

# Section VI F 1.2

Toastmasters International  
***POLICIES AND PROCEDURES***

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## **PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING PERSONAL CONDUCT MATTERS**

These procedures supplement Policies and Procedures VI F 1, F1.1, and F 2, regarding standards of ethics and conduct (including harassment) for members of Toastmasters clubs, as well as the disciplinary procedures for members and officers set forth in Policies and Procedures VI F 4 (removal from good standing), in Policies and Procedures VI F 5 (expulsion of clubs and clubs' expulsion of members), and in officer removal provisions contained in governing documents for Toastmasters International, the districts, and the clubs.

These procedures describe the various abilities and limitations existing at the club, district, and international levels when personal conduct issues arise. Ultimately, the goal is to better protect the organization by indicating how these matters can be solved fairly and expeditiously (a) without overburdening local club and district officers, international officers, or World Headquarters, and (b) without inviting unintended and excessive legal liability for Toastmasters International and the clubs.

### **Legal Organization of Toastmasters International**

Clubs are unincorporated associations which are separate legal entities from Toastmasters International. Our governing documents state that the clubs are not liable for claims against the international organization and the international organization is not liable for claims against the clubs. Therefore, if an issue regarding personal conduct arises within a club, the club is legally and practically responsible for resolving it, not Toastmasters International.

Club officers may seek guidance from district officers, international officers and directors, or from World Headquarters, but such guidance is purely advisory; circumstances where Toastmasters International would give mandatory direction should be extremely rare. If Toastmasters International officers or staff were to intervene directly and systematically in club matters, this could invite a claimant to try to hold Toastmasters International legally liable (i.e., for delayed or insufficient corrective action). The only sanction for club misconduct available to Toastmasters International involves club expulsion action taken at the Board of Directors level. Since the Board consists of twenty-three officers and directors who meet normally only in August and February, this sanction is ordinarily reserved for only the most severe, persistent, or defiant conduct causing harm to the organization at large and is not an efficient mechanism for addressing certain types of conduct.

Likewise, removal of an individual member of a club from good standing with Toastmasters International requires action to be taken at the Board of Directors level, a sanction also ordinarily reserved for only the most severe, persistent or defiant conduct causing harm to the organization at large.

Those persons holding office above the club level (area, division, district, or international officers or directors) are subject to the ultimate authority of the Board of Directors. However, most such

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officers function as part-time volunteers at a subordinate level, limited by geography and a short term of office, and so the ability of Toastmasters International to supervise their conduct is quite limited. The organization has no paid employees except those working at World Headquarters, further limiting the practical ability of Toastmasters International to oversee the work of volunteer officers in the districts.

Therefore, matters of personal conduct arising within districts above the club level should be resolved by district officers if they can be, with assistance from World Headquarters to the extent necessary and practically possible. The Executive Director should always be notified of incidents occurring above the club level, and may initiate independent action to assure that proper corrective steps are being taken. Again, action by the Board of Directors to remove a district-level officer is reserved ordinarily for only the most severe, persistent or defiant conduct causing harm to the organization at large.

### Communication of Standards and Procedures to Officers and Members

If the content of the written policies and procedures adopted by Toastmasters International regarding personal conduct can be communicated broadly throughout the organization, we can achieve a certain degree of prevention since officers and members will then be more likely to conform their behavior to these standards. If a problem arises, it should be handled initially at the lowest or most proximate practical level to the incident following the indicated procedures. If the resolution is not satisfactory to someone, he or she is assured that the matter may be safely reported to a higher level. If the person does not make such a report, the higher level should not be held responsible for the situation.

### Admission and Selection of Members and Officers

Because Toastmasters members and officers are comprised of part-time, adult volunteer participants, neither the clubs nor Toastmasters International can reasonably be expected to investigate the character or background of every person proposed to be a member or an officer. The financial resources of Toastmasters International and the clubs are extremely limited. When voting upon the admission of a member or the election of an officer, members are entitled to consider any information about the person's background or character of which they may be aware, but the prospective new member or officer is not required to make any affirmative disclosures about such matters. Clubs are formed for the mutual education and improvement of their members, regardless of their backgrounds. To illustrate the point, some clubs are formed within correctional institutions and others may include members with past criminal records. Therefore, neither Toastmasters International, nor the club, nor any club officer, nor any district officer, nor any international officer should be held responsible for the background or character of any person admitted to club membership or elected or appointed to a club, district, or international office.

Reference: Policies and Procedures, Section VI F 1  
Policies and Procedures, Section VI F 1.1  
Policies and Procedures, Section VI F 2  
Policies and Procedures, Section VI F 4  
Policies and Procedures, Section VI F 5