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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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Confidence Is Your Greatest Skill

Do you remember what prompted you to join Toastmasters?

I love that there is no single answer to this question! Every member's answer reflects our individuality as people, and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I joined because I needed to meet people. I had moved to a new country and needed a new network. Toastmasters was just the place where I could do that.

Engaging in the education program and participating in my club by taking on meeting roles, being a mentor, and later serving as an officer, I was able to meet people who helped me understand the culture of my new country, who helped me build connections and feel at home there. This gave me the confidence to try new things.

Being a member of a club is about so much more than developing communication and leadership skills. How we choose to use those enhanced skills is what helps us transform as people and grows our confidence to enrich our world.

Growth in confidence is the biggest single benefit to be gained from Toastmasters.

When I look at the opportunities I took after joining Toastmasters, both in my club and beyond at Area, Division, and District levels, I realize how much the organization has changed me. It gave me the confidence to step out and say yes to new leadership opportunities and to change my career direction.

I wouldn't have done that before because I wouldn't have had the confidence.

While working through the Toastmasters program, the reassurance of understanding the culture, knowing more people, and being more connected through Toastmasters opened doors, and made it possible for me to do something different, something that has had an impact on the world I live in.

Christian D. Larson, the American thought leader, teacher, and author, said, "Believe in yourself and all that you are. Know that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle."

Being engaged in Toastmasters makes it possible for us to develop that self-belief and not be afraid of the challenges we encounter. Growth in confidence is the biggest single benefit to be gained from Toastmasters. By establishing and extending our competence in all forms of communication and leadership, we are able to make a positive impact through all aspects of our lives.

Building your confidence may not be the reason you came to Toastmasters, yet I hope you're discovering that as your skills grow, your confidence is also growing and supporting your personal transformation.

Morag Mathieson, DTM
2023-2024 International President

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Snapshot



Members of **WAYAMBA TOASTMASTERS** in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, and **KEGALLE TOASTMASTERS CLUB** in Kegalle, Sri Lanka, host a joint meeting with the theme “cricket” on an indoor cricket field.



Traveling Toastmaster



FLORENCE STEWART, DTM, of North Miami, Florida, holds a printed cover of the magazine near the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt.



CHRIS ZAHN, DTM, of Long Beach, California, holds the *Toastmaster* magazine while visiting a market in Suzhou, Jiangsu, China.

Toastmasters Behind Barbed Wires

How a group of POWs bonded in a club in WWII Germany.

By Laura Amann

In 1945, Lieutenant Bob King, of the U.S. Army, marched on foot for 285 miles (485 km) over the course of 35 days while carrying the record book of a unique Toastmasters club in his pocket. Dubbed Oflag XIII-B Toastmasters, the club was composed of 15 American prisoners of war (POWs) being held at the Oflag XIII-B camp in Hammelburg, Germany, during World War II. The men had been captured at the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, in December 1944. They were subsequently sorted by military rank and initially sent to a camp intended for Russian prisoners before being transported via boxcar to the Hammelburg prison camp.

The meeting notes depict the activities of a group of POWs who, amid air raids and limited sustenance, found comfort in structured club meetings, where they shared speeches (and humor) about their lives, learned from each other, and helped ease the burden of life in a military prison camp.

A Club Emerges

Conditions at the camp were demoralizing, with freezing temperatures, a lack of hot water, and insufficient food. Looking for an activity that would provide mental stimulation, King drew on his memories of his father's Toastmasters club. King, who worked as a game warden in a mountainous and remote area of California prior to the war, frequently joined his father, Elmer King, at his Southwest Toastmasters Club in Los Angeles.

The Oflag club quickly came together and proved to be the perfect respite for the men. They drew up bylaws, which included the agenda and details of the two club officer roles: Toastmaster and executive secretary. Meetings were to be held in the camp library, twice a week for an hour and a half. They would include three impromptu speakers, one six-minute speaker, and one main speaker who would speak for 12 minutes. There were "critics" (speech evaluators) for all speeches, as well as a grammarian and an "evening critic" (General Evaluator).

The first meeting was held February 6, 1945. At the second meeting, on February 9, anticipating that what

they were doing might be of historical interest after the war, one member, Chaplain Rowland Koskamp, suggested that the minutes be more expansive and detailed than a mere outline. And in fact, the club proved so popular that within a few weeks, the men voted that any member could bring a guest to the meetings (likely other POWs).

Speech Topics

Topics for the impromptu speakers were chosen by the Toastmaster. Some were seemingly meant to elicit humorous responses, such as "Helping the Little Woman Buy a New Hat," "How I Handle My Monday Bread Ration," and "Red Cross Recipes."

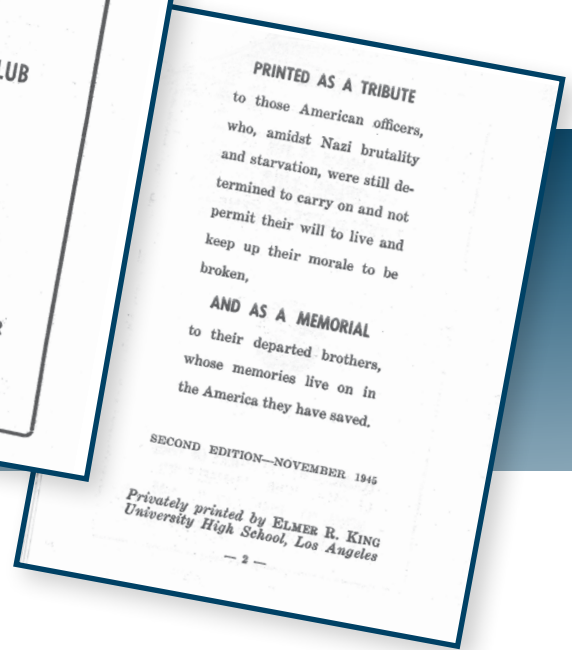
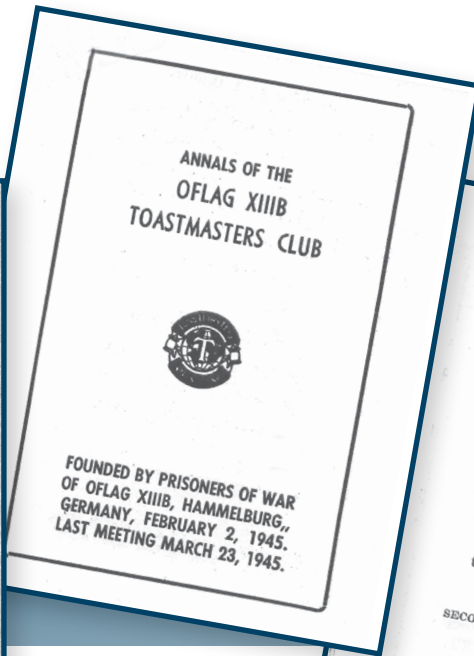
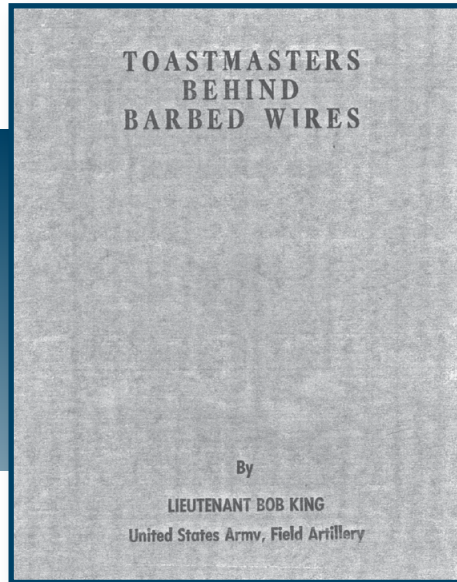
Other topics appear meant to help the men focus on something positive, such as "The Greatest Act of Kindness I Have Seen," "My Happiest Moment," "The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Known," and "What I Shall Do When I First Debar in the U.S."

The prepared speeches often reflected the men's interests and occupations prior to the war. An attorney gave the speech "Title and Trust Companies." Two of the chaplains gave speeches about public speaking. A banker delivered a speech titled "The Federal Home Loan Bank." Given that the men had no access to reference material and had likely been away from their professions for three years, the choice of topic perhaps reflected their desire to continue to make use of their skills and keep them from atrophying even more.

Other prepared speeches related to the men's hobbies or interests, such as "My Hobby – Fishing," "A Fascinating Business – Greyhound Racing," and "Sunset Symphony."

POW Realities

The minutes reflect other realities of life in a POW camp. The determined meeting time of 1300 was accompanied by the caveat "air raids and noon soup permitting." A few weeks later, the time was adjusted to 1230 hours "in an attempt to avoid air raid restrictions." This referred to the frequent Allied air raids and a strict air alert system that gave the men only a few minutes' advance warning.



By the third club meeting, the men discussed holding two impromptu talks instead of three to decrease the length of meetings, as the library of Oflag XIII-B was deemed “too cold for long-winded discussion.”

At the end of February, the men decided that the Toastmaster be elected for two meetings regardless of meeting times, “due to difficulties brought by air alerts, Red Cross boxes, and other interruptions common to POW life.”

The notes occasionally reflect humor or inside jokes, indicating a sense of camaraderie and attempts to keep up good spirits. The forward to the meeting records notes: “The club met in the camp library, to the accompaniment of the rattle of empty mess kits, with frequent admonitions to non-existent waiters to be less noisy with dishes.” And on March 13, “Captain Luzzie suggested that coffee might be served at our meetings. The kitchen will be contacted on this matter.”

That’s not to say the men didn’t take the club and their speeches seriously. Some of the notes could be from any Toastmasters meeting. At the second meeting, the critic of the evening pointed out the “over-usage of ‘ah,’ slurring of words, lack of animation, and ‘little imagination used thus far by the speakers.’”

The Toastmaster frequently had to remind speakers and critics of time limits, and one critic pointed out the necessity of keeping to one’s subject, a familiar refrain for many Toastmasters.

Critiques included comments on the speaker’s approach to the table, posture, gestures, use of notes, use of hands, subject matter, and

general confidence. A common critique was a lack of animation by the speakers, and after a few weeks of this note, one critic of the evening remarked that it was “due perhaps to poor diet.”

As the meetings continued, the critiques and the speeches became more substantive. One evening critic commented that the speakers’ evaluators needed to be more constructive and thorough. Another suggested that the meetings would benefit from more formality.

Visitors were becoming more regular, and the records indicate that minute notes and meeting roles were explained to guests, who were often called upon to introduce themselves.

End of the Club, and the War

The scheduled meeting on March 27, 1945, never happened. Gen. George S. Patton attempted to liberate the Hammelburg camp, but was stopped by several German divisions that were rushed in. Americans suffered heavy casualties, and most prisoners were sent on the 285-mile march to Moosburg, Germany. On April 5, the line of men was bombed by American aircraft at Nuremberg, killing many of the men, including

Topics for the impromptu speakers were seemingly meant to elicit humorous responses, such as “Helping the Little Woman Buy a New Hat,” “How I Handle My Monday Bread Ration,” and “Red Cross Recipes.”

two members of the Oflag Toastmasters club: Captain Feiker and Chaplain Koskamp.

King was often tempted to discard the record book during the long march in order to lighten his gear. The men from Oflag XIII-B, who had been scheduled to be evacuated to Hitler’s hideout as hostages, were instead liberated by Americans or released between April 29 and May 2, 1945.

After the war, the minutes of the club were privately printed and distributed by King’s father who titled the pamphlet “Toastmasters Behind Barbed Wires.” He also added a foreword, giving details of how the men came to Hammelburg Oflag XIII-B, and an epilogue explaining the attempted liberation, subsequent long march, and eventual liberation.

Despite lasting only a couple of months, the Oflag XIII-B Toastmasters Club is a poignant reminder of the many ways that Toastmasters can provide purpose and community. Even in the harshest of conditions, Toastmasters has the ability to change lives.

Laura Amann is managing editor for the Toastmaster magazine.

Sharing Our Cultural Diversity

Club speeches and interactions can expand our global understanding.

By Shubhani Mittal

In today's globalized world, where cross-cultural interactions have become the norm, it's more important than ever to understand cultural diversity. I've learned that firsthand. As a member of the online Blue Communicators club in Eagan, Minnesota, and an Indian by origin, I have experienced the importance of understanding and adapting to cultural differences for effective communication.

Toastmasters has taught me how enriching it is to learn the customs, greetings, and gestures of different cultures. Our meetings are a comfortable space to share our cultural stories and understand each other better.

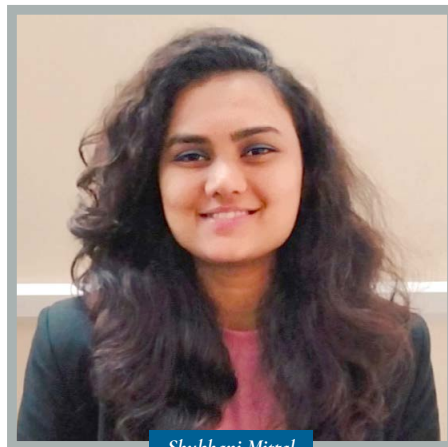
At one club meeting, I gave a brief explanation of the Indian greeting *namaste* and its significance in my culture. I demonstrated how we join our hands together and explained that it's not just a greeting but a way of recognizing the divine spark in every individual. This simple gesture represents a profound respect for one another, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

Similarly, other club members helped me learn about the American custom of shaking hands. While a handshake is different from the more self-contained gesture of joining your own hands, I appreciate the genuine and inclusive nature of shaking hands. These explanations weren't just lessons in customs; they were an invitation to see the world through a different lens.

This active sharing of customs and traditions has contributed to making our Toastmasters community a more inclusive and culturally enriched space, where respect and diversity are celebrated.

Storytelling is perhaps the most impactful way to bridge cultural gaps, and Toastmasters speeches give us the opportunity to share our personal experiences and stories, enabling others to gain a deeper understanding of our backgrounds.

I once delivered a club speech titled "Diwali: The Festival of Lights." I shared the significance of the Indian festival and how my family celebrates it. I described the customs and rituals, and the warmth of family gatherings,



Shubhani Mittal

Toastmasters speeches give us the opportunity to share our personal experiences and stories, enabling others to gain a deeper understanding of our backgrounds.

during this festive occasion. This speech gave me the privilege of offering my fellow Toastmasters a glimpse into the cultural richness of India, and piqued their curiosity, fostering a greater appreciation for the diversity that exists within our community.

After the speech, I received heartfelt feedback and questions from club members, further solidifying the idea that sharing personal stories and experiences can be a powerful tool for building empathy and understanding. It's through such exchanges that we truly come to appreciate the depth and beauty of diverse cultures and perspectives, making our club meetings a place of enlightenment, acceptance, and mutual growth.

Active listening is a fundamental skill in building effective cross-cultural communication,

as well as trust and understanding. It involves giving full attention to the speaker, seeking clarification when needed, and being patient.

I prioritize active listening when interacting with members from various cultural backgrounds, and one speech that stands out to me was delivered by a fellow Toastmaster named Sarah. Her speech was titled "Cultural Tapestry" and in it she shared her personal journey as a first-generation American born to immigrant parents.

As I listened attentively to Sarah's narrative, I gained a deeper appreciation for the diversity in American culture. She eloquently highlighted how, in the United States, people from all over the world come together, bringing their unique traditions and experiences to create a rich and intricate cultural tapestry. Her speech emphasized the values of acceptance, inclusivity, and the celebration of differences that are ingrained in American society.

My Toastmasters experience has taught me that recognizing cultural differences is an important aspect to having any type of effective communication. Merging your personal experiences and insights with the broader discussion on cultural diversity, respect, empathy, and active listening allows us to build bridges across cultures and create a more connected and harmonious environment.

Through my participation in Toastmasters, I have been fortunate to connect with individuals from various backgrounds and engage in meaningful exchanges. These interactions have shown me the transformative power of embracing cultural differences and adapting our communication style accordingly. By doing so, we can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and interconnected society, where cultural diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated, and communication barriers are overcome.

Shubhani Mittal is the editor of the District 6 newsletter, and a Past Area Director of District 6. She lives in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. She has been a member of Toastmasters since 2019.

Is Your Interpersonal Communication Personal?

Discover the value of the spoken word.

By Bill Brown, DTM

There is a trend today. Go, go, go. Rush, rush, rush. This has taken over much of our communication, especially with modern technology.

We went from phone calls to emails to texting. When we do talk, we frequently talk swiftly because our time is valuable. Get it out and get on with our day.

But have we lost something in the process?

I am fascinated by another trend in our communication. When emails first came out, they were only plain text. But sometimes, if we had a light-hearted comment, it was taken seriously. So, we started using the symbol :-).

That soon gave way to other symbols, each with its own meaning.

In spoken-word communication, our voices not only carry words, but they also carry emotions. And those emotions carry expanded meaning. If we say something tongue-in-cheek, we don't need a special symbol to tell the listener that they should take it that way. It is obvious.

Plain text took that away. So, the emoji was added to bring a hint of emotion back. And now our texts are filled with symbols and abbreviations. But why?

I believe that the emoji is a desperate attempt to regain part of what we already have in spoken-word communication. We have always had a strong, personal, and emotional component when we speak. The emoji, while somewhat filling the gap, does not do so fully. So why are we trending toward that method of communication rather than keeping what we already have?

I get it. Sometimes quick communication is best. When I leave my Toastmasters meeting, I text my wife, "On my way." We don't need to talk. But texting has been leaning toward ubiquity.

I suggest that we consider the question, "Has our interpersonal communication become impersonal communication?"

Maybe actually talking to somebody has value. 😊



Maybe actually talking to somebody has value. 😊

One important aspect of interpersonal communication is the speech.

What? How could speaking to a large group of people be interpersonal communication? Simple. The most effective speeches do not involve a speaker talking to a collective group. They involve the speaker talking to each person directly. Putting it another way, each member of the audience likes to feel that the speaker is talking directly to them. That makes it personal.

But how do you do that when you are talking to a group? Let's look at a few ways.

One component of our Toastmasters evaluation form is eye contact. What is the message that you are sending if you are constantly looking down at your notes? Or if you are always

looking to one side of the room, ignoring the other side?

If you look directly at a person, they get the impression that you are, in fact, talking to them. You don't have to look constantly at them, but at least acknowledge that they are there. In a larger group, look in their general direction. Eye contact is an important skill in public personal speaking.

The way you phrase your statements is another way that you can communicate on a personal basis.

It is quite common to hear a speaker say, "How many of you have ever [fill in the blank]?" That is speaking to the audience as a group. What if you said, "Have you ever ... ?" Or possibly, "How many times have you ... ?" Although you are talking to everyone in the audience, you are addressing each listener individually.

Your tone of voice is also important. How many times have you heard a speaker talking in an emotion-starved manner? I call that cardboard delivery. Did you listen intently? If the information was critical, yes. But if not, your mind could have easily wandered.

Speaking like you care and using effective vocal variety can go a long way toward moving your audience members to action. Remember, even group decisions are made by individuals. And you reach them through personal, and hence, interpersonal communication.

Years ago, there was a television commercial that advertised telephone services. Their tagline was "reach out and touch someone." Our goal is to reach out and touch everyone we talk with, whether it is one person or a group. And that includes touching them on an emotional level. Spoken-word communication does that better than the alternative. Let's not lose that important skill as we rush quickly through our day.

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

Speaking Across Cultures

Top 10 rules for communicating around the world.

By Dean Foster

In today's globalized world of work, crossing borders is easy. Many of us do it almost daily: when we get on a plane for a conference or client meeting abroad, when we jump on a Zoom meeting with colleagues based in different locations around the world, or when we make presentations, in person or virtually, to increasingly global audiences.

But crossing cultures is hard. People think, decide, evaluate, behave, negotiate, manage, and communicate according to hidden rules that differ from culture to culture. Today, as more of us communicate with others around the world, the already complicated task of speaking clearly and effectively becomes even more difficult.

Here are my top 10 rules for communicating across cultures successfully ... no matter where in the world you are.

10 Learn the communication style.

There are two types of communication styles: low context and high context. Low-context cultures communicate in a more direct way, putting all the important information they are trying to say into the words they use. High-context cultures are more indirect, intentionally disguising important facts inside the context of the communication.

For example, my client from the Netherlands, with a low-context culture, might say, "Please tell me what you don't like about the terms of the agreement." However, in a high-context culture, like in Japan, someone might say, "Please understand, there are many fine things about your proposal, perhaps just a few things need some further study."

Remember, high-context speakers are not trying to be uncooperative when they avoid direct answers, and low-context speakers are not trying to be difficult when they ask direct questions. This is a difference in how they prefer to share information.

9 Evaluate the importance of relationships.

All cultures value trusting relationships between people, but people in some cultures require this trust before they feel comfortable working with you and your

organization. People in other cultures will go straight to the task, and if it succeeds, they will use that success to justify a personal relationship.

In Brazil, a colleague might start by asking you personal questions because they are trying to get to know you in order to feel comfortable working with you. However, a colleague in Switzerland might initially resist spending time getting to know their team members until they have already worked together. They are both communicating according to their culture, just differently.

8 Learn how to socialize.

Taking the time to learn about someone requires more social time together, the details of which can differ between cultures. These details are the "do's and don'ts" and the "taboos" that you need to know. This includes everything from how to dine, drink, dress, greet, give and receive gifts to the etiquette rules between genders, generations, and ethnic groups. While you'll be forgiven for not knowing this at first (you are, after all, from somewhere else), you are expected to "get it," and the sooner you do, the better.

Knowing how the socializing rules change from culture to culture is essential to communicating effectively. But if you don't know, do not assume it is the same as back home in your culture. Act like the curious student: Communicate your ignorance and seek information. Most people love to talk about their culture, and your genuine interest will go far in building that all-important relationship.

7 Manage time-perception differences.

Some cultures are clock-bound: Time dictates what, when, and with whom people do things. Other cultures are time-flexible: Time—and schedules and deadlines—can, and should, always be ready to bend. This difference will affect how people communicate their priorities. Clock-conscious cultures plan, organize, manage project flows, rely on agendas, and take schedules very seriously. Time-flexible cultures see all the above as important, but not as important as being able to flexibly maneuver around time as situations may change.



6 How important are rules?

There are many cultures that make decisions based on rules, processes, and systems that are universal to all—no exceptions. Other cultures make decisions based on the immediate situation, the people involved, and what kind of obligations they may have with each other, despite the rules. Are rules meant to be obeyed or broken, and under what circumstances? Familiarizing yourself with the rules of different cultures will help you communicate and work with others more effectively.

5 Respect the need for “face.”

Some cultures prioritize the importance of maintaining a public persona built on respect, which affects how one communicates. For example, throughout much of East Asia, you must be careful to communicate information in a way that enhances the “face” of the person receiving the information, especially when others are observing. This means you are honoring and respecting someone, rather than criticizing or embarrassing them.

4 Learn how people organize information.

Everyone is capable of logic and rational thought, but cultures emphasize how we communicate our thoughts. Deductive cultures organize information according to an underlying process of thinking, which requires facts to be logically connected, leading ultimately to an irrefutable conclusion. Inductive cultures, on the other hand, lead with a conclusion and search for ways to make it happen (sometimes involving an underlying logical process, but not always).

For example, often my French colleagues will require me to justify my conclusions with logically connected details that substantiate my

Knowing how the socializing rules change from culture to culture is essential to communicating effectively.

“argument,” while refuting any possible alternatives. But my British colleagues may ask me for empirical evidence that what I want to do will work. Conversely, my American colleagues welcome “bullet point” synopses of information on why what I want will work.

3 Determine the cultural comfort with risk.

Associated with deductive and inductive thinking is the comfort level for uncertainty. Risk- and uncertainty-avoidant cultures communicate information that reduces risks associated with any action. Therefore, they often require a lot of information before starting on a task. Other cultures are more comfortable with risk and uncertainty and will use “just-enough” information to take a giant step. My Korean colleagues may require more and more information from me before responding to my requests, while my Nigerian associates might suddenly decide, with little information, to move forward with the entire plan overnight.

2 How do they make decisions?

Individualist cultures reward individual initiative, action, privacy, and achievement. In collectivist cultures, teams and groups of people take responsibility for decisions only after

building a group consensus. The United States, for example, is a highly individualist culture, where a team is a vehicle by which individuals can advance their own agendas. Japan, on the other hand, is a collectivist culture, where they try to make decisions as a group. It is important for people to keep in mind that communicating with an individual in a collectivist culture does not mean this person will communicate their own thoughts or ideas with you in a meeting, though they may do so in private.

1 Learn how authority is determined.

In some cultures, like Scandinavia and the U.S., authority is determined based on someone’s expertise. For example, someone might become a manager based on their experience and skill set.

In other cultures, like Korea and Egypt, authority is based on age, gender, ethnicity, tribe, or relationship. Is rank important—or not—and if so, how is it demonstrated? This affects whether you get to communicate with the decision-maker, or just a gatekeeper, and how you and others are expected to behave with authority, whether it’s a colleague, boss, subordinate, or friend.

Finally, remember that the communication style of any culture is the result of that culture’s particular mix of all of the above. This is what makes cultures so diverse. And that diversity offers an unexpected gift: the possibility of thinking, being, and communicating in new and different ways.

Dean Foster has been providing intercultural consulting for global organizations for over 30 years. He has worked in over 100 countries, is the author of five books, and the host of the podcast, *Oops, Your Culture’s Showing!* Learn more at deanfosterglobal.com.



Lisa Sun Redefines Confidence

The 2024 Golden Gavel recipient has gone from lacking gravitas to owning it.

By Ruth Nasrullah

Lisa Sun's track record of success makes her a natural choice to be the recipient of this year's [Golden Gavel Award](#). After all, she is the founder and CEO of the inclusive clothing brand Gravitas, as well as a national bestselling author and a popular speaker who has presented at some of the biggest corporate conferences around the world.

Those accomplishments, however, are only part of her story. A precocious student, she skipped two grades and entered high school in Southern California at the age of 12. She set her sights on an Ivy League university, but her parents, who were immigrants from Taiwan, worried that a top-tier private college was beyond their financial reach.

They began searching for ways to support their daughter's college aspirations. A friend in their community told her father about student speech competitions sponsored by service organizations. These contests offered the winners college scholarships from \$5,000 to \$10,000 USD, and he suggested that she might benefit from Toastmasters, of which he was also a member.

"He told my dad 'Why don't you and your daughter come join us at a meeting and see if you like it?'" Sun recalls.

Although she was too young to join, the club invited her father to attend meetings. That opportunity helped him improve his English skills, while allowing her to occasionally observe and study the club speeches.

Ultimately, Sun won more than \$20,000 USD in speech competitions over the course of her high school years.

So how did a girl who entered high school two years ahead of her junior high classmates grow up to be a professional speaker, business owner, and author? It started with her family.

The Strength of Immigrants

If you ask Sun who she is, she answers that first and foremost, she is the daughter of immigrants who owned a Mongolian BBQ all-you-can-eat restaurant in Fontana, California, a city that in the early- to mid-'90s still had something of a small-town feel.

“The kindness and generosity of those gentlemen [in my father’s Toastmasters club] in taking me on and coaching me and training me and being so proud when I started winning competitions was invaluable.”

—LISA SUN

“My parents’ restaurant was really the center of a lot of activity in this little city and the thing that was really meaningful was to see what it takes to create something from nothing,” she says.

Her parents also instilled in her the value of working hard. She held several part-time jobs while in high school, saving toward her college tuition. She helped in the restaurant as well.

“I always say I cut my teeth on the family business because from an early age I was working in the restaurant,” she says.

Life in the Corporate World

After finishing her degree at Yale University, Sun took a position in Washington, D.C., with McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm. She worked in their global fashion and luxury practice, making her way up the management chain. That experience, she says, taught her client service, the value of friendship, and mentorship skills. She takes pride in having been one of the few women of color in the boardroom.

However, after a decade of long hours, high pressure, and constant travel, she decided to leave McKinsey and take a year off.

Although Sun treasured her experience with McKinsey and describes it as the place where she learned critical leadership skills, it was time for a break from the fast pace. By this time, her parents had retired to Taiwan, and during a visit there, her mother encouraged her to find a new job. Sun reflected on the work she had done, what had been rewarding, and what had inspired her personally.

One incident particularly stood out.

“My first boss at McKinsey told me I didn’t have gravitas and told me to buy a new dress, look in the mirror, and love myself,” she recalls.

She took that comment and used it as the foundation for building a company. She formed Gravitas in 2013, as a retail clothing brand with a goal of creating dresses that would fit and flatter women of all sizes, from 0 to 24W. She filed a global patent for her size-inclusive apparel, with a mission to catalyze confidence.

Her clothing instantly resonated. A month and a half after launching, Gravitas was featured in *Oprah* and *People* magazines and on the *Today* show. She began receiving emails and letters from women describing how Gravitas dresses had given them the confidence to navigate professional and personal life events.

“We had this groundswell of support and what ended up happening was we realized that through our products, people were sharing their life stories,” Sun says.

The Science of Confidence

In her book *Gravitas: The 8 Strengths That Redefine Confidence*, which came out in September 2023, Sun drew on a quantitative study on the idea of confidence in America taken from a 1,000-person survey of women from a range of backgrounds.

She points out that while confidence is often seen as a reflection of performance, the dictionary defines it as an understanding and appreciation of trust in your own abilities. In other words, a mindset.

“[The survey] identified eight different types of confidence,” she says. “Most of us have two or three—my mom has all eight—I only have four. The whole idea is to change the language around what it means to be confident.”

The eight types of confidence—which she dubs “superpowers”—are leading, performing, achieving, giving, knowing, creating, believing, and self-sustaining.

“What we realized is that we’re all born fully self-confident,” she says. “Ask any 5-year-old what they’re the best at in the world and they’ll tell you.”

The book essentially combines an analysis of how society tends to define confidence and an outline of concrete steps enabling the reader to identify their superpowers and rebuild a sense of confidence.

Bringing Gravitas to Speaking

Sun is also a professional public speaker. Her speaking agent, Matthew Jones, president and CEO of Leading Authorities, says she is a highly



prized speaker by clients. “People connect with her,” he notes. “She comes from a very personal space—she’s telling her life story. She leaves a trail of happy people wherever she goes.”

Her speeches encourage people to cultivate the courage it takes to change direction in life, and go outside of their comfort zones. As the daughter of immigrants, she has seen firsthand how the power of self-confidence can propel people to a success they never imagined.

The Golden Gavel Award is particularly meaningful for Sun. She has never forgotten her time observing Toastmasters meetings, and feels that experience with her father provided her with invaluable insights she couldn’t have gotten elsewhere.

Today, she lauds Toastmasters as “one of the few places in the world where it’s risk-free and you’re encouraged to experiment.” She remembers being exposed to concepts like structuring a speech and the importance of timing.

“The kindness and generosity of those gentlemen in taking me on and coaching me and training me and being so proud when I started winning competitions was invaluable.”

Sun is now a role model to many, whether they are budding entrepreneurs, aspiring speakers, or perhaps someone like her—an exceptional first-generation American aiming to build gravitas to achieve success and fulfillment.

Learn more about Lisa Sun and Gravitas at gravitasnewyork.com. Learn more about the [Toastmasters 2024 International Convention](#).

Ruth Nasrullah is a freelance journalist based in Houston. She joined Toastmasters in 2006 and since then has belonged to several clubs in the greater Houston area. Visit ruthnasrullah.com to learn more about her and her writing.



Making Your Debut on the



What event curators and speakers want you to know about the TEDx process.

By Jillian Mitchell

If you daydream of giving a TEDx Talk on the big red dot, you're in good company. And what guides that reverie into reality is often unraveling the unknowns—the application, audition, and presentation, and perhaps more so the pivotal query: *Is my idea truly worth spreading?*

While TED Talks are large-scale events focused on bringing together well-known speakers, a TEDx Talk is organized at a local level, and volunteers search for unique ideas from lesser-known voices. Often, TEDx teams select a theme for speakers to focus on. The benefit is speakers can interpret the theme in their own way, allowing for a diversity of topics. The goal of TEDx is to spark conversation, connection, and community.

As a speaker coach for the TEDxRRU team in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, I have spoken directly with speakers and event curators to dispel the unknowns. I want to share how the TEDx process works, and unveil what curators are looking for in presentation ideas. Get ready, because implementing these tips may make your TEDx dream a reality.

1 Brainstorming

“Ideas worth spreading.” This event tagline may be the most important piece of advice. Before filling out the application, the actual first step is to clearly understand your idea, and decide whether that idea is, as the slogan suggests, worth spreading. If your idea is new, factual, and interesting to a broad audience, you're on track.

Relatable topics are a bonus, but even complex topics like artificial intelligence can be made relatable. Just ask Peter Scott, DTM, author and instructor, who presented at the 2023 TEDxRRU conference in Canada, on this very topic.

“TEDx is about communicating something that your audience is going to find worth their time,” says

“TEDx is about communicating something that your audience is going to find worth their time.”

—PETER SCOTT, DTM



Peter Scott, DTM, delivers one of his TEDx presentations.

overarching or amorphous. Be your authentic self, for example, is too broad. Look for one important takeaway and focus on that.

“TEDx is about conveying an *idea*,” he says. “You can work in things about yourself and your personal history in the service of that, but it’s not the main thing—though make sure you explain in your application why you’re the right person to do the talk.”

Pro Tip: Write a short proposal about your idea and why it matters ahead of the application: how it will add value to the event, how the idea is innovative, why you’re competent to speak about it, and how it fits with the local community. To find your idea, ask yourself, *If this thing is going to go viral, what is it that I want to say to the world?*

2 The Application

It’s never been easier to apply; sample application forms are readily available online. With a few clicks of a button and some wordsmithing, you’re done. The catch? Because you cannot rely on your presentation skills, spend time crafting your pitch beforehand, especially since you’re required to submit a sample of your script in the application process.



Jared Throneberry on the big red dot in Tennessee.

It may surprise you to learn that TEDx is partial to people without a platform to captivate audiences with fresh and compelling ideas deserving of global attention. While TEDx is known for its local flair, it is possible to apply for an event outside your homebase. That's what Jared Throneberry, Club President of Speak Up NASBA in Nashville, Tennessee, did.

"Anybody can apply to any TEDx," says Throneberry. "Nashville was the closest event, but I started looking around the area and applying to nearby events as well."

A key consideration when applying, Throneberry says, is making sure your idea fits with the event's theme and guidelines, in addition to the standard TEDx guidelines. If your idea fits, apply! Just remember that TEDx is a nonprofit and there is no travel budget.

Pro Tip: Get a head start by searching for your target venue's application form. You can also explore the [list of events](#) for a comprehensive overview.

3 The Selection Process

After the application deadline, the spotlight is on the curators, who sift through the mountain of written applications to find the gems. As highlighted by TEDx curator Scott, each event must aim for a diverse range of voices, with a mix of perspectives and topics. In this meticulous curation process, team members, each with specialized knowledge, carefully sift through applications to review all the scripts, with a particular focus on those that fall within their respective areas of expertise.

The criteria for selection, says Scott, is threefold. "Are these people ready? Are these people coachable? Do we have an idea here?"

Pro Tip: Whether or not you're selected, ask the curators for feedback—they'll be happy to provide it!

4 The Audition

Next, the in-person audition. At this stage, it's not just about having a good idea, it's about exceptionally communicating that idea.

"TEDx has such high standards, and the value of the audience's time is paramount," says Scott. "Looking at the context of what wins, it's anecdotes, examples, and stories with an underlying theme."

A perfect example comes from global coach Jimmy Thai, DTM. Thai hit on the many principles outlined in TED founder Chris Anderson's [TEDx guide video](#) for presenters; he connected his personal story of transformation (from refugee to Fortune 500 vice president) to his overall goal of building schools for poor children around the world, and did so with a curiosity-peaking focus: "How to Build 100 Schools for \$1."

"It's about the mission," says Thai, who now coaches prospective TEDx speakers. "The three things I always teach people are purpose, profit, and peace—to balance those. There's nothing wrong with profiting from a TEDx Talk but how can you reinforce your mission and reinvest in the less fortunate people? How can you use your voice, your talent to make a difference and make this world better than yesterday?"

Whether the oral audition requires a portion of your speech, or the entire gamut, is dependent on the venue (video auditions are rarely accepted). Memorization is not required at this stage; simply stand in front of the curation team and speaker coaches and read your script. The team will follow up with a few questions—asking you to summarize your idea's core message, how you plan to support this message outside of TEDx, and how you feel about coaching.

Both Thai and Throneberry finessed their presentation by working with their Toastmasters clubs. In fact, Throneberry credits his fellow Toastmasters for streamlining his TEDx Talk. "They're the ones that encouraged me to talk about foster care," he says. "They expressed the uniqueness of having a male talk about it. It actually made for one of the best moments in my talk!"

Scott echoes the value of the Toastmasters experience in the TEDx process. "You can absolutely see a difference between people who are experienced Toastmasters coming into TEDx and people who aren't—Toastmasters have a leg up," he shares. Scott also emphasizes Toastmasters' advantage of a heightened comfort level in presenting, time management, and familiarity with a constructive feedback culture as key differentiators. "For me, the competition environment with Toastmasters was absolutely the best training for TEDx and especially the evaluating feedback."

Pro Tip: Ahead of the audition, practice your speech with your Toastmasters club.

5 Coaching and Rehearsals

Six months of your life for an 18-minute talk is a commitment that may seem extensive to some, especially if your local venue opts for the even shorter 12-15-minute talks. However, Scott contends that the unique challenges posed by the shorter format outweigh those of the longer counterpart.

“How can you use your voice, your talent to make a difference and make this world better than yesterday?”

—JIMMY THAI, DTM



Jimmy Thai, DTM (wearing white hat and sunglasses), poses with children at one of the schools he helped build. They hold their fingers up in the shape of hearts.

“If you can’t find that value in 12 minutes, you’re not likely to do a good job in 18,” he says.

When it comes to editing, coaching becomes invaluable. Behind the scenes of TEDx, speaker preparation is a meticulous journey, from one-on-ones with coaches to workshops covering the TEDx Talk structure to the nuances of voice projection and crafting a commanding stage presence. The team of speaking coaches comprises an array of expertise, from Toastmasters to vocal coaches, theater veterans, and life coaches—all dedicated to extracting the utmost from the event’s lineup, providing guidance, and offering support, recognizing that an experience of this magnitude often stirs up a spectrum of emotions.

At TEDx, the mantra is clear: “We get the words right before we learn how to say them,” emphasizing the importance of refining content and messaging before focusing on delivery. Speakers are first directed by their coaches to finesse their speech, employing humor, engaging all five senses, and establishing an effective PowerPoint presentation, before shining up their presentation skills to drive home that one major idea (with no more than three subtopics). Coaches shoulder the responsibility of guiding speakers to complete their speeches by a designated date, termed as “script lockdown,” marking the point beyond which no further alterations are permitted, and the fact-checking process can begin. Next up is delivery, whereby coaches collaborate with their speakers to bring out the best in their presentation.

Memorization is an absolute must for the big red dot moment—there are no teleprompters. And interestingly, speakers are encouraged *not* to move around the stage, save for inside the red circle, for ease of video recording, though gestures are welcome.

Speakers undergo a transformative process, culminating in two crucial rehearsals: The first, a moment to unveil the final version of their speech with last-minute tweaks, and the second, a dress rehearsal complete with lighting, microphones, and wardrobe checks.

Pro Tip: This journey involves transformation. Be patient with yourself, give yourself grace, and recognize that the team is there to bring out the best in your already great performance.

6 The Presentation

Big red dot time! One thing all interviewees agree on: The big day comes faster than imagined. Here, the culmination of the past six months’ work comes full circle. If you’re here, you’ve earned it, you’ve got this, and remember to breathe.

If you’ve watched many of the 50,000 (and counting) TEDx Talks available online, you may not know that not all TEDx Talks get published on the TED site. The talks you see online have gone through an additional selection process that includes further editing and fact-checking.

Pro Tip: If you want the absolute inside scoop, become a volunteer at your local TEDx event.

7 The Celebration!

You did it—congrats! But surprise: The ceiling has now been raised. Here’s how Scott explains it: “A mistake that a lot of people make is acting as though this is their one and only chance they will ever have to speak to an audience of this size,” he says. “Really, you should set your sights higher. This is a start. If you don’t have bigger visions than speaking to a TEDx audience, then you don’t belong there. It’s about having a mission to reach a great many more people.”

Pro Tip: Harness that mission but remember to first stop and celebrate. You’ve earned it!

In the intricate tapestry of the TEDx experience, from contemplation to writing, auditioning to speaking, coaching to presenting, the central thread is the pursuit of that one monumental idea. As the endeavor to spread meaningful messages persists, so too does the mission to inspire, inform, and ignite change. Here’s to embracing your next mission—onward and upward, as the ripple effect of impactful ideas continues to shape the world.

Jillian Mitchell is a vocal coach, recording artist, podcast host, and all-around voice advocate. She is the founder of [Voxsana](#), an online platform dedicated to voice empowerment, and most recently has joined the 2024 TEDxRRU speaker coach team in her hometown. Jillian lives in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, with her husband and two children.

Can a Personality Test Make You a Better Communicator?

How the Enneagram or MBTI influences your relationships.

By Tara McMullin

Personality testing, a multi-billion-dollar industry, is ubiquitous—from hiring processes to team-building exercises and even on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. While psychologists question their accuracy and rigor, these tests can offer insights into self-understanding, empathy, and communication, provided we cautiously navigate their results.

Ultimately, such assessments can help us improve how we work and interact with others.

While many personality tests claim to be backed by research, only one test is regularly used by psychologists: the Big Five, also known as the Five Factor Model or OCEAN.



The Big Five

The Big Five test assesses personality across five traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN). Unlike type-based tests—which label people according to a particular characteristic—the Big Five describes a spectrum of behavioral and affective tendencies, offering insights without confining you to a specific category. This approach helps recognize your inclinations toward change, interaction, and stress management, providing a nuanced understanding of how we relate to ourselves and others.

“I see the strength of the [Big Five] tests as understanding more about your innate preferences or strengths when it comes to the workplace,” says Martha Menard, a behavioral scientist in Bellingham, Washington. Understanding your level of extraversion or agreeableness helps you make more sustainable decisions about how you work. And knowing others’ preferences allows you to collaborate with greater

ease. “But it’s important to remember that these traits are all on a continuum and not either/or, black or white,” adds Menard. “Context also plays an important role.”

But you might be more familiar with personality type systems, which categorize people by the ways they think and act.



MBTI (Myers-Briggs)

The MBTI was developed by a mother-daughter team, neither of whom were psychologists, between the 1920s and 1980s. The Myers-Briggs system examines four pairs of traits: extroversion/introversion (E/I), intuition/sensing (N/S), thinking/feeling (T/F), and perception/judging (P/J). Your test results tell you which one of 16 combinations is your Myers-Briggs type (e.g., I am an INTP, my husband is an ENFJ).

Personality psychologists Dan McAdams and William Dunlop point out that not only are the traits the MBTI tests for psychologically suspect, but the idea of a personality type is reductive and unsupported by science.

Despite the lack of supporting research on the validity of the MBTI, employers frequently use it to hire, coach, and manage employees. And many people find knowing their types and the types of others very valuable. The MBTI system offers a vocabulary for teams to discuss their needs with less stigma attached.

For instance, my husband (who is also my business partner) and I find it helpful navigating our different approaches to project management and client relationships. When it comes to project management, his judging tendencies (J) support our process-oriented approach, and

my perceiving tendencies (P) remind us to stay flexible. With client relationships, my thinking (T) tendencies give me distance and objectivity, while his feeling (F) tendencies create warm relationships with our clients.



Enneagram

Another famous personality assessment is known as the Enneagram. Developed by Bolivian philosopher Oscar Ichazo in the mid-20th century, it offers a unique take on the issue of personality.

Psychologists define personality along three dimensions: how you interact with others and the world (social), what beliefs and goals drive you (motivational), and your story about yourself (narrative). Ichazo's system theorizes that our motivations "fixate" on a particular goal (e.g., recognition, influence, uniqueness, etc.) that influences how we see the world, how our inner narrative evolves, and how we behave.

Like with the MBTI, psychologists don't recognize the Enneagram as a valid personality assessment, but it still has many devoted fans.

Kate Tyson, who owns a bookkeeping agency, uses the Enneagram with her team members to help them develop a "personal operating manual." Tyson says she's an "abstract thinker and communicator," while her team members are primarily "concrete thinkers and communicators." The Enneagram "has been a helpful shorthand for understanding bridging communication differences," she explains.

Copywriter Kate Hollis shares that she appreciates how the Enneagram system is "a framework for growth and not a static fact about ourselves. Unlike other personality tools, the Enneagram is about motivation, not behavior." Hollis explains that the Enneagram gives her tools to apply directly to copywriting. "Knowing a client's type helps me to quickly zone in on

what they're naturally good at and to identify messaging that other types would resonate with."

Personality type systems, like the MBTI and Enneagram, reduce wildly variable human personalities into tidy categories. These systems also seem to produce the most predictable results for white, professional, neurotypical people—so the relative value of these systems is likely lower for people from different groups.

Personality Types and Social Media

Both the MBTI and the Enneagram are wildly popular on social media. When I spoke with Steph Barron Hall, the founder of Nine Types Co., a California-based business focused on enhancing Enneagram knowledge and how it can be applied to individuals and organizations, about this phenomenon in 2022, she explained that personality-based content is "very algorithm-friendly." "Sharing a graphic to your stories that tells people 'Here's a blueprint of how to talk with me'—people love that," Hall told me.

Personality-type posts are front-facing representations of what's going on behind the scenes with the algorithms that use our behavior to sell ads. When we share a meme about how annoyingly achievement-oriented Enneagram Threes are or how laughably gregarious ENFJs are, we replicate the same social categorization that platforms like Instagram or TikTok use. We trade our uniqueness for shorthand that flattens out what makes us different. To Instagram, I'm a middle-aged woman who owns her home and enjoys outdoor recreation. To the Enneagram, I'm an ambitious yet insecure person prone to vanity and approval-seeking. None of those things are untrue. But they're also not who I am.

Insights for Communication and Collaboration

When used cautiously, the Big Five personality traits model and popular personality type systems can make communication more efficient and effective.

Hollis, the Maryland copywriter, says that she uses the Enneagram to notice her behavior and redirect it in ways that feel better to her and resonate more with her clients. When she finds herself skewing "quirky" and "eccentric," she reminds herself that her true strengths are "depth" and "nuance." Tyson, who owns the book-

keeping agency in Vermont, adds that she uses the Enneagram to consider how she will deliver feedback to her team members (e.g., choosing an appropriate setting and tone).

Tyson also notes that it's important to her to make personality testing an optional post-hire activity. When the team discusses results, it's always a "low-stakes activity." These conversations are "a jumping-off point for talking about ourselves and how we communicate with each other."

Cognitive Empathy

Regardless of your preferred personality trait or type system, these systems offer a helpful way to practice cognitive empathy—understanding more about what another person thinks and feels. While empathy is often discussed as an emotional phenomenon in pop culture, philosophers and psychologists note that a critical form of empathy is intellectual. How we think about another's perspective or experience helps us stay present with our emotional responses.

While we tend to expect others to respond to situations in the same way we would, personality types remind us that there are many different ways to engage with the world. Learning about a system—not only your own type—allows you to exercise cognitive empathy. For example, any situation you find yourself in is a chance to ask yourself how someone with a different personality type might respond.

Considering perspectives that differ from yours will become second nature with practice, and you'll become a more effective and empathetic leader.

From the Big Five to MBTI and Enneagram, personality tests offer intriguing insights into our behaviors and preferences, serving as tools for self-discovery and improved interactions. Even if the science is iffy, the actual value of these systems lies in fostering self-awareness and empathy.

By learning about the diverse ways you think, feel, and communicate with others, you can be a more effective and influential communicator at work, in meetings, onstage, and beyond.

Tara McMullin is the host of *What Works*, a podcast that explores how to navigate the 21st century without losing your humanity, and the author of *What Works: A Comprehensive Framework to Change the Way We Approach Goal Setting*.



The Keys to a Confident Voice

A voice coach's guide to unleashing your inner power.

By Jillian Mitchell

Confidence—we all want it, some of us have it, and others are desperately trying to find it. Whether it's a big speaking gig, a poignant conversation at work, or heart-to-hearts at home, the truth remains the same: Confidence is not an exclusive trait, but a skill accessible to all, and with the right tools, you can harness it when it truly matters.

As a voice coach and seasoned vocalist with over 20 years of experience, I've witnessed numerous success stories in the realm of confidence-building. Here, I'll unpack the voice-confidence link and unveil answers that may surprise you with their simplicity.

The Correlation Between Voice and Confidence

Within seconds, your audience will form impressions of your confidence, and a large part of that decision is based on your vocal attributes. The good news? Evidence suggests there are strategies to project confidence and competence, regardless of internal nervousness or timidity.

Perhaps the simplest way to kick off this voice-confidence conversation is to talk tone. The concept of

tone (i.e., the quality of sounds we make) becomes paramount in this discussion, as recent studies suggest that a person's voice may matter twice as much as the content conveyed. Qualities like roughness, strain, or breathiness in a voice may project negativity, weakness, passivity, or tension. Conversely, open and full voices (rich, resonant, warm/bright, velvety) are associated with confidence, dominance, and assurance.

I can hear you now: *Okay, so how do I get an open, free voice?* Through voice work—and regulating your nervous system. Let's dive in.

Voice Work for Enhanced Confidence

Your voice is an instrument—do you know how to “play” it efficiently, or even how it works? By developing competence in your instrument, you'll not only feel more confident, but you'll be empowered to skillfully course-correct to your desired expression. In other words, you'll have a choice in the sounds you make.

An open and free tone is the result of harmonious collaboration among the respiratory (air), phonatory

(voice box), and resonatory (chest, throat, head) systems. If you're not experiencing an open, free tone it's a cue that your voice is being blocked, likely by learned habits. Vocal work, particularly regular warm-ups, gets us out of those habits and into our full, resonant, and confident voices.

Whether it's a wedding toast, eulogy, or morning board meeting—don't let your first vocalization of the day be in a high-stakes situation. The voice is a muscle like any other, and muscles benefit from being warmed up. Though daily warm-ups are ideal, penciling one in before those key conversations and presentations will do the trick. And it'll make all the difference (think: no morning voice or incessant throat clearing). For an easy warm-up, check out [5 Exercises to Vocal Tone](#). (And be sure to drink your water! A dehydrated voice is a scratchy tired voice.)

Next—become friends with the sounds you make. Don't mistake this for egotistical; it's self-confidence. While your warm-up builds trust with your voice, this process builds self-acceptance. Together, it's a combination that fosters the competence-confidence loop: competence in your vocal ability, and confidence not only in the sounds you make, but in putting your voice out there when it counts. Record yourself, listen back, and build upon the good.

Dealing With Nerves in Awkward Conversations

Elevated heart rate, shortness of breath, racing thoughts—when nerves strike, the initial casualty is often our breath, the very foundation required for a confident and composed voice. The solution? Breathe. But it's not always that simple, and sometimes a reframe is needed before you can access that breath.

Nerves, acting as a silent attribute, emulate distinctive vibes to our listeners, subtly influencing the atmosphere and setting the tone of our communication. And often, nerves get a bad rap. But what if I told you that nerves can be reframed, as excitement without the breath? This helps shape a positive atmosphere for your listeners through the concept of co-regulation. Your vibe affects their vibe, and vice versa—here's how to use it to your advantage:

- **Reframe it:** Anxiety or excitement—you choose.
- **Breathe:** There's a great quote from psychologist Paul Ekman, who says, "The most

powerful person in the room is the one who's breathing." He's not wrong. We need breath to support a confident voice. Here's a simple exercise: Beforehand, take three deep breaths (an inhale followed by an exhale, three times), and extend the exhale twice as long as the inhale. During the conversation, do your best to breathe; create a mantra or visual cue as a reminder.

- **Resist the urge to judge:** We all get nervous. And some of us never outgrow it. The trick is to resist getting into a mental narrative about it.
- **Give it 90:** There's exciting research that says emotions will dissipate in 90 seconds if you practice three steps: identify it, label it, and observe it without trying to change it.

Confidence is not an exclusive trait, but a skill accessible to all, and with the right tools, you can harness it when it truly matters.

- **Actively listen:** Resist formulating your next thought. Pause before you react. Be intentional with your words. That will bring confidence to the game.
- **Use "I" language:** When you focus on yourself and how you feel, it comes across as constructive and confident, less accusatory.
- **Switch perspective:** You don't look as nervous as you feel. Remember co-regulation.
- **Practice:** Beforehand, practice what you're going to say—out loud. And don't forget your warm-up beforehand! A full, open voice is a confident voice.
- **Beware of your beverage:** Watch your caffeine intake. Too much can exacerbate nerves, so amp up the water.

Sounding Confident Even When You Don't Feel It

You'd expect to see the words "fake it till you make it" here, and with good reason. But to me, confidence is not a destination, it's a journey, and though it ebbs and flows with the situation, it's always accessible—and some of us may need a minute to access it.

Here are a few more tips to get you on the confidence track:

- Change the way you think about failure. Mistakes are okay.
- Change your motivation for being there, from convincing to sharing.
- Don't compare yourself to others.
- How you talk to yourself matters. If positive self-talk doesn't come naturally, try adopting a neutral way of speaking, one that's constructive and less judgmental.
- Eliminate filler words like "um" and "ah."
- Take time to pause; silence is an effective tool.
- Vary your vocal variety and pace of delivery.
- Be authentic. Bring value to the conversation.
- Body language counts. Make eye contact, keep an open posture, and use gestures meaningfully.
- Stay present. You don't look as anxious as you feel.
- Practice in front of others, or the mirror. Become familiar with what you look like when you speak and exercise self-acceptance.
- Manage nerves. Nerves stem from "what ifs" or uncertainties. Quash these doubts. Visit the venue beforehand. Play out the scenario. Refer to the tips in the previous section.
- Prepare. A lack of a clear message undermines your confidence.
- Record yourself, if possible, and listen back for cohesion and confidence.

Imagine giving a speech where the power and warmth of your voice captivates the audience, leaving a lasting impression. Where you're addressing colleagues in the workplace or presenting ideas to your manager with authority and competence, garnering respect from peers. Where heart-to-hearts at home happen regularly and with more ease.

By incorporating these insights and tools into your daily life, you, too, can access and project confidence whenever the need arises. Remember, your voice is not just a means of communication; it is a powerful instrument that, when mastered, can open doors to newfound confidence in every aspect of your life.

Jillian Mitchell is a vocal coach, recording artist, podcast host, TEDx speaker coach, and all-around voice advocate. She is the founder of [Voxsana](#), an online platform dedicated to voice empowerment. Jillian lives in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, with her husband and two children.

Kind vs. Nice Communication

Learn how to deliver an effective and considerate evaluation.

By Ben Guttmann

You come home exhausted after a long day, arms full of grocery bags, and you see two of your neighbors leaving your apartment building.

The first neighbor is all smiles, waving hello and asking how your recent vacation went, how your cat is feeling, and what your plans are for the summer. Your tired arms are about to give way, but you make the polite small talk while your neighbor gabs on. Finally, they bid farewell, and you resume your juggling act.

Your second neighbor is rushing through the lobby, looking a little upset and fiddling with their phone while listening to who-knows-what in their earbuds. In their hurry, they slam through the door, almost knocking you out in the process—but then they look up, see you, and silently hold the door open for you to scurry inside just before your vegetables are about to hit the ground. By the time you turn around to thank them, your neighbor is long gone.

Which neighbor would you rather have? The first one's behavior was nice but not kind. The second's behavior was kind but not nice.

These are two words that seem to mean the same thing on their face but are entirely different things in practice. Understanding the difference is the key to becoming a better communicator, giving better feedback, and, yes, even being a better neighbor.

Nice is caring about the surface level—being polite or friendly, maintaining decorum, or following social norms. It's nice to use somebody's honorific title, give a compliment, or use please and thank

you. There's nothing wrong with nice, but what is really needed when interacting with others is kindness.

Being kind means that you care about the other person as much—or more than—you care about yourself. It's kind to hold that door open, but it's also kind to tell people what they need to know and help them improve. Kindness is about caring for others and their well-being, even if it can be uncomfortable in the moment. It's action, not packaging.

The Benefits of Kind Feedback

The purpose of feedback, in Toastmasters and beyond, is to help somebody understand where they are and how they can improve. But often, it's more challenging to “just” give feedback to others than in creating your own work. Evaluations can be uncomfortable, and telling

somebody that something needs work or isn't measuring up can be painful for both the sender and receiver.

So, instead of giving critical feedback, people are predisposed to slip into the realm of nice, leaving the kind-but-awkward truths hidden behind high scores and “nice jobs!” This route feels good in the moment, but it ultimately does no good for the person on the receiving end.

A great orator himself, Winston Churchill, said, “Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.” When you shrink from necessary feedback, you prioritize your own well-being over that of your receiver's, placing agreeableness over necessity.



The Kindness Principles

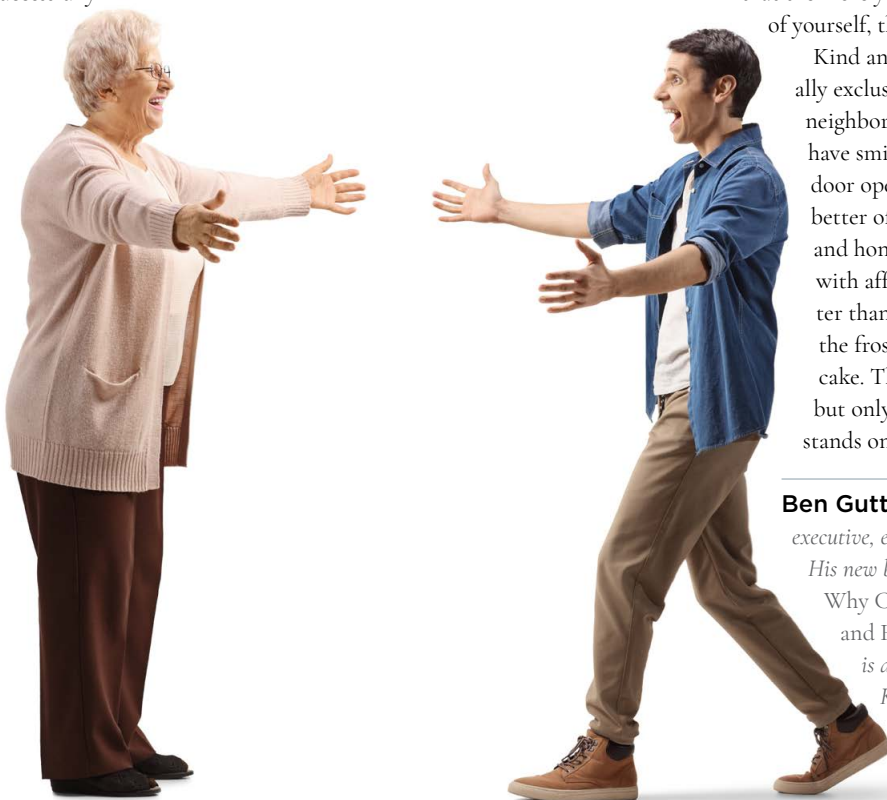
Three principles help to show kindness in feedback: benefits, focus, and empathy.

1 Benefits. Highlight the benefits and outcomes rather than just features and details. Take your initial reactions and interrogate them. If you say a speech was “really great” or “a little boring,” explain what you mean. What made it sparkle? Why did you lose interest? Giving feedback with the word “because” in it is the goal, as it helps your listener connect the input to a reason and helps them to improve going forward. There’s also research that shows the word “because” carries its own bit of magic. It turns out that people really like to hear the reasoning for things, and it makes us much more likely to be persuaded. Harvard University’s Ellen Langer showed this in a landmark 1978 study, where researchers tried to get in front of the line at a campus photocopier by using differently worded requests. When the word “because” was used—even in a phrase as meaningless as “because I have to make copies”—the odds of successfully cutting shot up by more than 50%.

2 Focus. The next step in effective feedback is to maintain focus: What is the one thing that the receiver needs to hear? Focus is challenging for two reasons. First, it can be tempting to throw in polite asides to help soften the anticipated blow of a critical note. And second, evaluators are often unsure of what it is they actually want to say and sprinkling around a few phrases here and there allows them to get through the task without too much sweat. Simplicity and focus are hard—there’s nowhere to hide. It’s also useful to highlight what the receiver authentically did well, which can help prime them to better receive the rest of your feedback; but don’t confuse genuine appreciation with sugarcoating.

There’s nothing wrong with nice, but what is really needed when interacting with others is kindness.

3 Empathy. Finally, practice empathy in feedback. Empathy is understanding your counterpart and meeting them where they are, in terms of language, emotions, motivations, and more. Take a moment to put yourself in their shoes and attempt to figure out why they did what they did or said what they said. Why did they choose their specific speech topic, and how does it fit in their Toastmasters journey? Empathy is a hard muscle to train, but the better you can understand your receiver, the better equipped you’ll be to deliver kind and effective feedback, in a language they will connect with.



Personal Benefits

In Toastmasters, it’s easy to think that the member giving a speech is the one communicating, and that those in the audience are simply just an audience, but that’s ignoring your responsibility to practice strong communication in how you respond.

If you don’t give feedback that connects and helps your colleagues grow, then you have failed. Your duty is to help them, and dishonest politeness just helps you—allowing you to “get done with it” and avoid uncomfortable conversations. Taken together, these principles will better enable you to do the former.

Leaning into this lesson helps the evaluator, too. Beyond the intrinsic value of kindness, there’s some evidence that it’s good for health. Practicing kindness is shown to release oxytocin in the brain, resulting in what’s been dubbed a “helper’s high.” Generosity, through kind communication and other acts, is shown to be tied to lower blood pressure, less depression, greater happiness, and even a longer life. It turns out that the more you help others instead of yourself, the better you feel.

Kind and nice are not mutually exclusive. The hypothetical neighbor from before could have smiled while holding the door open, and you’d likely be better off for it. Actionable and honest feedback delivered with affection will land better than without. But nice is the frosting, and kind is the cake. They’re better together, but only the cake of kindness stands on its own.

Ben Guttmann is a marketing executive, educator, and author.

His new book, *Simply Put:*

Why Clear Messages Win—and How to Design Them, is available from Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Learn more at

BenGuttmann.com



A Look Back at the Golden Gavel Award

An array of illustrious figures have received the honor over the years.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

For 65 years, Toastmasters International has presented a prestigious award to individuals distinguished in the fields of communication and leadership. The Golden Gavel is unlike any other honor given in the Toastmasters realm—the recipients, who aren't required to be members of Toastmasters, include authors, broadcasters, philanthropists, actors, leadership experts, and more. The winner is recognized at the annual International Convention during a special Golden Gavel presentation, where they receive a trophy (in the early days it was an actual golden gavel) and give an acceptance speech.

The first Golden Gavel was given in 1959 to Dr. Frank C. Baxter, a professor of English at the University of Southern California, who was nationally known for his many television appearances. You may recognize some other famous names and faces of past recipients—even Toastmasters founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley was awarded the Golden Gavel, in 1963.

Here are some memorable winners through the years.



GREER GARSON (left) was an Academy Award-winning actress who also starred onstage and in television. She was presented the 1968 award by then-International President Lothar Salin. Garson received the honor five years before women were admitted as members of Toastmasters.



WALTER CRONKITE, the legendary U.S. television newsman, was tapped for the award in 1969. In his speech, Cronkite urged all people to demand that news be presented thoroughly and accurately.



DR. DEEPAK CHOPRA (left), the famed health and wellness expert, was presented the Golden Gavel Award by 1997–1998 International President Robert Barnhill, DTM.



STEPHEN COVEY (left) received the 2004 award from then-International President Ted Corcoran, DTM. Covey, an author, businessman, and speaker, is most well-known for his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.



SUSAN CAIN, author of *Quiet*, a highly popular 2012 book about the power of introverts, was honored as the 2013 recipient. The onetime Toastmaster talked in her acceptance speech about how introverts can use their innate strengths to become great leaders.

In honor of Toastmasters International's 100th anniversary, this is the fifth in a year-long series of articles commemorating historic milestones.

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Author/Book Websites

One of the best ways to promote your book(s) and yourself as an author is through your own website. We have developed software specifically for authors and their needs.



Online Course

Take our online course to learn the strategies that will help make your book a best seller. For each strategy, a detailed audio and/or video explanation of the idea is included.



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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

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

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

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



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