.

She is this year’s recipient of Toastmasters’ [Golden Gavel Award](#), presented yearly at the International Convention to an individual distinguished in the fields of communication and leadership.

Moss says the award was quite a surprise, as receiving it would have been absolutely unpredictable 10 years ago. “Coming from [Toastmasters], an organization that helps people feel more comfortable onstage, this is, for me, a great space to talk about doing something you never thought you would or could do. I’m honored.”

When posting news of the award on LinkedIn, Moss reflected on the long journey of becoming a speaker. She noted that the memory of her first speech “is still so strong that I react viscerally to it. My stomach gets sick. I get sweaty. I fall over laughing at myself.”

Moss, of Ontario, Canada, is also a *Harvard Business Review* contributor, and the author of three books on workplace well-being: *Unlocking Happiness at Work*; *The Burnout Epidemic*; and her latest, *Why Are We Here? Creating a Work Culture Everyone Wants*. Moss calls the books a trilogy covering much of what she’s learned about workplace culture through the years and the sweeping changes she’s now seeing in the aftermath of COVID.

## Strength and Gratitude

Not surprisingly, there is quite a story behind Moss's story. Some years ago her husband, Jim, a healthy former professional lacrosse player (and inductee to the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame), contracted a harrowing illness. The disease was partially paralyzing and potentially fatal. With loads of support from family and friends, and an athlete's will to recover, he later walked out of the hospital on his own.

The experience was one of those "pivotal points in life where something really changes you," Moss says. The family worked mightily to remain positive, and eventually began to feel stronger. They learned to fully appreciate even the smallest bits of good news. Optimism led their thoughts.

The ordeal made the Moss family intensely aware of the power of gratitude. Sharing thankful thoughts became a family ritual at the dinner table. Moss came to believe even more passionately in self-expressed gratitude and positivity. It had sustained her family through a very dark time and then gifted them a guidepost for living.

Jennifer has a degree in communication; Jim Moss has one in philosophy. After the crisis passed, they decided to draw on their parallel academic backgrounds and interests and learn more about how other people practice gratitude.

They started a blog, [The Smile Epidemic](#), where people could share photos and Post-it notes of what makes them happy. Posts were silly, poignant, thought-provoking, and heartfelt. "We smiled and people smiled back," Jennifer Moss says.

Participants, both young and adult, signed on from more than 120 countries. Comments ranged from "no more chemo" to being thankful for bacon. "Bacon is right up there with family and friends," Moss laughs.

## The First Speech

In 2014, a friend of Moss's who was active in a Toronto TEDxWomen event asked Moss to share her story—the high points, the low ones, and the one about being

"COVID taught us some very bad habits, and now it's time to unwind them."

—JENNIFER MOSS

eight months pregnant with another small child at home when it all happened. Moss consistently declined—but her friend persistently asked. Finally, Moss said yes.

Moss remembers writing and rewriting her TEDx speech, endless practice sessions, and even using the bathroom mirror to rehearse some [power poses](#) before going onstage. [The speech](#) wasn't perfect but Moss learned she *could* speak on a topic that riveted her.

So she kept speaking, honed her skills, and found her life's calling.

Now she gives more than 200 speeches and media interviews a year, in addition to teaching, leading workshops, and tracking workplace trends.

"Even though it can be frightening, and it was for me, public speaking ended up being what I love, it's where I *live*," she says. "When I get onstage,

I feel like I'm talking to people who care about me, they want to hear from me, and I feel like I'm in a room full of my friends."

## Life Is Short

Moss's work currently focuses on the steps critical to revitalizing a workforce forever changed by COVID. The pandemic was long, disruptive, terrifying, and isolating. Moss notes that when faced with their own mortality, people realized life is short. Understandably, they began taking a hard look at their lives, including the giant chunk of time taken up by work. They began to ask themselves, *Does my work matter to anyone?* and *Why am I here?*

COVID also created a toxic productivity among many workers as businesses struggled and projects demanded urgency and the 24-7 willingness to take on more and more work, whenever it was assigned.

Moss explains that pandemic stress, along with growing anxiety about AI and other technological advances, made many employees burn out. Currently, a vast majority of the workforce—nearly 80% according to a 2025 global poll by Gallup—feel disengaged from workplaces that are mired in stress, frustration, and a notable and damaging lack of leadership. Many of today's workers can barely see a few weeks ahead, let



## PROFILE

alone bring high-performance mindsets to long-term, innovative projects that companies are anxious to develop.

“COVID taught us some very bad habits, and now it’s time to unwind them,” Moss notes.

### Facts and Fallacies

Believing that none of the conventional workplace systems that worked in 2020 will work now, Moss developed a myth/truth list that illustrates the old practices many companies still follow, compared to solutions for today’s world.

**Myth:** Employee engagement is about perks and benefits.

**Truth:** Employee engagement is driven by purpose, trust, and fairness.

**Myth:** Workers become disengaged because they lack motivation.

**Truth:** People disengage when the system blocks their efforts and ideas.

**Myth:** “We’ll fix culture when we’re past this busy season.”

**Truth:** Culture is *always* forming, by intention or accident.

**Myth:** Engagement surveys will tell us what went wrong.

**Truth:** Well-being surveys prevent the root causes of problems before they go wrong.

**Myth:** If you’re highly engaged, you must not be burned out.

**Truth:** Often the highest engaged employees are at the highest risk of burnout.

Moss notes that when leaders

recognize these myths still playing out in their workplace culture, it’s time for a major reboot. They should instead focus on instilling the fundamental human-led values that underlie high performance in the first place: trust, meaningful work, flexibility, rewarding relationships, and well-being.

“I always like to say, culture can be improved in 20 minutes or less. It’s about daily micro shifts rooted in these values!” Moss says.

### The Impact of Toastmasters Training

Moss applauds Toastmasters for its enduring commitment to teach speaking skills, whether members are speaking at work or in a public-speaking arena, and she notes that skillful communication will be just as important in future workplaces as it is now.

“Communicating with AI, for example, will be almost like communicating with another species in the future,” she says. “We’ll need people who can do that and translate that information back to their teams with other tasks—and serve as a bridge between people and technology.”

She adds: “I think investing in what Toastmasters is teaching us to invest in will be more beneficial than we know.”

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



Jennifer Moss speaking in 2024 at the annual conference of the Public Sector HR Association. Photo credit: Jason Dixson Photography

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**Jennifer Moss's**  
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**“Why Are We Here?  
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Everyone Wants,”**

on August 22.

Register now

# Pathways Additions on Their Way

Vintage paths debut, with pricing updates and new learnings in store.

By Paul Sterman

Nearly a decade after it was introduced to members, the Pathways learning experience continues to evolve. This year, Toastmasters is launching special vintage paths for the program, offering new learnings called “explorations,” and increasing the price of learning paths for the first time.

With vintage paths, Pathways offers a look back at educational content that was foundational to the Toastmasters program. The material hasn’t been available to members for many years.

Two vintage paths became available in mid-April. The first, Basic Training for Toastmasters, is based on the manual of the same name and features content that Toastmasters founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley first introduced more than 80 years ago—in 1943.

The other vintage path is The Communication Series: Entertaining Speaker + Storytelling. It is composed of three manuals that date back to the 1980s and were retired in 2018: *Competent Communication*, *The Entertaining Speaker*, and *Storytelling*.

If you’re working in a vintage path, you will access content on Base Camp, where you can navigate materials online or download and print a copy. The projects in a vintage path—such as, say, “The Ice Breaker” and “Speech Building” in the Basic Training path—are

organized in the same five Pathways levels that currently exist in the six specialized learning paths.

You can earn [Distinguished Club Program \(DCP\)](#) credit along with new credentials and badges at each level. If you complete the Basic Training for Toastmasters path, you will earn what is called the BT credential; and if you complete The Communication Series: Entertaining Speaker + Storytelling, you will earn the new CES credential.

The vintage paths each cost \$60 USD. Before purchasing one, you must first complete Level 1 in any of the other six learning paths.

Starting July 1, the beginning of the new program year, the cost to purchase any of the other six paths will be \$35. (The price has remained at \$20 ever since Pathways began, while Toastmasters has made a number of improvements to the program largely based on member feedback.)

Members can still pay \$20 to purchase one of the six paths before the new price goes into effect.

## Explore Further

Explorations are a new product that will further expand Pathways’ offerings. These learnings are composed of three projects that will enable members to focus on multiple aspects of a specific topic. The first exploration, launching

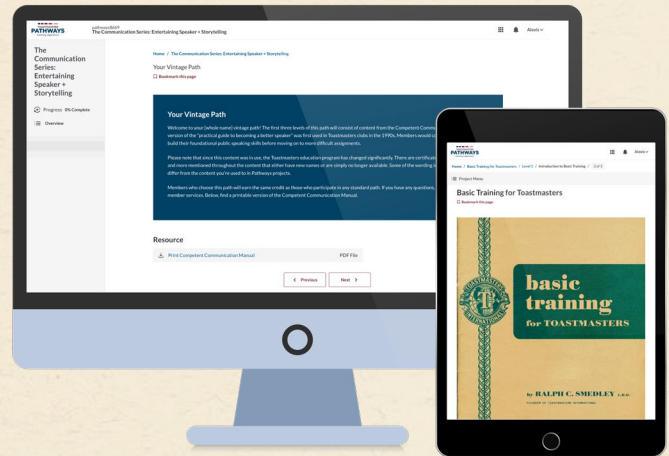
later this year, is Online Meeting Mastery, and its three projects are “Attending Online Meetings,” “Delivering Online Presentations,” and “Leading Online Meetings.” When you complete an exploration, you’ll earn DCP credit. Finishing Online Meeting Mastery will earn you credit equivalent to completing Level 2 in a learning path.

In 2025, [enhancements](#) were added to all existing paths. One component of these enhancements was tailored to improving members’ participation in club meetings: The first item in each level of a path now requires participants to complete meeting roles.

Additionally, in Levels 3 to 5 of each path, members must now deliver 10-to-15-minute presentations from the Toastmasters Education Series. Such presentations help members expand their skills and, by sharing tips in club meetings, presenters also help improve club quality.

For more information about Pathways updates, visit the [Education Programs FAQ page](#). Information about new Pathways developments will also be shared on the [Pathways Updates](#) page as it becomes available.

**Paul Sterman** is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for Toastmasters International.



Two vintage paths in Pathways are now available to members: The Communication Series: Entertaining Speaker + Storytelling, and Basic Training for Toastmasters.

# CHANGING CAREERS?

Members share insights on making a successful transition.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Before college, Heather Turner, DTM, debated between two career paths: studying graphic design or attending culinary school. She chose the latter. Over 20 years, she rose from entry level to executive chef positions.

At her last executive chef role, Turner worked at least 16–18 hours each day for three months without a day off. She wasn't seeing her family. She developed an ulcer and high blood pressure. It was time for a change.

With her Toastmasters skills and experience, the help of a mentor, and resilience, Turner, a former member of Cromwell Community Toastmasters in Cromwell, Connecticut, successfully navigated multiple career transitions, including into graphic design, social media, and consulting.

Like Turner, many people may want to switch professions, and may make several such changes in their lifetime. You may want to as well—because of too much stress, too little enjoyment, a change of priorities, not enough pay, a desire for more growth, or a combination of factors.

Changing careers can be daunting, a process often mired in stress and uncertainty. The journeys of Turner and other Toastmasters spotlight the steps you can take—including [networking](#), working with [mentors](#), and honing communication, leadership, and other skills in Toastmasters—to help you forge a rewarding transition to a new profession.

## Make a Plan

When Turner was ready to move on from being a chef, she explored her options. She had never lost her early interest in graphic design. "I had the computer equipment, the graphic design programs and knowledge, and the passion for

it," she says. After conducting a self-assessment, she put a portfolio together.

The timing wasn't good. It was the dot-com bust in the United States—a time when internet startup companies were failing and technology stocks were plummeting in value. Turner wasn't receiving any responses from her job applications.

A friend suggested she start her own graphic design business. Turner found a business mentor who helped her develop a detailed and realistic plan to move forward, including making a projected budget for the amount of money she needed to live on. She worked part-time as an office manager for six months while she built her graphic design business.

"My business would have failed without [my mentor's] guidance on so many issues."

Turner also credits Toastmasters for providing the skills she needed to move from behind the scenes to getting in front of people. "When I started my business, my mentor talked to me about networking," she says. "I dreaded it. But

Toastmasters taught me so much about getting out of my skin and out of my comfort level and starting a conversation with someone I don't know."

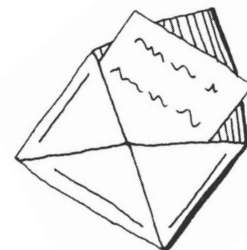
Toastmasters also taught her about constructive feedback and better time management in an office-type environment.

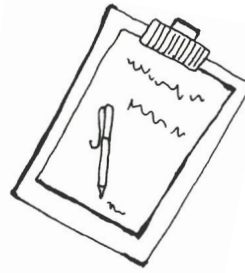
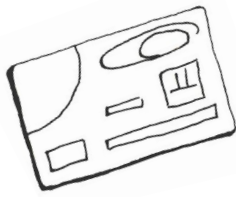
After eight years, Turner transitioned into social media, when the field was just developing. She delved deep into the medium and started offering related services and training people on it.

Now semi-retired, she offers hospitality consulting and

"These days, I'm excited about what I'm going to learn, and I don't let the fear stop me."

—GAURI SESHADRI, DTM





marketing services and has written three related business books. She also mentors small-business leaders.

“If I hadn’t been in Toastmasters, I probably wouldn’t be a mentor now, as I wouldn’t be as comfortable mentoring people,” she says.

## Recognize Transferable Skills

Gauri Seshadri, DTM, Toastmasters First Vice President and a member of WeSpeak Toastmasters Club in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, has changed career paths several times, each transition spurred by a connection or skill she developed in Toastmasters.

She grew up in India and moved to the United States for graduate school, studying chemical engineering and spending more than half of her career in the environmental industry. She joined Toastmasters in 2005, while working in Colorado.

When she returned to India, she ran into constraints. Environmental regulations vary by country. While Seshadri was willing to relearn and work her way up the ladder again, she says there were age limits for junior-level

work in India. She was above the age range and no longer eligible, so she had to reconsider her options.

At the same time, Seshadri was climbing the Toastmasters ladder in India. After serving in multiple District officer roles, she became District 92 Director in 2015.

Her Toastmasters experience helped her realize she missed working with people in her full-time job—the conversations, the energy from collaboration, and the opportunity to learn from others. Someone who had seen the conference Seshadri organized as District Director reached out with an opportunity to organize India’s first national health equity conference.

“That experience helped me see how the skills I’d built over the years—project management from my environmental consulting work and people leadership, training, and event organization from Toastmasters—were transferable and how they were valuable in an entirely new context,” says Seshadri.

Organizing the health equity conference opened up a range of new possibilities she hadn’t considered. Until



Toastmasters First Vice President Gauri Seshadri, DTM, credits her Toastmasters experience as key to her career changes.

then, she had seen her career mainly through an environmental lens.

## Tap Into Your Network

One of Seshadri’s Toastmasters club members was in the travel industry; he knew she had organized the health equity conference and had a passion for travel. He proposed a corporate travel program, tailored to employee business travel. Together, they developed strategies to market to corporations and conducted offsite events.

After a while, another Toastmaster reached out, noting Seshadri’s experience in team leadership and management, and asked for her help. The person was at an organization working to improve client retention and team stability. Seshadri joined the digital marketing and branding company and soon was expanding her portfolio with social media and other work.

Later, when Seshadri was International Director, one of her Toastmasters mentees asked her to join him in the game-based learning field. He was looking for someone from the corporate world who knew how to work with different generations of people and had experience empowering people. She joined the company in July 2022 and is still working there today.



Heather Turner, DTM, worked in the culinary field for many years before successfully changing careers several times.”



Networking and honing communication skills help people navigate career transitions.

## Don't Be Derailed by Fear

Before she ever joined Toastmasters, one of Seshadri's bosses offered her an opportunity to give a sales presentation for a program she helped create. She refused. Instead, she said she would teach him what to say. Her boss suggested she go back to her office and think about what she had just said.

"It took me two or three weeks to realize I was the biggest obstacle in my own career," she says. "My fear was stopping me from stepping up."

Even though she can still be nervous and even skeptical about different professional roles, transitions, or industries, Seshadri is now open to possibilities. She knows something is right when she wakes up curious and energized. "These days, I'm excited about what I'm going to learn, and I don't let the fear stop me," she says.

## Be Open and Curious

Tebogo Matolo, from Thriving Toastmasters in Rustenburg, North West Province, South Africa, also gets excited about learning something new. A qualified geologist, she worked in the production side of the mining industry for about 10 years.

"Toastmasters taught me so much about getting out of my skin and out of my comfort level and starting a conversation with someone I don't know."

—HEATHER TURNER, DTM

At that point, she didn't feel challenged anymore. "Once you are familiar with a particular mine or area, there are no new discoveries," says Matolo. "Your job is just to direct mining. I wasn't learning anything new."

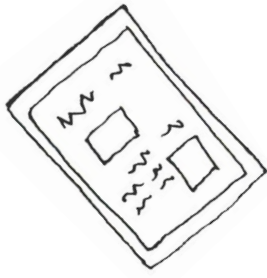
The culture in production was also not very conducive to females at the time, so she wanted to move into an area that required professionalism and offered new adventures.

Matolo was hired for a job within enterprise and supplier development (ESD), which focuses on building capacity and helping establish start-up small, medium, and micro-businesses. It was a new field for her.

After she was hired, she educated herself on the relevant policies and laws. She asked family members to test her on her knowledge and aligned herself with people in the field. She also registered for a management development program at a nearby university.

As part of her new role, she gave speeches and led workshops. She also had to build trust with business owners and advocate for small businesses to large corporations, which also involved many negotiations. She joined Toastmasters to help her succeed. "Toastmasters gave me all the skills I needed to perform these duties," says Matolo.

Eventually, the company began downsizing, so Matolo started job searching just in case. She joined a businesswomen's association and connected with others throughout Toastmasters and her other networks.



“Part of my job was connecting with funders and big corporations,” she says. “In that engagement, you meet a lot of people. I was sent a job opening from one of my contacts.”

## Go for It

Matolo took a leap of faith and got the job, which was in the social-community development space. This expanded her portfolio, as ESD is one pillar of social-community development. In addition to small businesses, she’s now working on initiatives within the education, health, and livelihood areas.

“Because of the downsizing, going into the social space was not by choice—but it ended up much better for my growth than where I was coming from,” says Matolo. “It was the universe forcing me to go into where I’m actually supposed to be.”

Changing careers gave Turner, Seshadri, and Matolo exciting new challenges and a fulfilling professional journey. “I wish I had known it was okay for my career to have a lot of different chapters—that I didn’t have to live my entire life in one career like my parents did,” says Seshadri. “I would have saved a lot of worry and self-doubt. With each transition, work is getting to be more intentional and more fun.”

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**Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM**, has more than 25 years of career development and advising experience. She is a member of 5-Star Toastmasters Club in Arlington, Virginia, and AAMC Toastmasters in Washington, D.C., as well as a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at [jenniferblanck.com](http://jenniferblanck.com).

Toastmaster Tebogo Matolo, of South Africa, left her job as a geologist and was later hired to work in enterprise and development (ESD), where she gave speeches and led workshops in her new role.



## Tips on Making a Career Transition

According to the [World Economic Forum](http://WorldEconomicForum.com), experts predict people will have many careers in the future, core skills will matter, and lifelong learning will be essential. Here are some tips if you’re considering a career transition.

- **Conduct a self-assessment.** Consider what you’re good at and what you like doing, and focus on where the two overlap. Inventory your transferable skills—the skills you have demonstrated in your current career and volunteer experiences that you can apply to the new field. Also, know your financial situation and what compensation range is possible for you.
- **Do your research.** Learn about your options and what skills, experience, and education are needed to be successful in the new field. Talk with people working in the industry. Join groups, such as associations and online communities, in your desired career so you can learn about current issues and gain access to resources, including job postings and salary surveys. For more in-depth information, see if you can shadow someone, intern, volunteer, or work part-time to see if the position is the right fit.
- **Prepare your story.** Be ready to highlight your career journey in a way that’s relevant to your new field, shows a logical progression to where you want to go, and presents how you can bring value.
- **Leverage your resources.** Connect with and learn from people throughout your network. Use your Toastmasters Pathways projects to advance your search, and explore and strengthen your leadership and communications skills. Practice interview questions and your elevator pitch through Table Topics®.

—Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

# Master Your Fear of FAILURE

Train your brain to move forward after a setback.

By Katie Stoddart

If you're afraid of taking chances, or trying something unproven, or even speaking up, you're not alone. Fear of failure is something we all experience, for a variety of reasons—fear of embarrassing ourselves, being rejected, or feeling humiliated. And not all fear is bad; in fact, it often keeps us safe, protecting us from taking dangerous risks.

Yet fear can hold people back, particularly at work. Although workplace fears likely aren't life-threatening, your brain responds in a similarly cautious manner, making it hard to apply for a new job or promotion, ask for a raise, or try a new project that hasn't been proven.

There's a reason everyone has an innate sense of fear, albeit in varying levels. But by changing your view of it, it's possible to rebuild your confidence, even in stressful times.

## Rejection Dysphoria

For certain individuals, fear of failure is amplified through "rejection dysphoria": a heightened sensitivity and feeling of increased pain when dealing with rejection.

Ordinary minor setbacks, or small criticisms, are felt acutely, often leading to perceived irrational emotional outbursts, increased fear and worry, or a fight/flight/freeze reaction.

In the workplace, rejection dysphoria often leads to coping mechanisms like people-pleasing or perfectionism. Both of these can lead to overwhelm, overwork, and increased self-doubt.

Confidence is not the absence of fear, but the belief that you will be okay despite the fear.

If this sounds familiar, the good news is there are proven methods to help you cope with rejection dysphoria:

- **Label the pattern.** Recognizing and raising awareness about your fears of rejection helps to create some distance between you and the behavior. Naming the emotion by telling yourself something like *This is rejection dysphoria* calms down the nervous system and reduces the activity in the fight/flight/freeze part of the brain.
- **Regulate the nervous system.** You can lower your fear level by calming down your body and nervous system, and processing the emotion. Do this by deep breathing,

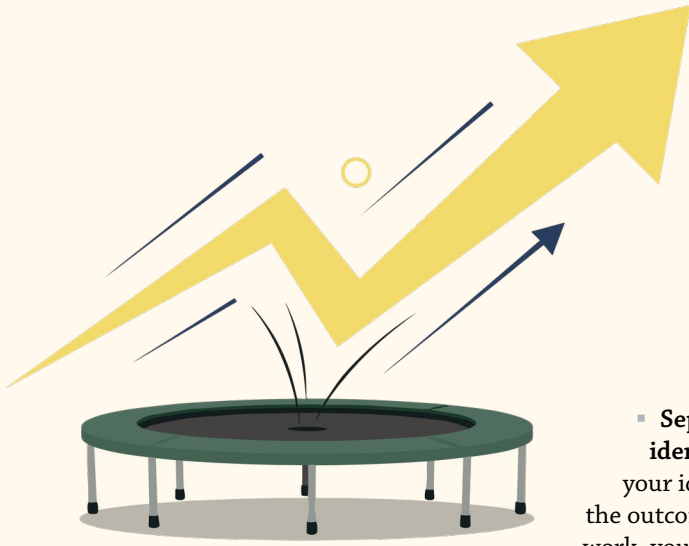
box breathing (inhale – 4, hold – 4, exhale – 4, hold – 4), or by going for a brisk walk.

- **Break the thought spiral.** When dealing with rejection or failure at work, the mind often starts to spiral as it reviews what could have been done differently. Instead, calm your nervous system (using pattern labeling and breathing techniques), then break that inner spiral by asking yourself: *What can I learn from this? How can I improve next time? What's one action I can take now that helps?* Action builds momentum, which calms your overactive thinking.
- **Build self-trust.** Often we feel more sensitive to rejection because we're projecting other people's feedback onto an image of ourselves. We can build stronger self-trust by having greater self-compassion, leaving us better equipped to handle tough criticism. Self-kindness, after a spike of rejection, can support you to rebuild self-trust and confidence.

## Dichotomy Thinking

Fear of failure originates from "dichotomy thinking": that is, believing in two extremes. One extreme is success, the other is failure. With this mindset, there is no room or space for the

# GROWTH



View failure as a learning point and a trampoline for further growth and development.

in-between; everything is either the ultimate success or the ultimate failure.

The brain looks for ways to simplify situations for future decision-making. By painting a highly negative picture of a situation and calling it a failure, your brain thinks it needs to protect you from a similar situation in the future.

In the workplace, dichotomy thinking can show up as analysis paralysis, avoidance of responsibility, blaming others, refusing to be proactive, or showing a highly competitive spirit (needing to be the one who succeeds).

Yet very rarely are situations quite so negative or positive—most are somewhere in between. For instance, you might be slightly disappointed with some parts of a project, but can recognize that other parts went smoothly.

If you feel yourself slipping into dichotomy thinking, try these tools:

- **Practice continuum thinking.** Instead of labeling everything as success or failure, shift your perspective to a continuum on a scale from 0 to 10. What worked well? What can be improved?
- **Shift the bias.** Our brains have a negative bias, which means we notice anything negative three times more than we do anything positive. This makes us more likely to focus on the mistakes rather than the successes. However, you can train your mind—through visualization, reframing, and shifting of perspective—to see both the negative and the positive. Once you do this, you will feel calmer and more confident the next time you're in a similar situation.

- **Separate outcome and identity.** When you attach your identity and self-worth to the outcomes and results in your work, your self-belief and confidence will always fluctuate. Being able to understand that your identity is more than your job will bring a greater sense of inner confidence and self-trust.
- **Focus on process, not goals.** Dichotomy thinking is often related to goals, with a high emphasis on achieving goals and results, and very little on the process. Instead, pivot and focus on the process, and celebrate the wins of your actions rather than your results. This not only makes you feel more in control but also gets you out of the all-or-nothing mindset.
- **Expand your timeline.** Dichotomy thinking focuses on the immediate, giving you an extreme visualization of the situation. Instead, expand your timeline forward, and see what it will mean a year from now. Also, expand your timeline backward, looking at how far you've come and what you've already overcome.
- **Take on an experimental mindset.** Capture all the learnings from each work project or assignment, and view everything through the lens of experiments. Instead of taking rejection or failure personally, view failure as a learning point and a trampoline for further growth and development.

## Fail Fast, Fail Forward

The truth is everyone faces failure or rejection at some point. Don't let that stop you—instead try to see failure as something you can analyze and learn from. Here are some strategies

to help you shift your perspective and view failure more as a building block than a roadblock.

- **Fail fast.** Exposure to more failure and rejection reduces the emotional impact. By acting quickly and learning fast, you develop muscles for coping. Failure is only paralyzing when you don't take any action, and fear loses its power with more exposure, providing proof that you have survived tough situations already.
- **Adapt a beginner mindset.** Allow yourself to approach each new situation with a beginner's mindset, curiosity, and eagerness to learn more about yourself and others through a new light. Have a thirst for feedback and improvement, instead of radical perfection.
- **Build resilience.** Each time you fail and then try again, you are building up inner resilience. You are proving to yourself that you can handle challenges, are persevering, and don't give up easily.

Confidence is not the absence of fear, but the belief that you will be okay despite it. When you rewire your rejection dysphoria, change your habit of dichotomy thinking, and build an experimental mindset through failing fast, you can handle anything with self-compassion, and see future opportunities rather than closed doors.

**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.com](https://www.linkedin.com) and [katiestoddart.com](https://www.katiestoddart.com)

# Share Your Accomplishments Without Showing Off

The art and science of effective self-promotion.

By Alison Fragale, Ph.D.



**M**y first boss was a braggart. I was fresh out of my undergraduate program. He had just earned his Master of Business Administration (MBA) and was my supervisor on my first work project in a new job. I had heard great things about him, only to quickly discover he was both incompetent and unkind. I was bewildered that he was widely considered a rising star.

Turns out, he had simply bragged his way to a stellar reputation. He told everyone he met how successful he was. Since few people had worked with him directly, they took his claims at face value—and repeated them to others. In a game of office “telephone,” he had boasted his way to success.

For many people, experiences like this solidify their aversion to talking about their accomplishments; no one wants to be that person. But I learned a different lesson—one that has shaped both my academic research and how I’ve presented myself for the past 30 years: How you talk about yourself matters—a lot. If talking positively about yourself could boost the success of someone with limited talent, imagine how effective it is when used by someone who has great talent, like you. Especially if you do it the right way.

## Sharing Your Wins

The upside of sharing your accomplishments is clear: It increases others’ perceptions of your competence. This can lead to opportunities—being hired, promoted, invited to speak, or recommended to others. The downside is equally real: You might seem less considerate or less likeable. In social psychology terms, self-promotion increases perceptions of competence but can decrease perceptions of warmth. When warmth drops, it feels like bragging. But when you signal competence without sacrificing warmth, self-promotion works.

The distinction between bragging and self-promotion is a fine line, and the fear of crossing that line often leads people to overcorrect. As a research psychologist and professor who teaches and coaches leaders, I encounter far more people who undersell themselves than oversell themselves. Staying silent about your achievements guarantees you won’t seem boastful—but it also limits your effectiveness. You are the most informed source about your own work; if you don’t share your skills and accomplishments, others won’t know about them.

I once counseled a journalist who was pivoting to professional speaking. Although she was new in her industry, she had recently received a standing ovation for a speech she delivered. She believed this was strong evidence of her effectiveness and wanted prospective clients to know about it, but she didn’t know how to share it without sounding self-congratulatory.

“I can’t put ‘got standing ovation’ on my résumé,” she said. She was right. She needed to find opportunities to mention it naturally in everyday conversation—something that required a shift in her mindset, and an understanding of approach.

The upside of sharing your accomplishments is clear: It increases others’ perceptions of your competence.

## Shifting Your Mindset

For many people, talking about themselves feels selfish, or like bragging. To overcome this perception, adjust your mindset from being “someone who

is seeking attention” to “someone who is being of service.” The term “self-promotion” is a misnomer because you aren’t just benefitting yourself. If people don’t know your talents, they won’t know how you can help them.

In the journalist-turned-speaker’s case, audiences were gaining useful knowledge from her talks. The more audiences she reached, the greater her impact. Sharing her standing ovation wasn’t saying, “I’m so great.” It was saying, “I can deliver value.”

Another reason people feel awkward over-promoting themselves is they assume people are paying full attention to every word they say. In reality, we overestimate how much others notice us—a phenomenon known as the “spotlight effect.” In one [study](#), researchers asked students to wear a T-shirt of American singer Barry Manilow into a room full of people. The students predicted that about half the strangers would notice and be able to identify who was on the shirt. In reality, only a little over 20% did.

When you talk about yourself, the spotlight effect may lead you to assume your audience will scrutinize every word. They won’t. They are preoccupied with their own concerns. In fact, [research](#) conducted by Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist and professor, and myself suggests that self-promotion can be especially effective with distracted audiences. When people are busy, they often remember what was said but forget who said it.

Clearing these mental barriers gets you into the right frame of mind. The next step is using tactics that convey your skills and knowledge while preserving warmth.

## Strategies to Promote Yourself Successfully

You don’t want to insert yourself unnecessarily, so pick the right moment to tout your accomplishments.

Self-promotion doesn’t require a 30-minute monologue about your résumé. Often, it’s more comfortable—and more effective—to respond in more detail when someone invites you to share. Every time someone asks, “What’s new?” “How’s work?” or “How’s it going?,” you’ve been given an opening. Too often we waste it with a shrug and short reply: “Fine.” “Good.” “Busy.”

A better response is brief but informative: “I had a great day at work today,” or “I got my first standing ovation.” Even if the conversation ends there, you’ve shared something positive. If the other person asks a follow-up question, you’re no longer bragging—you’re answering. [Research](#) shows that being evasive or coy in response to direct questions can make you seem less trustworthy. Being forthcoming and truthful is one of the most effective ways to signal competence while still appearing considerate.

Another powerful tactic is what psychologists call [dual promotion](#): pairing a positive statement about yourself with acknowledgment of others. The aspiring speaker might say, “I was thrilled to receive a standing ovation. The event organizers understood their

audience so well—it helped me tailor a message that resonated.”

Importantly, dual promotion is not self-deprecation. You still own your success. Acknowledging others simply shows that you recognize other people’s contributions and successes.

This approach works across contexts. In an email, thank colleagues who contributed. On social media, mention the mentor who supported you. In conversation, credit collaborators. You amplify your achievement without diminishing yourself.

There is science to self-promotion—but there is also art. Observe how others share their wins in ways that feel confident but not boastful. Notice the language they use and the tone they strike. Then experiment with their approaches to see if they work for you.

At first, you may worry that people will judge you. In reality, they are more likely to express excitement, congratulate you, and ask follow-up questions. Those responses are signs that your self-presentation is landing well. Over time, this builds confidence to keep sharing your wins.

My first boss taught me one of the most powerful lessons: Reputations are built on what people can see and hear, not on what we privately know about ourselves. The goal is not to boast your way to success. It is to make sure your true competence is visible so that others can benefit.

If you want to be chosen, trusted, and recommended, people need evidence. You are the best person to give it to them. Don’t miss your chance.

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**Alison Fragale** is an organizational psychologist, professor, and author of *Likeable Badass: How Women Get the Success They Deserve*.

You are the most informed source about your own work; if you don't share your skills and accomplishments, others won't know about them.



# Share

# 3 Mindset Patterns That Limit Professional Growth

Break the mental blocks and watch your confidence and success soar.

By Jennifer Fidler

**D**o you ever wonder why Robin from accounting got promoted instead of you? Or why Alex, who started in the company long after you did, is much more successful? You know you're smart, capable, and probably more skilled than they are. Yet you're watching other people pass you by while you're standing on the sidelines, wondering what is wrong with you.

I am not blaming you, because I was the same way.

The people who are most qualified in their area of expertise seem to suffer the most from impostor syndrome.

In my first business as a personal fitness trainer, I struggled getting clients for a long time. I watched other trainers take personal phone calls as they worked, show up late to sessions, and even eat while their clients struggled through a session. Meanwhile, I always paid full attention to my clients, showed up on time, and never ate while working. I also invested time and money to get 12 different certificates, hoping they would catapult my business forward.

Yet the other trainers always had a full roster of clientele, while I had to take on a part-time job to pay my bills.

It wasn't until I made three important mindset shifts that I was finally able to grow my business. These thought patterns can hold you back and ultimately lead to resentment rather than success.

## 1 Re-Define Impostor Syndrome

Impostor syndrome refers to the feeling that you're incompetent—at your job or something else in your life—and just fooling people, even if all evidence points to your capability. It includes thought patterns such as: *Everyone will soon find out I don't know what I am talking about, or others know so much more than I do—who am I to claim I am an "expert"? I'm a fraud!*

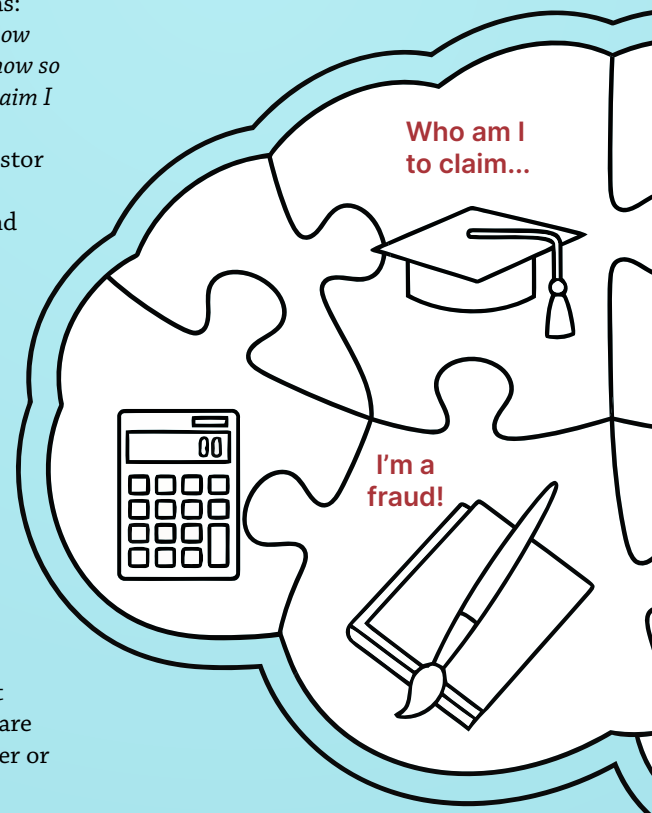
Those feelings of being an impostor and "fooling" people into thinking you're capable are very common and can undermine even extremely qualified people.

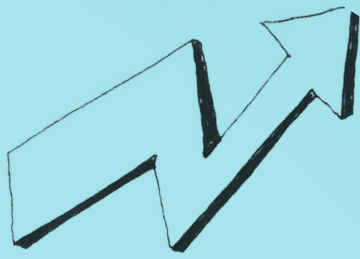
What I personally find fascinating about impostor syndrome is that even if you overcome it, it usually comes back. Every time you are offered a challenging opportunity or reach a new career milestone, the feeling can pop up again.

If we can't get rid of impostor syndrome, why not just redefine it? Instead of seeing it as a flaw or proof of your inadequacy, see it as an indicator. An indicator that you are about to level up, that you are reaching the next step in your career or

life. This takes a bit of time, but the more you practice, the sooner you'll be able to see impostor syndrome for what it is: a guiding light.

Interestingly, it's the people who are most qualified in their area of expertise who seem to suffer the most from impostor syndrome. And that makes sense because, ironically, in order to have the feeling of not knowing enough, you need to be aware that there is, in fact, a lot of knowledge you don't know. If you think you have it all figured out, you will stagnate and develop an oversized sense of confidence and superiority.





Being haunted by impostor syndrome actually indicates your willingness to grow and learn, as well as your ability to acknowledge that you don't know everything. All of these feelings leave you open to pushing yourself.

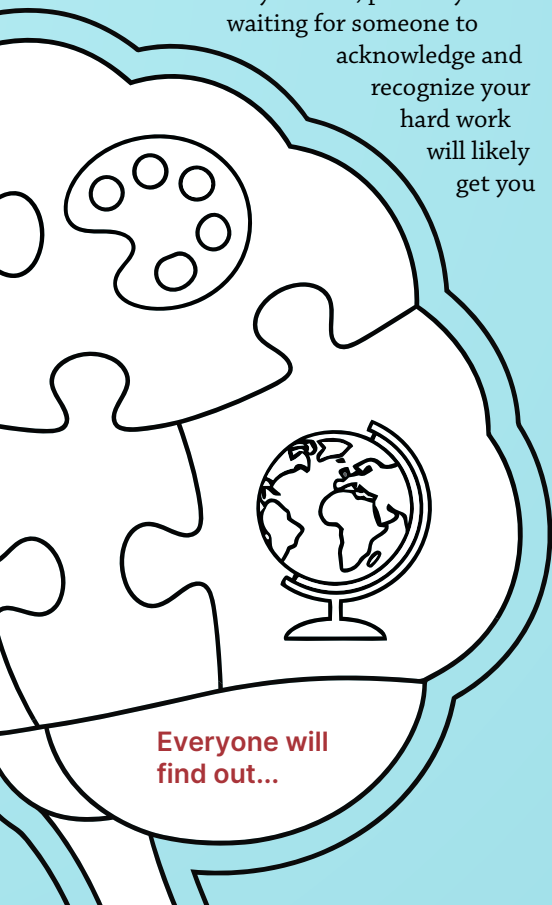
**Daily Practice Tip:** Whenever you feel impostor syndrome creeping up, pause. Take a deep breath and remind yourself: *This is a sign that I am on the right track.*

## 2 Escape the Need to Be Noticed

Many of us believe that just becoming great at what we do will be enough to get recognized for our abilities. *Surely my boss will notice that I've been upleveling my work lately. Surely the clients will come once I have all the knowledge I need to serve them.*

Unfortunately, that's not how it works. Hard work doesn't speak for itself anymore.

In today's world, patiently waiting for someone to acknowledge and recognize your hard work will likely get you



Everyone will find out...

overlooked. Many people find it hard to [flaunt success or brag](#) about a project done well. Sometimes it's a case of being too humble, or having low confidence, or simply feeling that bragging is rude. However, the fact is that successful people are often not the ones who are best at what they do, but the ones who are the most vocal.

Identity follows behavior, not the other way around.

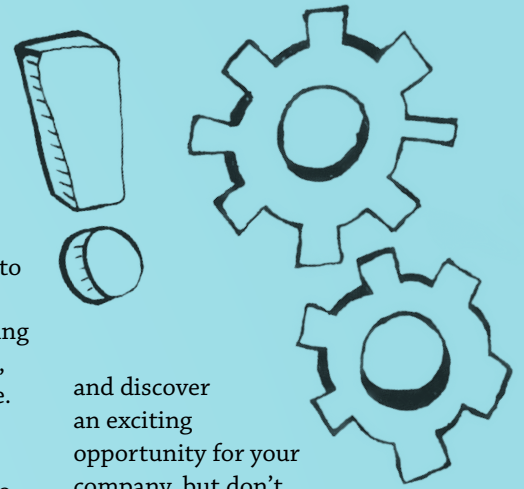
Learning how to sell yourself, how to become visible, and how to position yourself is crucial. Professional growth is no longer only about competence but about visibility, clarity, and ownership.

**Daily Practice Tip:** Every morning, ask yourself: *How can I be more visible today and show others what I have to offer?*

## 3 Let Go of Your Past Identity

When we want to step into a new role, whether it's a promotion, a new job, an entrepreneurial venture, or any type of new position, we need to let go of aspects of our past selves.

That's easier said than done. We often identify so much with our old roles that we reject opportunities that come our way because we feel they don't match this identity. Maybe you're in a new position and are offered the opportunity to present a new project, but you decline because you don't see yourself as a "leader." Or you're a new business owner



and discover an exciting opportunity for your company, but don't pursue it because "this is something for bigger companies, not for a small business like mine."

These are also perfect opportunities for impostor syndrome to creep back in. And so the cycle continues.

To step into your new identity, you need to stop *protecting* the old persona and start deliberately *building* the new one.

**Daily Practice Tip:** Practice the behaviors that your new role, your new identity, requires. If you want to become a leader, practice leading! While this will likely feel uncomfortable at first, soon you will feel the shift happening. Identity follows behavior, not the other way around.

When you apply these mindset shifts, professional growth becomes less about collecting skills, certificates, and licenses, and more about using your skills intentionally to actually grow and finally reap the rewards of your hard work.

**Jennifer Fidler** is a social psychologist, hypnotist, and speaker who helps people find happiness, confidence, and success. Her company, [Jennifer Fidler Coaching LLC](#), offers hypnosis-based coaching sessions, self-hypnosis and confidence workshops, and speaking engagements for university students, corporations, and retreats.



# 5 QUESTIONS WITH... Sima Dahl, DTM, AS

Professional development advice from an expert.



This month we're talking to Accredited Speaker and Certified Speaking Professional Sima Dahl, DTM, a branding expert, keynote speaker, corporate trainer, author, and coach. She is known for her ["Sway Factor"](#) philosophy, a mindset that empowers professionals to stand out, stay relevant, and be in demand. Sima helps her clients increase their own Sway Factor and harness their unique brand of executive presence.

More about Sima

### Hometown:

Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California

### Number of years in Toastmasters:

14

### Profession:

Keynote speaker and corporate trainer

### Hobbies:

Travel, live music, road biking, and skiing

### What does executive presence mean to you?

My favorite definition is from the International Institute for Management Development: "Executive presence is the ability to project confidence, authority, and leadership in a way that inspires trust and motivates others. It involves a blend of behaviors, communication skills, and personal qualities that convey a sense of competence and poise. People with executive presence are able to command attention, maintain calm under pressure, and make others feel confident in their decision-making abilities."

### Why is developing executive presence important?

Executive presence is a critical skill for career advancement, for influencing others to achieve desired outcomes, and even for managing volunteers. It is essential in any situation where you hope to be seen as a leader worthy of following.

### How can someone build executive presence?

First, cultivate gravitas (composure) by stepping outside your comfort zone and taking on what I call "thoughtful risk." That may mean giving an advanced speech, volunteering for a club leadership role, or offering to take on more responsibility at the office. Second, lean in and speak up in work meetings. Second, lean in and speak up in work meetings, and offer to evaluate a speech at your club. Finally, stand tall, shoulders back, and keep your gaze steady.

### If someone is uncomfortable with self-promotion, what's one visibility habit that feels authentic but still gets them noticed by decision-makers?

Showcasing soft skills is what most often results in career advancement. A powerful way to do that is to speak clearly, without self-censorship. The more comfortable you become presenting your ideas, stating your accomplishments, and asking clarifying questions, the more likely you will be perceived as having leadership skills.

### What is your top tip for making a positive first impression when networking?

Maintain an open posture, smile, and show excitement and interest in the other person. Put them at ease, even when you feel uneasy yourself. As we say in the speaking trade, take care of your audience!

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