

TOASTMASTER®

December 2010



Crisis Leadership

Thoughts on teamwork from
Miracle on the Hudson pilot
Captain Sullenberger

Levity on
Capitol Hill

Toastmaster
Politicians
Tap Into Club
Experience



Living the Vision

"Action with vision is making a positive difference."
 – Joel Barker, futurist and scholar

There is a story about John F. Kennedy, the late president of the United States, as he was touring the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and its operations. During the tour, he walked by a man with cleaning supplies. JFK paused and asked him what he did at NASA. The janitor responded that he was "helping to put a man on the moon."

Do we live our Toastmasters vision in a similar manner? Leaders hold the vision and work to make it a reality. Our vision statement says: *"Toastmasters International [you and I] empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change."*

Do we, individually and collectively, provide an environment where people are able to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams? How would our club meetings be different if this happened at every meeting?

Do we stop to think what a member's full potential could be? Do we know the dreams of each of our club members? If we embody our organization's vision, we will ensure that our clubs thrive and grow.

While visiting in District 82 in India and Sri Lanka, I saw our Toastmasters vision in action. Members who came to their district governor's home for information and supplies were treated with respect and hospitality. That household ensured that each member was equipped to achieve their full potential.

Many more Toastmasters take the vision to heart in everything they do. Webster, a man who lives in St. Lucia in District 81, is just such a Toastmaster. He was amazing to watch as he played a pivotal role in a district conference. Webster was everywhere, doing whatever it took to guarantee that all attendees had the best experience possible. He embodied our vision.

Margaret, from District 21, is also someone willing to serve the greater good. She raised her hand when a district conference committee chair was needed. She led her Distinguished District team by providing members with the opportunity to change through communication and leadership development. She had a vision.

Just as the NASA gentleman worked to fulfill the vision statements of his organization, we can make a difference in the lives of our members by fulfilling our Toastmasters vision. When this happens, we are indeed Toastmasters: Achieving Greatness Together.

Pat Johnson, DTM
 International President

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Crisis Leadership: A Leader's Highest Duty

Thoughts on teamwork from Miracle on the Hudson's Captain Sullenberger.

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A Toastmaster's Promise

As a member of Toastmasters International and my club, I promise...

- To attend club meetings regularly;
- To prepare all of my speech and leadership projects to the best of my ability, basing them on projects in the *Competent Communication* manual, *Advanced Communication* manuals or *Competent Leadership* manual;
- To prepare for and fulfill meeting assignments;
- To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations;
- To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow;
- To serve my club as an officer when called upon to do so;
- To treat my fellow club members and our guests with respect and courtesy;
- To bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits Toastmasters membership offers;
- To adhere to the guidelines and rules for all Toastmasters educational and recognition programs;
- To maintain honest and highly ethical standards during the conduct of all Toastmasters activities.

Do you have something to say? Write it in 200 words or less, sign it with your name, address and club affiliation and send it to letters@toastmasters.org.

Not Just an Average Joe

I read the article "Make Them Laugh" by William H. Stevenson, III (August) with a big smile – especially the story of Mr. Bruce Jin. I was fortunate enough to win the District 27 Humorous Speech Contest in the fall of 2009. Believe it or not, I had a very similar idea to Mr. Jin's. My speech, "Recognized by All Americans," was about living life with the last name of "Joe."

Like Mr. Jin, I am Chinese. My speech highlighted how my grandfather immigrated to the United States in the 1920s. One of his first tasks was to select a recognizable surname that could be spelled in English. He chose "Joe" since it sounded like our Chinese surname. But he certainly didn't anticipate the many stories that would result for future generations.

I will be using Mr. Stevenson's article as a focal point in a Toastmasters Leadership Institute workshop I will give on how to deliver a humorous speech.

Edmond Joe, ACB, CL • Ashburn Professional Speakers
Falls Church, Virginia

When Sharing and Conversing Collide

Patricia Fry's article, "Become a Better Conversationalist" (August), spoke to me because I struggle with so many of the poor-communication points mentioned. I am especially guilty of "She talks on and on and on... she chimes in with a story of her own."

I've tried to break this annoying habit for several years (still working on it as evidenced by writing this letter). From my perspective, the author's explanation of her friend who does this – "She doesn't care what you have to say" – doesn't quite apply to me. I tell my story because I want you to know that I understand and empathize. That is my reason, though not an excuse to continue this bad habit.

As for the third point, "He doesn't contribute to the conversation," my husband often is talked over for the reasons stated. I ask people to wait a minute, and I explain that my husband was getting ready to say something. Or I bring the conversation back to him so he can share his thought.

Lenet Compton, ACB • Masters Toastmasters club
Overland Park, Kansas

Don't Fret Over Faux Pas

Having lived most of my life outside the United States (40 of my 67 years), I am naturally attracted to articles about cultural differences. I am usually disappointed by them because they consistently fail to mention the most important aspect of encountering "foreigners." That is: They aren't the foreigners. You are.

It has been my happy experience (with rare exception) that once people recognize you as new to their culture, they give you wide latitude for unintentional faux pas. If it is a minor error, they probably won't mention it. If it is more substantial, they will good-naturedly explain it to you so you won't be embarrassed by doing it again.

Learning and observing cultural customs will indeed help you avoid making awkward mistakes. But there is no need to become obsessive about it. Your interlocutor is unlikely to take offense. Quite the contrary; most people love explaining the customs and idiosyncrasies of their culture to others. An awkward mistake may very well be the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Philip Yaffe • Claddagh Toastmasters • Brussels, Belgium

Toastmasters: the Best Experience Ever

Originally from East Germany, immigrating to West Germany before the wall came down, moving

to New Zealand about 14 years ago and joining Toastmasters four months ago, my life has changed so much. Thanks, Toastmasters, for helping me create more positive change in my life.

Our Excel Toastmasters club, here at the Mount in Tauranga, in New Zealand, is like a big welcoming family. Members are friendly and fun to be with and you get all the support you need.

With English as my second language, Toastmasters has given me a greater understanding and confidence to speak in public. I already have three speeches lined up for the next four weeks, with the biggest audience being 250 people, including a cooking demonstration in a large company!

I love reading the *Toastmaster* magazine from cover to cover – it's so interesting and alive. Toastmasters membership should be compulsory in schools to help students from an early age build up their confidence to speak in front of other people, and develop communication skills to use their whole life.

Steffi Mueller • Excel Toastmasters
Mount Maunganui, New Zealand

Standing Up for Keeping It Clean

Thanks for the great articles in the September issue about using clean humor. It really came at the perfect time. I started stand-up [comedy] about a month ago and have been onstage three times. The last couple days I've been thinking about not going back because everyone else uses dirty humor. I don't talk or even think that way. After reading your article I am going to work on being funny with clean humor and show the others that it can be done.

Steve Jans • Westend Club • Billings, Montana

Awards or not, this member is a winner in Toastmasters.

Why I Stay

† Since joining Toastmasters in 2002, I have given more than 30 prepared speeches and entered numerous speech contests. I can't win a title or a "Best Speaker" ribbon if my life depends on it. I still keep speaking.

I have read stories in the *Toastmaster* magazine about how improved speaking skills enable members to land better jobs and realize their dreams. My income has gone down by 10 percent and I don't know what my dreams are. I still keep coming.

I have given speeches and Table Topics presentations peppered with plenty of ums, ahs and you knows. Many times my cheeks burn red and cold sweat beads pop out on my forehead. I still keep at it.

Why? Because since joining Toastmasters, I have gone from being unable to speak in front of a group without a script to being able to (mostly) give five- to 15-minute speeches without so much as an index card to guide me. My sonic-speed vocal cadence has slowed to a rate accessible to the human ear.

There was a time when I wanted to quit. Then I remembered that at my first three club meetings, I could not utter a word. Now I regularly stand up and speak off the cuff as a participant in Table Topics. Making announcements at the lectern as a club officer poses no problem.

While my professional situation is currently in tatters, the practice of speaking and thinking on my feet allows me to better articulate my thoughts. I may be between jobs at the moment, but I sound and act like a professional.

With Toastmasters helping me take the fear out of talking, my self-esteem improved. Now I can stand up for myself – firmly but gently – in personal and work situations. When I felt wronged or criticized in the past, I wouldn't say anything – not because I felt I deserved such treatment, but because I couldn't think of an appropriate response fast enough. Now I can, thanks to Toastmasters.

many of my fellow club members have. I have no desire to become a life coach or a corporate trainer. My reason for joining was simple: I wanted to become a better public speaker for those life events that require it. Should I have to give a eulogy, speak out about a community issue or give a toast at a birthday party, I wanted to be prepared.

If called on, I now readily get up to speak in front of a large group.

“Even if you can't join the best in the world at the International Speech Contest, you'll still seem like a great orator to the average person.”

By taking on leadership activities within my club, my confidence has grown. I can even facilitate communication among people with opposing viewpoints. I am not afraid to gently push people to do what they need to do. Through the process of delivering evaluations, I can now express my thoughts diplomatically as opposed to too bluntly.

Every time I give a speech, I am pushing myself toward my goals, whether it is another degree of certification or becoming a better speaker.

My creativity has blossomed through brainstorming sessions for speech topics. My brain power has expanded by doing research for my speeches. My comfort level has increased as I have shared my own thoughts, interests and experiences in the gentle, supportive atmosphere of my club.

I joined Toastmasters not to become a professional speaker, as

I'm still far from perfect, but I've improved enough so that a non-Toastmaster cannot see my flaws. That is one of the hidden benefits of Toastmasters: Even if you can't join the best in the world at the International Speech Contest, you'll seem like a great orator to the average person. To everyone who tells me, "You sounded great up there," I tell my secret: "Join Toastmasters."

I have just completed my Advanced Communicator Bronze award and will now become the president of my club and join my area's advanced club. I realize I'm in Toastmasters for the long haul.

Competing at the International Speech Contest is not what I hoped to get out of my Toastmasters experience – but you never know. 2011 might be my year! †

Tracy Keller, ACB, is a member of the Back Talk Toastmasters in Peabody, Massachusetts.

Muslim computer scientist promotes gender equality.

A Pioneer in Pakistan

When Maliha Elahi started a computer-run bulletin board service in an ultra-conservative part of Pakistan in the early 1990s, the Toastmaster used her young son's name to conduct business, because at the time, and even today in some parts of the country, it was unheard of for women to even speak to men.

"People couldn't know that a woman was running the business, so all of my dealings with the company were conducted by mail," says Elahi of the service, which con-

[a pilgrimage to Mecca] with my son two years back."

In 2008, she chartered a Toastmasters club in Islamabad, the country's capital. The Islamabad Toastmasters has 35 members – both male and female – and has earned Distinguished Club status each of its first two years.

Elahi's experience with public speaking dates back to the mid-1990s. After passing on the bulletin board service to a colleague, she took a job maintaining an e-mail server. "At that job I was urged to

remain behind the veil," says Elahi of the multicultural, ethnically diverse society. "Peshawar, where I worked in the tax department, is ultra-conservative. There many women walk three steps behind men, and most don't drive their own cars. I've never walked behind a man, because it's demeaning and there's no logical reason for it.

"When I worked for the tax department, I was quite rebellious and insisted on driving my own Jeep. I got a lot of attention because I was the only female driver in the city at the time." Her rebellious ways provoke strong reactions from people close to her. Elahi says her independence has alienated her own mother. "We have parted ways," she says. Her siblings are also confounded by her nonconformity: "My sister to this day says she can't understand me."

On the other hand, Elahi notes, she has friends and family who are supportive of her independence.

Struggles and Perseverance

While many men in the tax department accepted Elahi, she struggled with harassment from some who refused to take her seriously. She resigned in 2000 and moved on to work for the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) where she served as head of Data Warehousing Directorate for the entire country of Pakistan. That position required her to give presentations to high-ranking visitors about NADRA's state-of-the-art technology. In 2003 she also began training individuals on project management.

"I was restrained from doing much in life because of social taboos but I broke those taboos."

stituted a pre-Internet information portal and social-networking site.

Elahi read about how to start a bulletin board service in an American computer magazine. Armed with a master's degree in computer science, the young mother and recent widow ignored custom and ran the business. Over the next 20 years in Pakistan, Elahi forged a successful career in computer science and project management training and has worked toward expanding gender equality.

Elahi is among the majority of Pakistanis who are Muslim. She describes herself as "devout."

"During Ramadan I have collective prayers at home," she says. "I struggle but manage to pray five times a day. I performed *hajji*

hold weekly public information sessions regarding the Internet and e-mail," she says. "During my first presentation I was really nervous, and the session turned out to be excruciatingly boring. Afterward, a co-worker who had fallen asleep during my talk critiqued me and offered tips for making the session more exciting. I took his advice, and the presentations got much better."

Elahi stayed at that job for a few years and then worked for the government's tax department, where she made waves expressing exactly how she felt about the treatment of women in Pakistan.

"There are some areas of the country where females wear trousers and drive, but in other parts of Pakistan, women still

“Training took some getting used to, but once I got comfortable, I learned that I had a knack for public speaking,” she says.

Elahi eventually started her own training company, Business Essentials, which she ran for several years, serving as a consultant to a wide range of businesses.

Suhail Iqbal worked with Elahi at NADRA and praises her professionalism and speaking ability. “NADRA was developed from scratch, and Maliha was a pioneer member,” he says. “Her straightforward approach made it possible for NADRA to have an immaculate Data Warehouse that is still functional and serving the entire population of Pakistan.

“Her personality is imposing and charismatic, and when you supplement that with her exceptional speaking skills, she has a magnetic, motivational appeal that has allowed her to achieve great heights in her career.”

Elahi stumbled onto Toastmasters in December 2007, when she was at a conference in the city of Lahore in Pakistan to present a paper. There she met a Pakistani man who had moved to America but was attending the conference; Elahi shared with him how boring she thought the conference speeches were. “He told me about Toastmasters, and I remember thinking how funny the word sounded,” she recalls. “I wrote it on a napkin and looked the organization up on the Internet when I got home.”

Elahi felt that her community would benefit from Toastmasters, so she decided to start a club in Islamabad. She found one active club in the country, located in Karachi and asked for its guidance and support. At the end of January 2008, the Islamabad Toastmasters held its first meeting. Guests from the Karachi club attended and demonstrated how to conduct a meeting. Elahi served as club presi-



dent that first year and has since helped charter other clubs, including one in Lahore.

Leading the Way

Mohsin Lodhi, the 2009-2010 president of the Islamabad Toastmasters, says Elahi’s leadership has been key to the club’s development. “She often comes up with creative ideas that encourage members to [stretch] themselves,” he says. “Her mentoring to the executive committee... enables members to excel in their professional and personal lives. And she clearly promoted gender equality by opening up the club to men and women.”

Elahi regularly mentors younger women, giving them career advice in a variety of areas, especially when it relates to gaining equal treatment in the workforce. And in her current position as business process manager for Teradata Pakistan, she is involved in the Women of Teradata Pakistan initiative, which is designed to promote gender equality.

Iqbal, the former colleague from NADRA, notes how Elahi has helped

women in the workplace. “She has always promoted participation by other females and introduced several talented women to the field who have grown and progressed through her efforts,” he says.

When Elahi worked for the government’s tax department, she fulfilled a lifelong dream by earning her pilot’s license. “I would go in for lessons early in the morning before I went to the office, and some of my most beautiful moments have been up in the Cessna,” she says. “You realize when you’re suspended in midair how you can accomplish just about anything you want.

“I was restrained from doing much in life because of social taboos, but I broke those taboos by taking flying lessons in a place like Peshawar. The experience taught me that my dreams can have wings.”

Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California and a longtime contributor to the *Toastmaster*. You can reach her at Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com.

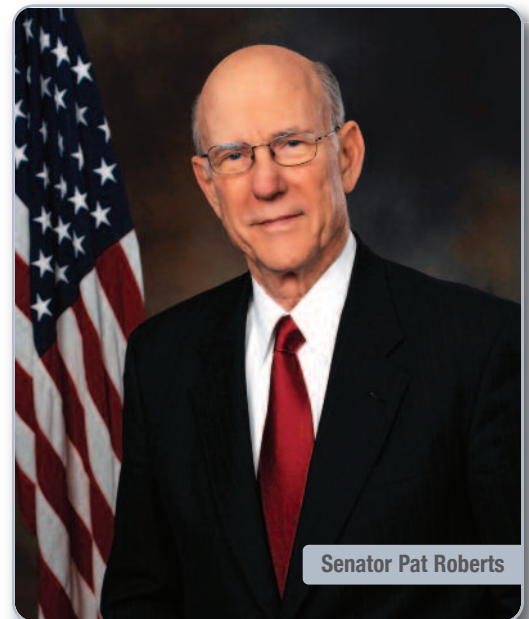


Politicians Tap Into Their Club Experience

By Paul Sterman

Lawmakers practice their leadership and communication skills every day.

For three decades, Pat Roberts has deftly navigated the byways of power and public service in Washington, D.C. The three-term United States senator from Kansas displays his communication skills in myriad ways, whether speaking in the Senate chamber on Capitol Hill, addressing his home-state constituents at community events or debating hot-button issues as a member of the U.S. Senate Financial Committee.





◀ City councilman Danny Nguyen (center) leads a meeting.

Yet there was a time when Roberts was a novice at public speaking – and Toastmasters provided his training. He first joined a club nearly 50 years ago, when he was a United States Marine stationed at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The club was located at the military base. Later, when Roberts began his career in politics, he joined a club in Washington, D.C.



Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle

Toastmasters supplied a foundation of skills that greatly benefited him as a political leader. “The biggest thing Toastmasters will do for you,” says Roberts, “is that if you have something to say, then by golly, you feel you have the confidence to stand up on your own two feet and say it – and say it well.”

Other civic leaders say Toastmasters has helped them hone skills pivotal to their success. Toastmasters members ranging from high-powered professional politicians such as **Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle** (see article on page 12) to newly elected city council members credit their Toastmasters experience for helping them with not only giving and writing speeches, but also with campaigning and connecting to audiences in diverse settings.

Lingle says her Toastmasters training “helped me get elected mayor of Maui, and then to get elected governor of Hawaii.”

In her club, she notes, she received supportive feedback at a time when she was still developing her speaking skills. The lessons obviously paid off: The highly popular legislator, whose second four-year term ends this month, is known as an articulate and poised speaker, whether she is making a live TV appearance, participating in a political debate or promoting Hawaii as a travel destination.



Congressional Candidate Fred Johnson

Fred Johnson, who ran for a U.S. congressional seat in West Michigan in November, says when he gives a political speech or participates in a candidate debate, he employs speaking tools he honed in his clubs, such as precise body language, potent pauses and proper enunciation. “My Toastmasters skills have been indispensable to me,” says Johnson, whose home club is the Haworth/Holland Toastmasters in Holland, Michigan.

“Toastmasters helps people in every profession, but especially in politics.”

–Past International President Gary Schmidt

The award-winning history professor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, was one of 81 semifinalists in this year’s Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. He says he learned a great deal by competing at such a high level, adding that the storytelling techniques used by expert Toastmasters are crucial for someone in public service. Voters don’t want politicians to steamroll them with a long list of facts and statistics – they want you to make a human connection, says Johnson, noting that the best way to do that is to tell stories about real people.

Toastmaster Achieves Pioneering Feat

Danny Nguyen was elected in May to the City Council in Missouri City, an area just south of Houston, Texas. He is the first Asian-American councilman in the city’s history, according to the *Houston Chronicle* newspaper. Nguyen escaped communist Vietnam with his father at age 15, and then spent the next two years in refugee camps before arriving in Texas.

He joined Toastmasters 10 years ago. “I was terrified to speak in public,” recalls Nguyen. But the constant

practice speaking and filling club meeting roles dramatically improved his confidence. When the 43-year-old commercial real estate developer ran for the council seat, he used his communication and leadership skills to connect with voters.

“People’s perception of you is based on how you present yourself,” he says. A member of the Articulators Club in Missouri City, Nguyen says effective campaigning “all boils down to the ability to speak – and, more importantly, to speak on your feet. Table Topics skills are extremely relevant to real-life situations, and they were very helpful in my political campaigning.”

With a sense of wonder and gratitude, he reflects on his dramatic journey over the past decade, from painfully nervous speaker to city leader. “I would not be where I am today without Toastmasters,” says Nguyen. “This has been such a transformation for me.”

Lawmaker Appreciates Laughter

Senator Roberts, a fourth-generation Kansan, is well-known in political circles for his good-natured sense of humor and droll wit. Voted “Funniest Senator” in 2005 and 2006 in an informal poll of Capitol Hill staffers, he says it was in Toastmasters that he realized how to employ humor in speeches. Perhaps more significantly – considering the sensitivities in politics – Toastmasters showed him “when to use [humor] and when not to use it,” adds Roberts, who joined the Capitol Hill Toastmasters in the late 1960s.

“If you can use humor to your advantage, it really throws your opponent off or makes your point,” Roberts says.

Lucille Kring, a former Anaheim (California) City Councilwoman who vied for a seat in the California State Senate in November, also points to the value of Toastmasters. In the mid 1990s, she joined the now-defunct Anaheim Board of Realtors club. She says Table Topics practice, in particular, was of great value when she later went into politics. Kring served on the Anaheim council from 1998 to 2002 and 2006 to 2010.

The benefits started on her first night as a council member, as members of the local media interviewed her before the city council meeting. Anaheim’s Public Information Officer stood nearby, watching protectively as the political newcomer fielded the queries.

When she was done, recounts Kring, the city official said to her, “I was going to help you with your delivery, but you don’t need any help.”



“So that was a real compliment.”

These days, Kring is constantly delivering speeches and says her oratory is free of distracting filler words like “ah,” “um” and “you know” – another bonus from her Toastmasters days.

Top Toastmasters Officers Have Also Thrived in Politics

A couple of Toastmasters International’s top leaders have an impressive background in politics: **First Vice**

President John Lau

and Immediate Past International President Gary Schmidt. In June 2009, Lau was elected a Supreme Council member of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) of Malaysia, a component party of the Malaysian federal government. It’s a prestigious position: The Council is the highest decision-making body in the PPP, and members serve five-year terms.



Six months later, Lau also became party chairman for the state of Sarawak, one of the largest of Malaysia’s 13 states, where his main duty is to spur party growth. He regularly calls on his communication and leadership skills to give presentations, meet with groups and conduct one-on-one discussions with residents.

So far Lau has had great success: 40 new PPP branches have formed in the state. “Linking the people, the PPP and the Malaysian government is like building bridges,” he says. “The inspirational and persuasive skills I have learned in Toastmasters are of great help to me.”

Twenty years ago, Lau was working in the sales and marketing department of a German multinational company – a job that required him to give presentations to clients. Wanting to improve his speaking skills, he joined Toastmasters.

The organization’s emphasis on self-improvement and helping fellow members has enabled him to flourish as a Malaysian business leader and politician, he says.

“The communication and leadership programs in Toastmasters have groomed me to listen attentively to the people’s needs,” says Lau, DTM, a member of the Kuching Mandarin and Connections clubs, both in the city of Kuching in Sarawak. “[PPP] leaders need to maintain excellent contacts with the [party] members, the people, the press, the government and our leaders.”

PIP Knows His Public Service

Toastmasters Past International President Gary Schmidt, DTM, is not a politician himself, but he is well-versed in the world of politics. He served as a top aide to two United States senators from his home state of Oregon: Mark Hatfield and Gordon Smith. Schmidt says his Toastmasters training helped him develop skills in areas such as speechwriting, impromptu speaking and leadership, which led to increased professional success.

“Every leadership role I’ve had in Toastmasters has helped me in my role in politics,” Schmidt says. “Toastmasters helps people in every profession, but especially in politics. Leadership is an essential component in public service and as many people have said, you can be a communicator and not a leader – but to be a leader you have to be a communicator.”

Schmidt, a longtime member of the Clackamas Stepping Stones club in Clackamas, Oregon, says Toastmasters taught him that speeches should be written with directness and economy of language, streamlined messages, lively phrasing and snappy pacing.

This was a huge help when he started writing speeches for Senator Hatfield. “I knew how to craft a speech



that is well received by the ear,” he says. “The typical speechwriter writes for the eye; they are really good writers but not necessarily speakers... A more effective speechwriter writes for the ear – he knows that a speech is heard.”

Now the public affairs manager for Clackamas County, Schmidt also benefited from Table Topics. He recounts an event – what he refers to as his “worst speaking experience at a town hall meeting” – where he was representing Senator Hatfield and an audience member asked him a question. “I wasn’t sure of the answer, so I panicked and tried to make it up. That was a bad mistake. They called me on it. I learned a lesson from that experience: You have to speak about what you know.”

With the help of Table Topics practice, he became more confident in those types of situations, developing a clear, effective approach to answering questions off the cuff. “You keep your cool, calm down, take a breath, take a moment to pause and think about what the appropriate response is. Then you address the question.”

Toastmasters Campaigns Pay Off

Dan Winterburn, DTM, says his experience campaigning for various Toastmasters offices throughout the years was a big asset when he campaigned for – and won – a seat on the Jacksonville City Council in Oregon. It helped him with campaign strategies and with training and leading his campaign team. The listening skills he developed also helped him connect with voters, says Winterburn, a member of the Rogue Valley Toastmasters in Medford, Oregon.



“You listen to people to find out what their needs are, what their concerns are,” says Winterburn. “As you get to know people, you get a feeling for their community, just like you do when you give a speech to an audience.”


The Toastmaster says his speaking skills set him apart from other candidates in the community forums: By giving well-organized presentations, he made maximum use of the five minutes allotted to each candidate.

Now those speaking abilities are paying off at council meetings. When a difficult issue will be discussed, Winterburn takes plenty of time to prepare his remarks and explain his decision to audience members. “It’s much like preparing a speech for your club,” says the councilman.

Mr. Roberts Goes to Washington

In the late 1960s, Pat Roberts went to Washington, D.C., to work as an administrative assistant for then-Kansas Senator Frank Carlson. He soon joined the newly formed Capitol Hill Toastmasters, a group of mostly high-level congressional staffers.

In Toastmasters, Roberts says he learned something very valuable about speechwriting: “You learn how to be succinct.”

“Toastmasters keeps you on your toes,” says Roberts, 74, who served eight terms as a congressman before being elected to the Senate in 1996. “If you want to be a good communicator – and lord knows we need that in our country – then I think it would be very helpful to consider joining Toastmasters.” 

Paul Serman is an associate editor of the *Toastmaster* magazine and a member of Le Gourmet Toastmasters in Costa Mesa, California.



Governor Linda Lingle is joined by members of the Hawaii Republican Party Toastmasters, including the author of this article, Jason Garrett, third from left.

Linda Lingle speaks at Open House for new club in Honolulu.

By Jason Garrett

Hawaii Governor Touts Toastmasters

If you scan the list of famous Toastmasters (a list you can find on the Toastmasters International Web site), you will see actors, former astronauts, CEOs and politicians. Among the latter group, you will see Linda Lingle, the governor of Hawaii.

She joined Toastmasters in the early 1980s, when serving as a member of the Maui County Council in Hawaii. She also helped start a Toastmasters club at the Maui County government when she was elected mayor of that county, which encompasses five islands. Governor Lingle has spoken often about the benefits of Toastmasters and credits the program for much of her success in politics.

The two-term Republican governor has encouraged local political candidates and party leaders to polish their speaking skills by joining a Toastmasters club. To answer her call, the Hawaii Republican Party (HRP) officially chartered the HRP Toastmasters in January 2010. As the

Honolulu-based club became firmly established over the next six months, its members invited Governor Lingle to speak at the club's first Open House – and were thrilled when she accepted their invitation.

More than 50 guests attended the August 26th meeting in downtown Honolulu. The audience included Toastmasters leaders in Hawaii such as District 49 Governor Anne Myers, Toastmasters from local clubs, and Republican Party leaders and candidates in Hawaii.

Unabashed Toastmasters Supporter

Governor Lingle greeted the audience with a warm “*Aloha!* It’s not

a secret that when it comes to Toastmasters, I am an unabashed supporter and participant.” Because everyday aspects of life require effective communication, Toastmasters “is the best investment that you can ever make,” she said.

The governor went on to outline the top three benefits she gained from the organization – benefits that not only helped her ascend to the highest political offices in Hawaii but that anyone can acquire as a Toastmaster.

Benefit #1: Gaining Confidence in Your Skills

Confidence comes from practicing, and ultimately mastering, the speaking skills learned in Toastmasters, the governor said, stressing that these skills can be used in any setting, whether you “communicate with a small group, a large group or at the Republican National Convention.” Two skills, in particular, are critical to master.

The first skill is to **always consider your audience when giving a speech.** “The speech is not about you, it is about them,” the governor said, noting that she has learned to adjust her speeches to accommodate her audiences. “I make adjustments because some people like to hear a fiery kind of speech, but some people are too overwhelmed by that – they would like something a little calmer. You’re not changing your message, but how you deliver it can change from group to group. It’s a respect for your audience that I think is so important.”

The other skill is to **know when to stop talking.** Speakers often have difficulty wrapping up their speeches; Governor Lingle said they need to work out their conclusions long before they take the stage. This doesn’t mean that the ending can’t be altered or adjusted for a particular situation. A speaker needs to be “a little bit flexible, but [he or she] still needs to know how to wrap up,” Governor Lingle said.

Benefit #2: Interaction with Club Members

Toastmasters clubs offer a supportive environment for growth, and all members are trying to improve themselves and help each other in the process, the governor said. Giving speeches and being evaluated in this kind of environment helps you improve: “You don’t have to worry that people are going to laugh at you if you make a mistake. Instead, they’re going to help you to recognize how you can be better.”

Such positive and constructive feedback is invaluable. As Governor Lingle pointed out, interacting with fellow club members is a great learning experience.

Benefit #3: Learning to Think Clearly

In order to move or inspire an audience, speakers must prepare their presentations in advance; otherwise they might find themselves stringing together comments that don’t make

sense. Toastmasters teaches people the right way to do this, said the governor – to think in a clear and logical manner so they can properly convey what they mean to their audiences. “You can’t get up in front of your fellow Toastmasters if you haven’t thought about your speech in advance,” she noted.

Concluding her speech, Governor Lingle reiterated just how important Toastmasters has been to her. “I have a deep and abiding love for this organization and I encourage everyone who is even thinking about running for office to join Toastmasters,” she said. “It will give you a level of confidence that you wouldn’t already have; it will

give you a built-in support base among your fellow Toastmasters, and it will enable you to stand up and be effective in front of any audience and communicate ideas that are worthwhile.”

Editor’s Note: *Governor Linda Lingle, whose second term ends this month, was ineligible to run in Hawaii’s 2010 gubernatorial election because of term limits.*

Jason Garrett is a member of the HRP Toastmasters club in Honolulu, Hawaii, and a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy. Reach Jason at jmgarretts.mailbox@gmail.com.

Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle inspires new Toastmasters club

By Jason Garrett

Editor’s Note: *Toastmasters International does not support any one political party or philosophy. However, political parties or government agencies are free to form clubs for the benefit of their employees or members.*

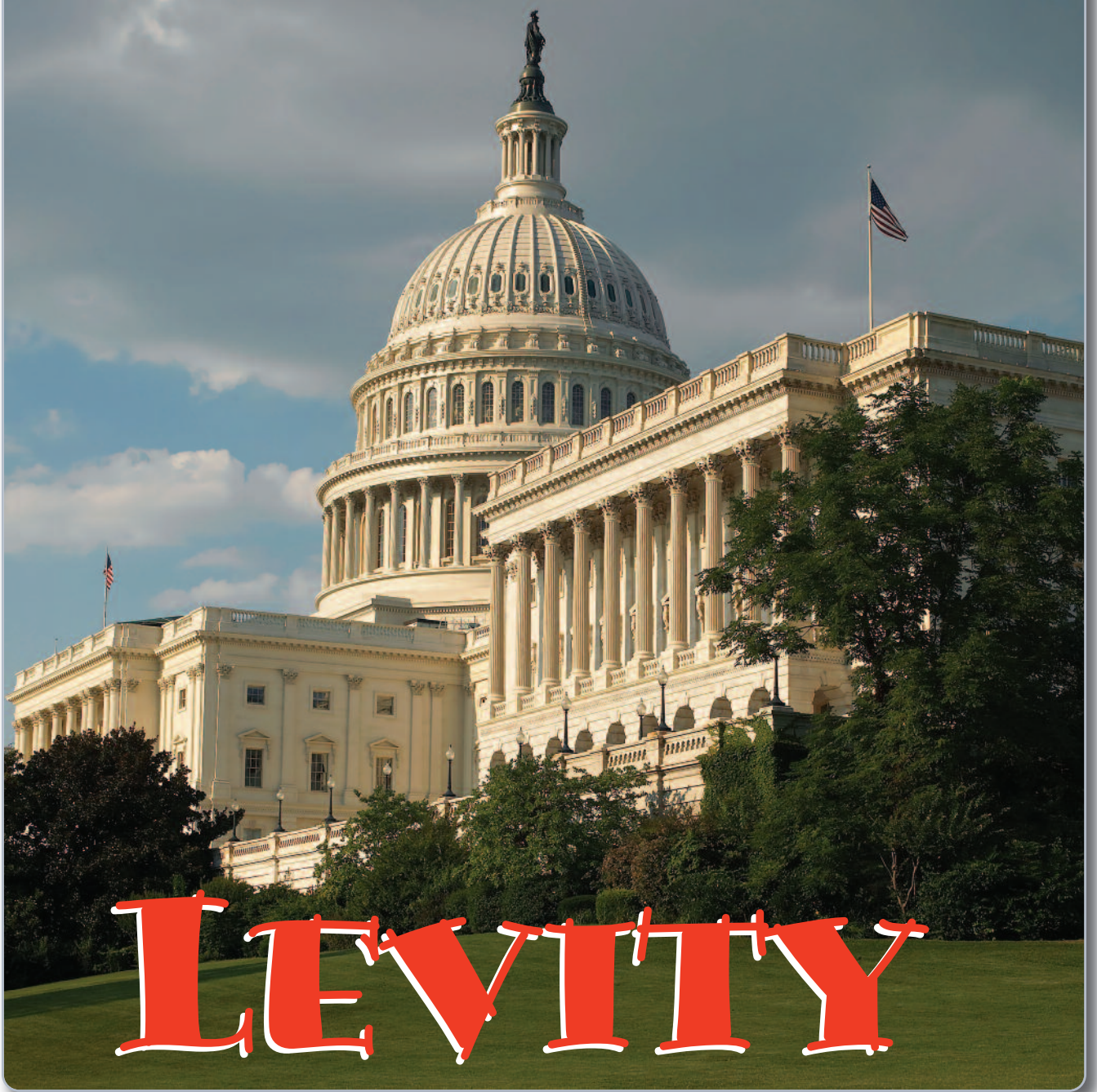
At the first Open House hosted by the Hawaii Republican Party Toastmasters, club member Jonah Kaaui – chairman of the Hawaii Republican Party – spoke about what inspired the creation of the club.

“I had heard a story that Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle had mastered the art of communication from something called Toastmasters. She had told [those in Hawaii government] that in order to be master communicators and leaders in the state of Hawaii, they needed to be Toastmasters,” he said.

So last year Kaaui followed her advice and joined the First Hawaiian Center Toastmasters in Honolulu. “I was introduced into an incredible world where people were encouraging, people were nurturing and people wanted me to be better than I was when I came in,” he said.

Because of that experience, he wanted other party members and political candidates to reap the same benefits and helped found the Hawaii Republican Party (HRP) Toastmasters, which chartered this past January with 22 members. Kaaui was the club’s first president.

At the Open House, the HRP Toastmasters presented Governor Lingle with a certificate acknowledging her as the inspiration for its club. She was also invited into the club as an honorary member.



on Capitol Hill



The U.S. Senate Toastmasters club offers a break from politics.

By Christine Clapp, DTM

When visitors attend a meeting of the U.S. Senate Toastmasters club in Washington, D.C., they are often surprised by the club's informality and sense of humor. As a visitor recently put it: "When you go to Capitol Hill, you expect it to be a suit-and-tie affair. It was great to see the personalities of your club members come out in today's meeting – you have some comedians and know how to have fun."



This observation distills the club's essence and uniqueness. About half of its membership are employees of the United States Senate (though none are senators themselves); however, the club offers a non-partisan escape from the demands of work in the nation's capital. The Senate Toastmasters club conducts business with humor and flexibility. Members come here to improve their communication skills and enjoy camaraderie – not to score political points.

"We shy away from politics not just because it's the tacit understanding of the club, but because we want to escape the office and political discussions for the hour and talk about hobbies, current events, our families or whatever," explains Erica Stern, director of constituent communications for U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota.

Tradition, Protocol and Laughter

Founded in 1972, the Senate club has included many outstanding speakers over the years. One reason visitors might be expecting a suit-and-tie affair is that club meetings take place in the elegant Russell Senate Office Building, across the street from the U.S. Capitol Building. The 1908 structure is the oldest of all the Senate office buildings.

"It's a beautiful building – the marble, the architecture – with a feeling of tradition and history, where national issues have been debated and decided," says Pete Weissman, an award-winning speechwriter who belonged to the club while he worked for a senator.

In addition to meeting in an impressive setting, the Senate club conducts business formally, carefully following Toastmasters protocol. "Professionalism and formality are things that reflect the institution in which the club resides, and that formality is represented in how the club runs meetings," says Brandon Hirsch, director of operations in the office of Senator Dorgan.

Formality may play a role, but a key to the club's success is that there is also plenty of fun. "A huge number of speeches focus on humor, which many people wouldn't expect," notes Hirsch.

A few examples from recent months: an ode to American cowboys delivered by a member after a trip to Texas; a humorous exploration of the benefits and social consequences of not owning a television; one member's self-deprecating tale of succeeding in life despite constantly being below average; and the toast a club member practiced for his brother's upcoming wedding that chronicled both tender and hilarious moments from their youth.

Away from the Fray

In Washington, D.C., the very place where partisans come to join the political fray, the non-political atmosphere of the Senate Toastmasters club is refreshing. Weissman, who now operates his own communications strategy firm in Atlanta, Georgia, refers to the club as "a non-political oasis in an institution that has become very partisan." For club members, the common goal of improving communication and leadership skills supersedes political and ideological differences.

"So much time in [political] campaigns is spent demonizing Washington, bureaucrats and Congress as a band of people with horns," says club member Barry Piatt, DTM. "But we're regular people who happen to work on Capitol Hill. Maybe we're a little better informed on issues than the average Joe, but not necessarily. Despite our different and strong viewpoints, we all get along just fine. And one of the reasons is that we don't talk politics."

Club member Michael Keister recounts an experience that tested this policy. During a time of heightened partisan

"[The club is] a non-political oasis in an institution that has become very partisan."

– Pete Weissman



sensitivity following the contested 2000 presidential election, a visitor to the club prefaced his Table Topics response with an apology for his political leanings.

Recalls Keister: "After expressing his thoughts on the matter at hand, I think he was surprised to find that there were no recriminations, no censure, no withering, no condescending criticism, no heckling or jeering or barbed rebuttals. The room sat and listened patiently, attentively and politely to his thoughts."

"I rather think he might have been slightly disappointed!"

Hirsch, who as club president last year led the group to President's Distinguished status, says the club provides a respite from the neck-breaking work pace in a congressional office. "Anyone who has worked on Capitol Hill can agree that it's a high-stress, high-demand atmosphere," he says. "Dealing with these demands requires focus, but having a place like Toastmasters to talk about family and to exercise your sense of humor is important. It gives a much-needed mental and physical break."



Membership is Wide-Ranging

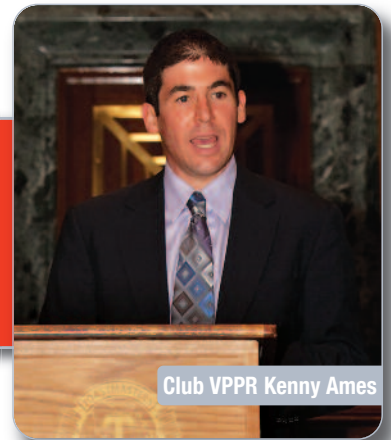
The U.S. Senate Toastmasters is a diverse group, with many of its members coming from outside the Senate. They typically fall into one of two camps: former Senate staffers who now work off Capitol Hill, and people who have no professional connection to the U.S. Senate. For both of these groups, the club's interesting membership and tradition of speaking excellence are draws.

"I've been a bit surprised by how many members come to the Senate club who don't even work on [Capitol] Hill," admits club member Kellie Donnelley, who serves as deputy chief counsel for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Philip D. Moeller is an example of a club member who once worked on Capitol Hill, and now does not, but still returns to the Hill to attend the club. His current job is as a commissioner on the U.S. Federal

new to politics on a national level. For example, congressional staff members develop the communication skills they need to field constituent telephone calls and take visitors on tours of the U.S. Capitol Building; legislative staff gain confidence to brief their senator and others on issues and legislation in their areas of expertise; and communications staff learn to craft effective speeches for their senator, give useful and diplomatic feedback on speeches and interviews, and respond to impromptu questions from journalists.

It's not surprising that the Senate club is home to several seasoned members who have spent years mastering the art of communication – both in their profession and through Toastmasters. That's one of the things that makes club meetings so exciting, says Evan Liddiard, a senior tax policy advisor



“Despite our different and strong viewpoints, we all get along just fine. And one of the reasons is that we don’t talk politics.”

– Barry Piatt

Energy Regulatory Commission. Moeller maintains his club membership because it is “a very good club with interesting people.”

“Interesting people move [to Washington, D.C.] from all over the nation, because it's the Major Leagues of public policy,” says Moeller, a former District 32 governor.

The Senate club's longest continuously serving member, Bonnie Maidak, DTM, is a bioinformatics data analyst at the National Institutes of Health, who commutes almost an hour each way to participate in club meetings. She has never worked on Capitol Hill, but joined the club when she moved to the area nine years ago because she figured it would have strong speakers. She was right.

Maidak says the number of advanced speakers in the club is due in part to “the self-selective nature of people who work on the Hill. Most have gone through debate competition or something similar, so their participation in Toastmasters isn't their first experience with public speaking.” She is quick to point out, however, that she has seen such members develop their presentation skills by participating in Toastmasters. And they build other key communication skills, like listening, evaluating and running a meeting. They also gain leadership experience.

For senate staff members, such benefits can directly impact their workplace success, especially those who are

to U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah.

“You can be evaluating a speech given by a person who writes speeches for one of America's top leaders, and you can share Table Topics with people who engage in political debates for a living,” says Liddiard.

Dealing with Challenges

The Senate club's location, traditions and members make it unique. But these assets pose two unique challenges:

- **Club members who work on Capitol Hill are all too often overwhelmed at the office and have a hard time attending club meetings regularly.** When the Senate is in session, they might be stuck at their desks monitoring legislative action or pulled into an impromptu meeting on a breaking issue. And during the few congressional work periods each year when the Senate recesses, they likely are traveling in their senator's home state for on-site meetings and events. These dynamics make it tricky to plan agendas for club meetings; the Toastmaster of the Day has to approach the role with a hearty dose of poise, flexibility and humor.
- **The club's membership is transitory due to the nature of work in a congressional office.** A high burnout rate causes



most staffers to leave Capitol Hill after a few years. Some staff positions, such as interns, are time-limited. Senate staff members also move across the nation – and return “home” after their stint in a Senate office. And there’s the lack of job security for congressional staff. On any given day, a club member could be out of a job because a senator loses re-election, retires or resigns.

Stop By for a Visit

Mirroring the accessibility of the Senate itself, visitors are welcome at club meetings. Members of the public can attend without prior arrangements by simply passing through a security checkpoint when entering the building. And the U.S. Senate Toastmasters truly is a club worth visiting. Though meetings aren’t necessarily a suit-and-tie affair, guests are awestruck by the club’s impressive location in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol Building; pleased by the light, convivial and non-political tone of meetings and grateful for the fascinating and hospitable friends they make.

On your next trip to Washington, D.C., visit the Senate club – and find some levity in the nation’s capital.

The U.S. Senate Toastmasters club meets on the first and third Friday of each month from noon to 1 p.m. in the Russell Senate Office Building, at Constitution Avenue and 1st Street, NE, Washington, D.C. For more information, visit

www.usenatetoastmasters.org/. 



Club treasurer Erica Stern

Christine Clapp, DTM, is a member of the U.S. Senate Toastmasters club and the president of Spoken with Authority. Her firm specializes in giving young professionals confidence as speakers. She can be reached at www.spokenwithauthority.com.

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By Jana Barnhill, PIP, AS

Earning Accredited Speaker status is a daunting journey that is well worth it.



Becoming a Pro

Toastmasters International is proud to welcome two new Accredited Speakers! Rochelle Rice from New York City, and Karen Twichell of Newport Beach, California, successfully completed the final round of judging at this year's International Convention. With this accomplishment, they joined a small group of only 60 Toastmasters who have obtained this lofty goal.

What is an Accredited Speaker? This is a person who possesses expert-level speaking skills. Many have made the jump from speaking for free to speaking for a fee, becoming professional speakers who work for themselves or for their employers. Sound appealing? If so, Toastmasters International encourages you to apply. But be prepared: Similar to advancing to the World Championship of Public Speaking, the journey is quite daunting.

Becoming an Accredited Speaker takes time and requires the completion of several prerequisites. First, you must earn your Advanced Communicator Bronze award. You must also deliver at least 25 speeches to non-Toastmasters groups within three years of your application. But don't let that deter you. The fact is, there are always groups within a community looking for speakers. Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, women's special interest groups and groups that support causes, such as cancer and diabetes research, are

often looking for individuals to speak either for them or to them. Perhaps you have the opportunity to make presentations at your work or place of worship. You simply have to make the effort to find those opportunities, contact the appropriate people and schedule the presentations.

A bigger challenge as you work through these 25 speeches is having to incorporate *each type of presentation skill*, including informative, persuasive, motivational/inspirational, entertaining/humorous and seminar/discussion leader. This is one of the differences between the Accredited Speaker Program and competing in a speech contest, where you can focus on one skill, such as in the Humorous Speech Contest. But in return for your efforts, you'll "reach the height of excellence in public speaking skills," as the Accredited Speaker Program Brochure and Application points out. This form (Item #1208) is available for download at www.toastmasters.org/asapp.asp.

Submitting Your Application

Once those prerequisites have been met, it is time for you to submit your application, which is due to World Headquarters on November 1, 2011. While this is nearly a year away, it's a good idea to start planning now in order to fulfill all the requirements. Among other things, the application requires you to send an audiotape or CD of a live 15- to 45-minute presentation to a non-Toastmasters audience. That time limit is another big difference between vying to become an Accredited Speaker and competing in a speech contest, where your speech is limited to seven minutes or less.

Your audio, which is sent to a panel of judges, is another true test of your abilities as a speaker. Since you do not have the benefit of engaging the judges face-to-face, you must rely completely on the strength of your ability to transcend the need to be seen. Think of listening to an audio book. Have you ever begun listening to one, then turned it off because it did not grab you from the beginning and hold your attention to the end? Similarly, your vocal projection is crucial on this audiotape or CD.

If you pass that first level of judging, congratulations! You're *almost* there. You must then prepare for round two: a live, new presentation delivered at the next International



Karen Twitchell



Rochelle Rice

Convention, as Rochelle and Karen did this past August.

As happens in speech contests, when you are trying to become an Accredited Speaker, you don't always walk away with the trophy. This was Karen Twitchell's second attempt; she had spoken in the final round during the 2009 International Convention and did not pass.

"I had worked so hard for this and I was very disappointed," recalls Karen. "My fellow Toastmasters urged me to try again in 2010. My family and non-Toastmasters friends told me not to torture myself by trying again."

Past International President and fellow Accredited Speaker Robert Barnhill understands her dilemma. He also did not pass on his first attempt and says, "Becoming an Accredited Speaker requires not only having skills, but a willingness to adapt and change. It doesn't matter how good *you* think you are. If you don't pass, there is a reason and you have to be willing to learn what it is and make the necessary changes so you can pass the next time."

This is exactly what Karen did. "After a couple of months of getting over hurt feelings, I made the deci-

sion to try again." She worked hard, reviewing the tape of her 2009 presentation, seeking advice and making the needed changes. It paid off!

Likewise, Rochelle found each level of the Accredited Speaker Program challenging. "But once I got my message clear, I knew I was on my way," she says. As a former professional dancer, she benefited from her dance training. "I chose my clothes, practiced onstage at 7 a.m. in my heels and practiced my breathing and stretching. I felt like a dancer again, getting ready

Tackling the Ultimate Challenge

So yes, it is a daunting process: 25 outside speeches, a live recording, a live presentation during the International Convention and training like an athlete. But all the Accredited Speakers I know agree that this program was the ultimate challenge in taking their skills -to the highest level possible. It dared us to ask the question, -"Am I good enough to be a *professional* speaker?"

Accredited Speaker Ross Mackay, from Aurora, Ontario, Canada,

"I do not treat one designation greater than the other. The World Champion of Public Speaking represents performance at a moment in time against a group of contenders. Accredited Speaker represents a solid foundation of professional skills displayed over time. I cherish them both."

- Dana Lamon, Accredited Speaker and World Champion of Public Speaking

for the stage. Having my goal [of becoming an Accredited Speaker] made me stay centered and focused."

Accredited Speaker Johnny Campbell from Carol Stream, Illinois, adds that "Preparing for Accredited Speaker was rigorous and tough. I trained like an athlete."

recalls this advice given to him when he applied for the Accredited Speaker program: "Would you pay money to hear this speaker? If not, that person should not be an Accredited Speaker."

As Accredited Speakers, we are often asked how we have benefited

from earning our designation. In addition to improving our skills and receiving invitations to speak at Toastmasters conferences, the title was important to those of us who speak professionally because it differentiates us and carries credibility. Even though the person hiring you doesn't really know what it means or what you did to earn it, they do recognize that it is a speaking credential.

Past International President and Accredited Speaker Dilip Abayasekara of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, says, "The AS designation has given me instant credibility with prospects and clients. Although non-Toastmasters don't have any idea about what is required to earn the Accredited Speaker designation, they recognize it as a high-level recogni-


tion of professional speaking skills by an international organization. I use it as a way to differentiate myself from others in the speaking, coaching and training industry."

The title also keeps you on top of your game. Says Accredited Speaker and past District 5 Governor Sheryl Roush, DTM, of San Diego, California: "We are now professionals. We cannot have a bad day. No matter what we are doing, we always have to be 'on'."

That may sound more like a challenge than a benefit, but we are doing what we love: speaking, sharing our knowledge, our hearts and our motivation with others. And we get paid for it. How is that for icing on the cake?

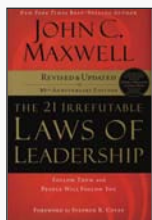
Do you have what it takes to become an Accredited Speaker?

If so, you have a year to submit your application. Be sure to read all the materials carefully, and please feel free to contact any of the Accredited Speakers. We are always ready, willing and excited to help. We look forward to welcoming you as our newest Accredited Speaker in 2012!

For a list of all Accredited Speakers to date, visit www.toastmasters.org/AccreditedSpeakers.aspx. 

Jana Barnhill, DTM, AS, served as Toastmasters International President in 2008-2009 and earned her Accredited Speaker title in 1998. A member of two Toastmasters clubs, she lives with her husband, fellow Past International President and Accredited Speaker Robert Barnhill, in Lubbock, Texas.

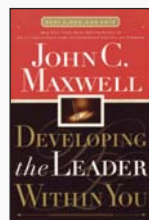
Literature Guide



The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

By John C. Maxwell
In this book, John C. Maxwell sets out the essential "laws of leadership" as well as the principles behind them.

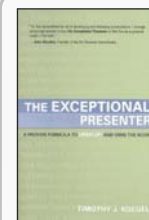
B117 Hardback **\$22**



Developing the Leader Within You

By John C. Maxwell
This book gives a fresh perspective of your leadership potential now and in the future.

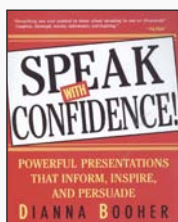
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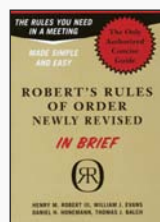
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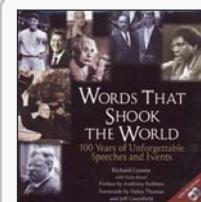


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How Romania's first club makes the most of new freedoms.

Small Steps, Great Changes

† On June 9, 2010, Victor Tomescu gave his 10th speech from the *Competent Communication* manual, speaking about how Toastmasters in Romania had reached success by following their dreams. His speech title was “*Trebuie doar sa vreau*” (“I Only Have to Want It”), and his examples were so vivid that he inspired fellow club members to try to accomplish great things of their own.

Such a speech could never have been made in our country only a few years ago. Romanians lived under Communist rule and were not encouraged to think and dream about personal development outside the public education system. But today, we can dream, dare and share our stories. Best of all, we can join Toastmasters! So this is the story of Timișoara Toastmasters.

Romanian Society Had to Change First

Starting in 1990, democracy freed the Romanian spirit, but emboldening that spirit and accomplishing true change was not easy. The early years of democracy were characterized by political and economic uncertainty, which led to mass emigration to Western Europe, America and Australia. Unfortunately, those years also unveiled scars of the Communist mentality.

Real, substantial change began after the year 2000 and can be credited to several multinational companies that opened offices in Romania. They not only brought new workplaces, they also brought new ways of thinking and opportunities for our people to travel. Romanians traveled abroad,

visiting other countries and cultures with a hunger for knowledge and innovation that is still growing. They became increasingly interested in personal and professional development, with new *ideas* and *challenges* being the words of the day. One such idea was a Toastmasters club in Timișoara, one of the largest cities in Romania and located in the western part of the country.

The Arrival of Toastmasters

Timișoara is the first Toastmasters club in Romania. This is an important fact by itself. A group of highly motivated people had the courage

that the startup of a club would be a real gain for Timisoara and a great personal accomplishment.

“I’m proud of the quality and dedication [of our members].”

Vlad Valea, another founder and charter member, recalls what was most important in the beginning. “The decisive ingredient for the success of Timișoara Toastmasters and the soul that led to its development in its first year was a core of extraordinary people,” he says. “Based on the involvement and the courage of these people – our colleagues – to embark upon an unknown road, we built this club.”

“The Toastmasters spirit is spreading in our country, and general improvements will not be far behind.”

to face a daunting challenge and implement a new idea. The journey began in November 2008, when the Timișoara club officially made its debut. A crowd of curious people wanted to see the “new thing.” Eventually, a solid team developed – a team kept together by one common goal: to grow personally and professionally.

“Communication skills are probably one of the most important assets a person can have,” says Silviu Trebuian, immediate past president and one of the club’s founders. “They are invaluable as a means of conveying ideas and fostering collaboration. When it comes to communication, Toastmasters clubs have proven their utility, and I felt

The first open event was our one-year anniversary celebration in November 2009. The meeting turned out to be a success, but the most important part was that we learned a lot from organizing it: We had found a great location, done the marketing, created an agenda and offered well-prepared speeches. For most of us, it was the first time being involved in something that large. Just remembering those happy moments makes me smile.

Success!

In only two years, we have accomplished so much! So far, our club has three Competent Communicators, one Competent Leader and our

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Small Steps. Great Changes *(Continued from page 21)*

own monthly newsletter. For the first time, we participated as visitors in an international event – a speech contest in Vienna, Austria. In addition, our mentorship program is functional and we have already started a training program for our active members, beginning with Toastmasters' *Better Speaker Series*.

Club president Calin Iepure joined Timișoara Toastmasters because he considered it an opportunity for self-development. He has helped with the club's PR efforts because he didn't have any public relations experience and wanted to learn. For him, the trip to Vienna was a great experience because he says it put Timișoara on the Toastmasters International map. "The most important thing is the fact that I made connections," he says. "I met fellow Toastmasters with whom I can share experiences and best practices."

Continuing Challenges and Achievements

The times in Romania are rough even now, because the economic and political systems still do not function properly. However, this does not mean we have to accept the situation. We now know it is in our power to create change, and that is what club member Paul Negruțiu encouraged us to do in his speech entitled "*Rușine!*" ("Shame!"). He talked about actions and change needed in Romanian society and citizen mentality.

True change is based on small steps. Our club now mentors a Toastmasters club in Cluj-Napoca, and we hope they will taste the same success that we do. Bucharest also has a Toastmasters club, and interested people from other cities in Romania have contacted us asking about founding new clubs. The Toastmasters spirit is spreading in our country, and general improvements will not be far behind.

Timișoara Toastmasters made us all look further than our daily jobs or activities. Given that we all have different professions, we found in each other new points of view and opportunities for personal improvement that bind us and make us enjoy each other's company beyond the weekly meetings.

Flori Zilahi, a member of the club since February 2010, is a psychologist. In her job, communication is very important and she wanted to boost her self-confidence. She never misses our club meetings, enjoying the way she can experiment in a friendly environment.

We have embraced the Toastmasters lifestyle and we understand that it is easy to make a difference as long as we want to. And now I can proudly state: This is who we are. This is our story. 📌

Maria Tomescu is Vice President Education of Timișoara Toastmasters. She can be reached at maria.tomescu@gmail.com.

By Lana Swearingen

How to make people feel welcome at holiday parties.

Minding Our Manners in Social Settings

I've known about Toastmasters for years, thought about joining many times and am happy to say I finally did. The group I joined extended a warm welcome, as well as any assistance I might need to learn the ropes. The members are courteous, friendly and encouraging.

Therefore, I was surprised by what happened when I attended a recent Toastmasters event with about 60 people, including district dignitaries and members of several clubs. During the social hour prior to the meeting, I was very eager to meet everyone – and not being a shy person, I approached small groups of people who were chatting. I knew people in only some of the groups. Regardless, practically no one welcomed me into any of the small circles. Those who knew me did not introduce me to the others. And when I did not know anyone, I stood on the periphery of a circle, waiting for my chance to say, “Hello, I’m Lana.”

In all cases, they kept their conversations going, never pausing to allow me to introduce myself. I felt somewhat awkward and was very surprised that outside the rigors of Toastmasters protocol, the members could act with such disregard for common courtesy.

I do not believe these social gaffes were deliberate, but rather stemmed from a general movement away from the exercise of social graces in our fast-paced, high-tech society. However, Toastmasters need to show sensitivity when it comes to such issues. We’re a communication and leadership organization that fosters personal growth and a positive, welcoming attitude. In the short time I’ve been a member, I have been amazed at some of the stories I’ve heard of personal improvement and growth shared by other members. Yet while we become proficient in speaking to an audience, we sometimes forget social graces when speaking to an individual or a small group in a social setting. As a result, that event was ruined for me. I would have felt differently about it if I had been treated more courteously.

Hone Your Skills at Holiday Time

With the holiday season upon us, many social events and office

parties will take place in the coming weeks. These are ideal settings to practice your social graces and small-group communication. Here’s how you can fine-tune your skills and make people at such festivities feel welcome and included.

If you’re chatting in a small group and see someone approaching to join in, you have a number of options. Rather than interrupt a speaker mid-sentence, you could simply touch the newcomer on the arm, as a gesture to draw that person into the conversation. If you know the newcomer, wait for a break in the conversation, and then make introductions. The “rock star” mentality should be avoided. That is, do not assume that when someone is introduced to you, that person should already know who you are, and therefore, you have no need to introduce yourself to them.

If you don’t know the person approaching to join your small





People's comfort levels vary, which makes each individual react differently to the same situation. I remember my high school days, when being in a "clique" felt safe. It gave one status. To allow someone to penetrate the circle was somewhat threatening. However, as we mature, we learn that everyone wants to be accepted and welcomed, which is why we need to show sensitivity in social settings.

"It doesn't take much to express acceptance – a gesture, an introduction, a kind word."

circle, it's still acceptable to pull the person in with a light touch. If a conversation is ongoing, the speakers should make eye contact with the newcomer, as a way of including the person in what is being said. It doesn't matter that the topic may not be immediately apparent to someone just stepping in. The gesture is the welcoming factor, not the subject matter. As soon as possible, the speakers should take a break in their conversation to introduce themselves and ask a question or two of the new person. They should avoid plunging back into their own discussion.

Body language can also encourage or discourage someone from joining a small circle of people. If someone approaches a group you're in, step back or move to one side to make room. Under no circumstances should you turn your back. Try nodding in a welcoming gesture – it's a great way

to acknowledge that person, even while the conversation continues.

More to Consider

Exceptions to these suggestions exist, of course. If the conversation is private, you have a couple of options. Rather than shun a newcomer, you could say something to indicate the private nature of the conversation. You might say, "We're right in the middle of an urgent business discussion. As soon as we're done, we'd love for you to join us." In turn, the newcomer should respect that and step away.

Another option is to simply stop the conversation and ask the others if it's okay to finish the discussion later. Then turn and greet the newcomer. The person may realize the conversation was private and leave on her own. If not, simply make it a point to meet later and pick up where you left off.

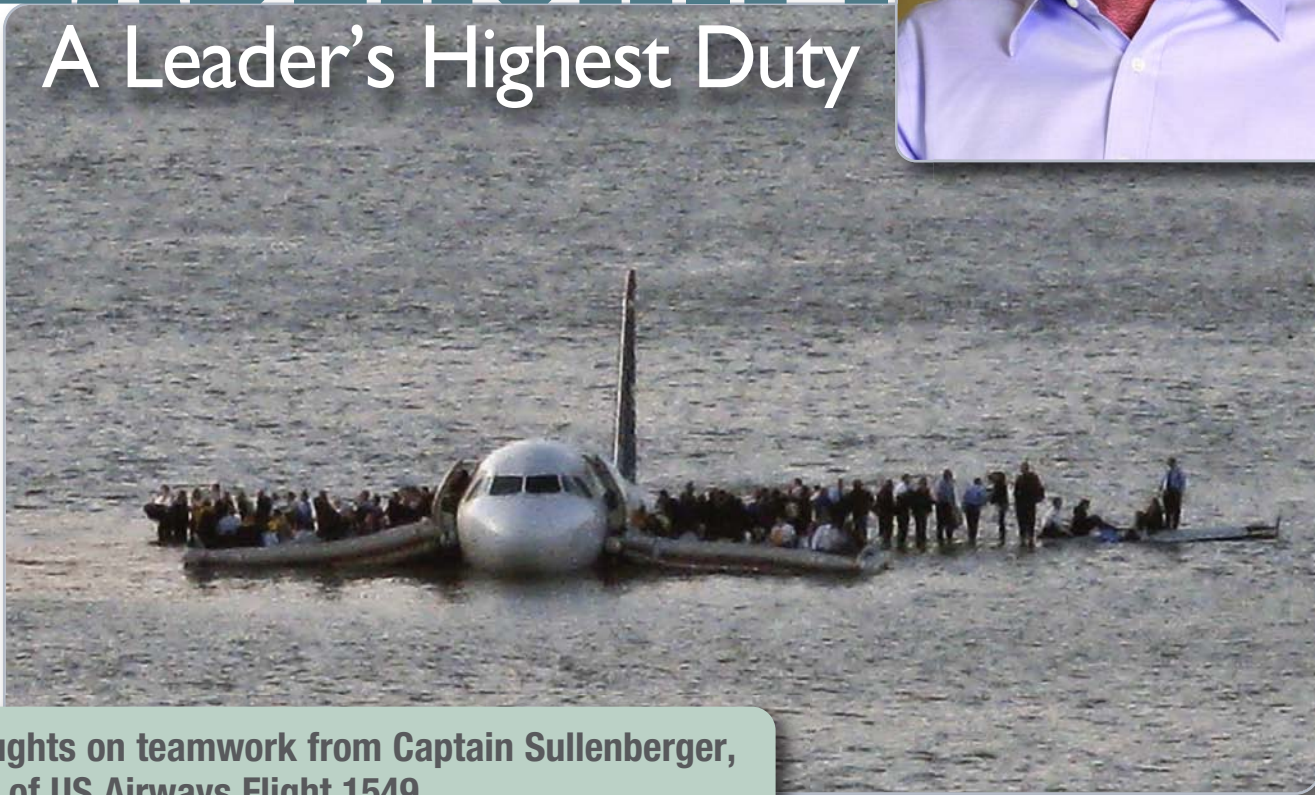
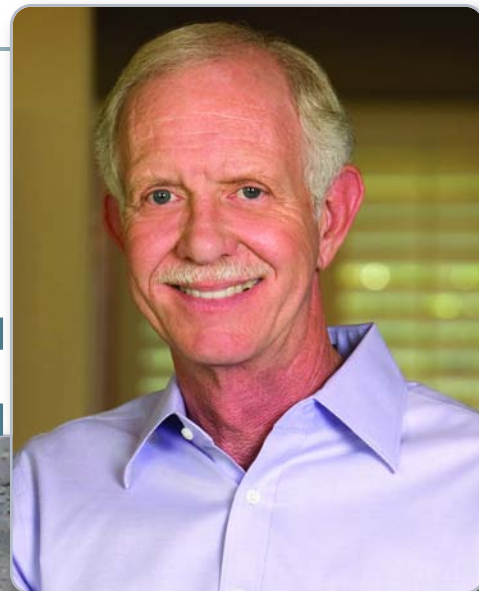
Remember, many people join Toastmasters to battle shyness. Some members are too shy even to approach a small group. If they're ignored, it just reinforces any feelings they might have that they don't belong. You have the power to change that; it doesn't take much to express acceptance – a gesture, an introduction, a kind word.

I am pleased to be a part of the Toastmasters organization and have already learned a great deal about interacting with people in a public-speaking environment. I also look forward to attending more social events. So when you see me hanging around your inner circle, please invite me in. 📧

Lana Swearingen is a member of the Gilbert Toastmasters club in Gilbert, Arizona. Reach her at **LSwearingen1@cox.net**.

CRISIS LEADERSHIP:

A Leader's Highest Duty



Thoughts on teamwork from Captain Sullenberger, pilot of US Airways Flight 1549.

By Craig Harrison, DTM

Editor's note: On January 15, 2009, pilot Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III masterfully landed US Airways Flight 1549 on New York's Hudson River just minutes after takeoff from New York's LaGuardia Airport. The passenger plane's twin engines were disabled after it struck a flock of Canada geese. In what has been dubbed "The Miracle on the Hudson," Captain Sullenberger's skillful leadership of his crew and expert piloting saved the lives of all 155 people onboard the jetliner.

A 59-year-old resident of Danville, California, Sullenberger retired in March after a 30-year aviation career with US Airways. His story may soon be on the big screen: Producers have optioned the movie rights to his memoir, *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters*.

Craig Harrison, DTM, interviewed Captain Sullenberger on an array of leadership topics, including crisis communication, teamwork and the need for continual improvement.

Toastmasters are students of leadership. What can you teach us about leadership in crisis situations?

I didn't have time in those incredibly intense 208 seconds from when our airplane hit the birds until we landed in the Hudson River to learn what I needed to learn. I had to have already learned it. I had to have invested the preparation, put in the hard work and paid attention for decades – during thousands of hours of flying time. The same is true in many other areas of our lives, including leadership. It's a daily process.

Does leadership need to be demonstrative?

One of the key tenets of leadership is leading by example – live your life in such a way that your values are apparent. I don't have to tell you what they are, wear a shirt with a slogan on it or display posters on my walls. If you watch me long enough, if I am congruent enough and if my actions and words match enough, then it's really apparent how I live and what I believe. I embody it.

Course Corrections

Toastmasters prepare their presentations, yet things go wrong and they have to ad-lib. How did you balance procedure with ad-libbing?

From decades of practice and constant improvement and learning, we [as a crew] had to have clear priorities in those moments: Fly the airplane first, analyze the situation, see what our options were and then begin to take the most appropriate remedial steps. We only got through the first page of a three-page checklist.

That day, I had deeply internalized values and fundamental skills and knowledge that I had developed over decades that I brought to bear very quickly. They needed to be immediately accessible to me.

Ours was really an exceptional case in terms of airline accidents. We had never specifically trained for what we faced that day: the loss of both engines, so suddenly, so completely, at such a low speed, over such a densely populated area with so little time and so few options.

It Takes a Team to Fly (and Land) a Plane

At times you led crews that you hadn't yet worked with. How did you form a cohesive team with so little practice time?

As the captain – the leader – I always set the tone for what was going to happen for the next four days in a brief pre-trip meeting with our flight crew. I began to open channels of communication, make myself approachable, let the crew know that we were working

together for these common goals on this trip: To get back safely on the fourth day having had as good an experience as we can. We were going to look out for each other. I needed them to be my eyes and ears in the cabin and tell me certain things when I was in the cockpit.

The meeting took only about three minutes. But it took this collection of individuals and quickly formed a crew, a working team. We were trying to front-load the problem and create a team very quickly. And that's what this initial meeting did.

It seems this type of communication would help teams of workers in many fields.

In *Highest Duty* I discuss the concept of Crew Resource Management (CRM). CRM began in the 1980s in the airline industry to address the human performance issue. Part of the CRM process is developing a team.

There are parallels between aviation and other domains, with so many shared analogies – patient safety or oil and gas exploration or nuclear power or aircraft carrier flight deck operations. We're talking about human performance. It should really be no surprise that we find so many similarities.

Isn't great rapport between pilot and co-pilot critical to success?

Indeed. A major airline might have 10,000 pilots, 30,000 flight attendants or more. And it's not unusual at all to team with people you've not only not flown with before, but perhaps never met. That was the case for me and first officer Jeffrey Skiles, whom I met for the first time three days [before the plane accident]. Yet we worked together as if we'd done it for years.

One key to our success: We had this common vocabulary, this common core of experience. We'd each been trained to such a high professional standard that we had become essentially interchangeable.

Safety Communication: Log, Look and Learn

You're the founder and chief executive officer of Safety Reliability Methods, a consulting company that studies past aviation accidents. What can people in other fields glean about safety from your findings?

In aviation we have a formalized process of reporting precursory incidents that can lead to accidents and solving systemic deficiencies before they can become problematic. We also have an institutionalized "lessons learned" process through the National Transportation Safety Board. The results are widely disseminated and they inform our procedures and training.

This process of balancing accountability with learning allows us to not just penalize individual practitioners, but look for root causes and fix them, to prevent them from happening again. That mindfulness – that mindset and that learning process – is something that other domains can certainly adopt.

Regularizing best practices isn't limited to aviation. In medicine now, in patient safety, there's a realization that not everything has to be done on the fly. Some situations are extraordinary, like ours. Most other activities are not extreme crises and can be regularized with five- or seven-step checklists of tasks to do in the proper order every time, whether it's a central line insertion in a patient setting or whether it's how to make a soufflé.

A False Dichotomy Between Cost and Safety **Can cost be a mitigating factor in decisions that impinge on safety?**

Aviation teaches us safety can pay for itself if one is willing and able to take a longer view than American business does, with its short-term financial focus on the next quarter.

- What is the nature of front-line leadership?
- Are supervisors mentors or just disciplinarians?
- What's the gallows-humor joke that everybody knows, that really tells the tale about what your organization is all about, but that everyone is afraid to tell the CEO?
- Does trust exist? Are our employees trusted partners or are they seen to be inconvenient nuisances. Are they valued? Are people listened to or are they simply told?

While championing safety and continual improvement, how can one change an organization's entire culture?

I am fond of a quote from author and University of Southern California professor Warren Bennis: "When leaders treat followers with respect, followers respond with trust."

It's not just the organizational charts that we develop or the procedures we have. It's how we lead and treat people, and how we view each other, that really ultimately makes the difference in whether or not we are able to achieve these efficiencies. This is how we are able to achieve the quality and safety that are good, not only for the outcome, but ultimately for the bottom line.

“We had never specifically trained for what we faced that day: the loss of both engines, so suddenly, so completely, at such a low speed, over such a densely populated area with so little time and so few options.”

– Captain Sullenberger

There's a false dichotomy between cost and safety. Are we willing and able to account for the many costs of not having a quality operation: lack of cooperation, poor leadership, waste, and incidents and accidents? If we really and truly account for them, then safety can pay for itself. Getting it wrong is more expensive than doing it right the first time.

A Culture of Improvement, a Commitment to Safety **How can Toastmasters, in our chosen fields, carry the torch for continual improvement, lifelong learning and the pursuit of excellence?**

Again, leadership is absolutely key. Ultimately we're talking about culture. Dr. Lucian Leape, the father of the medical-patient safety movement, defined it as "the way we do things here." It's our paradigm, attitudes, behavior and how we view our work world and our colleagues. There are several questions one can ask to detect what one's organizational culture is:

How key was your power of focus in navigating your flight to safety?

The power of focus was essential that day. Professional pilots learn to compartmentalize, to leave outside the cockpit all the distractions, the distressing details of our everyday lives, to come to work and simply focus at the task at hand. It's impossible to completely do that. To an even greater extent on January 15, 2009, on flight number 1549 we had to do that – very effectively, very quickly.

You've had ample time to reflect on the cockpit decisions made during those harrowing minutes over New York City. How did you keep your wits about you?

I was very proud ultimately of how much we got done in such a quick time and how well we did it. The three things that I think I did very well that day that made all the difference in the world were:

- I forced calm on myself.
- I then imposed order on what could have been chaos; I imposed my lifelong training paradigm on this situation even though we had never specifically trained for it (just for portions of it), thereby making it a problem I knew I could solve.
- I load-shed! I knew I didn't have time to do everything I needed to do, or would want to do; instead, I had time to do the highest priority things, but I needed to do them extraordinarily well. I ignored everything else as being a mere distraction.

Those are the things that I did the best that day and that made the most difference. **T**

Craig Harrison, DTM, PDG, is a professional speaker and member of Toastmasters Leadership club in Oakland, California, and the author of *Cultivating the Leader in You*. He can be reached at: www.SpeakAndLeadWithConfidence.com.

Captain Sullenberger's Definition of Leadership

I regard a leader as someone who continues to learn and grow both professionally and personally. Leaders are able to:

- Invest in themselves.
- Draw from within something that can touch and inspire others.
- Have priorities and goals, and clearly articulate them in a way that will resonate with followers.
- Have goals that are in alignment.
- Clearly articulate a direction to head in, how the team will get there, and what their part in it is, thus creating a shared sense of responsibility for the outcome.
- Rise to the occasion when called upon.

Small Steps. Great Changes *(Continued from page 21)*

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The times in Romania are rough even now, because the economic and political systems still do not function properly. However, this does not mean we have to accept the situation. We now know it is in our power to create change, and that is what club member Paul Negruțiu encouraged us to do in his speech entitled "*Rușine!*" ("Shame!"). He talked about actions and change needed in Romanian society and citizen mentality.

True change is based on small steps. Our club now mentors a Toastmasters club in Cluj-Napoca, and we hope they will taste the same success that we do. Bucharest also has a Toastmasters club, and interested people from other cities in Romania have contacted us asking about founding new clubs. The Toastmasters spirit is spreading in our country, and general improvements will not be far behind.

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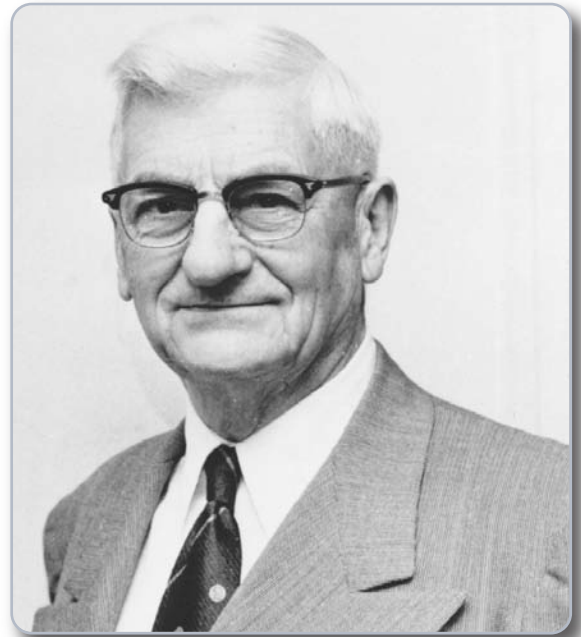
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Maria Tomescu is Vice President Education of Timișoara Toastmasters. She can be reached at maria.tomescu@ymail.com.

Continue the legacy of the organization's founder by donating to this fund.

The Ralph C. Smedley Fund: A Perfect Gift



The year is coming to an end, and it's time to reflect on the past 12 months. One good question to ask is: Has your year been better because of Toastmasters? If so, consider making a contribution to the Ralph C. Smedley Fund. By doing so, you continue the legacy of the organization's founder and help others gain the same benefits you've enjoyed, while also honoring a special person or event in your life.

As a nonprofit organization, Toastmasters International relies on the financial support of its members and supporters. The Smedley Fund is one of the means to provide that support. This fund is set up in Dr. Smedley's name to help ensure that the Toastmasters program remains competitive, offering new and innovative approaches to effective communication and leadership at an affordable cost to members.

The Smedley Fund accepts donations throughout the year. As outlined in the Toastmasters 2010 Strategic Plan, "Additional revenue provides the opportunity to invest in education and training, which in turn supports a higher-value Toastmasters experience." This means that any gift you present to the fund will not only honor your special person or occasion, it will help members of your community develop their public speaking and leadership skills in new and better ways.

This gift fits all shapes and sizes:

- **Individuals.** Members and non-members may contribute to the fund. If your Toastmasters experience has led to improvements in your own life, consider commemorating your success by giving to the fund. If you're not a member but would like to improve your community, you could be responsible for the development of new and innovative educational materials, which means more people learning, growing and achieving through Toastmasters.
- **Clubs.** Groups may arrange for a regular contribution to celebrate an important date, such as a club anniversary. Did someone in your club progress from nervous novice to speech contest champ? Here's a great way to let your club celebrate its success as a haven for that kind of personal growth.

- **Honorary.** You may make a donation to honor a person or event. Did your cousin perform a fantastic college commencement speech? Recognize this success with a donation to the fund. Celebrating the birthday of a longtime friend and raconteur? Here's your chance to honor those you know – as a holiday, birthday or anniversary gift. A Smedley Fund donation is a creative way to pay tribute to someone just because they're great.

- **Memorial.** What amazing people have filled your life? Do you know how to celebrate their lives? A memorial donation shows how much that person's life has meant to you. When Toastmaster and writer Craig Harrison interviewed legendary basketball coach John Wooden for the *Toastmaster* magazine, he felt a profound impact on his own thinking. Later when Coach Wooden

passed away, Harrison paid his respects by making a donation in honor of the coach and his wife, Nell, to the Ralph C. Smedley Fund.

■ **Corporate Contributions** and Foundation Grants. If you run a company that wants to acknowledge the achievements of its employees or recognize its valuable customers, the Smedley Fund is an excellent choice. Your gift helps the Toastmasters mission of making “better communication and leadership a worldwide reality.” It also provides a practical means by which your company can find qualified leaders.

Enjoy the Personal Benefits of Planned Giving

With some preparation, you can maximize the effects of your gift while minimizing your personal financial impact. Here are a few options to consider when making financial decisions:

- Bequests: an affordable way to keep your memory alive.

Planning your estate with Toastmasters in mind demonstrates your commitment to continuing Dr. Smedley’s legacy while preserving the financial security of your estate.

- Save now on investments. Protect your portfolio from paying capital gains tax on investments when you make certain types of donations. Cash, stocks, bonds or mutual funds can be prudent choices – worth discussing with your financial planner.
- A simple choice: Make Toastmasters a beneficiary. Including the organization in your preparation regarding life insurance and retirement plans can be a good financial move.

A Great Tax Deduction

What’s more, your gift to the organization also provides an end-of-year tax deduction.

Toastmasters International holds a 501(c) (3) U.S. Federal tax exemption, which means that any contribution may be listed as a

deduction on the donor’s U.S. Federal Income Tax return (and in some cases listed on a State Income Tax return). If you live outside the United States, please consult your tax advisor to find out if your donation is tax deductible.

How to Make it Happen

Contributions may be made via check, money order, Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover cards. If making an honorary or memorial contribution, please indicate the name and address of any person(s) to whom acknowledgement should be sent. Contribution forms are available at www.Toastmasters.org/smedleyfund.

Contributions should be sent to:

*The Ralph C. Smedley
Memorial Fund
Toastmasters International
P.O. Box 9052
Mission Viejo, CA 92690-9052, USA.*

New Year Brings Web Site Advances

The Toastmasters International Web site is being upgraded over the holidays to benefit members in many ways. Chief among these benefits is a greater ability to access Toastmasters materials and information. Features will include streamlined administrative processes, an enhanced digital content offering and visibility into one’s own Toastmasters achievements.

“The goal is to provide members with the highest-quality service possible,” says Toastmasters Executive Director Daniel Rex. “To that end, we are enhancing the site to give all members access to the information they need.”

To accommodate the Web site upgrade, specific sections of the site, including the online store, will be inactive from 11:59 p.m., December 15, until 5 a.m., January 3, 2010. (All times are Pacific Standard Time).

Remember: You *will not* be able to log in if you share an e-mail address with another individual; every member must have their own unique e-mail address.

Single sign-on benefits you by providing a safe, secure and private online system.

Other online improvements:

- Opportunity to purchase select digital content online. For example, instead of purchasing

a pamphlet that would normally be mailed to you, you can download it for immediate access and save money on postage.

- Enhanced “My Profile” section will allow detailed access to members’ education awards and overall Toastmasters history, including previous club memberships.
- Streamlined online processing of dual members and reinstated members.

These features – as well as more to come – will combine to make the Toastmasters Web site a user-friendly tool that enhances the member experience.



Celebrating the Holidays (All of Them)

My December is going to be busier than I expected. I have one of those calendars that includes all the holidays, and it's a lot more than Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanza. For instance, December 5 is Bathtub Party Day. Apparently, the majority of modern folk opt for showers instead of baths, and this is the day when we rediscover the relaxing comfort of domestic immersion – preferably with friends, according to the calendar. I don't know if they should bring over their own bathtubs or if we all will try to cram in one tub together. That would be a problem: (a) my bathtub is kind of small, and (b) I have friends I would never want to see in a bathtub.

December 7 is Letter Writing Day. The idea here is that so few people write letters any more, it will take them a whole day to do it. The good news is that after a day in the bathtub with your friends, you'll have plenty to write about.

Then on December 9 comes Weary Willie Day, in honor of the clown character made famous by Emmett Kelly. On this day, we are encouraged to rediscover the importance of play and silliness by learning clown skills – juggling, for example. I'm not sure why this is a special day since I juggle things all day at work... which is a circus... where I'm surrounded by clowns. Maybe I'll let that one pass and wake up to Sister Friend Day on December 10, although that could be another toughie. When I was two years old and my sister was four, she hit me over the head

with a casserole dish and our relationship has been that way ever since. I suppose we could get together briefly, but then I'd have to cancel the restraining order.

Thankfully, there's nothing on December 11, so I can rest up for December 12, which hosts two holidays – Poinsettia Day and Bonza Bottler Day. I'll go and buy a poinsettia in the little green plastic tub with the gold aluminum foil wrapping, place it where my cats won't get it, then forget about it until after Christmas when I'm cleaning up and discover a dried cake of dirt with a tumbleweed in the middle. Bonza Bottler Day, on the other hand, requires nothing. It happens every time the number of the month and the day coincide – i.e., December 12 is 12/12, which someone thought was sufficient cause for wild celebration. Whatever.

Next up is Underdog Day on December 15, dedicated to everybody who never gets what they want in life. They don't say what to do on this day, maybe because it really doesn't matter. It's not going to work out anyway.

However, if you can wait patiently until December 21, you'll have an entire day to vent all your frustration and discontent. It's Humbug Day, when you're allowed to be as cranky and cantankerous as Ebenezer Scrooge without being called Ebenezer Scrooge. My calendar says you're allowed up to 12 “Bah, Humbugs” per person. That's not enough for me, so I'm setting up a Humbug Cap and Trade Program in my neighborhood like they do for air

pollution. Those who don't need their full allotment can sell credits to those like me who want more. At the moment I've earned the right to say “Bah, Humbug” 98 times, which is about four an hour for one full day, or one every 15 minutes. Given my temperament during the holidays, that's just about right.

December 23 is Feast of the Radishes Day. I live in Syracuse, New York, the Snow Capital of the World, and if you can find a radish in December it would rival Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanza as a day of miraculous wonder. December 27 and 28 celebrate the birthdays of Louis Pasteur and Frederic Chopin, respectively. I always combine these two by playing Chopin's Sonata in B-Flat Minor while toasting myself with a glass of pasteurized milk every time I get a note right.

Finally, there's Make Up Your Mind Day on December 31, when you finally make the gut-wrenching, mind-boggling decisions you've been putting off all year. It's too late to do anything about them, of course, but at least you can start the New Year knowing you made them. Then you're free to start putting off a new set of gut wrenching, mind-boggling decisions for the next 364 days.

And that's my December. Seems exhausting. Good thing January 1 is another Bonza Bottler Day (1/1). Then I can celebrate doing nothing.

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