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MARCH 2007

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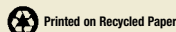
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Contestant or Candidate?

✦ Back in 1994, I was a contestant at the Interdistrict Speech Contest in Louisville, Kentucky. I didn't win and decided to make a comeback the following year. But that year I was also nominated for district office as Lt. governor marketing. Thus, my dilemma began. Should I be a contestant or a candidate for district office?



I asked for advice from many leaders and speech champions. The funny thing was, the leaders advised me to go for district leadership and the speech champions said I should compete again. I was right back where I started.

That's when I consulted with then-Second Vice President Ian Edwards. He asked me very simply, "What is your purpose for entering speech contests?" He explained that if I competed to become a better speaker and communicator, then following the leadership track would actually offer me more opportunities to speak and develop my skills than any speech contest could. I decided that that was what I wanted, so I ran for district office; the rest is history.

Isn't it Simply Amazing how serendipity works? That's when you look for something and find something else that is even better. I joined Toastmasters because I thought it would be cool to do speeches and have fun with fellow members. I entered speech contests because I thought that was the best way to improve my speaking skills. Yet I found that volunteering for leadership roles was the biggest factor in helping me refine my communication skills – not to mention the tons of leadership lessons I've picked up over the years. These are practical lessons no book or school can ever teach.

Too often we think of TI's communication and leadership tracks as two separate and distinct entities. But the reality is that one develops and sustains the other. Our new *Competent Leadership* manual shows how club speaking roles can help develop leadership skills. And as leaders having to motivate, facilitate and counsel others, we develop our communication skills in the process.

In the next two months, Toastmasters clubs and districts around the world will hold elections for new sets of officers. I urge you to consider taking on a leadership role. Serve your clubs, areas, divisions and districts as volunteer leaders. Volunteer leaders form the backbone of our organization. They are why we continue to grow. They are why our clubs and districts function smoothly. And yet, volunteer leaders can gain from their experience as much as our organization benefits from them. This symbiotic relationship is what makes Toastmasters International and its members Simply Amazing!

As for me, well, I may never be a World Champion of Public Speaking, but in 2005, as Senior Vice President and contest chairman of that event, I did have my picture taken on the International Speech Contest stage holding the winner's trophy in front of 2000 people. As time passes, will anyone know the difference?


 Johnny Uy, DTM
 International President

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The Toastmasters Vision:

Toastmasters International 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.

The Toastmasters Mission:

Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

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Don't Stress Over the Dress

I was taken aback by Tammy D. Bailey's letter in the January issue. Personally I thought this was one of the most eye-catching cover photos I have seen in your magazine since I joined Toastmasters in 1984.

We must realize that we learn best when we are having fun. I wish to congratulate the pretty lady for her fantastic panel moderating pose.

Douglas Wijesinha, CTM • Colombo Toastmaster Club
Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Dressing Up or Dressing Down?

I just couldn't stop laughing at the "dressing down" the lovely young lady on the cover of the December issue has received in the Letters to the Editor section. The tone sounded more like a chastisement than an evaluation.

I didn't have a problem with the young lady's attire. I took a closer look at the photo and found that the audience's attire tells us more about the picture than first meets the eye. My guess is the meeting was held in a very hot location and just maybe the air conditioner wasn't up to speed. Thus, the short sleeves and sleeveless dress.

Casual and informal attire has its merits. It creates a relaxed and more personal atmosphere. How people dress is subjective and can also be dictated by geography and climate. For instance, I know of a club on the coast that meets near the beach.

Many of its members work in the beach industry and attend meetings in shorts and shake sand out of their sandals as they enter the building. Are shorts and sandals appropriate attire? Obviously not at a corporate club downtown. But, since shorts and sandals are the norm at the beach, why not?

Sure, Toastmasters suggests dressing appropriately for meetings, for your leadership role, for speech contests and for banquets. But what might be one cat's furball could be another cat's meow. Give the lady a little credit. She had on stockings and a nice pair of shoes. And for crying out loud, leave the publishers and editors alone. They do a great job.

Michael Kesselring, DTM • Mountain Messengers
Sylva, North Carolina

Who Should Impress Whom?

I wish to point out a serious misprint in the Rosetta Stone advertisement on page 17 in the February issue. The ad shows a young man in a white T-shirt and baseball cap looking out across a field in thoughtful pose with this caption:

*He was a hardworking farm boy.
She was an Italian supermodel.
He knew he would have just one
chance to impress her.*

Instead, the last line obviously should read:

*She knew she would have only one
chance to
impress him!*

I would appreciate it if you would make this amendment to this particular advertisement in any future editions.

Richard Walsh, dairy
farmer, CL • Clonmel Club
County Tipperary, Ireland

High Score for Evaluation Issue

The timing of February's special issue on evaluations was great for our four-month-old club.

Everybody at our last meeting praised the articles, especially the one by Shelia Spencer, "3 Points to Keep Your Evaluation on Target." This article offers an excellent framework for speech evaluators.

Unlike cultures in other parts of the world, many people in Europe are not used to giving and receiving feedback outside of the formal corporate performance evaluation or education system. It's easy to become defensive and afraid to help others evolve. Our meetings are improving every week because we are now more confident giving honest analysis, thoughtful recommendations and encouragement.

Francisco Saraiva • Oporto Toastmasters Club
Porto, Portugal

Planning for Effective Evaluations

While paging through the February issue, I saw Shelia Spencer's article on evaluations. When I saw the author's name I knew I had to read it.

I liked the theme that evaluations are for everyone attending meetings, not just for the speaker. At some clubs the speaker and evaluator frequently stand and talk at each other, thereby missing the growth opportunity for the entire audience. Avoiding subjectivity was also a salient point, especially when not being familiar with a speaker's background.

One suggestion that was not included is the importance of evaluators and speakers getting together for a "practice session" to gear the evaluation not just to the manual but to specific goals the speaker might have.

Thanks again for a great article!

Jim Simms, CTM • Oldsmar Top of the Morning Club
Oldsmar, Florida



Life in a Grammar Slammer

✶ For most of us, English is a sentence (buh dum bum). In school we learned the basics followed by their 6,534 exceptions. We discovered, for instance, that “i” goes before “e” except after “c,” then immediately took off to SCIENCE.

In sixth grade I entered the Wildwood Elementary Spelling Bee and in the final round misspelled “lenient,” which does not, for the record, end in “-ant.”

I cried myself raw on the merry-go-round, shouting at the heavens: L-e-n-i-E-n-t, l-e-n-i-E-n-t... My shrink still enjoys the irony.

In the wake of that sinister day, I pledged to memorize every word in the dictionary, beginning with the a’s. “*Audacity*, noun. Unreserved impudence.”

Flip flip flip flip.

“*Impudent*, adjective. Impertinent disrespect.”

Flip flip flip flip.

“*Impertinence*, noun...”

In high school they made us diagram sentences that seem friendly enough but which are, beneath the surface, crawling with “prepositional phrases” and “subordinate clauses.” Example: *All people must have been laughing*.

In eighth grade, “all people” is the subject, and “must have been laughing” is the verb.

By tenth grade, “all” is an adjectival modifier, “must” is a modal auxiliary verb, and “have been laughing” is a contusion of the lower occipital lobe. Wait, I’m back in science class.

The problem is that English has so many unnecessary, unneeded, needless words, and let me explicate why: Our founding grammarians had a sick sense of humor and are even now snickering in the dis-

tance. How else can you explain the pronunciation of *colone!*?

But they were the ones waving quills, and if a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how do you know? So they brainstormed new exceptions... “No, no. Let’s have ‘grammer’ end in -ar. That’ll *really* make ‘em feel stupid.”



When they finished with spellings, our twisted forebears gave each word numerous – sometimes contradictory – meanings. For example:

Match, verb. 1. To fit together, be in harmony 2. To pit in opposition against. 52. To light on fire (e.g., *The boy matched his dictionary*).

Then they moved on to pronunciation, which would depend, of course, on context (the part of the country you’re from). Example:

Don’t project on my project unless you effect my affects, and by that I mean my personal belongings.

And it’s just this sort of thing that makes people speak Spanish. To this day, I say “amen” both ways just to make sure the prayer counts.

They, the grammar sickos, considered adding an “s” to “misspell,” but were far too subtle with a-b. They enjoy it most when nobody knows the word “arcane” and that phonetic begins with “ph.”

So what happens? Kids stop judging books by their covers and judge them by their movies instead. At Christmas, my nephew unwrapped *Catcher in the Rye* and asked, “Where do you plug it in?”

So it goes.

Other signs of language decay can be found in this perfectly acceptable use of online grammar: LOL BTW luv 2 chat but CUL8er :P We’ll diagram tomorrow.

Advertisers have their own rules, which include lots of verbing:

- *Staples is the best place to office.*
- *How to California in 30 Days.*

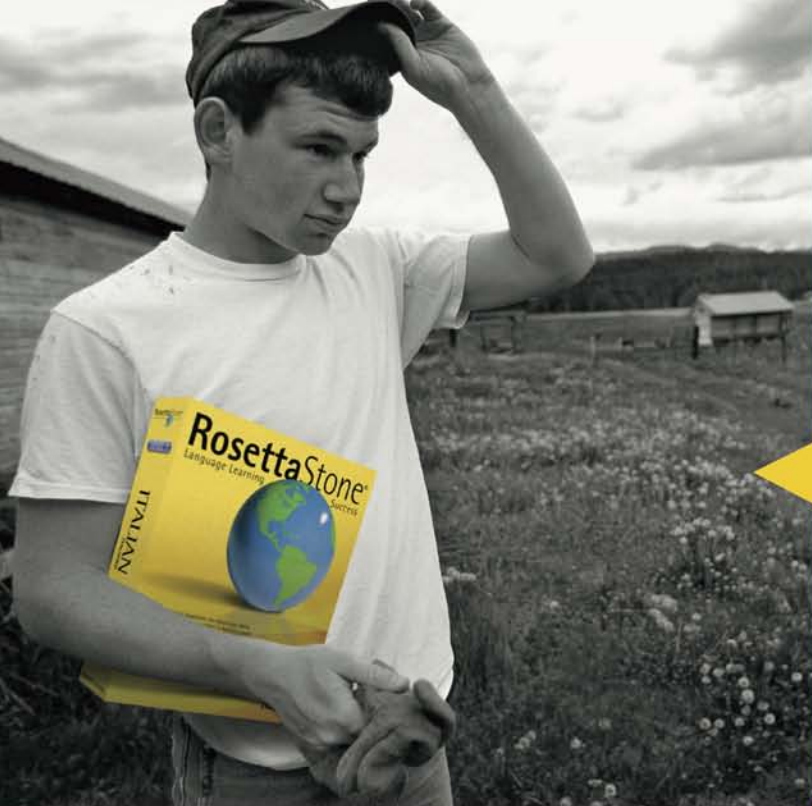
Note that California is an intransitive verb, so you couldn’t say, “Go California yourself.” You could, however, engage in Californication according to noted grammarians, The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

I personally feel that it’s immoral to put our children through English when grownups are running around using “office” as a verb. Think of all the time we slumped over those big blue English books of death. Those years could have been so much funner!

All I’m saying is that we could stand to be a little more l-e-n-i-A-n-t.

AY-men and AH-men. ■

Jason Love is a syndicated humor writer and cartoonist. Contact him at jason@jasonlove.com.



He was a hardworking farm boy.

She was an Italian supermodel.





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Cab driver uses his Toastmasters training to implement life-saving law.

The Ability to Advocate

When former cab driver Arthur McClenaghan began reading self-help, motivational books several years ago, friends and co-workers snickered and told him not to bother. They doubted the effectiveness of inspirational publications and had a hard time visualizing

McClenaghan as anything more than an overweight taxi driver.

"I truly was an American slob," says McClenaghan of his former self. "I was so lazy that I needed a remote control to fetch my remote control. I was overweight, had no plans for the future and very little money. I knew, however, that I wanted something better out of life, so I began reading books by authors such as Brian Tracy, including his book about overcoming procrastination, *Eat That Frog*."

The encouragement and advice McClenaghan found in such volumes drastically changed his life. He began exercising and eating well, eventually losing 70 pounds.

"The suggestions in the books taught me to ignore demotivators and concentrate on motivators," says McClenaghan, who found references to Toastmasters in many of the books.

"Authors like Tracy highly recommended Toastmasters for building confidence and speaking skills," he says. "At the time I was interested in increasing confidence, but I didn't think I'd needed speaking skills; after all, I was just a cab driver."

But he would soon become much more than a cab driver – thanks, in part, to Toastmasters.

"For over 12 years I drove taxicabs in downtown Las Vegas," he says. "While driving cabs is an interesting job, it can also be dangerous. I personally knew a driver who had his throat slit and another who was hit on the head with a blunt object and died."

Feeling sorry for family members of cab drivers who were hurt or killed in the line of duty, McClenaghan came up with the idea of putting security cameras in taxis and began pushing for legislation that would mandate their use.

"Many drivers said I was wasting my time because there were only nine owners monopolizing the whole cab industry in Las Vegas, and many people thought that they would never allow the cameras," he says. Bolstered by the motivational books he'd read, however, McClenaghan decided to forge ahead anyway.

"I originally petitioned other drivers, and everyone – including my boss at the time – told me that it would be impossible to get the cameras installed," he says. He continued to spread the word, however, soon getting local media attention for his cause.

When it became apparent that McClenaghan would need to speak

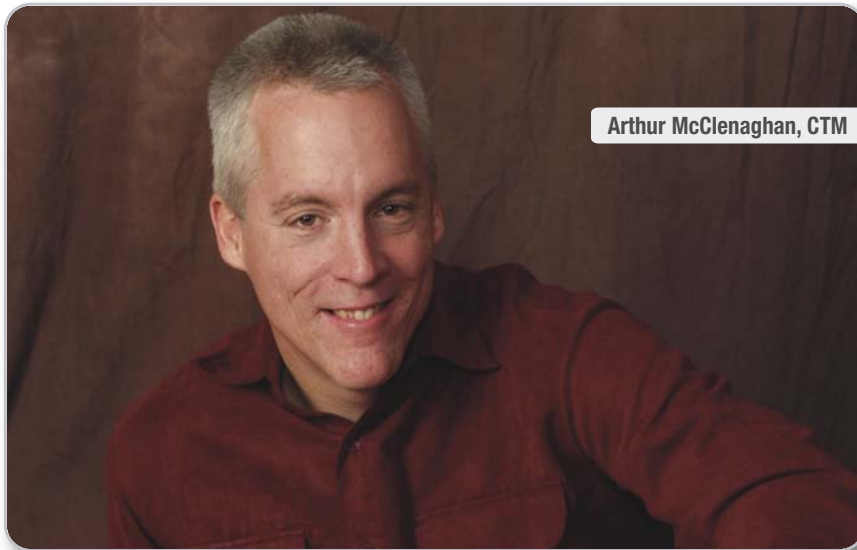
on camera and in front of the Nevada Taxicab Board, which is a state legislative committee appointed by the governor, he became nervous.

"At first I thought, this is scary! I'm just a cabbie; what the heck was I thinking? But then I remembered reading about Toastmasters and found a club and visited right way. At my first meetings, I was very nervous. When I stood up to speak, I was so shaky, I'd hold onto the podium and had a hard time letting go. Everyone was so friendly and professional, though, that I stayed and stuck it out."

The Toast of Sierra Toastmasters club helped McClenaghan almost immediately with speaking skills and his confidence grew every day. Just six months after joining, he had to make an important speech regarding the campaign, and he was ready.

Fellow club member Bob Dobson notes how quickly McClenaghan advanced in Toastmasters: "In an amazingly short period of time, Arthur went from being so nervous he could barely stand up, to completely self assured in front of news cameras," says Dobson, who has been a Toast of Sierra Toastmasters member since 1990. "Considering his admirable and brave cause, club members were more than willing to help him improve, and as a result he became an excellent Toastmaster."

McClenaghan's fight for security cameras was not an easy one, and



Arthur McClenaghan, CTM

his idea met with a great deal of resistance. "The nine owners of the taxi-cab industry in Las Vegas are very powerful, and at times I was a little nervous, he says. "I also didn't know if I'd lose my job, but I truly believed in the cause and kept at it."

As he fought for the security cameras, McClenaghan marshaled all of his Toastmasters training, which he believes helped tremendously.

"Toastmasters teaches you not to argue, because everyone loses in an argument," he says. "Instead you learn to clearly and concisely state your views and the facts with emotion behind them, as many times as necessary."

Fellow Las Vegas cab driver Greg Bambic says, "Art presented information regarding the cameras in a reasonable, very persuasive manner that really helped the cause." Bambic is currently president of the Professional Drivers Association, a group which he, McClenaghan and another cabbie helped turn into a charitable organization to assist injured or killed Las Vegas taxi drivers and their families. Since the organization started helping victim's families, it has collected almost \$100,000 and donated \$75,000.

Former taxi driver Jim Szekely, Sr., was almost killed on duty in 1984. "Driving a cab is a really dangerous profession," he says. "You're essentially picking up hitch hikers for a living 24/7. I was attacked by

a passenger who cut my throat, stabbed me in the back of the neck and made mincemeat out of my hands and arms. Fortunately, God spared me, but others aren't so lucky, and the money can be very helpful for those left behind."

Szekely, who started the Huntington, West Virginia-based International Taxi Drivers' Safety Council 23 years ago after his attack, consulted with McClenaghan throughout the campaign for cameras in Las Vegas cabs. Szekely says McClenaghan's work on behalf of cab drivers has spurred heightened security throughout the world.

"What Art was able to accomplish in Las Vegas had a ripple effect," he says. "His professional, direct message was heard all over the world, and it made a difference. Other cities throughout the nation have since adopted policies for security cameras in cabs."

McClenaghan credits his Toastmaster training with helping him reasonably and calmly convince the media and lawmakers to take his message seriously. Even when the topic went up before the Nevada Taxicab Authority the first time and was rejected 4 to 1 in February 2004, McClenaghan remained determined to turn the tide. Several months later, after studies backed up the research McClenaghan had shared regarding the danger of driving a taxi, and a


cab driver was burned to death by a passenger, the Nevada Taxicab Authority changed its position and voted unanimously to mandate security cameras in all Las Vegas cabs on October 26, 2004. Although there have been some changes in the law since that mandate was passed, today all taxi cab companies in Las Vegas have security cameras.

"According to a report by CNN, there has reportedly been a 70 percent drop in crime toward cab drivers since the cameras were installed," says McClenaghan.

McClenaghan and his wife recently moved to Southern California so he could pursue a career in screenwriting. He is taking courses at UCLA and trying to sell his screenplay, *True American*. It hasn't sold yet, but a producer recently offered him a writing job.

"I'm still amazed at my transformation," he says. "When I joined Toastmasters and started researching the security cameras, I wrote my first article since 10th grade. Until then, I had never attended any college courses. I didn't even know I would enjoy writing. My point is that deep down inside all of us are hidden talents which can only be discovered when we stretch out into the unknown."

"I encourage everyone to discover their passion and live their destiny. Toastmasters allows you to do that and so much more."

For more information regarding taxi cab safety, visit www.itdsc.org and www.Taxi-L.org. 

Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California. Reach her at Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com.

Editor's Note: Do you have an inspiring story of how the Toastmasters program has helped you? Tell us at letters@toastmasters.org.



Getting Comfy with Comedy

**It's fun to
be funny!**

By Lisa Mulcahy

The right amount of well-placed and appropriate humor can make your speech a smashing success!

Using humor effectively can be tricky. We've all sat through functions where the speaker is a John Cleese wannabe who hardly belongs on *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Not to suggest that public speaking must be a laugh fest, but injecting just the right joke at just the right moment into an address can really capture your audience's attention and goodwill. Humor can also serve to sharpen your speech's focus and maximize its impact.

As an experienced Off-Broadway musical comedy director, actress and writer, I've mastered many comic stage skills in my time. The great thing about such theatrical tricks is that they can be easily and seamlessly incorporated into virtually any speech or report you may be called on to give. Learning a few simple humor-oriented speaking tips can also calm those butterflies in your stomach and give you a sense of control over your presentation.

Let's get you comfy with comedy by reviewing some basics:

Feel Free to be Funny

A confident, relaxed attitude is the first thing you need to master. Yet the idea of trying to be funny in front of your colleagues probably makes you feel anything but relaxed. This is normal. Randy Farias is a seasoned stage actor who specializes in comic roles. He explains: "Everyone in the world is nervous in front of a large group of people. If you try to clamp down on nervousness, your focus becomes the nervousness instead of the subject you're trying to present."

So acknowledge that the thought of being funny gives you the jitters, then work to become calm and self-assured. It's important to understand that you really can't fail at being funny. Resolve that your goal is not to be so hilarious as to knock Mr. Bean out of show business. Instead, all you want to do is share a funny, positive moment with your audience. If they laugh along, terrific; if not, it isn't the end of the world. You deserve credit for trying to spread great vibes, no matter what!

Still, if your sweat glands are going into overdrive as you take the podium, plan ahead. "Indulge in the energy created by nerves," advises Farias. "If you stumble at first, comment on it and laugh at yourself. It's honest! The audience will laugh *with* you, not *at* you." Don't apologize, but do share the humor in it.

It's also very important to tap into your Toastmasters training. Memorize and try to relax by following these tried and tested Toastmasters tips:

- Focus on your message, not on the audience.
- Visualize yourself giving your speech.
- Realize that people want you to succeed.

What's Your Humor Style?

Many people assume they shouldn't crack a joke because they feel they are not naturally funny. But the fact that you possess the ability to laugh is proof that you have the tools to be funny.

Everyone has a sense of humor; what makes the world so interesting is the fact that everyone's sense of humor is unique. Some folks laugh their heads off at slapstick skits while others chuckle at romantic

***"Humor is a rubber sword –
it allows you to make a point
without drawing blood."***

– MARY HIRSCH

comedies. It's easy to identify your natural style of humor; just zone in on what kind of comedy you find truly funny. Chances are good that the type of stuff you laugh hardest at is the type of humor you'll be most comfortable delivering.

Really, it's just a matter of being yourself. Randy Farias agrees heartily with this. "Children are some of the best models for comedy," he says. "They don't filter anything before they speak or act. They're honest with how they feel, they show it, and that often makes children very, very funny. I try to take that same tack when performing comedy."

Comedy works when it isn't forced. So don't try to imitate a slapstick comedian – or even your favorite speaker. Don't practice funny faces into your mirror, or put on weird, silly voices. Plan to face your audience as yourself. When thinking about the kinds of jokes you might include within your speech, think anecdotes – everyday situations your entire audience can relate to. Simply tell a funny tale in your speech the same way you'd relate a funny story to a friend, and your humor style – be it absurd, ironic or acerbic – will shine through naturally, with no obvious effort.

Plugging Humor into Your Material

Once you've identified the particulars of your humor, what specific process do you use to work it into your speech?

Start by writing the body of your address, leaving out the jokes initially. Your overall message is more important than anything else. Think of the humor you want to insert as an accent to, not an aspect of, your main message.

Once your speech is factually complete, read it over carefully. Make note of sections that can benefit logically from a bit of levity. Once you find such a section, play around with a few options of how to highlight these points with humor.

If your speech revolves around specific work issues that everyone present is well-versed in, for instance, having a bit of fun with the given circumstances will probably go over very well. However, it's extremely important, especially in a professional setting, not to employ controversial or offensive humor, which I guarantee will backfire on you. Never resort to using any humor that is racist or sexist in nature. And unless you perform stand-up comedy in an adult-only nightclub, refrain from using off-color or profane jokes as well.

Your Toastmasters training stresses the importance of knowing your room and your audience. Researching what the audience demographic will be is invaluable when it comes to predicting what type of humor will work. Similarly, the Toastmasters concept of knowing your material will help you feel prepared. Write your jokes directly into the copy of your speech and practice, practice, practice! Memorizing your speech, jokes included, will help you deliver it most naturally, as will trying it out in advance in front of family and friends.

Should You Use a Straight Man?

Jerry Lewis famously worked with comic foil Dean Martin in many classic movie comedies. But in a public-speaking situation, is it really advisable to employ someone else as a straight man for your humor?

In certain circumstances, it can work, but you must evaluate and set up such a scenario very carefully. My Off-Broadway show pulled up an audience member onstage and into the production every single show, and it always appeared funny and spontaneous. In reality, however, each person we used was a “plant” – usually a friend of a cast member who was asked ahead of time and given plenty of preparation. This ensured that the show ran smoothly.

If you have a funny idea you’d like to employ in your presentation using another person, follow our tried-and-true theatrical sleight-of-hand and use a plant. Don’t spring any improvised surprises on your cohort. Also, don’t do a 10-minute routine with this person – you’ll bore your audience, and the message will be lost. Just one short, well-placed joke will suffice.

If your speech is meant to honor or introduce someone who is present, you may be tempted to employ this person as your straight man. Will it work? It depends on the person. Is this individual stuffy and serious or fun-loving and spontaneous? If the latter description fits, then include him or her in the levity.

Here’s an example of how you could do this: Say that a local political candidate has accepted an endorsement from your organization. Today a luncheon is being held to make his acceptance official, and your job is to introduce the candidate to your group and to the local media. Your written speech naturally highlights a long list of the candidate’s accomplishments. Let’s assume, though, that during his most recent public appearance, he sang the local college football fight song notably off-key. Chances are your candidate might want to make light of such a minor embarrassment, if given the chance. So, ask him in advance if you can poke some good-natured fun at him in your remarks. He’ll probably agree, as it could work to his advantage and defuse any bad publicity.

Sarcastic humor is a big mistake, however. The last thing you want to do is make fun of a person you’re supposed to respect. Always put yourself in the other person’s shoes. If you wouldn’t like a particular joke to be told about you, then don’t tell it about someone else.

Pace Yourself

They say timing is everything, especially in terms of delivering jokes. How important is pacing the humor in your speech? How exactly do you employ the practice of good comic timing?

Randy Farias boils it down: “Simply be honest with the situation,” he says. “Allow the moments or moment needed and make the correct reaction choice. There’s a saying that acting is not acting but *reacting*, which is never truer than in comedy. That’s where the timing resides – that moment of truthful processing.”

You can easily translate this smart philosophy to your speech. Take in your environment – listen to what your audience gives you – and react to it. This will give your speech a natural rhythm and the proper pacing. Give the audience time to laugh. But speak faster or with more spirit if you sense a lull in the crowd. Let the situation reveal itself to you, and follow its lead in regard to the timing of the humor you use within your speech.

Points to Remember

Here are a few more hints that can help your humor work smoothly:

- **Smile and make eye contact** with various audience members.
- **Don’t laugh at your own jokes.**
- **Avoid improvisation**, unless you’re feeling very comfortable with how the speech is going.
- **Customize your material.** What works for one audience may not work for another.
- **Know when to leave ‘em laughing.** Don’t run on too long. Always leave your audience wanting more.

Enjoy how fun it is to be funny. Plus, use it as a learning tool. What jokes and delivery techniques worked best for you? Which didn’t? This type of information will pay off when it’s time to use humor in your next speech. **T**

Lisa Mulcahy is the author of *Building the Successful Theater Company*. She is a Manhattan-based multimedia writer with extensive experience in theater.

Want to be funny?

You Can't Go Wrong If You Name That Song

✎ Most people consider public speaking more frightening than death. It's a commonly cited survey result. It's a cliché. And it's not true.

If public speaking were scarier than death, it would be used as a threat in action movies. After capturing the hero, the bad guy would say, "If you don't cooperate, I'll make you give a speech!" But that never happens. The bad guy inevitably says, "If you don't cooperate, I'll shoot you." That's because death is a more powerful threat.

But there is one type of public speaking that *is* scarier than death – using humor in a speech. Ever hear someone say, "I couldn't tell a joke to save my life"? That person would rather die than try to get a laugh in a presentation. And that person has lots of company.

Fortunately, there's a simple way for anyone to inject humor into a speech about even the driest of topics. It's the song-title technique. Let me tell you about it!

A friend of mine asked for my help on giving a speech to lawyers and accountants about the status of the U.S. estate tax. So we're talking dry topic. Actually, more like a drought. Anyway, the status is uncertain because the American Congress made deep cuts in the estate tax until 2010. That means heirs of rich people who die get to keep a lot more money. But the cuts disappear if they're not made permanent in the next year or two. And my friend wanted to begin his speech by addressing this uncertainty with humor.

Because the speech was in Memphis, the birthplace of Elvis Presley, I suggested he make a reference to Elvis. "How do I say something funny that relates to Elvis and the uncertainty of estate taxes?" my friend asked. That's when I created the song-title technique.

I selected titles of Elvis songs that could be grouped into a common theme. Then I made it seem as if Elvis had recorded the songs in anticipation of the estate-tax debate. This is what I told my friend to say:

Here in Memphis you can feel the presence of Elvis everywhere – especially when you talk about the estate tax. Really. He died before the current reforms took effect. But he knew that one day Congress would have to decide whether to make them permanent. And he recorded some songs as a message to Congress. Here are the top 5 titles:

- "It's Now Or Never"
- "Don't Be Cruel"
- "Keep Your Hands Off It"
- "Walk A Mile In My Shoes"
- "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?"

Elvis also recorded some songs if the estate-tax law doesn't pass. The top 5 are:

- "Tell Me Why"
- "Reconsider Baby"
- "You've Lost That Loving Feeling"
- "Hearts Of Stone"
- "Easy Come, Easy Go"

As you can imagine, this went over very well. The audience appreciated any effort to spice up a topic as dull as estate taxes. And my friend was off to a great start with his speech.

What if you're not speaking in Memphis? No problem. This technique isn't limited to Elvis Presley's birth place. It will work anywhere people are familiar with Elvis – which means just about anywhere in the world. In fact, the song-title technique can work with any well-known musician or group that has recorded a large number of songs.

A good example is the Beatles. Everyone knows who they are. And

they have a long list of song titles that you can group into themes.

So let's say you're going to make a training presentation. You have to teach a group of people something really complicated – a computer program, details of complex new legislation, medical procedures, whatever. You might begin by saying:

It may sound strange, but I feel the Beatles are here with us today. Because they recorded some songs on how you may feel about learning [topic of your talk]. The top three titles are:


- "The Long And Winding Road"
- "It's All Too Much"
- "Help!"

Fortunately, they also recorded some songs about how I feel. The top three are:

- "I Want To Hold Your Hand"
- "Ask Me Why"
- "We Can Work It Out"

The beauty of this technique is that it doesn't require any special comic delivery. Anyone can use it successfully. And the research required – finding lists of song titles – is easily accomplished with a quick Web search.

So the next time you want to use humor in a speech, you don't have to fear the experience more than death. Just remember the songs that Frank Sinatra recorded for you:

"High Hopes; I've Got The World On A String;" and "(The) Best Is Yet To Come." 

Malcolm Kushner is the author of *Presentations For Dummies* and curator of the museum of humor.com. Visit his web sites at www.kushnergroup.com and www.museumofhumor.com.

What's the difference between humor that helps and humor that hurts?

Moving from Toxic to Nourishing Humor

Have you ever had someone say to you, “I was only kidding? Can’t you take a joke?” Do you ever feel guilty after laughing at a joke? Have you ever been an evaluator at a club meeting when the speaker used inappropriate humor?

Do you wonder why I am asking these questions? These queries will help us focus on the most important question when it comes to using humor: To tell the difference between constructive and destructive humor, between humor that helps and humor that hurts, between laughing *with* others and laughing *at* others.

Humor is a powerful tool. It can build up or cut down. Toastmasters need to look for ways to maximize the positive and to minimize the negative impacts of humor. You need to learn the difference between humor that works *for* you and humor that works *against* you as a speaker (and as a human being).

To develop an effective sense of humor, you need to develop *sensitivity* to humor. To accomplish this, try the following three steps:

- Draw the line between laughing with others and laughing at others.
- Interrupt toxic humor.
- Use humor that is nourishing.

Let’s take these steps one at a time. The more we can help ourselves and others be aware of the

difference between positive and negative humor, the more intentional we can be in following Robin Williams’ notion that humor is “acting out optimism.”

Laughing At Others:

- Is based on contempt and insensitivity
- Destroys confidence through put-downs
- Excludes some people
- Is offensive, sarcastic and divisive
- Reinforces stereotypes
- Is slanderous
- Is cruel

Laughing With Others:

- Is based on caring and empathy
- Builds confidence
- Is inclusive – A person chooses to be the “butt” of a joke (as in “laughing at yourself”)
- Is amusing – invites people to laugh
- Is supportive
- Brings people closer
- Leads to positive repartee
- Pokes fun at universal human foibles
- Is nourishing
- Is an ice-breaker

Interrupting Negative Humor

My guess is that most people who use toxic humor are not trying to be malicious – they are just unaware that their humor is hurtful to others and ultimately to themselves. They often respond with, “Can’t you take a joke? I was only kidding.”

Regardless of the person’s intent, this kind of humor hurts. We can all learn from the African proverb, “The ax forgets. The tree remembers.”

So how can we help those who use the ax, who use cutting humor, to become aware of what they are doing and to break this negative habit? We need to be assertive, supportive and firm – and take some risks. There is no single “best” way to respond to negative humor – it will really depend on the situation, the people involved, and the nature of the interaction.

Here is a list of ways to interrupt an ethnic or put-down joke. The next time you hear toxic humor, try out this behavior and make note of the reactions (both in yourself and in the other person). The key is to move from awareness into action.

■ Use a quotation to give perspective.

A fifth-grade teacher told me her students used negative humor on each other all the time. She inter-

vened by putting up a quote on the board, "You don't have to blow out my candle to make yours glow brighter." She called the pattern to their attention, and the behavior stopped.

■ **Use an "I statement."** Comedian Bill Cosby says that when someone is about to tell an ethnic joke, he simply says, "I really don't want to hear it." Making an "I" statement (e.g., "I don't appreciate jokes like that" or "I feel uncomfortable with ethnic jokes") can be a powerful way to take responsibility for yourself and to let the other person know the impact of negative humor.

■ **Don't respond.** Without the reinforcement of laughter, the behavior may disappear by itself. Some people take this a step further by walking away from negative humor.

■ **Ask the negative joke-teller to explain the joke.** This does two things simultaneously: (1) it kills the joke (whenever you have to explain humor, you analyze it to death) and (2) it helps the joke-teller to become more aware of what he or she is saying. An innocent request like this can be a very smart approach.

Of course, there are many more ways to tackle this situation. Feel free to add to this list...and use the responses whenever appropriate.

Example: The Only Way

Many people who use negative humor just don't know any better – or any alternative. Most of what they have seen, heard and experienced is toxic humor – humor used as a weapon rather than as a tool. It's no wonder this is the style they adopt. As Albert Schweitzer noted, "Example is not

the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

We need to help people see by our own behavior that humor doesn't have to be at someone else's expense, that we can use humor to laugh at ourselves and not at others, and that humor can be used to heal rather than harm. We can remind them that humor is laughter made from pain, not pain inflicted by laughter.

Look for ways to invite helpful humor into your life and work. Look before you lip. Laughing

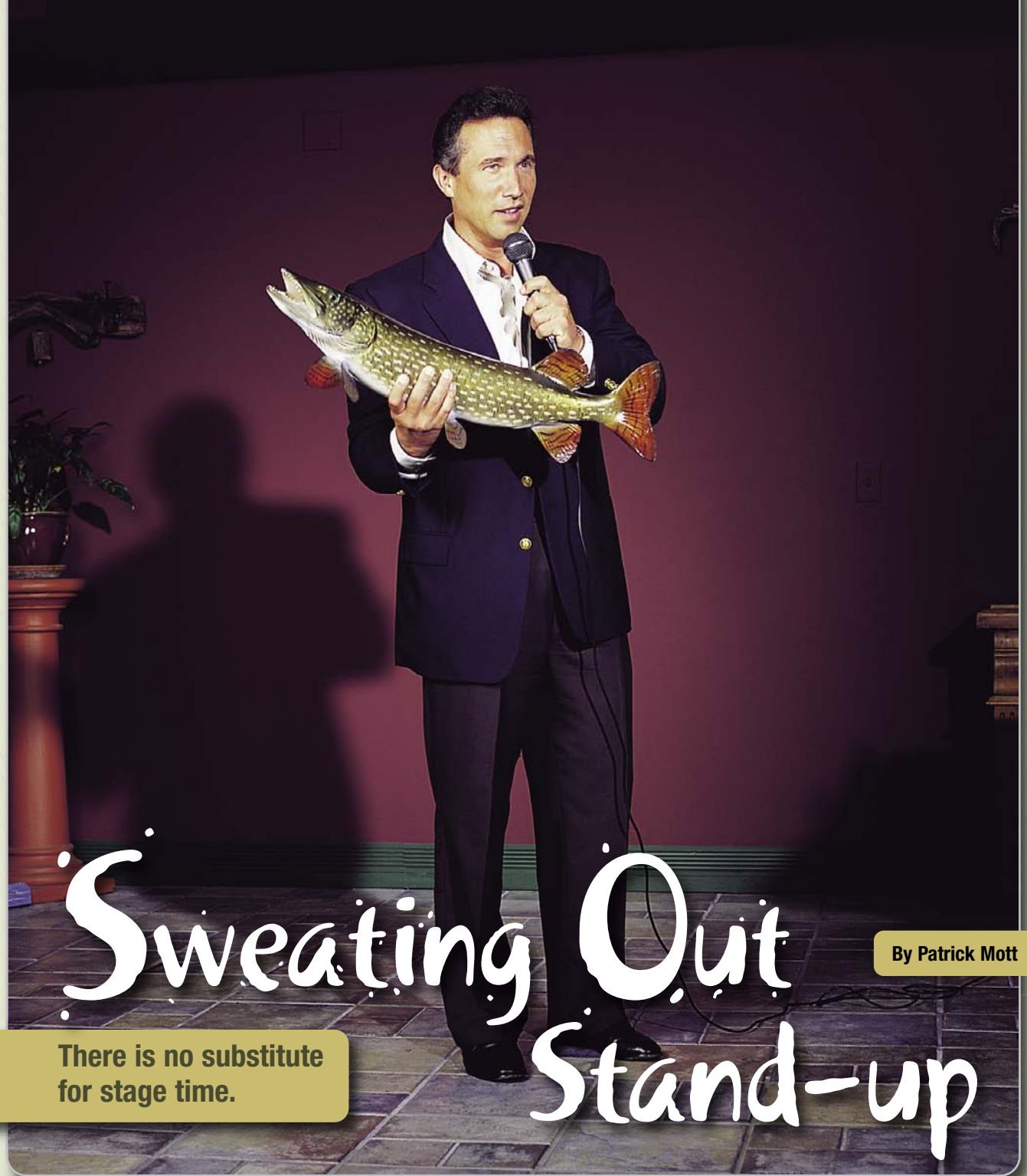
with others leaves people with whole self-esteem; laughing at others leaves people with a hole in their self-esteem. Let's move from "roasting and laughing at others" to "toasting and laughing with others!" **T**

Joel Goodman, spoke at the 2006 Toastmasters International Convention in Washington D.C. Dr. Goodman is the founder and director of The HUMOR Project, Inc. (www.HumorProject.com) in Saratoga Springs, New York.

10 Tips for Finding Nourishing Humor at Work and at Home

Here are a few of the many tips collected from 3,000,000 participants in the Humor Project's programs over the years. By drawing from these tips and creating your own, you can add years to your life...and life to your years!

1. Make a long list of things to do around the house each weekend. Title it, "Ways to Procrastinate!"
2. Have a Smile Day at work each month: free lunch for the 10 biggest smiles in the office.
3. Seek to reframe stressful situations into laughing matters by asking yourself, "What would my favorite comedian see or say if he or she were in my shoes?"
4. Make your kitchen refrigerator into a humor bulletin board. Keep a variety of cartoons, fun quotes and photos that elicit a smile.
5. Look for funny signs around town. One example is a doctor's sign that reads: "Specializing in ear, nose and throat. Office in the rear."
6. Turn Sunday into "Funday" by creating a weekly dinner-table ritual with your family and friends. Everyone seated at the table shares a funny incident or situation that invited laughter that week.
7. At work, hand out "va-va-voom vouchers," which can be cashed in when needed. The vouchers can be good for anything from "a one-liner" to "five minutes to help you with one of your tasks."
8. Send fun and unusual postcards to friends and relatives.
9. At home, practice playful ways of entering a room. Find mischievous ways for you and your kids to jump out of a closet to greet your spouse upon arrival home.
10. Watch old videotapes of family and friends. It's a sure-fire way to laugh your way down memory lane.



Sweating Out Stand-up

By Patrick Mott

There is no substitute for stage time.

It is possible to hear yourself sweat. It doesn't happen instantly. First, you become aware of the metallic hum of the nearby speakers. Then comes the forlorn rattle of ice cubes in cocktail glasses, then the subtle but unmistakably self-conscious clearing of throats. And then comes a terrifying symphony of creaks, groans, squeaks, scrapes and shuffles you never noticed before, all pouring out of that pitiless black void in front of you.

And then – in the moment, you're absolutely sure of this – you can feel and hear the beads of sweat erupting, like the sound of bubble wrap popping. It's pure, exquisite agony.

Here's why you should try it: Taking the stage as an amateur stand-up comic is as close as you can come in the 21st century to being thrown to ravenous lions in the middle of an arena filled with a blood-lusting mob.

Okay, scratch that. It's not that bad. Honest. It can actually be fun, even intermittently exhilarating. And if you're looking to learn how to control your nerves while speaking to a group – while, coincidentally, learning how to control the group as well – there can hardly be a better training ground. Or at least a more abrupt one.

Recently I stepped out of cozy anonymity and onto the stage at a local club during “open mike” night. There are thousands of these places throughout the English-speaking world, and they're known in the stand-up biz as “workout rooms.” These are bars, restaurants and clubs that are designed to showcase the beginners and the smaller fry among comic talent, or to allow more seasoned veterans to work out new material in front of a less critical audience. They are, in short, places where you can flop and get away with it, and come back to fight another day.

The usual amount of stage time per performer is five to eight minutes, which, depending on how you're doing up there, can be an instant or an eternity.

The difference between simply speaking to an audience and doing stand-up lies in the comedian's ability to instantly form a connection with the audience and to elicit an utterly visceral response within seconds. It's one thing to hold people's interest; it's quite another to persuade them to laugh. Again and again.

What's funny? Thousands of books have been written on the subject and very smart people have ended up pounding their heads on their desks over that one. One man's hilarity is another's disgust. Bob Hope and Sam Kinison had legions of devoted fans, but neither man would ever try the other's material. Ever. So let's leave any discussion of what's funny to academics and others who buy their aspirin by the trainload.

Instead, let's talk about a few tools the average public speaker can cull from the stand-up comedian's bag of tricks.

Know Thyself

While it may be possible to slip into a stage persona that is 180 degrees out of phase with your actual personality and still get a laugh or two, your audience will see through this quickly and begin to distrust you. The best material, seasoned comics will agree, comes from real life – *your* life. And your best presence on stage arises from your own distinct personality and unique experiences.

A mantra among aspiring comedians is, “Trust your funny.” This means nothing more than believing that what you bring to the stage is worth listening to, and will ring true with an audience.

This self-trust can take time. “Your style is formed in childhood and you can't escape it,” writes comedian and

comedy coach Judy Carter in her book *Stand-Up Comedy: The Book*. “Your style will be revealed to you. It is a discovery of who you already are – what you are cut out to do. This process of discovery can happen overnight or, more likely, it can take months or years.”

Study the Good Ones

Be an intellectual sponge. Watch successful comedians with an eye to their timing, their physical actions, their particular style, their vocal delivery. Before long,

“It's one thing to hold people's interest; it's quite another to persuade them to laugh. Again and again.”

you'll naturally gravitate toward a favorite or favorites. At that point, writes comedian and teacher Franklyn Ajaye in *Comic Insights: The Art of Stand-Up Comedy*, “zero in on the comedian or comedians whose sense of humor and style of comedy reminds you of the sense of humor you naturally display around your friends and associates when you are relaxed. When you find the comedian who reminds you of what you do naturally, that particular comedian can serve as a guide or influence.”

Use Real Life

“Where do you get your ideas?” It's a question comedians are asked all the time. The answer is simple: from their own lives and from observing the world around them. However, it's not enough to simply be an observer. Aspiring comedians must have an especially keen eye for the absurd and hilarious in daily life. They must see life through funny-colored glasses.

Jeff Jena, a successful comedian I once interviewed, said that most people who say they have a sense of humor are mistaken. “They have an *appreciation* of humor,” he said. “They recognize a funny line when they hear it. But as a professional comedian I have a *sense* of humor. I'm able to mine the funny situations in the world around me.”

Practice, Practice, Practice

Some comedians practice in front of a mirror; others say that won't work, that you need a live audience, even if it's only one person. The bottom line is that practice is essential, and honing your material in a workout room is the best practice of all. There's no substitute for stage time. Will the nerves ever go away? Nope. Will you gain confidence and presence? Absolutely.

Confidence Is Everything

Before one of my first sets in the local workout room, a veteran comedian advised me to “walk up on that stage like you owned it. Swagger. Strut. Jump up those three steps like you’re about to get handed a check for a million bucks. Look like you’re having the time of your life.”

He said that not just to boost my confidence, but to remind me that the previous few rookie comics had taken the stage as if they were ascending the gallows or boarding the Titanic. They were terrified, and it showed. And, as an audience, your heart goes out to them. But pity and laughs are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, if you vault into the spotlight like Tarzan, you can get away with a couple of jokes that bomb. The audience will trust that you’ll get it right the next time. And, amazingly, so will you.

You’re In the Driver’s Seat. So Drive!

Judy Carter’s book *Stand-Up Comedy* makes reference to talent manager Buddy Mora, who discovered David Letterman, when she talks about being true to your own

vision. She quotes Mora as saying, “You shouldn’t give an audience what *they* want. Give them what you want. Most comics will go down to the audience level to make it work, when in fact what you should be doing is bringing the audience to your level.”

Carter goes on: “It’s hard to swallow the idea that you can’t make everyone love you. This one’s worth repeating: You can’t and won’t be able to make everyone love you. You must go onstage with a passionate desire and the intent to communicate your thoughts and feelings, not just to make people laugh.”

Know Thy Audience

I once witnessed (that’s the only word for it) a very skillful comedian perform at a black-tie cigar stag dinner at a posh country club. His act consisted, in large part, of edgy, countercultural, “stick-it-to-the-man” style material. His audience consisted, almost without exception, of uncommonly wealthy arch-conservative businessmen. The silence was deafening.

You need enough flexibility built into your presentation that you can shift gears and, for instance, cut any

A Crash Course in Confidence



Stand-up comedy is for speakers what extreme sports are for athletes.

By Nina L. Kaufman, ATMB

As a child, I was painfully shy. And old habits die hard. Fast forward 25 years – I was not long out of law school and newly minted as a business owner, having started my own law practice. I had to exert authority over employees in my firm and exude authority to clients and colleagues. But I still felt naïve and vulnerable.

“blue” bits out of your act when you’re working the mayor’s annual prayer breakfast.

Start Big, End Bigger

This is a nifty little trick that applies to speakers as well as comics. You want to get the audience laughing as quickly as possible, but you don’t want to hit them with your Sunday punch in the first seconds of the first round. Start with your *second-best* bit. End with a killer.

Make It Look Easy

If you can make something so monumentally difficult as stand-up comedy look like duck soup, you can’t help but succeed. This means developing polish. Which means, again, practice and perform, practice and perform. If it looks to the audience like you just wandered in off the street to share a few yuks with them, if your act is so seamless that it appears you’re just talking off the top of your head, if you can stand up under those intensely bright lights and look out into that bottomless blackness

I needed a crash course in becoming self-confident – or, at least, in playing the part.

I found mine in performing stand-up comedy.

Stand-up comedy is for speakers what Extreme Sports are for athletes. It’s not for everyone. Despite my experience giving speeches in Toastmasters, teaching classes, leading workshops and running meetings, I needed a higher level of skills and resources for comedy. It takes a certain intensity – insanity, really – to pursue it. But it’s not just a bizarre hobby; stand-up comedy has strengthened my business skills. Here’s how:

1 “Riffing.” Preparation is always crucial. But comedy, like business, can’t always be scripted. Like participating in Table Topics, your ability to win over an audience, whether of merry-makers or venture capitalists, often hinges on your ability to think on your feet. How well do you handle the curve-ball

from the bank loan officer? The heckler at the back of the comedy club? The hypothetical during a job interview? Training your mind to be creative on the spur of the moment takes discipline and practice, but it can be done. Many of the most successful arguments I’ve made in court have come during a riff.


2 “Teflon” skin. Comedy is an exercise in irony: When you desperately need audience validation by way of their laughter, you don’t get it. And when you don’t try so hard, you get it – en masse. The key is to cultivate a sense of detachment, so that the outcome – a flat joke, for example – doesn’t

and feel like you just settled into your own personal recliner chair, well...

It’s not impossible. And the journey truly is energizing, both physically and creatively. Even if you only get up onstage two or three times, you’ll be a better and more confident speaker. It’s worth breaking a sweat.

Want to give it a try?

A great resource for aspiring comics – which also offers listings of comedy clubs and workout rooms throughout the U.S. – is

www.chucklemonkey.com. 

Patrick Mott is a freelance writer from Fullerton, California.

affect your sense of self. With that detached attitude – not worrying about whether my colleagues liked me – I was once able to vigorously oppose an ill-conceived proposal by a popular board president and ultimately sway the board away from it.

3 Timing. Step on the all-important pause before delivering a punch line, and you ruin your joke. Fail to pause *after* you’ve delivered the punch line to let the audience respond, and you show that you

“How well do you handle the curve-ball from the bank loan officer? The heckler at the back of the comedy club?”

are nervously awaiting their mirth. When your pacing flows smoothly, both in comedy and in business, it reveals your confidence in what

you've said. Timing is also important in the sense of "keeping to time," as we learn in Toastmasters. Often in comedy, you're limited to a five-minute routine. Exceed the

know. As playing the role of grammarian in my Toastmasters club has taught me, clarity is key. Plus, you gain your listeners' attention and respect through the

substance of what you say.

I once attended a litigation seminar given by a trial lawyer. He "ummed" over 160 times in a

15-minute presentation (a rate of more than 10 "ums" per minute), which was distracting. All I could think about was, "Is he this bad when appearing before the United States Securities and Exchange Commission?" He got my attention, but for all the wrong reasons. And I can't remember anything he said.

client so difficult, no judge so appalling, that it can't serve as grist for the comedy mill. When an adversary's bombastic approach whips me into a screaming frenzy, my business partner suggests, "Put him in your next comedy act!" So I've decided that if living well is the best revenge, mocking someone in stand-up is second best. The best part is, a humor-seeking disposition has a positive effect on others too. Customers, colleagues and friends generally prefer to be with people who laugh instead of complain.

Learning to perform stand-up comedy was like going through personal boot camp. It toughened my "skin," sharpened my skills and helped me put things in perspective. Best of all – it made me funny. Which means that when the going gets tough, I can make 'em laugh. And an audience that laughs with you will probably stick with you. **T**

"No criticism is so abysmal, no client so difficult, no judge so appalling, that it can't serve as grist for the comedy mill."

limit, and you're history. The same applies in business and in normal conversation. Hog the time, fail to listen, and you will not be appreciated. As a result, you learn to wring the most you can from however little time you have. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "Be sincere; be brief; be seated."

4 Keeping it tight. Words count. Comedy forces you to focus on your speech, because filler words cost you time and dull the impact of your punch line. You learn very quickly to cut the fat, choose the right word, and eliminate the crutches or "fillers," such as *uh, er, I mean, I'm like, and, so* and *ya*

5 Perspective. Few situations are so dire that some humor can't be wrung from it. Having a mindset of "would this make a good comedy routine?" allows me to stay focused on the silver lining (the zippy one-liner) instead of the cloud (the situation that inspired it). No criticism is so abysmal, no

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How to

Add

Humor

to Any

Speech

By Joe Cooke, ACB

Learn how to make people laugh. You'll have more fun and the listeners will too!

Listeners appreciate a little humor, even in a serious speech. Done incorrectly, humor can be a disaster. Executed correctly, humor lightens the load, eases the burden and releases

tension. There are three basic methods for adding humor to a speech: Tell a canned joke, tell an original joke or simply make a wry observation.

Method #1: Canned Jokes

The beauty of a canned joke is that it has usually withstood the test of time. For someone just starting to add humor, this is the best technique. By telling an old standby, you can concentrate on timing and delivery – two of the major keys to being funny.

Timing and Delivery: This refers to the way you present a joke. These two ideas may be the most important aspects of humor. As Toastmasters, we know that communication is more than just words. When you deliver a joke, your attitude alone can make or break the punch line.

But you have to get over the idea that you have to be perfect. Your audience wants you to succeed, and they want to laugh.

One of our newer members served as Toastmaster for the first time. She opened with a joke, stumbling through it. Even though she had to read the joke and even apologized to us ahead of time for her lack of experience, she told the joke with a smile and a wink. We laughed!

Audacity and an air of confidence can overcome your worst fears. Just say to yourself, “Okay, I’m terrified. I might botch the punch line, I might forget the entire joke; maybe no one will laugh. But I’m going to do it anyway. It will be hard this first time, but easier the next and the next and the next.”

The basic keys to adding humor to your speech are:

- relevance, and
- unexpected insight.

Let’s say you were doing a talk about ESPN or sports fanatics or even just sports in general. You might try the following “used” joke:

“A sports-buff showed up at the sold-out football game. He took his seat on the 50-yard line and then gently placed a woman’s coat and an extra ticket on the seat next to him. The spectator behind him asked, “Are you saving that seat for someone?”

The man said, “No. It would have been for my wife, but she’s passed on.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that,” the spectator said. Then he added, “Gosh, why didn’t you give that extra ticket to a friend?”

The man turned around with a surprised look on his face and said, “All my friends are at the funeral.”

This joke is obviously *relevant* to a sports-oriented talk. It sets the theme of the speech and warms up the audience.

The *insight* is that we sometimes get so wrapped up in our own stuff that we forget about other people. We all

do it. This guy just did it bigger and that makes it funny.

Try out this joke (or any other) on several friends. Practice timing the punch line. Try different wording to make it your own. Try out different pacing, pausing in various places for emphasis. Like any other skill, you learn to tell a joke by practicing. Most people who claim they don’t know any jokes are simply saying that they haven’t practiced any.

Most canned jokes are generic and you don’t have to attribute your source. However, if you are relating something specific to a certain comedian, you should give proper credit. Use your best judgment. You may want to

“Audacity and an air of confidence can overcome your worst fears.”

say something like, “As Steve Martin so aptly put it: ‘The new phone book is here! The new phone book is here!’” But don’t start your joke with “I got this off the Internet...” Just launch into it.

Once you become comfortable telling jokes you’ve found from other sources, take your humor up a notch by trying out some original material.

Method #2: New Material

There is a basic three-point structure you can follow to create your own, original material:

- Come up with a topic,
- Add a premise, and
- Turn it around.

Here’s how it works: First, come up with a topic. For example, if you are a parent, you might want to make a joke about being a father or a mother. Here’s a caveat. If you are a woman, don’t choose the topic of being a father. The audience won’t be able to relate through you.

Next, create a premise. Let’s say you are making a joke about being a dad. Your premise might be that it’s hard to be a dad. Or, that having kids makes men a bit stupid. Or weird. Or that having kids is scary.

Comedy trainer Judy Carter uses those four specific words when she is training people to be funny. She calls them “attitude” words. When you are just beginning to experiment with writing your own material, it is best to stick with the basics:

- Algebra homework is hard.
- Skateboarding on the highway is stupid.
- Being a dad is weird.
- Being tall around toddlers is scary.

Tools for Comics

Share your favorite joke with other speakers by posting it to www.breakingthefunnybone.blogspot.com and check out the following bonus links:

- For an audio example of a re-worked version of the “Traveling with kids is hard” joke, follow the “Quit whining...” link. You’ll also hear an example of a “canned joke” about shopping.
- For an example of how humor can be worked into a serious speech, follow the link titled “Subtle humor adds to a serious topic...” This is a streaming video of a short talk I gave describing my daughter’s life-threatening condition. (Note: we helped raise over \$250,000 for a local charity that evening.)

Best books on developing funny material:

- The Comedy Bible: From Stand-up to Sitcom – The Comedy Writer’s Ultimate “How To” Guide, by Judy Carter. Also, see www.comedyworkshops.com. The author gives a step-by-step process for creating humor, comedy and jokes from everyday life.
- The Comic Toolbox: How to Be Funny Even If You’re Not, by John Vorhaus

The third part is the hard part. You have to bring in the unexpected. For instance, if you are working with “skateboarding on the highway is stupid,” and you were being serious, you might finish with how dangerous it is. For a joke, look for insight. Look for pain.

Now, let’s look at a concrete example:

- **Step one:** Choose a topic.
Let’s say you chose “parenting.”
- **Step two:** Choose an attitude.
For example, “raising kids is hard.”
- **Step three:** Create a twist. First of all, what is hard about raising kids?

Maybe your answer is that you have to be more mature.

Now, think of a way to twist that around to surprise the audience. Here is how I used this topic to open my speech on traveling.

“Traveling with kids is hard! You gotta be tough, you know?”

We just got back from Disney World. We spent all day walking and it was hot and it was like, ‘I need a drink of water, and I’m tired,’ and ‘I need to go potty.’

Finally, my six-year old put her hands on her hips and said, ‘Dad, quit whining.’”

Timing and Delivery, Part II. Practice makes perfect. Although great material always sounds like it is impromptu, it



rarely is. With jokes, more than with anything else, practice is imperative. You have to practice until it sounds as if you are just making it up on the spot.

Record your joke delivery and then listen. After a while, you will get a good feel for the pace. You will hear where the pauses work and where they don’t. Along the way, you’ll memorize the joke. It will also stop sounding funny to you. Don’t worry; your audience has never heard it.

In my travelogue about Florida, I tell a story about my five-year old.

“Kids are wise, aren’t they? My five-year old son played in the sprinklers at the park and on the ride back to our condo, he took off all his clothes. He got out of the car and everyone stared at him as he walked down the street, naked as can be. JoAnn and I were mortified, of course, but he just looked around and said, ‘Well, at least I’m wearing sun block!’”

This story stopped being funny to me a long time ago, but whenever I tell it, everyone guffaws.

The Rule of Three

Three is an inherently funny number. Just make a list of three things. Throw out the last one and replace it with something outlandish. A word, a phrase. A dead fish.

Let's take the simple topic of sun block and play it out.

"Sun block is weird. (notice the attitude word) My wife packs SPF 44. Sun protection factor 44. Do you know what that means? That means that we can stay out in the sun 44 times longer with it on. Where are we going anyway? The Mojave Desert? The Sahara? The planet Mercury?"

Acting Out

Take your humor up another notch... act it out. Now take your rant against sun block and play it out even further:

"Have you ever noticed that the companies that make sun block make bug repellent too? You have to have both because they make the sun block smell like Piña Coladas. Of course it's going to attract bugs. They're like 'Yeah baby! It's cocktail hour!'"

Surviving the Joke

If you've practiced your jokes and bounced them off the right people ahead of time, you're sure to get some laughs. Even so, the day will come when the audience just doesn't get it. There are two ways to deal with the "bomb:"

One is the "saver." Powerhouse speaker J.R. Ridinger sometimes gets going so fast and furious that he leaves the audience behind. His favorite saver: "Maybe that one will catch you on the way home."

The other technique is to just keep on keeping on. One of my all-time favorite inspirational speakers once

"Sometimes a witty observation will produce no more than a smile or a twinkle in someone's eye. That's enough."

gave a sermon on sex. The funny quotes she told at the beginning left the audience speechless. She handled her choice of material like a true professional, never missing a beat, though I squirmed and turned a bit red.

Listening to this professional also showed me how confidence and audacity can pull off a joke that a less confident person could never get away with.

Method #3: Wry Observations

Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society. – Mark Twain



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One of the great masters of the witty statements, Mark Twain once said that electric lights were to humor as lightning was to wit. In other words, unlike a joke that has a story-line, natural wit usually comes out as a pointed, wry observation.

Use the triple-A method to develop your ability to make witty statements. First, be **A**ware, then add **A**ttitude and **A**llow yourself to grow.

“You have to develop an attitude that fits you and then you have to let it shine.”

Be aware by understanding that humor comes from understanding shared experiences, especially painful ones. In order to fully cultivate your own sense of humor, you have to stop seeing your life as completely tragic. We all have troubles. Open your eyes and your mind and watch for the irony and the contrast in life.

Your attitude will help you be funny. Watch any great comedian, male or female. Some are gutsy and loud, some are meek and shy. You have to develop an attitude that fits you and then you have to let it shine.

Finally, allow yourself to be funny. Open your mouth and try. Toastmasters is the perfect place to nurture your inner comic. Occasionally you may tell a stinker. Get over it and try again. Progress only comes with practice in front of real people.

You don't have to elicit a roar of laughter from your audience. Sometimes a witty observation will produce no more than a smile or a twinkle in someone's eye.

That's enough.

Remember that Toastmasters is a learning organization. Give yourself permission to try, and trust that your fellow members are either (a) wishing they were as brave as you and respecting you for it, (b) about in the same place on the progress curve as you are and respecting you for it, or (c) re-living the time they first tried humor and respecting you for doing the same.

Now, get out there. Be yourself, be happy and be confident. Long after your listeners have forgotten the content of your speech, they will still remember how you made them feel. **T**

Joe Cooke is an author, speaker and management consultant, who is a ballroom dancer and has played the role of Jesus in *Godspell*. Reach him at www.joecooke.info.

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If you thought my last speech was great, wait until you hear my next one!

By Gene Perret

Experience Is Great – But Only If You Learn From It

At a tennis seminar I attended several years ago, one of the students complained to the pro: “I’ve been playing tennis for 10 years. I have 10 years of experience, but I don’t seem to get any better. Why?”

The pro answered simply, “Because you don’t have 10 years of experience. You have *one* year of experience *ten* times.” In other words, experience doesn’t do you any good unless you learn from it. If you’re playing a flawed game of tennis and you keep playing the same way, you don’t improve. You are getting better, but not at tennis. You’re getting better at making the same mistakes.

To relate this more to the speaking world, I once asked a very successful comedian a similar question. At that time, an abundance of comedy clubs were opening around the country where aspiring comics could try out their material and acquire some stage time. I asked this comedian if he thought this proliferation of comedy venues was a benefit to wannabe comedians or a hindrance. He hesitated a moment then said, “They benefit the smart comics.”

Again, they were a help only to those who used the stage time to improve their act and their performance. The experience was valuable only to those who learned from it.

As a speaker, you make many presentations. Sometimes your speech goes over beautifully. The audience is enraptured with your

skill. Other times, (be honest) you’re less than sparkling. There are lessons, though, embedded in both occurrences. When you’re great, you should know *why* you’re spectacular. When you bomb, you should figure out *why* you failed.

Let me offer you specific examples of how I learned from both good and bad performances.

One time, I was giving a humorous speech. It was going well, the gags were working, I was a hit. At one performance, though, I told a joke that got a big laugh from the audience. I stepped back from the microphone to let the laughter ring. When the laughs were dying down, I was about to step back to the mike. However, I got a slight frog in my throat. I paused, put my hand to my mouth, and let out an almost inaudible cough. The audience thought I was laughing at my own joke. They began to laugh again, and in appreciation gave me a round of appreciative applause.

I was stunned. It was an accident – a fortuitous accident, of course, but an accident none the less. After the performance, a friend said, “That was a wonderful move you made tonight. It got a big laugh and applause.” I confessed it was not

planned, but added, “I guarantee it will be in the act from now on.”

It was, and it worked just as well each time.

Another time, I was writing for Bob Hope and he had a self-deprecating line in the show. He said, while talking with another performer who had just graduated from college, “I remember how proud I was when I graduated from the sixth grade. My wife and children were in the audience and they were proud, too.” It was a nice line that always received a welcome laugh.

However, Bob Hope said, we need a laugh line for the guest star right there. We writers had a hard time topping this one, but Hope desperately wanted a laugh line for his guest. Finally, someone suggested that we give the punch line to the guest.

The revised script read:

BOB HOPE: *I remember how proud I was when I graduated from the sixth grade.*

GUEST: *Yes, I know your wife and children must have been proud of you at that time too.*

This got a much bigger laugh from the audience. We learned that the laughter is magnified when the guest star puts down the big star. It was a lesson that we subsequently used in many scripts to pump up the response.



The lessons you can learn from your own speaking can be just as valuable and useful. If your talk is uninspired, it can be improved. If it is fantastic, it can be even more so.

Learn to analyze your material and your performances. Listen to yourself, listen to your audience, listen to your advisors. Make minor changes. Make major changes. If they work, keep them in. If they don't, drop them and perhaps try others.

Here are a few tips that may help you analyze each of your performances:

■ **Review your own reactions.**

Speaking is a two-way communication. You talk to your audience, but they also relay their emotions back to you. It's almost impossible to give a speech and not *feel* how you're doing.

Recall which segments of your presentation made you feel good. Note those moments when you felt the audience slipping away. Record any parts of your speech that could have worked better.

These lessons are especially valuable because they are gut reactions.

They represent pure interaction between you and your audience.

■ **Listen to audience comments.** After most speeches, members of the audience will offer comments or ask questions. It's fairly easy to recognize the sincere compliments and the polite, courteous comments.

How many people approach you after your presentation? How eager are they to meet and talk with you? How long will they wait to shake your hand and tell you what they thought of your speech?

Also, if several people comment on a specific anecdote or segment of your talk, then you know you've got a winner.

It's important to pay attention to your audience during your speech, but it's just as important to listen to them even after it's over.

■ **Review any evaluations.** Many speakers hand out an evaluation sheet of their own for the listeners to fill out and hand in. Other times, the organization that booked you may have its own evaluation forms.

Review them for recurring comments. Use them to help you make your speech more appealing to your listeners.

Note the positive remarks as well as the negative. An advisor once told me that my question-and-answer period was gimmicky and should be dropped from my talks. I enjoy the interaction with the audience, so I was reluctant to eliminate the Q & A session. I discovered from several evaluation summaries that people enjoyed the fun of the questioning, so I kept it in.

■ **Tape and listen to your presentation.**

As mentioned earlier, you should learn to judge the effectiveness of your speech while you're on the podium. However taped feedback can be useful too.

It can often reveal some startling

flaws that you're not even aware of. For instance, if you use the phrase "you know" 817 times during a 20-minute speech, maybe you should work harder on getting rid of it. If your club's grammarian has tried to warn you, this may be the proof you need.

Recordings of your performance can also highlight positive elements. Noting these, you can often reformat your speech to use them more effectively.

■ **Study an assistant's notes.** To get a fairly dependable second opinion – one that can corroborate your own evaluation of your presentation – have an assistant sit in the audience and take appropriate notes. When I worked for a comedian who did an opening show monologue, we would have one of the writers grade each joke for audience reaction. A big laugh might get a "5." A weak laugh would earn a "1"

After the monologue, we all reviewed the scores and decided which jokes to put where for the next taping – or which gags needed rewriting or killing.

By studying how various elements in your own presentation are graded, you can see at a glance where your talk needs to be reinforced.

Each talk you give will tell you something about how to improve your platform performance. With a little bit of study and analyzation you can say, "If you thought my last speech was great, wait until you hear my next one!" **T**

Gene Perret was Bob Hope's head writer and is a three-time Emmy Award winner on the Carol Burnett Show. He teaches an e-mail course on using humor in speaking and has written many books on that subject. Contact him at **Gper276@sbcglobal.net** or visit **www.writingcomedy.com**.

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 Blue-Gray 2459-77, Montgomery, Alabama

30 Year

Knotts Speak Easy 2495-F, Buena Park, California
 Twilight Time 2740-F, Irvine, California
 The Orange Motivators 3033-F, Tustin, California

Del Rey 2646-01, Marina Del Rey, California
 Jim Hand 1276-06, Marshall, Minnesota
 Wordsmiths Toastmasters 3105-33, Las Vegas, Nevada
 Blackhawk 3521-35, Madison, Wisconsin
 Reader's Digest 3605-46, Pleasantville, New York
 Toastmasters at UF & Shands 3661-47, Jacksonville, Florida
 Twin Towns 3000-69, SouthTweed Heads, Australia
 Lion City 2086-80, Singapore, Singapore

25 Year

Paradise Valley 4770-03, Scottsdale, Arizona
 Encouraging Words 4777-07, Longview, Washington
 Bell Of Penn Noon-Time 2988-38, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Milton 4778-60, Milton, Canada
 Transportation 4776-62, Lansing, Michigan
 Crown City 2465-65, Cortland, New York
 Tropic City 2987-69, Kirwan, Australia
 Johnsonville 4775-72, Johnsonville, Wellington, New Zealand
 Iligan 611592-75, Lanao Del Norte, Philippines

20 Year

Water Meeters 6492-F, Irvine, California
 Growthmasters 4801-02, Tukwila, Washington
 In Ahwatukee 4873-03, Phoenix, Arizona
 Classic Communicators 3347-11, Indianapolis, Indiana
 Windward Leaders and Keynote Speakers 4212-14, Alpharetta, Georgia
 Northwest Perimeter 6488-14, Atlanta, Georgia
 Albuquerque Challenge 4581-23, Albuquerque, New Mexico
 The Good Neighbor 4296-24, Lincoln, Nebraska
 Thomas Jefferson 6490-27, Woodbridge, Virginia
 Graphically Speaking 5149-28, Troy, Michigan
 At Ease 4186-32, Bremerton, Washington
 The Good Neighbor 2698-40, Newark, Ohio
 The Trendsetters 1860-42, Red Deer, Canada
 Mid Coast 6487-45, Bath, Maine
 Pioneer 3736-54, Bloomington, Illinois
 Fantastic 682-57, Newark, California

March 2007

65 Year

Greysolon 217-06, Duluth, Minnesota

60 Year

Hillcrest Club 460-F, Whittier, California
 Webster Groves 461-08, Saint Louis, Missouri
 Pioneer 453-40, Crestview Hills, Kentucky
 San Leandro 452-57, San Leandro, California

55 Year

Skyline 1038-26, Denver, Colorado
 Saskatoon 450-42, Saskatoon, Canada
 Park City Toastmasters of Greater Bpt. 1065-53, Stratford, Connecticut

50 Year

Early Birds 2255-13, Butler, Pennsylvania
 Macon 824-14, Macon, Georgia
 Helmsmen 2412-27, Arlington, Virginia

Williams County 2268-28, Bryan, Ohio
 Club VA 2349-39, West Sacramento, California
 Traffic 2286-46, New York, New York
 Brampton 2347-60, Brampton, Canada
 Midland 2399-62, Midland, Michigan

45 Year

Rochester Suburban 1883-06, Rochester, Minnesota
 Northeast 3412-14, Norcross, Georgia
 Hangtown 3416-39, Diamond Springs, California
 Cronulla R S L 3445-70, Cronulla, Australia

40 Year

Fred H Rohr 2518-05, Chula Vista, California
 Goodyear Community 2809-10, Akron, Ohio
 Quesnel 3197-21, Quesnel, Canada
 Rockhampton 3732-69, Rockhampton, Australia

35 Year

Escondido 1546-05, Escondido, California
 Western Reserve 2502-10, Madison, Ohio
 Monroe 1661-28, Monroe, Michigan
 Wilmington 3603-37, Wilmington, North Carolina
 Saturday Motivators 215-39, Stockton, California

30 Year

Speech Masters 3268-08, Saint Louis, Missouri
 The Battlefords 1512-42, North Battleford, Canada
 Kennebec Valley 1468-45, Augusta, Maine
 Venetian 952-47, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
 Lillian R. Bradley 2346-47, Jacksonville, Florida
 PwC 2178-70, Sydney, Australia
 Dun Laoghaire 3452-71, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland

25 Year

Vons 1962-F, Arcadia, California
 Anchor 3882-U, Anchorage, Alaska
 Harbor Lights 1015-01, Torrance, California
 Adventurers 2538-05, San Diego, California
 Dialoggers 2401-06, Saint Paul, Minnesota
 Caltrans Communicators 1124-12, San Bernardino, California
 Macon State 4781-14, Macon, Georgia
 Speaking Up 3816-16, Tulsa, Oklahoma
 Olympus 4785-32, Olympia, Washington
 Goleta Valley 878-33, Goleta, California
 Natl. Research Council 292-36, Washington, Dist. of Columbia
 NIH Evening Speakers 3691-36, Bethesda, Maryland
 Maryland Advanced 4036-36, Chevy Chase, Maryland
 Twin Towers 3215-42, Calgary, Canada
 Grande Prairie Morning 3489-42, Grande Prairie, Canada
 Uptown 2492-47, Tallahassee, Florida
 Katy 2755-56, Katy, Texas
 Markham 4782-60, Markham, Canada
 Louis St-Laurent de l'Estrie 3747-61, Sherbrooke, Canada
 GSU Beaumont 2484-68, Beaumont, Texas
 Hawkesbury Valley 2009-70, Richmond, Australia
 Piako 3837-72, Morrinsville, New Zealand

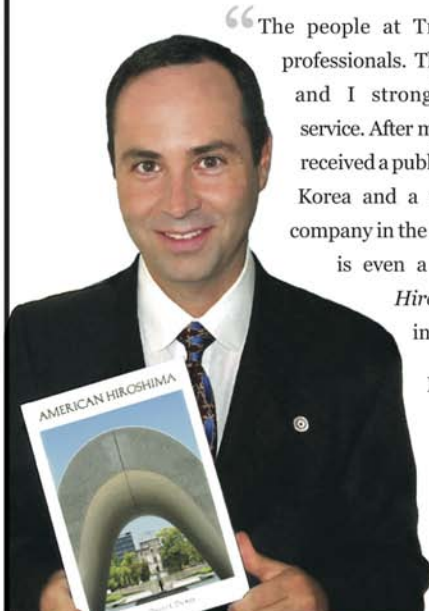
20 Year

Boeing Anaheim 4007-F, Anaheim, California
 Agile Articulators - Speech and Debate 3104-04, Santa Clara, California
 Tongue Trippers 5234-04, Sunnyvale, California

Speakers Of The House 2248-06, Owatonna, Minnesota
 Chetco Chatterers 1215-07, Brookings, Oregon
 University Orators 4626-08, Rolla, Missouri
 The Oregon Trail 4599-09, La Grande, Oregon
 High Noon 4968-09, Walla Walla, Washington
 Executive Diction 4742-11, Merrillville, Indiana
 Plymouth Park 1415-25, Irving, Texas
 Plane Talk 5286-25, Dallas, Texas
 Adams State College 5550-26, Alamosa, Colorado
 Windy City Prof Speakr 5283-30, Oak Brook, Illinois
 Confident Communicators Toastmasters 5350-31, Tewksbury, Massachusetts
 Wizards Of Ahs 1148-33, Las Vegas, Nevada
 The Good Neighbors 5145-33, Westlake Village, California
 PCAR 4685-39, Rocklin, California
 Best By A Dam Site 5113-39, Oroville, California
 Oxbridge Orators 323-42, Edmonton, Canada
 Baptist Health 4901-43, Little Rock, Arkansas
 Capital City 976-47, Tallahassee, Florida
 Speak Easy 3196-47, Port St Lucie, Florida
 Stephenson 3481-54, Freeport, Illinois
 Overnights 1763-56, Houston, Texas
 Toastmasters on Campus 5306-57, Berkeley, California
 Causeurs Sussex Speakers 180-61, Ottawa, Canada
 Trail Blazers 3917-62, Jackson, Michigan
 Telstra Transit 4034-69, Brisbane, Australia
 AMP 3129-70, Sydney, Australia
 Taxation 4530-70, Sydney, Australia
 Early Risers 4696-70, Canberra, Australia
 Richmond 3185-72, Richmond, New Zealand
 Auckland West 5208-72, New Lynn, New Zealand
 Research Park 4838-77, Huntsville, Alabama
 Last Word 2781-78, Livingston, Montana

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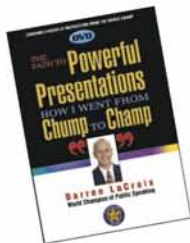
~ Michael Erwine, Eaton Rapids, MI



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