

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | SEPTEMBER 2026

TOASTMASTER®

**Meet
Stefano
McGhee, DTM**
2026-2027
International
President

Top Tips From a Longtime
Speaking Coach

Boost Your Club's
Public Relations Efforts

TOASTMASTERS
INTERNATIONAL
2026 CONVENTION

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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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Where It All Begins

still remember my first speech.

It was in the basement of a poorly lit local library, in a room full of people I had never met. I didn't know what to expect. I had never heard of terms like Ice Breaker and Ah-Counter. But I showed up anyway.

That is where Toastmasters begins. Not at World Headquarters. Not at a Board meeting. Not at an International Convention. It begins at a club.

Every one of us has a club story. A first speech we almost didn't give. A Table Topics answer that surprised us. A moment when someone looked us in the eye after we finished and said, "You've got something." Those moments changed us.

What Toastmasters really sells is confidence. Our product—the real one—is a more capable, more certain version of the person who walked through that door.

That confidence shows up when you're called on unexpectedly in a meeting and you answer clearly instead of stumbling. It shows up in the job interview when you give a clear answer to a question you didn't prepare. It shows up when you have to stand in front of your organization and explain why the hard path is the right one.

I'll be direct with you about where we are. Before 2020, this organization had overall healthy growth each year. New members. New clubs. New energy. The pandemic changed that. We lost thousands of members. We closed thousands of clubs. And somewhere in those years, we lost some of the

culture of excellence that made Toastmasters what it is.

We're not going to fix that from the top down.

The International President doesn't change Toastmasters. Club members do. Club officers do. The Vice President Membership who makes a phone call to a member who's gone quiet. The Sergeant at Arms who sets up the room with pride every week. The evaluator who gives honest feedback because they care about the person in front of them.

What Toastmasters really sells is confidence.

My intention this year is simple: Put the club back at the center of everything we do. Every decision the Board makes should answer one question—does this make the club meeting better?

Right now, someone is giving their Ice Breaker. They are terrified, hoping to survive the next five minutes. But when they sit down, the room will applaud. Not out of courtesy, but because everyone is rooting for each other. Perhaps the speaker will be surprised by the warm reaction, never expecting to feel proud, never expecting to want to come back.

But they will.

That is Toastmasters. Let's get back to it.

Stefano McGhee, DTM
International President



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Insights, inspiration, and interesting tidbits.

Snapshot



Members of the **Hawkesbury Valley Toastmasters Club** in Windsor, New South Wales, Australia, celebrate the club's 44th anniversary. The club was chartered in March 1982.

Traveling Toastmaster



Sayuni Madatuwa of Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, shares the April 2026 *Toastmaster* magazine while on top of the Great Wall of China.



Lasitha Wijesinghe of Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, enjoys a bamboo boat tour at the Tràng An Landscape Complex, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in the Ninh Binh province in Vietnam.

CLUB EXPERIENCE

Top Tips to Retain Club Members

If your Toastmasters club is looking for ways to maintain its membership numbers, try out these ideas to keep people engaged, excited, and challenged.

- **Meet members' needs.** People join Toastmasters for different reasons, and their reasons for staying can change over time. Make sure your club is meeting members' individual and evolving needs. [Surveying](#) members periodically and pairing them with mentors can help with this.
- **Foster friendship and connection.** Camaraderie with fellow club members is key for many Toastmasters. Help members [build relationships](#), instill a respectful and

caring atmosphere, and take time for snack breaks, socializing, and after-meeting activities or special events.

- **Keep meetings creative.** Avoid becoming stagnant in your club routines. Try [different formats and activities](#) to engage members, such as themed meetings, costume parties, and fun puzzles or games.
- **Stress the benefits of Toastmasters.** Make sure members, especially new ones, are aware of all the benefits Toastmasters offers. Remind them of available resources. Emphasize the value of feedback, and of gaining skills that boost [professional and personal development](#).

- **Reach out.** If certain members haven't been attending recent meetings, have a club officer contact them with a gentle, friendly message saying they are missed and valued.
- **Recognize! Praise** always makes people feel good. Recognize speaking progress and Pathways achievements in your club. Beyond club ribbons and prizes from the Toastmasters Online Store, you can recognize members on social media, in club newsletters, or with kind words and a simple thank-you.

Adapted from a May 2022 Toastmaster magazine article

TOASTMASTERS NEWS

Serve Up Your Pictures and Stories

Don't miss your chance to show off your culinary prowess! The *Toastmaster* magazine will be highlighting the impact food can have on culture in the December issue. Share your best recipe, food photo, or explanation of a food-related cultural experience you've had. Email photos@toastmasters.org or submit your photos on our [photo submissions page](#) by September 21.

TOASTMASTERS NEWS

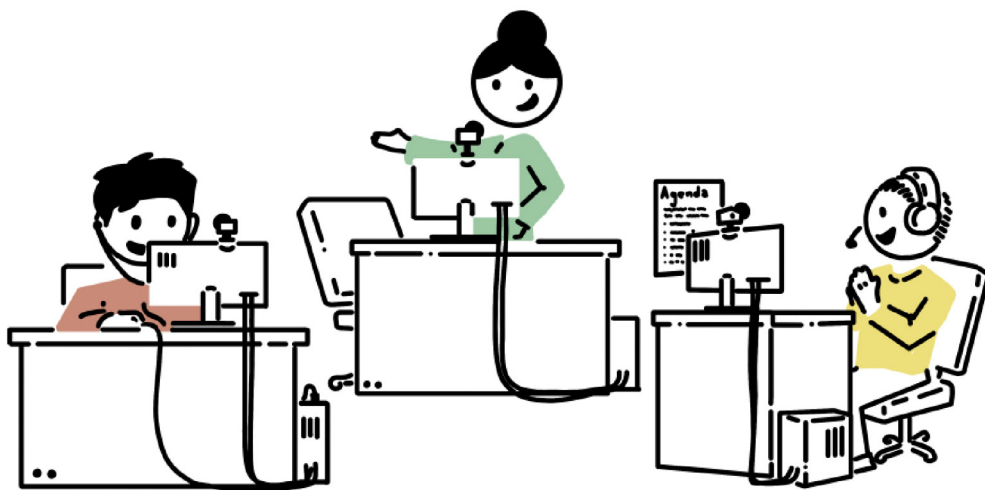
Explore Online Meetings

Looking to sharpen your online meeting skills? Still struggling with speaking online or keeping online attendees engaged? A new Pathways product is here to help.

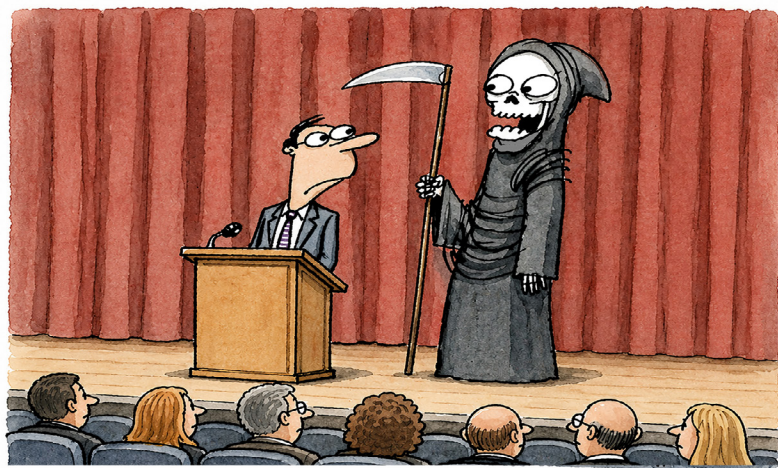
Called “explorations,” these in-depth learnings aren’t as long as a path. Instead, they include three projects that enable members to dive deep into multiple aspects of a specific topic. The projects in the Online Meeting Mastery exploration are Attending Online Meetings, Delivering Online Presentations, and Leading Online Meetings.

Completion of Online Meeting Mastery can be applied toward goals 2 or 3 of the [Distinguished Club Program \(DCP\)](#), in place of a Level 2 completion in a path.

Information about new Pathways developments is shared on the [Education Programs FAQ](#) page.



CARTOON



"Relax, I'm just here as your speech evaluator."

Illustration by Jerry King

WORD OF THE MONTH

Saga

[sa·ga]

Noun

Definition: a dramatic and often complicated story or series of events (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Synonyms: tale, story, epic

Examples of use: The speaker shared a family *saga* that reflected both sorrow and triumph.

The two-year legal *saga* captivated television audiences around the world.

Producing a Podcast to Promote the Arts

One Toastmaster's journey as a content creator and mentor.

By J. Carlos Velázquez, DTM



In 2025, I took over a podcast called *Embracing Arlington Arts Talks*, aimed at promoting the arts in Northern Virginia. Since that time, my communication and marketing skills have been well tested by the intricacies of producing this program. Thankfully, my Toastmasters training has elevated my ability to understand the evolving landscape of digital marketing strategies and content creation.

When I inherited the podcast from the founder, I wanted to change things up. I immersed myself in this new venture with some lofty goals in mind. I rebranded the podcast with a new logo and tagline and promoted content through strategic messaging on social media platforms and the website. I had experience in these areas thanks to one of my High Performance Leadership projects: By modernizing my [home club's website](#), I had developed marketing strategies to boost club membership.

In addition, the skills I had honed as Vice President Education and Vice President Public Relations enabled me to develop an editorial calendar, target new audiences, and secure sponsorship for a special podcast series. Such steps were a key to managing the podcast successfully.

I am constantly receiving requests from agents, PR professionals, and award-winning artists to secure a spot on the program. I have interviewed actors, directors, playwrights, choreographers, designers, and theater educators, including Tony Award-winning actor Ari'el Stachel and musical theater performer George Salazar.

After my interviews with the co-creators of the award-winning Off-Broadway hit musical *Mexodus*, Brian Quijada and Nygel D. Robinson, I was inspired to engage more artists of color to promote their contributions to the theater industry.

The power of mentorship can't be undervalued, and this is one of the biggest benefits of the Toastmasters experience.

Through Toastmasters and the podcast, I have become a mentor for young and aspiring content creators. With the support of universities with reputable theater programs, including George Mason University (Fairfax, Virginia), Howard University (Washington, D.C.), and Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), I have connected with students interested in the arts. The intern placement director at George Mason University, a fellow Toastmaster, introduced me to Sujay Khona. He, too, is a Toastmaster, and develops new video content to promote the benefits of our bilingual club.

My current podcast co-host, Manuel Coronado, is a social media influencer whose video content reaches millions of viewers, and I am his mentor in Que

Pasa, a bilingual club in Alexandria, Virginia. Manuel and I share a love for theater, and together we have held dynamic conversations with a number of artists.

The power of mentorship can't be undervalued, and this is one of the biggest benefits of the Toastmasters experience. After every interview recording, Manuel and I follow the traditional feedback session that is implemented in our club by talking about what went well in the podcast interview and what we can improve on in the future.

My journey hosting *Embracing Arlington Arts Talks* has given me an opportunity to interview hundreds of talented artists, and I am diligently working to expand my subscriber base. My mentoring experience has made me proud of how I am contributing to the development of future content creators. I am thankful for these opportunities, which never would have been possible if not for the transferable skills built through my Toastmasters experience, including target marketing, developing an editorial calendar, and conducting engaging interviews that are generating conversations about theater and the arts.

J. Carlos Velázquez, DTM, is president and CEO of HMA Associates, Inc., a communications firm in Virginia, and host of *Embracing Arlington Arts Talks* podcast. He is a member of the Que Pasa club in Alexandria, Virginia, and Dupont Circle of Speakers Club in Washington, D.C.

Using Her Past to Impact Others' Futures

How one member tapped into her Toastmasters skills to become an advocate for foster children.

By Stephanie Darling



Communications and speech professor Sherri Raftery, DTM, has been a Toastmaster for 21 years, earning accolades and awards as a leader, mentor, coach, blogger, Gavel Club supporter, Toastmasters International Convention Helping Hands volunteer, and District speech contest finalist.

But most of all she is a tireless advocate for foster youth, having both lived and studied their complex lives. Raftery grew up in the child welfare system herself—an experience that taught her many things, including an unshakable belief in education as the path to a productive life.

Raftery is a fervent lifelong learner. Her academic pursuits include a bachelor's degree in theater arts, performance, and communication from Emerson College in Boston, followed by a master's degree in education and a doctorate in higher education leadership from [Endicott College](#). She currently teaches at Fisher College and North Shore Community College in Massachusetts. Along her career path, she dipped a toe into live theater and stand-up comedy.

She approaches Toastmasters with that same learner's energy. Raftery notes she was so impressed by her first Toastmasters meeting that she joined on the spot. Today, she is a member of three online clubs: Island Foghorns Toastmasters Club, Advanced Articulators Online, and Contest Mastery, where she is a charter member.

She's working on her sixth DTM. One of her most notable DTM projects was working to reinstate Gavel Clubs in prisons after COVID. She's helped lead and recruit Toastmasters volunteers for Gavel Clubs since 2006.

Raftery never says “no” to Toastmasters opportunities. Just a year after joining, she accepted an invitation to serve as an Area Governor (now called Area Director). She's happily taken on new roles every year, at almost every organizational level.

Beyond Toastmasters, Raftery volunteers with child welfare nonprofits, and is a court-appointed advocate for foster youth. As a child, she grew up in The Home for Little Wanderers, which was founded in 1799 in Boston, and is the oldest child welfare agency in the United States. Her hero was the child movie star Shirley Temple. Temple often played an orphan, filled with boundless kindness and optimism, who brought joy to everyone. It was exactly the message Raftery wanted to live.

Raftery's passion for foster youth was ignited when she was growing up and learned that approximately 50% of them graduated from high school. Just 3% went to college; only 1% graduated. As an adult, Raftery was intensely proud to be among the 1% of her peers with a college degree, but she began to ask herself: *Where are the other 99% of us?*

Looking for answers led her through a rigorous doctoral program and final thesis, “Foster Youth Mentorship Programs in Higher Education.” When

it came time to defend her work, fellow Toastmasters stepped in to mentor *her*, offering support and feedback as she practiced her speech for months in numerous clubs. They also attended her thesis presentation, which was held virtually due to COVID.

She now uses her heartfelt speaking skills to share sobering stories with community audiences and child welfare professionals about the challenges foster youth face.

Raftery credits Toastmasters for helping her gain the confidence to tell her personal story, but it wasn't easy at first. One exciting—yet heart-thumping—moment came as she spoke to an audience of 900, when honored for her work by The Home for Little Wanderers.

“I was comfortable in front of people but not in talking about my foster journey. When people came up to me after I spoke, I was overwhelmed. I didn't know how to handle it.

“Toastmasters taught me how to balance my story and emotions,” Raftery says.

Today, Raftery continues as a vibrant teacher and Toastmaster. She's grateful to those who raised and inspired her. She appreciates the opportunity to pay it forward to young people.

“I'm an ordinary person who's had an extraordinary life,” she says.

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

Growing Strong Clubs

Discover how clubs become healthy and stay that way.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Toastmasters clubs come in all shapes and sizes: Some are big, and some are small. Some are formal, and others are more casual. Some meet weekly, and others meet monthly. They might be community clubs, corporate clubs, specialty clubs, or advanced clubs. They might meet in person, online, or both. No personality or method is better than another because there is no difference in what members can learn and how they can grow.

The quality that does make a difference, however, is the strength of the club. We all join Toastmasters for our own reasons. We have our own goals, and the strength of a club can go a long way toward determining exactly how well we achieve those objectives.

Qualities of a Strong Club

Strong Toastmasters clubs often share similar characteristics. For example, a strong club usually includes members who are striving to be excellent speakers. This shows newer members what is possible and sets a high bar for everyone.

There is also strong progression toward members' goals, which you can measure by how many members are advancing through their Pathways path. This advancement means the members are speaking frequently, which yields confident speakers. You also see

members willing to step up and take on leadership positions.

Strong clubs typically have good energy as well, which makes meetings fun. These meetings are more like events that are not only high energy, but are also tightly run, keeping to an agenda and respecting the members' time.

Qualities to Watch Out For

Now what about those clubs that are, perhaps, not as strong? They have some common characteristics, too.

In a club that isn't as strong, there is often no real growth in speaking or leadership skills among members. They may speak at meetings, but they may not be putting much effort into preparation. Some speeches are written the night before or not practiced at all.

Additionally, many times the leaders don't have a strong Toastmasters vision. They aren't as familiar with what Toastmasters International has available in terms of services and resources, as well as the club's growth potential. This can result in members becoming stagnant. A club like this can have a stable membership, but new members are rare or non-existent. This results in the club just coasting.

Unfortunately, this can happen to any club. A club may have started strong, but, over time, it can lose momentum. If your

club is good today, it can move toward stagnation over time. Which is why you need to work at staying strong.

How to Become Strong Again

All too often weaker clubs don't realize their situation. They think they are strong, but they often need outside help.

Cue the Area Director and club coach. Area Directors visit clubs and work with members to brainstorm solutions to problems and offer resources. Club coaches are experienced Toastmasters who work with members to rebuild their membership and improve club quality.

Another step you can take to strengthen your club is identifying the leaders and motivated members of your club. These members may not be club officers, but they are often active participants in meetings and are working through Pathways. Encourage them to set a good example that others will want to follow. All members should be studying the education materials and striving to master the principles, and if some are using it effectively, hopefully others will follow.

As a club, you should also attend local events. If an expert speaker, particularly a World Champion or Accredited Speaker, is speaking at an event, make sure you attend with fellow club members. And plug into District functions. Learn what tools and support are available.

And finally, for all clubs, do the basics that make a difference. Create your agenda early. Fill all roles before the meeting starts. Come prepared, whether it is for a speech, an evaluation, or a word of the day. And come prepared to have some fun.

Tips to Keep Your Club Strong

Once you have strengthened your club—or if your club was already going strong—continue to focus on growing. Being in a strong club doesn't mean you can sit back and relax. Every club can get better. The danger to a strong club is thinking you have arrived.

To keep your club strong, there are two areas where you can continue to grow. First, keep members focused on improving their speaking skills.

Encourage members to work through Pathways. As a club, expect high quality in each member's speech writing and speech delivery. Hold each other accountable. Seek to write better speeches. Learn how to employ effective rhetorical devices. Become awesome in your vocal variety.

Identify key experts, even outside of your District, and learn from them as well. A pivotal point in my speaking came when I attended a meeting with one of the World Champions of Public Speaking, who gave a very thorough evaluation of an advanced speech. I went into that meeting thinking I was a good speaker.

Boy, was I wrong. Midway through, I realized how much more I could grow and I started seeking out high level resources. That should be a common practice for advanced members.

A second area for growth is stretching members' leadership skills. Recruit members to lead events, such as speech contests and other Area, Division, and District events. Give them a greater challenge than a club leadership role.

You should also identify emerging leaders in your club and connect them to mentors for additional support.

Reach higher. There is always room to grow.

So how would you rate your club? Are you moving forward? Are your members achieving their goals? Are they striving to get better? Are they fully engaged in the Toastmasters program?

Momentum is critical in a club. If a club has strong momentum, it will grow. If not, it will struggle. Take action to build that forward momentum by encouraging every member to excel.

What will you achieve this coming year? Aim high—and go for it!

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.



The strength of a club can go a long way toward determining exactly how well members achieve their objectives.

My Most Contentious Contentions

A communication coach shares his top 10 most-challenged recommendations.

By Joel Schwartzberg

If you think public speakers and communication coaches agree on everything, think again.

Throughout my 15 years running communications workshops, I've received pushback on some of my recommendations—but I always welcome questions and challenges. If we coaches aren't open to learning and evolving, we underserve the leaders, clients, and students we support.

Here are 10 of my recommendations that get the most pushback, and why I stand by them.

1

Don't perform.

Presenting and performing are very different approaches. Presenting focuses on your point and your delivery, while performing focuses on your image and your talent.

That's why we typically say speakers "deliver" speeches, not "perform" them. Actors, magicians, and singers entertain. Speakers deliver ideas.

2

Follow up stories with the point they illustrate.

Some consultants say a well-told story conveys its own point, but I disagree.

Just as you should always explain the conclusion of data, you should reinforce the point of a story with a simple follow-up like "This story illustrates ..." or "This case study proves ..."

A story about a failed launch is memorable, but unless you clarify the takeaway—"This story illustrates why we now always test the concept before releasing it"—audiences may remember the story but miss the lesson.

Ultimately, you want your audience to remember your point more than your story because your biggest goal isn't to be riveting, it's to be relevant.

3

Don't write out speeches word for word.

Unless you're giving a keynote, a highly technical speech, or using a teleprompter, having a word-for-word script is usually a disadvantage.

First, using a full script puts your brain in "read" mode, not "present" mode, diminishing your passion and emotion unless you're a trained actor.

Reading also creates distance between you and your audience, and memorizing a speech can backfire catastrophically.

For instance, your brain might go blank as you try to remember the exact phrasing you wrote.

Finally, know that your writing and speaking voices sound substantially different. If you speak in your writing voice—which is usually more academic and less conversational than your speaking voice—audiences may perceive that voice as artificial and pretentious.



4

Don't preplan gestures or vocal variety.

Yes, you should use functional gestures and avoid monotone delivery, but let your passion and conviction drive those decisions naturally in the moment versus planning them ahead of time.

The more you manufacture these moments in advance, the more robotic and forced they will seem.

5

Raise your volume.

Research on vocal perception consistently shows audiences perceive louder voices as more confident and authoritative, something I see every time I run a simple exercise in my workshops.

I ask a volunteer to say their name and a point “uncomfortably loud.” I then ask the other attendees to share how their impression of that speaker changed. Every time, they describe the speaker as not just more audible, but more confident, authoritative, knowledgeable, and assertive. Whether or not speakers feel that way, they project those positive attributes when they increase their volume.

Is this advice unfair to soft-spoken people? Perhaps, but there's no arguing that louder volume signals energy and confidence, and even a small increase makes a difference.

My female clients sometimes share a fear that increasing their volume will make some perceive them as aggressive. But mistaking assertion for aggression when women speak is a sexist bias that speakers should ignore, not accommodate.

6

Not every “ah” or “um” is a problem.

I've softened my stance on crutch or filler words over the years because some vocal imperfections can increase perceived authenticity.

Filler words like “ah,” “um,” and “so” only distract if they become noticeable. For me, the most valuable information you can get from a speaker who uses crutch words is knowing which filler words they most often overuse—not how often they utter them. Knowing this makes it easier for speakers to reduce the most glaring fillers.

7

Bullets on a slide are fine.

Don't dismiss a template just because it's old. Bullets still improve clarity so long as you use five or fewer bullets per slide and simplify the text in each to convey only the most essential words and ideas.

Also, some members of your audience process visual information better than they can process spoken information, and benefit from seeing the points you're saying. (I'm one of them!)

Your biggest goal isn't to be riveting, it's to be relevant.

8

The most important element on your slide is the title.

Where does your audience look if they've lost track of your point? How do they keep the “why” of your slide in mind? The slide title—the header of your slide—should answer both questions.

Broad slide titles like “History,” “Data,” and “Partners” don't work hard enough. They merely categorize, not convey, the point of the page.

- Instead of a title like “History,” think, “Three Decisions That Shaped Our Growth”
- Instead of “Data,” think, “24% of Readers Regularly Read Digital Books”
- Instead of “Partners,” think, “Extending Our Reach Through Strategic Partnerships”

9

You're NOT afraid of public speaking.

Surprise! Most people aren't afraid of public speaking itself; they're afraid of embarrassing themselves in front of others, which is why you may be just as afraid of singing or telling jokes in public.

Understanding this distinction matters because it moves the challenge from an innate flaw (“I'm a terrible public speaker”) to a buildable skill (“I need to increase my confidence”).

10

Public speaking is not a soft skill.

Until humans evolve to communicate telepathically, oral communication will always be a vital skill. Through public speaking—in a room or on Zoom—we communicate what should happen, why it matters, and how to deal with it. That's important stuff, which is why—whether you're leading or learning—you should always be open to improving.

You may disagree with some of these recommendations—and that's fine. The goal of communication coaching isn't to end debate, but to keep refining the ideas and tactics that help audiences understand, remember, and act on your point.

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](#).

Meet Stefano McGhee, DTM

2026–2027's International President doesn't sit still.

By Laura Amann

“Change doesn't start with World Headquarters. It doesn't start with the Board of Directors. It starts with: What do you feel when you walk into the door of your club?”

Stefano McGhee





Toastmasters' 2026–2027 International President, Stefano McGhee, DTM, likes to joke he joined Toastmasters because his wife made him. But in all fairness, it isn't a joke. His wife, Jennifer, joined Toastmasters first, in 2000, to prepare for a job that required her to do public speaking.

For five years, her time at Toastmasters was his time to play video games. He occasionally went to club meetings, first as a guest, then when they needed a meeting role filled. Eventually, he realized he was having so much fun that he wanted to give a speech.

At that point, he says, club leaders told him, "Nah, you gotta pay!" That's when he joined.

Answering the "Why" of Leadership

McGhee officially joined Network Voice Toastmasters Club in 2005, and is still a member. Once onboard, it only took a year before he jumped on the leadership track. His first role was Club President. After that came Area Governor, then Division Governor, then a variety of District leadership positions, some of which he did twice, and then the International Board of Directors. In 2023, he was elected Second Vice President.

His love of leadership is also a love of answering the question "why?" McGhee says he figured out there are three types of people: people who like things the way they are, people who wish things would change, and people who actually do something about it.

And as he went through Toastmasters, people would bring him questions and complaints: Why do we have to do it that way? Why is it like this? Why can't I do that?

"So I said I'm going to figure out why is this the way that it is. And it just kept going from there—find out what's broken, do something about it, listen to the people that are complaining, and say, 'Yeah, that does stink. Maybe we could do something about that.'"

He learned that that little leap—from just complaining to actually fixing or understanding a problem—is one a lot of people aren't willing to take. But for him, that leap is where the fun is.

"Even getting to where people can say 'Oh, that's why. Okay, I understand. I don't like it, but I understand why' is rewarding," he says, adding that most adults are okay with things once they understand the why.

"And that's when I got hooked on Toastmasters. How can you do more good? How can you listen to more people? How can you show them that the system works for them? Or how we try to make it work for them. It doesn't always work. I don't always succeed, but that's what drives me. That's why I'm still here."

Toastmasters at Work

In his professional life, McGhee is the senior director of technology operations at Harvard Business Publishing, and he was previously in the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard.

He credits Toastmasters for teaching him the skills he needed to put together a speech and deliver it, something that has helped him advance in his career.

He first demonstrated his communication prowess in the military when they needed someone to present bystander awareness training (what to do if you witness something wrong or problematic in the workplace). No one wanted to address this sensitive topic, but McGhee figured Toastmasters had prepared him for this.

"I volunteered and I did it, and people were like 'Wow, you actually know what you're doing.' And yes, it's a tough subject, but you can pull people in, tell them stories."

He uses those same skills today in his presentations, particularly the data-heavy ones, and he says Toastmasters has taught him how to transform the abstract into something comprehensible.

"How do you convince CEO and C-suite types that we should spend \$150,000 extra here to save \$450,000 here? How do you show that? Or if you're talking to non-technical people, how do you explain we're moving 75 terabytes worth of data? What does 75 terabytes worth of data look like?"

To explain terabytes he likes to use this analogy: "Say you grab a bag of popcorn, sit down on your couch, and watch a James Bond movie non-stop 4,000 times. You're getting close if you watch it for *this* many years to get to *this* number of terabytes."



On the ski slopes with his wife, Jennifer, and son, Tucker



In the pilot's seat



Family Time

While McGhee has lived most of his life in the state of Massachusetts, he was born in Italy, and his mother is Italian. His dad was in the military, and the family lived in Italy, California, Germany, and finally Massachusetts where he has lived since.

He's currently pursuing getting his Italian citizenship, and says his fluency in Italian depends on who you ask (his wife is impressed; his mother, not so much).

He and his wife have one son, Tucker, who attends the University of New Hampshire, and a beagle named Trevor.

Tucker played soccer throughout high school, and father and son still enjoy watching games together, particularly the World Cup games this past summer. As a longtime fan of soccer, McGhee can be found most fall weekends on the pitch, serving as a referee for youth (ages 6–18) soccer games, something he's been doing since the pandemic when referees were desperately needed.

The McGhees are also avid boaters, either taking day trips around the islands in the Boston Harbor (McGhee has become well versed in the rich history of the area), or doing short overnight trips. They've also recently all taken up golf and enjoy skiing together as well.

More Recreation, More Leadership

In addition to his Toastmasters role, McGhee is also poised to become the commodore (the elected leader) of a local yacht club next year—and whatever image that conjures up for you, he says to bring it way down, explaining that it's nothing fancy. He compares that club's structure similarly to Toastmasters but

on a much, much smaller scale. He loves the challenge of uncovering the whys and what-ifs there as well.

"I wouldn't have even dreamed of this job if it wasn't for Toastmasters. Wouldn't even have thought about it. But I can put together a presentation deck and explain the whys. I know how to talk to people. I know how to use Robert's Rules in our meetings.

"It's been fun taking Toastmasters leadership skills and applying them to a nonprofit that has nothing to do with Toastmasters. That's been educational—stressful, but educational."

When he's not on the water, you're likely to find McGhee up in the skies. He first learned to fly in 2018, fulfilling a lifelong fascination with flight. He had to step away for a few years when work and other activities took precedence, but he recently joined a flying club.

"I call it delightfully terrifying," he says of piloting a plane by himself. "When I'm up there there's no roadside assistance, there is no instructor. There is only me. I have to bail myself out if [anything goes wrong]."

He finds the deep focus of flying to be relaxing. "There's



In the mountains east of Bolzano, Italy

no thinking about what was going on at work, or those bylaws at all the meetings you go to. You are locked into the airplane; you need to know what's going on around you and look at all the gauges. So yeah, it's relaxing because you are only focused on one thing."

That intense focus allows him to see the bigger picture, like the colorful summer beach umbrellas and beach clubs dotting the coast of Block Island as he flies above or the technicolor greens, yellows, reds, and oranges of New England on a clear fall day.

And, as in boating, his renewed interest in flying has led to an interest in what goes on behind the scenes—he's already on a committee at the flying club reviewing their 21-year-old bylaws.

Another passion of McGhee's is the motorcycle. For the past 19 years, this has been his favorite method for getting around on the ground, whether that is heading to work (about a 20-mile/32-km ride one-way, which he does regularly unless the weather dips well below freezing) or taking long rides along the south coast of Massachusetts.



Hitting the open road on his motorcycle

The Coming Year

McGhee is excited about the endless possibilities for Toastmasters in the coming years. While recognizing that he is just one person, he also hopes to inspire and help more people see the power of the organization and what it can do for others.

But he recognizes that change often comes from the roots, and that's where he wants to focus.

"Change doesn't start with World Headquarters. It doesn't start with the Board of Directors. It starts with: What do you feel when you walk into the door of your club? If that's good, things are going to turn out great, but if it doesn't, it's not. It's just not. So it is incumbent upon all of us to remember how we felt when we came in the door—the warmth, the sense of wonder, the sense that you could do more, be more, that you had that support."

He recognizes that while having a stellar education program and a nimble online experience are important and make things smoother, the main thing is what happens in the club, and



Spending time in the Toastmasters video studio

McGhee hopes to inspire and help more people see the power of the organization and what it can do for others.



Celebrating with District 31



having excited and motivated members. What sticks is what happens in the club and having members so excited and motivated.

"That's the part where I feel like we got lost. I'm trying to figure out how do we bring that back. How do we get back to the basics?"

He hopes he can motivate people to see their own possibilities by being vulnerable himself, and staying authentic, even if that looks different than people might expect from an International President.

"I know there have been leaders where you think, *I could never be that person. I'd never be that good*, and I don't want to do that. I want to be somebody that you could look at and say, *I could do that, I could be that*, because if I can make you realize that, then you might work toward it yourself."

Laura Amann is managing editor for the Toastmaster magazine.



With his wife, Jennifer, at the 2024 International Convention



With then-District Director Veera Raghavendra Sriram, DTM, at the 2026 District 31 conference



The newly elected Executive Committee at the 2024 International Convention: Radhi Spear (center), Aletta Rochat (on left), and McGhee

Back to School



The Hague University Toastmasters club in the Netherlands

Members thrive at clubs on college campuses.

By Megan Preston Meyer

For many of us, “back to school” conjures up memories of sharpened pencils and chalkboard dust. With many students heading off to school this time of year, it’s a season for beginnings and new experiences—and what better place to dive in than a college or university Toastmasters club?

There are currently 365 Toastmasters clubs affiliated with colleges and universities in 47 different countries. In some of these clubs, membership consists of students, faculty, and staff only, but many are open to alumni and the general public as well.

Whether you’re completing coursework, preparing for a job interview, or looking to connect across generations, these campus clubs are a great way to continue your education, even if it’s been years since you were a student.

I fell in love with the people, the place, and the university itself.

—LASZLO WALBURG

investment in the future, but as I got to go to more meetings and practice my speeches, I found that it helped with whatever I was doing in college at the moment,” he says.

Sheehan has been able to put his experience in Toastmasters to immediate use. “I feel like it gives me a one-up in class whenever I have to give a presentation,” he notes.

But the advantages aren’t limited to assignments. At club meetings, “you’re always thinking about [communication], whether you’re the one presenting or you’re in the audience,” and that has changed the way he experiences classes. “I’m much more observant ... of how the professor is presenting the course material,” says Sheehan. “A lot of the skills I learned in Toastmasters I use in lecture halls and discussion classes.”

Homework Helper

One such campus club is the ZotSpeak Club at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Founded in 1998 by Bob Hudack, DTM, the club was initially composed entirely of staff members.

“Now it is mostly students of various [academic] majors,” along with staff, alumni, and university retirees like himself, says Hudack. Members of all ages find benefit in the club.

Member Kyle Sheehan is a third-year history major. “Initially, I saw [Toastmasters] as an

Acing the Interview

Laszlo Walburg attends a campus club in the Netherlands. He had already completed his university education, and joined The Hague University Toastmasters (HUT) while job-hunting earlier this year. During the interview process for a promising position, the company “told me that the job itself would be a good fit, but they also give presentations to clients, and they [envisioned] me doing that role as well. But I knew from my past that whenever I had to do a presentation, I got hit with these crazy nerves,” says Walburg. He decided to join Toastmasters.

TI



Kyle Sheehan, a student at the University of California, Irvine, shares his enthusiasm for the school's ZotSpeak Toastmasters club.



The ZotSpeak Club at the University of California, Irvine

A lot of the skills I learned in Toastmasters I use in lecture halls and discussion classes.

—KYLE SHEEHAN

is a major draw. “The location makes it more of a learning environment,” he says. “You walk into the university with the idea that you’re doing something [where you] will either teach or learn. I’m an energy person, so that really helps me.”

He also likes the laid-back vibe and the fact that members come from “all walks of life”—students, entrepreneurs, and professionals; people from Egypt, Argentina, and China. A variety of speeches stem from that diversity. “I fell in love with the people, the place, and the university itself,” says Walburg.

As for the job interview that originally spurred him to join the club? “I had the second job interview, and I told them that I [had joined] Toastmasters. They were like, ‘Oh, that’s pretty proactive of you.’” He got the job.

Connection and Continuity

Despite being retired from UCI, where he had worked in the IT department, Hudack keeps coming back to the Southern California campus for the things he learns at the ZotSpeak Club. “I stay in Toastmasters because I hear a variety of presentations and topics that never would have occurred to me,” he says. “Someone will give a presentation about their studies, or things that are important to them.” He enjoys connecting across generations.

That cross-generational connection can help smooth out some unique hurdles that university clubs face. Member turnover can be high among students, especially on campuses where school schedules change quarterly. “If there is a required course that happens during the [club] meeting time,” Hudack says, “the member drops out, understandably.”

There is also the problem of attrition, shrinking the club’s membership numbers. “I think it’s difficult once people graduate,” Sheehan says. “We do offer a hybrid format, so that’s very convenient, but people move on and go on their own

Walburg lives near the university, and as he was trying out different clubs, he happened upon HUT. The fact that the club meets on campus

career path.” Having members from all stages of life, whose schedules are more stable, can help provide continuity.

This stability and continuity is important not only at the club level, but at the organizational level as well, says Phebe Pendon, DTM, of Manila, Philippines. Pendon, a club coach for the UP Manila Club at the University of the Philippines Manila, is passionate about helping students succeed and about building connections between older and younger Toastmasters.

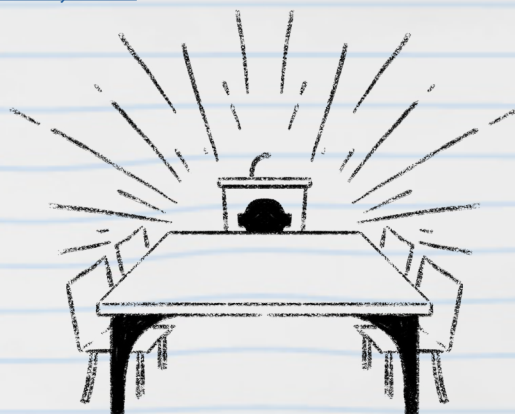
“I think there is a need to reach out to the young generation so that there will be a merging of membership,” she says. “Senior members can address the needs of the new ones and build them up” so they are ready to become the next generation of club leaders. This continuity and transfer of knowledge will help Toastmasters provide learning opportunities far into the future.

Educational Journey

From the younger generation to the older, from first-year college students to professionals, from brand-new Toastmasters who haven’t done their Ice Breakers to seasoned DTMs, there’s a place for everyone in college and university clubs.

A school setting might be just the sort of environment you need to continue your lifelong learning.

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





Letting Go at College Dropoff

When the nest empties, the adjustments begin.

By Paul Sterman

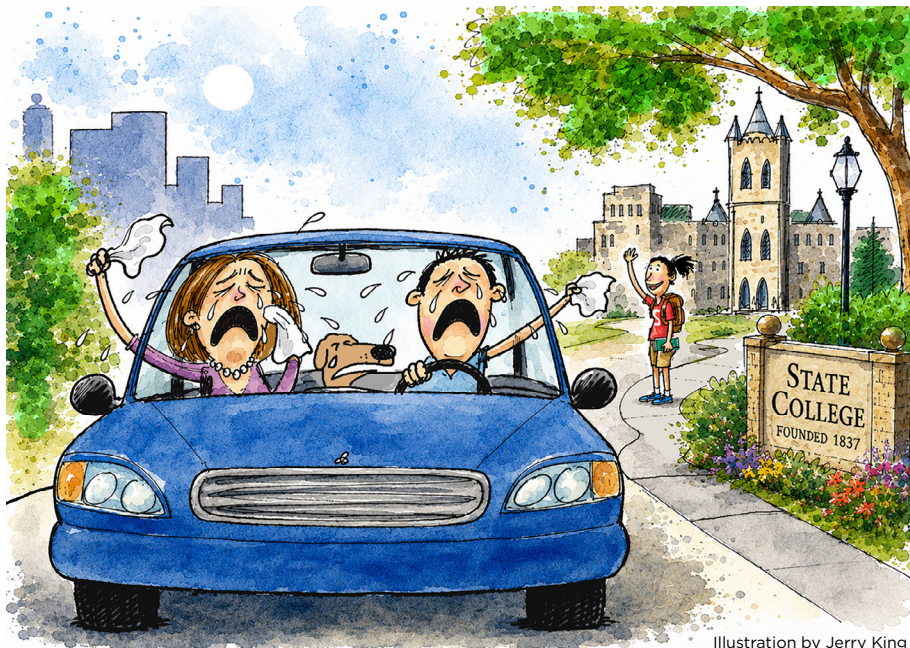


Illustration by Jerry King

This month, my wife, Joelle, and I will carry out a timeless ritual: drive our teenager to college for the first time, help her get set up on campus, then say goodbye ... and drive away.

Ouch. It hurts just to write those words.

Hannah, our only child, will be 1,000 miles (1,600 km) away from home. What happens now?

First, the driving-away part—how does *that* ride go?

Do my wife and I sit in numbed silence for the first 20 minutes and then erupt in a primal scream? Do we distract ourselves by manically planning vacations to fill the next three months? Or simply hit the first doughnut shop we see and eat our feelings?

And yet, agonizing as it might be, it's a ritual for a reason. This is the process. This is what parents the world over do. We must let go (at least a little), so that our cherished child can become independent.

While the child soars, the parents stumble, right into an empty nest. There will be sadness, but also excitement. *What friends will she make? What professor will she tell us all about?*

There will, of course, be worry—a parent's birthright. *Will she be safe away*

from home? Will she feel lonely, or lost? Will she balance social life with studies?

My Toastmasters training could come in handy. After 18 years of “How is Hannah? Where is Hannah? What should we tell Hannah? What should we get Hannah? Can you drive Hannah?,” my wife and I will need to learn how to hold a conversation again. Time for Table Topics at home!

On the other hand, with Hannah away, our schedules will free up. New hobbies await. Ballroom dancing? Poetry class? Roller skating at the retro rink? Although ... the last time I tried skating there—when Hannah was 6—I took more spills than a duck on ice. Breaking bones isn't the adventure I'm seeking.

The house will be quiet. I'll miss Hannah's noise. Gabbing and giggling with her friends on the phone or iPad for hours. Her constant cooing to our little dog, Charlie. Her company on the couch as we watch “Dancing With The Stars.” Her late-night requests for mint-chip ice cream. Even her irritation: “Yes, I know, Dad [requisite eyeroll]. You already told me that about a hundred times.” I'll miss it all.

The conversations will continue, just with new methods to cover the distance. We'll be phoning, texting, FaceTiming,

While the child soars, the parents stumble, right into an empty nest.

WhatsApping, and more. Of course, I know Hannah will be home again. There will be holiday breaks and whole summers. The same routines will resume. I'll watch her cuddling with Charlie, bug her to stop looking at her phone, and witness her disdain at my jokes.

It will be the same ... and yet different. It's a new stage of life for our daughter. Parenting involves constant adjustments and accommodations as our children journey forward, bringing a new sense of wonder and appreciation.

But we like looking back too. I remember Hannah in the swimming pool when she was small. I stood in the shallow water, held her in front of me, then gave her a little push. She swam away, with furious little strokes, then turned and came back, again and again, lodging herself snugly in my arms upon return.

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



A Good PR Strategy Pays Off

Use these tips to tailor club promotion to your audience.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Today, more and more things vie for people's attention. Getting the word out about Toastmasters and its benefits can be a challenge. To be successful, clubs must execute a public relations (PR) strategy.

Public relations fosters positive perceptions of, and connections between, an organization and different audiences. For clubs, these audiences could be prospective and current members, businesses, media, the public, and others. PR helps you increase your club's visibility and tell the story of your club and Toastmasters. It drives membership growth by attracting new members and helping you retain current ones.

Develop a Plan

A PR plan will help your club define its goals, determine how to achieve them, track progress, and evaluate success. Toastmasters offers many resources for clubs, including a PR manual, brand guidelines, social media content, and promotional templates. The Brand Manual, templates, branded images, and more are available on the [Toastmasters Brand Portal](#).

Clementine Flack, recent Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) of The Speakers of Croydon Club in Croydon, England, suggests not overthinking it. "Start somewhere, take action, and improve as you go," she says. "PR shouldn't be a one-off activity. It needs to be consistent, well thought out, and continually improved over time."

A plan can start with a singular focus, such as holding an open house or conducting social media outreach to engage with people and groups online, and grow incrementally. Or you can establish goals for the year using a [club PR calendar](#)—mapping out events, activities, and special dates, and creating PR strategies for each.

Consider building an editorial calendar. It can help you organize promotional activities ahead of time for all the items on your club calendar. You can plan what content you'll focus on for each item, how and when you'll promote them, and who will lead each effort. This fosters a strategic approach and removes last-minute pressure for ideas.

At the same time, it's important to be flexible. The Public Relations and



Amadi Karunathilake recently served as Vice President Public Relations for the Central Link Toastmasters Club in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Photo by Chamith Jayasundara

Marketing Club, a virtual club based in Hawaii, plans some social media posts in advance and creates others during events. Rose Kirland, DTM, a member, emphasizes the club's focus on intentional visibility. "The priority has always been to stay active and maintain a visible presence rather than wait for perfection," she says.

Know Your Audience

Like public speaking, a successful PR plan identifies and understands audiences. People join Toastmasters for different reasons, so it's essential to tailor your prospective-member outreach messaging and methods. You will likely need different communications for partner organizations, media, and other audiences.

Past club VPPR Sharookh Daroowala, DTM, of Quay Speakers Toastmasters Club in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, recommends highlighting what prospective members

will gain from joining. "Sell the outcome," he says. "Instead of persuading people to attend a club meeting by pushing program features and benefits, elevate the pitch higher by inspiring and motivating them with purpose-driven stories." This is an opportunity to highlight member journeys and successes.

Recent club VPPR Amadie Karunathilake from Central Link Toastmasters Club in Kandy, Sri Lanka, agrees. The majority of Central Link's membership are new and undergraduate college students, as well as recent graduates aiming to enter the professional world. The club offers support and helps members develop poise and communication skills.

"Our [PR] strategy succeeds because we constantly speak directly to our audience," she says, "explaining exactly how this specific club benefits them as young people trying to step into society as confident new graduates and interns."

The focus on outcomes is not limited to prospective members. Think of the WIIFM mantra—What's In It For Me—for all potential audiences. You could offer increased business for local companies or news content for media.

Clubs can gain greater visibility by reaching out to media outlets, such as local newspapers or television stations.

Customize Your Communications Methods

It's also important to tailor your communications channels. While most clubs have a website or social media presence, some also use analog approaches. In addition to digital marketing, the Quay Speakers Toastmasters Club posts fliers at neighborhood hubs.

Recently, the club moved from a corporate setting to a busy street-level site. Quay Speakers is coordinating with another Toastmasters club, which meets at the same venue on another day, to order a sandwich board—a double-sided sign for outdoor advertising—to place on the sidewalk.

The club also maintains a relationship with a past member who owns a real estate office nearby. She employs many agents who recently moved to Canada and encourages them to join the Quay Speakers Toastmasters Club. "That initiative has worked remarkably well for them and for us," says Daroowala.

As an online group, the Public Relations and Marketing Club has found success with a different approach to promotion. To engage members and prospective members, the Hawaii-based club creates meeting announcements with graphic elements and copy that match the upcoming meeting theme and reflect the club's personality.

The Central Link Toastmasters Club tries to make its promotional content accessible to young people—its main



Public relations can also help clubs retain members by keeping them informed, highlighting their achievements, and building a club's identity.

audience—by using social media, especially Instagram. When the club's communication channels are active with regular updates about meetings, member achievements, and educational content, there's higher engagement, says recent VPPR Karunathilake. The club also tries to make fun social media posts that resonate with young people. For example, the club's recent Facebook post announcing an awards event showed wavy musical notes above the words "Melody Feels Like Home." A post announcing the last club meeting of the program year had the words "One Last Take: The Final Cut of a Year Worth Remembering" and a picture of a young woman taking a photograph.

Central Link tries to do the same thing with its marketing campaigns. "By injecting elements of curiosity and humor into our campaigns, we create a distinct buzz that inspires new people to come and see what we are all about," says Karunathilake.

Use All Your Tools

The Public Relations and Marketing Club uses the same engaging content as on its meeting invitations to communicate a welcoming environment for its open houses—another important PR tool and one that is often under-utilized. "With open houses, our philosophy has always been experience first," says Kirland. "From the very beginning

of planning, we focus on the experience we want guests to have. Then we build the theme, promotion, visuals, and meeting flow around that intention."

Another PR tactic not used as often is media relations. Clubs can gain greater visibility by reaching out to media outlets, such as local newspapers or television stations. Two effective outreach tools are media advisories and [news releases](#). Media advisories are brief and tend to focus on event or activity announcements, including open houses or speaking contests. News releases tend to provide more details about activities or people, such as a member's accomplishment or election to leadership, or a contest winner's journey.

When Daroowala, of Quay Speakers, was a finalist in the 2014 World Championship of Public Speaking, a local Vancouver

newspaper sent a photojournalist to interview him after receiving a news release. Some publications where he grew up in India also ran stories about him.

Integrate Your Approach

Integrating multiple PR tools can pay off. In late 2025, The Speakers of Croydon Club decided to conduct [Speechcraft](#)[®], a Toastmasters recruitment program that teaches nonmembers public speaking skills. Flack, VPPR at the time, ran an eight-week PR campaign that spanned the holidays. With a focus on the following three content pillars, the plan raised awareness about the club and the program:

- Testimonials featuring members' Toastmasters journeys
- Educational content about the skills Speechcraft teaches
- Direct promotion about what Speechcraft is and how to register



An Instagram post from the Quay Speakers, a club in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

CLUB OFFICERS

Flack posted on social media two to three times weekly and repurposed content for a club blog. She also engaged club officers. The Club President recorded a video introduction. The Vice President Membership contacted previous guests with promotional messaging.

Eight people in the community registered for the January 2026 Speechcraft—close to the goal of 10. “The campaign had a wider impact,” says Flack. “The [club’s] Executive Committee became more involved in PR activities, members collaborated across roles, and the club built momentum and confidence around delivering Speechcraft.”

Public relations can also help clubs retain members by keeping them informed, highlighting their achievements, and building a club’s

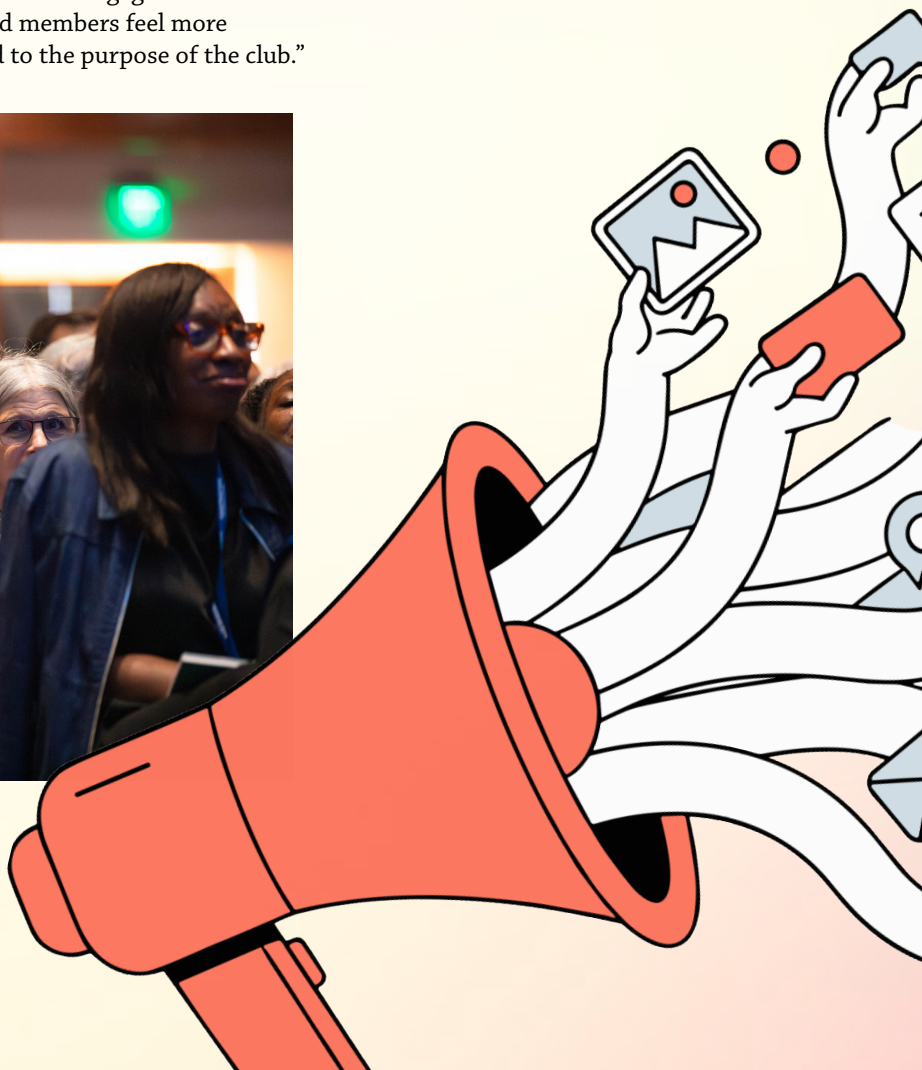
identity. When promoting members’ journeys and accomplishments, you can foster pride and build excitement about the club.

Kirland, the Hawaii member and a 2024–2025 Region Advisor, emphasizes that strong clubs are able to define who they are, who they serve, what experience they create, and why it matters to the people they hope to reach. “Once a club understands that, PR becomes much more natural and authentic,” she says. “Messaging becomes clearer. Engagement becomes easier. And members feel more connected to the purpose of the club.”

PR shouldn’t be a one-off activity. It needs to be consistent, well thought out, and continually improved over time.

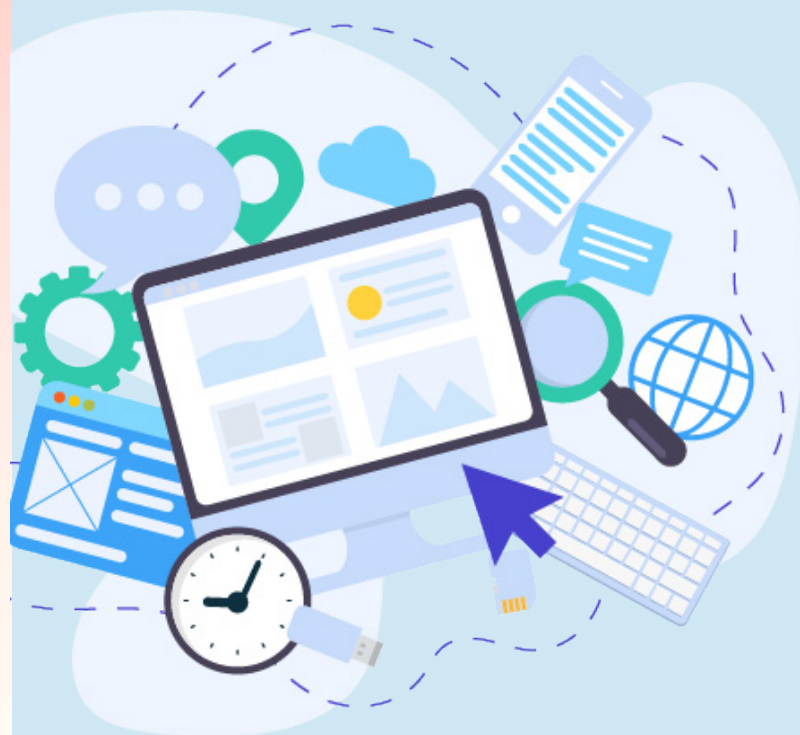
—CLEMENTINE FLACK

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, has more than 25 years of communications and member engagement experience and served for multiple years as a club’s VPPR. 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 jenniferlblank.com.





The online Public Relations and Marketing Club tries to create imaginative meeting announcements that reflect the group's fun personality.



PR Resources

Brand Manual

"The holy grail for us is the Toastmasters [Brand Manual](#)," says Amadie Karunathilake from Central Link Toastmasters Club in Kandy, Sri Lanka. "It is a master class in brand ambassadorship, teaching us how to represent a global organization by balancing a warm, friendly tone with absolute professionalism."

Social Media

Clubs can follow Toastmasters International's communications and social media channels for inspiration and easy-to-share content. Karunathilake and her PR team adapted Toastmasters posts for the club and created their own weekly public speaking tips series. "We gathered advanced public speaking tips from conference keynotes and District educational sessions, condensing them into aesthetically pleasing, digestible graphics," she says.

Other Resources

[Let the World Know handbook](#): a manual covering the public relations function with detailed guidance, checklists, and templates.

[Public Relations page](#) on the Toastmasters website: a source of promotional templates and other resources.

[Club Marketing Guide](#): a resource providing marketing materials and additional tools.

5 QUESTIONS WITH... Stefano McGhee, DTM

Get the inside scoop on some favorites of the new International President.



This month we reached out to Stefano McGhee, DTM, Toastmasters' 97th International President, to get his insights on his Toastmasters experience and the advice and words that have shaped him.

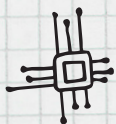
More about
Stefano

Hometown:

Weymouth, Massachusetts

Number of years in Toastmasters:

≥ 21 ≤

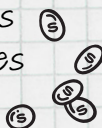


Profession:

Senior director
of technology
operations at Harvard
Business Publishing

Favorite snacks:

Sour Patch Kids
and Sour Skittles



What is your happiest International Convention memory?

Winning Second Vice President. That was unbelievable!

What is the best part about serving on the Toastmasters Board of Directors?

Being able to explain to our members the "why" [behind decisions]. That and having the influence to try to encourage them to get the most that they can out of the program. That's the best part for me.

What is the best advice you've ever received?

I wasn't sure if I was going to run for Second Vice President a second time, and there was talk that there were going to be a lot of people running for that position that year. I thought, *I can't win against a field like that*. But someone said, "If you think you're the best person for the job, it doesn't matter if there's one person or 100 people running for the job, you should run anyway." I never thought of it that way. So that was very pivotal for me.

Another piece of advice is a quote from my wife, "Nobody has to give you compliments." That means don't second-guess compliments. If they give it to you, accept it, move on. And that changed my head a lot.

Do you get stage fright before a big event speech?

Speaking in front of my club? No. Speaking at a District event? No. Speaking at the International Convention? Yes. It has just moved up as I've gotten better. So yes.

Do you have a favorite quote or inspirational message you share?

It's too long to share, but it's known as the [man in the arena](#) from [former U.S. President] Theodore Roosevelt. It's a wonderful quote about going out and doing something difficult. And even if you don't get it done, you are better than the people sitting on the side, too scared to do it. You got in there and did it anyway. And I 100% agree with that.

Editor's Note: Read an expanded version of this story in the online edition, ["Getting to Know Stefano McGhee, DTM."](#)

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Get inspired with exclusive interviews, communication strategies, and Toastmasters stories.



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