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July 2009

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Ways to expect the best, not the worst.

Be a Champion of Change

Talking Through Tough Times at Work

The value of communication
after company layoffs.





The Courage to Conquer Begins at the Core

† One thing has become clear to me this year: We as an organization do not speak enough about our core values. They are the principles on which this organization stands, yet I am finding they are virtually unknown to many. In order for us to accomplish our vision and mission, it is imperative

that we begin with the following core values:

Integrity. When a member submits an educational application, we must trust that he or she actually fulfilled the obligations of that award. Yet there have been times when a WHQ staff member has received a phone call from an individual saying, "I just received a certificate from you, but I haven't been in Toastmasters for years." Someone in a district had completely sacrificed their integrity for the sake of false recognition. What a shame! Integrity means when you say or do something, it is genuine and true.

Respect for the individual. During the contestant interviews at the D73 evaluation contest, the Toastmaster asked the participants to share the most meaningful evaluation they had ever received. One woman replied that she once received an evaluation that was a "complete destructive disaster." She said it was so horrible that she almost quit. Thankfully, she didn't, and she said that evaluation reminded her to always be empathetic to the speaker. Regardless of our role in Toastmasters, we should always show respect for the individual.

Service to the member. Our members are served through our clubs. We provide the best possible service to our members by focusing on our program as designed, and working to be a Distinguished club. Toastmasters is an educational organization. Not following our program would be like enrolling in a university class and the professor not using the textbook, allowing students to do as they wish, and not caring what happens as long as everyone has a good time. That is not service. Is your club voting in its members, formally inducting them, assigning them a mentor and explaining all that Toastmasters has to offer? *Are you following the program?* If you can answer yes to these questions, then your club is providing the best possible service to its members!

Dedication to excellence. My husband, Bob, and I had the honor of recently visiting a meeting of the Auckland Toastmasters club in Auckland, New Zealand. It was the night they were electing officers. I watched the formalities unfold. For every position, one member of the club stood and made a formal nomination. The nomination was seconded. The nominator then stood and spoke about why the nominee would do a good job as an officer. I was so impressed! I couldn't help but think, *Now this is dedication to excellence!* Excellence is a standard the club lives by. What is the standard of your club? Your district?

As we begin a new year, I ask us all to remember that courage is a strength that allows us to conquer many things...but it must begin at our core!

Jana Barnhill

Jana Barnhill, DTM, Accredited Speaker
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.

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

The Courage to Conquer Microphone Trouble

President Jana Barnhill's theme message saved the Division A International Speech Contest of District 76 on April 12th this year. Two clip-on microphones did not work during the contest, though I could hear the speeches from the back of the room. The contestants seemed unhappy and the atmosphere was not good. As the hosting club president, I desperately tried to brighten the mood with my closing remarks. The words suddenly came to me.

I took a *Toastmaster* magazine out of my bag and stood by the lectern. I gave an apology for the malfunction of the sound amplification system and then said, "The courage to conquer tough mike trouble: I'd like to introduce your courage in this magazine!" and I held up the page that features Jana Barnhill's Viewpoint article. The words were a great success and the audience gave me applause. The atmosphere changed. International President Jana Barnhill, thank you for saving our contest. We all share your message: the Courage to Conquer tough times!

Shigeru Kobayashi, ACB, CL • Eight Princes Toastmasters Club
Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan

The Real Prize

This year I entered the International Speech Contest for the second time. What a remarkable experience! During my first competition, I had gone overtime by two seconds at the area level and disqualified myself. I learned a valuable lesson: Time is important in Toastmasters.

Now, I've earned second place at the division level in Founder's District. The experience, as explained by Darren LaCroix, 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking, taught me much about myself: I grew and learned how to connect better with my audience

After each contest, listeners told me they applied the strategies [from my speech] in their personal lives – or wished they had. It is exhilarating and revealing to learn that my presentations changed people's perspectives and added to their pool of knowledge, while I improved my speaking talents.

Dr. Patricia Adelekan, DTM • Inner Strength Toastmasters Club
Santa Ana, California

Paulette's Journey Inspires Others

I wanted to share with readers some good news on what has occurred since my article was published on Paulette Bass ("Paulette's Path") in the *Toastmaster* (December 2008). In that story, I described how Paulette had earned her Competent Communicator award despite being developmentally disabled, and how she and I had used the "language expression" approach when working on her speeches together.

After the article came out, Toastmasters clubs from as far away as Taiwan and Hong Kong wrote to me about the article and how inspiring they found Paulette. Most importantly, some Toastmasters from District 27 in Northern Virginia,

in the U.S., wrote to tell me they're helping to create a Toastmasters club made up of developmentally disabled citizens.

The group requested my assistance. To help the club get started, I provided instructions on how to use the "language experience" approach, guidelines to follow when evaluating someone with developmental disabilities, and any charts and forms I created to assist Paulette in her journey to Competent Communicator status.

On June 25, Paulette is scheduled to earn her Advanced Communicator Bronze award. She continues to be an inspiration to others.

Carol Lunsford • High Noon Toastmasters • Peachtree City, Georgia

Thanks for Witty Articles.

Reading "No Parking Anytime" by John Cadley (June) was a great way to enjoy my first cup of coffee this morning! The article had me smiling and laughing out loud before I knew it. I love when that happens! John Cadley's articles are so funny and that's a great gift to us all.

Thanks for sharing his wit within the pages of the *Toastmaster* magazine. It's very much appreciated.

Linda Potter, CC • Tracy Toastmasters • Tracy, Calif.

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Finding the true value of Toastmasters.

Where's the Proof?

When joining Toastmasters, we were told we would learn communication and leadership skills that would enrich our lives. Now we tell new members the same thing. But what proof do we have? What can we hold up as evidence that Toastmasters is actually of true value?

Recently, I hit a home run in my career, and Toastmasters played a huge role in that success. My experience with Table Topics, speech manuals, contests and other Toastmasters activities all helped me qualify for a new job.

But before I fill you in, let me tell you a bit about my journey with Toastmasters. Eight years ago a co-worker invited me to join her at a Toastmasters meeting. My response? *No!* She invited me again. *No!* And again...until I realized she recognized the fear in me and would not let me succumb to it. So, reluctantly, I went to a meeting of our local club, Tuesdays with Toastmasters in Austin, Minnesota. The members were so welcoming, I decided to join.

For my first six speeches, I struggled mightily. I could not eat the day before a speech. I could not stay within time limits. I was red-faced, sweating and trembling. Yup, I was a perfect mess.

Then the seventh speech came. I trembled less. I was not red-faced. My evaluator was elated at my progress. Maybe there was something to be said for this Toastmasters thing.

Soon after, I entered a speech contest and stood in front of my largest audience yet, speaking about hunting and putting on layers of duck-hunting clothing. I had officially lost my mind...and my terror!

My story is not unique. Like all of you, I had speeches that were successes and others that flopped. But like you, I kept trying. And my confidence grew. As did my leadership and communication skills.

Hunting for a New Job

Then, recently, Toastmasters ran smack dab into the rest of my life. I have worked for Hormel Foods Corporation for more than 10 years. One day, I saw a posting on the company job board for a brand-new position: e-Learning Coordinator. One of the requirements was being able to speak in front of large groups.

After reviewing my job application, Human Resources scheduled me for four interviews, each with a different person. This was like going into a Table Topics contest circuit – club to area to division to district. I would need to answer questions for a variety of audiences. I prepared for the interviews by devising practice questions and then developing answers based on Toastmasters' basic speech plan of creating an opening, body and conclusion: I would set up a situation, tell the interviewers how I dealt with it, and then explain what the outcome was.

Practicing my answers, I incorporated lessons I learned both from Table Topics and the Storytelling manual.

When I interviewed with the job supervisor, she was extremely interested in Toastmasters and noted that I had listed it twice on my resumé: once under "skills" and once under "organizations." Her

astute questions showed me that people in management know about Toastmasters and look to it as valuable training for the skills and experiences they require in employees.

Persuasive Speaking

My final interview was with the person leaving the position I was applying for. She was clearly unconvinced about Toastmasters. She noted that I would need to speak to much larger groups than 10 to 20 people. Happily and confidently, I told her my story about a speech evaluation contest that took me as far as the district level, where I spoke to more than 200 people.

I left this interview with the impression that without my experiences in Toastmasters' speech contests, I may have been eliminated from the job.

Instead, I waited nervously for a call...and then learned I was awarded the position. My Toastmasters experiences had paid off!

I recently received my job review. In it, my boss wrote the following: "Ability to present in front of a large audience – Ann's experience in Toastmasters is invaluable. As we develop this new job role, it is very apparent that the ability to speak in front of a large group is an integral part of the position..."

So now, in my hand, in my life and even in my job review, is the proof that the skills learned in Toastmasters truly do enrich life. **T**

Ann Maxfield, ATMB, is president of Tuesdays with Toastmasters in Austin, Minnesota. Reach her at ammaxfield@hormel.com.

How Toastmasters training can see you through.

Help in Hard Times

There's no doubt that many Toastmasters are facing challenging times. With corporate cutbacks, Wall Street woes and other worldwide financial difficulties, we're all feeling the stress of the day. If you find yourself squeezed by some belt-tightening tactics, it's tempting to retreat from long-term goals and instead focus on short-term survival strategies.

That may be a mistake.

Maintaining your progress toward a goal by setting a course that includes daily, weekly and monthly objectives can help you navigate your way through the troubled waters of today and prepare you for better times ahead. What better place to do this than at your regular Toastmasters meetings?

He Got Through It

Consider the example of Tom Oh, of Rancho Santa Margarita, California. Oh works for an interactive marketing media company in the nearby town of Irvine. Before he landed this job, he spent what he describes as "seven long months" unemployed and job hunting. It was the longest period of time Oh had ever been out of work, and rather than panic, he chose a path that set him in the direction of reconnecting with his

career and his future. He decided to use part of the time constructively by joining a Toastmasters club and improving his job skills.

Oh says two things became apparent when he was out of work: First, he needed to hone his public speaking skills. Second, he had no excuse to delay it any longer. This was a job skill he knew he would eventually need again, and now his time was finally free to work on it. "No excuses!" says Oh with a laugh.

Encouraged by a Toastmasters friend, Oh attended a meeting last July and was hooked. He attended only five meetings before finding a new job – but in that time he pushed himself to give two speeches.

Oh especially wanted to improve his skills in speechwriting and preparation. So he made the most of the *Competent Communication* manual's features allowing members to focus on certain aspects. For him, it meant working through the Ice Breaker and then the project on organization. He enjoyed putting together a speech, following instructions on how to improve its organization. Re-evaluating his

work and writing a more-focused speech – even before presenting it to the club – gave Oh extra confidence in his skills.

The meetings offered Oh emotional benefits as well. During a stressful time in his life, his club activities allowed him to escape to a place of camaraderie and support. Getting to know his fellow Toastmasters through their speeches made networking fun and easy. He relished the opportunity to network with all kinds

of people. Oh says, "I met people working in different industries and enjoyed the opportunity to meet a diversified group."

And the speeches – even those that were not work-related – really affected him. "People shared about their personal lives," he says, "with wonderful quality and content to their speeches." He learned that these personal perspectives make speeches more compelling and engaging. "They were passionate about their subject matter. It worked for the speakers and us, the audience." He soon discovered the lessons



learned in the club improved his job-related speaking as well.

To his own amazement, Oh had fun and learned a lot during his seven-month break from a job. And while he admits it was uncomfortable to be job hunting in a difficult economy, he looks back at his experiences in Toastmasters with fondness. His new job doesn't allow the time to attend the morning meetings of his old club. But he wonders about finishing those other eight projects in the *Competent Communication* manual. Who knows? Maybe he'll start a corporate club in his new company.

She's Getting Through It

Another example is Paula Harris, a "local market sales manager" with Avis Budget Group before she was laid off along with a thousand other employees in a cost-cutting

measure last September. Paula joined Toastmasters a few weeks later with a plan to become a more confident and effective speaker. "I did have to do some public speaking at my last job and want to feel more comfortable and confident when I am speaking in front of others," she says.

Harris hopes to soon land another job in marketing or account management and is preparing herself for the position by attending club meetings. "I want to increase my self-confidence and leadership skills and feel comfortable speaking in front of an audience," she says.

Indeed Harris does appear positive and confident when speaking in her new club. When she gave her Ice Breaker speech, she stood in front of the lectern, presenting her story without the use of notes. She performed well and received a

round of well-deserved applause. Beaming, she returned to her seat and was all smiles for the rest of the meeting. Although Harris hasn't yet taken advantage of any networking opportunities, she does see the benefit of being in the group. She says, "Everyone is so friendly and supportive that I believe this is a group I can learn from."

With that kind of attitude, Harris will no doubt make it through this trying time and move up to the next step in her career. And with the support of her friends in Toastmasters, she will definitely be smiling when she gets there. **T**

Beth Black, CC, is an associate editor of the Toastmaster magazine and a member of Unimasters club in Lake Forest, California. Reach her at bblack@toastmasters.org.



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Talking Through Tough Times at Work

By Dave Zielinski

The value of communication after company layoffs.

A big-city newspaper announces staff cutbacks, and many longtime reporters, editors and circulation employees all receive pink slips. But Joe, a 50-year-old police reporter who suspected that he, too, might be in management's crosshairs, is spared in the purge. One by one, Joe says goodbye to his old friends and colleagues. He is sad but secretly relieved to still be employed.

But in the weeks that follow, Joe finds himself dealing with his own kind of angst. Sometimes called "layoff survivor sickness," it's a combination of guilt, insecurity, anger and fear. Joe wonders why he survived while equally talented or tenured co-workers got the heave-ho, and he thinks it's only a matter of time before his number is up, too. He's also growing annoyed at everyone who keeps saying he should be grateful just to have a job; sure, it beats the alternative, but with all the staff cutbacks, he's doing twice the amount of work for the same paycheck.

The stress is affecting his concentration and motivation, and it's showing in the quality of his work. Joe is hardly alone. Other employ-



ees still at the newspaper are showing similar symptoms, and management has done itself no favors by ignoring the situation and telling people to “buck up” and just be happy they’re receiving a paycheck.

The longer that these workers’ disabling emotions stay unaddressed, the more corrosive the effects are on the company’s performance and employee health.

The Employees Left Behind

In this grim economic climate, it’s easy to focus only on those in the toughest of circumstances – people who’ve lost their jobs. But those left behind – the layoff survivors – also can suffer emotionally in the aftermath of downsizing, and organizational psychologists say if their feelings are squelched rather than provided a healthy outlet, it can have serious consequences. Companies that

choose to deny these emotions exist in the workforce often experience plummeting productivity, more concentration-related errors and increasingly listless, risk-averse employees.

“Most businesses take the macho attitude of, ‘When the going gets tough, the tough should get going,’” says Mitchell Marks, a business professor at San Francisco State University in California. “There’s almost an implicit message that if you can’t cut it, maybe you should leave the company, too.”

But the problem with that approach is, if such employees aren’t allowed to release or address feelings of guilt or fear, they’ll remain stuck in the past, says Marks, the author of *Charging Back Up the Hill: Workplace Recovery After Mergers, Acquisitions and Downsizings*. “You can’t truly move forward until you deal with the baggage left behind,” he says.

Organizations that encourage layoff survivors to vent feelings in constructive ways see far fewer of these debilitating post-pink slip effects, says David Noer, professor of business leadership at Elon University in North Carolina. He believes the healing in these situations should begin from the top down: Leaders must first deal with their own, often-repressed emotions regarding downsizing before they can begin helping others.



Mike Goering, a former Toastmaster who is a manager at Best Buy, the electronics retailer based in Richfield, Minnesota, understands the value of frequent, honest communication in times of corporate upheaval. Best Buy experienced both voluntary and involuntary layoffs in 2008 as its financial performance suffered, and five of 11 people on Goering's staff were affected by the workforce reduction. Best Buy executives held town-hall meetings to explain the decision and to field employee questions. Department heads followed up by meeting

“The post-layoff climate places a premium on a new set of skills: listening, helping and empathizing.”

with each of their staff members, regardless of whether they were affected by layoffs.

“There was no veil of secrecy around our objectives or communication plan,” says Goering. “The one-on-one meetings were a chance for genuine communication, and also an opportunity to let those who would be staying on know what to expect in the post-layoff environment.”

The Damage of Denial

One symptom of layoff survivor sickness is a hierarchical denial pattern – the higher a person resides in an organization, the more he or she will want to deny any signs of the workplace malady. “Managers are expected to suck it up, be good role models and not show others they, too, might be feeling guilty or fearful,” Noer says. “But for them to heal others, they have to first look in the mirror and heal themselves.”

The author of *Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations*, Noer often works with top managers in offsite sessions to help them drop the façade, confront their own issues and provide a safe place to grieve the sense of guilt and loss that accompanies issuing layoff orders.

Such work is critical because leaders play a vital role in bringing about the emotional release necessary to begin survivors' post-layoff healing process – an “unblocking,” as Marks calls it, that's key to helping people move forward.

Managers usually achieve their positions because they've mastered a traditional skill set that includes planning, organizing and directing. But the post-layoff climate places a premium on a new set of skills: listening, helping and empathizing. “The things managers

really aren't rewarded for coming up through the ranks are the things in demand today as their employees struggle,” Noer says.

The message for managers in post-layoff settings: Tune up your interpersonal and “helping” skills if you want to keep your team's performance and morale strong. That can be as simple as scheduling one-on-one meetings with remaining employees to gauge their emotional temperature and let them know it's okay to be feeling guilt, anxiety or fear. Noer says that, simplistically put, the basic

theory of therapy is this: “If you have disabling thoughts, feelings or emotions, unless you talk to someone about them, they will only get worse.”

The post-layoff environment at Best Buy meant having to work differently and more efficiently with fewer people, and the probability of increased stress levels. To stay on top of that challenge, Goering now holds one-on-one meetings with his staff members for an hour each week. The idea is a reflection of something he learned in Toastmasters – take the focus off of yourself and put it on your audience.

“It's essentially [the staff members'] meeting to talk about whatever they want to,” he says. “We can talk about business or what's going on with them.” The idea is to let people vent a bit, share coping strategies and provide some perspective in difficult times, Goering says. “Those of us who are older have seen many economic challenges, but it can be scary for those experiencing it for the first time,” he adds. “I try to use a ‘this too shall pass’ philosophy and emphasize that we'll all make it through this just fine.”

Noer believes it's better to have managers like Goering handle these communication tasks than to hire outside experts. Some initial training and a structured checklist to facilitate discussion will help wary managers get started. Noer's experience is that even the most bottom-line-oriented, hard-boiled managers can pick up helping skills fairly quickly in workshops.

“Even the most clumsy attempt by a supervisor to listen to his people is better than the most sophisticated outplacement firm, consultant or psychologist coming in to do similar work,” he says. Why? Because the manager's involvement will feel more authentic to employees.

Marks says managers should check in with layoff survivors not only regarding their emotional health but regarding new workload challenges as well. “It might be, ‘We had 10 people in our department before, and only six survived, so what changes are we going to make to allow us to handle the work of 10?’” he says. “There should be an honest discussion around issues such as,

If you want me to do the work of two people, something has to come off of my plate."

'Sanctioned' Group Venting

On an organizational level, Noer says it can be helpful for companies to create town-hall-style "venting" sessions that allow layoff survivors to address how they're feeling. "I've seen a lot of success in companies who authorize employees to externalize their pent-up feelings and emotions in these sessions," he says.

Many organizations use outsiders to guide the meetings, since highly skilled facilitators are crucial to navigate what can quickly become turbulent waters. It's essential that these meetings don't just become "bitching sessions," says Marks, and that they create an environment where people feel safe speaking honestly about their feelings. Layoff survivors are often hesitant to open up for fear of repercussions.

"Many are afraid to talk openly because they are afraid they might say something that will be used against them when the next downsizing occurs," he says.

When management allows people to be heard, and is honest about conditions in the company – letting employees know, for example, that the downsizing may

not necessarily be over – survivors at least feel management is giving them straight talk rather than being evasive or sugarcoating a situation.

And when top executives choose to share some of their own authentic feelings in venting sessions, it can have a powerful effect on the workforce. Marks has seen rank-and-file employees walk away from post-downsizing meetings where CEOs have said, in essence, "This is really hurting me, too," with a newfound respect and understanding of leaders they once reviled. "There are some ruthless executives out there, but the reality is that it pains most leaders to have to cut people off from their livelihood when it was no fault of their own," Marks says. "And that pain is almost always expressed behind closed doors."

While venting sessions won't solve the problem of companies' dwindling revenues or rising expenses, Noer says "they can help solve the emotional problem, and that helps survivors move forward, and become more focused and committed than those in companies who don't get a chance to open up and talk." ■

Dave Zielinski is a freelance writer who divides his time between Wisconsin and South Carolina.

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Speechcraft Superheroes

Judy was a shining example of the good things our program had done. A few months earlier, our club – the Stamano Toastmasters in Stanwood, Washington – had launched a Speechcraft program for the unemployed. Layoffs and unemployment were a dire problem in our area, and we wanted to help by teaching Toastmasters skills to people trying to secure jobs.

Judy stood before our group, giving her final Speechcraft presentation. She concluded with the following words:

“Right here in this room with a group called Toastmasters, this is real. You have invited a motley crew of the unemployed into your organization and taught us skills that may enable us to score that job. Each of you has given freely and generously of your time, talent and energy – at no cost to us.”

Then she added, *“I believe that my fellow Speechcrafters would agree, and so I ask them to join me in giving you a round of applause. To the Toastmasters! A class act!”*

And with that, the members of the Speechcraft program stood and clapped enthusiastically.

These Speechcraft participants had learned to give excellent speeches – with fewer “ahs” and “ums.” They had developed skill in answering hard questions – even those impossible queries asked by job interviewers. Through evaluations, they practiced giving newly-learned advice to each other. Some

took on leadership roles in the meetings, surprising themselves with increased confidence and ability. They were prepared to walk with heads held high into new job opportunities.

Grappling with Job Losses

Stanwood is located in Snohomish County, in the U.S. state of Washington, where times have grown very tough in recent months. At one point, the county’s unemployment rate had grown to nearly 10 percent, the highest rate in more than 25 years. Layoffs at Boeing Commercial Airplanes (headquartered in Washington) led to the loss of jobs for contractors and aerospace suppliers. Construction projects died, manufacturing plants closed and biotech companies downsized their workforces. People who had been securely employed for most of their lives were starting over.

Thus, our club turned to Speechcraft – a short-term program designed to teach public speaking skills and provide growth opportunities for people without the requirement of Toastmasters membership. The Speechcraft program’s purpose is to demonstrate the organization’s vision and service while bringing new members into a club. We hoped it would be a win-win situation: Participants would learn skills to help them gain jobs, while our club would expand its membership and also inspire members with a new and different program.

The Daily Herald, Snohomish County’s largest paper, promoted the program in its JobSource section with a full-color picture and eye-catching article. Other papers printed news releases. A local company helped pay for the Speechcraft materials, and the public library offered its conference room.

Within hours of newspaper distribution, the first e-mail pre-registrations arrived – and they just kept coming. To meet the growing demand, the Stamano Toastmasters offered to replace the regular meeting schedule with an additional class. Speechcraft manuals were ordered a second, then a third time. Many of those who registered were even committing to an hour commute! Our club members realized they would have high expectations, so we focused on getting ready.

Participants Make Progress

The Speechcraft manuals provided a basic structure and schedule of projects. During each session, the program leaders made the projects and Toastmasters activities applicable to specific job searches. As the participants progressed, they took on more meeting roles, such as providing and using a word of the day and leading Table Topics.

“It was an opportunity to challenge myself in unfamiliar territory, to build confidence and to work on my communication skills,” says Jane, one of the program participants.

Don, another participant, said he was stumbling on his “ums” when he joined. “I have improved the ‘um’ problem and gained confidence in speaking to my audience,” he notes.

Celebrating a Job Well Done

The nine-week Speechcraft series ended with an awards celebration and party. Eight participants received certificates for completing the manual speeches. Among them was a woman named Carol, who had found work as a substitute teacher – and credited the Speechcraft program with helping her perform well in the job.

“I feel more assured that I can give clear directions,” she said.

“Last week I was involved in two important meetings,” Carol added. “Before opening my mouth, I quickly thought of Speechcraft and having an outline in my head. Those Table Topics were good practice!”

Looking at the Results

Did the Stamano Toastmasters benefit by running this program? Club membership did not significantly increase, but several participants have promised to visit clubs closer

to their homes. Not everyone who registered completed the course, but those who attended even briefly gained valuable experience and have become familiar with the vision and service of Toastmasters International.

The graduates, on the other hand, who consistently completed assignments and gave speeches, have developed valuable communication and leadership skills to take with them to their interviews, their new jobs and their everyday interactions. In turn, their determination to change a difficult situation into an opportunity for personal and professional growth has inspired the Stamano club. John, one of our

Translating Toastmasters to Jobs

Role-playing in Table Topics can help job seekers.

Table Topics Questions for Interview Practice


- Why did you register for Speechcraft?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your biggest weakness? Tell what you are doing to turn the weakness into a strength.
- Evaluate the hardest aspect of your performance in your last job.
- Describe what success means to you.
- Give one or two reasons why we should hire you.

recharged members, expressed that new enthusiasm to serve by asking, “How soon can we do it again?”

Does your club need to be rejuvenated? Why not serve the needs of others by offering your skills and experience? You’ll be amazed at the overflow of energy that comes back to you. ■


Editor’s Note: For more information about Speechcraft, go to www.toastmasters.org/speechcraft.

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Toastmasters help bashful bakery owner on T.V.'s *Rachael Ray Show*.

When Public Speaking Is No Cake Walk...

On March 3, Micheline Cummings appeared on the daytime show hosted by Rachael Ray, the perky and popular TV chef who first gained notoriety with her Food Network programs. Micheline ("It's pronounced like the tire company") runs her own custom cake shop, but she wasn't on Ray's show because the two share common culinary ground. Her presence was tied to a fear of public speaking – and how to overcome it.

So, naturally, Toastmasters played a starring role.

In many ways, Cummings' story is the type that's familiar to any Toastmaster: The 35-year-old has long been terrified of the prospect of talking in front of people – to the point where it held her back from professional opportunities and advancement. But in another way, her situation is starkly different: The New Yorker participated in her first Toastmasters meeting under the scrutiny of a huge United States network television audience.

At the meeting of the SEC Roughriders in New York City, Cummings took a turn at Table Topics, then later gave a short talk about her business – Madame Butterfly Cakes. As painfully nerve-wracking as it was, Cummings says that successfully participating in the Toastmasters meeting – simply *surviving* the

speaking experience – was a huge confidence builder. She says it has marked a turning point for her.

"I was on such a high after that meeting," Cummings says, "I thought, 'I did it! I didn't fall apart.' I was so happy. I was so amazed. I thought, 'I can do anything now.'"

"I was explaining this to somebody the other day: You know how when you're so used to your old eyeglasses prescription that when you get a new pair of glasses, you can suddenly see everything so clearly? I was so used to that old prescription, that's what it felt like: All of a sudden, I could see everything....It's an amazing feeling."

Madame Butterfly Emerges

Since 2002, Cummings, a self-taught cake designer, has operated Madame Butterfly Cakes in Babylon, New York. The shop has won a fiercely loyal following and has been written about in several magazines. Cummings decorates diversely flavored cakes – meticulously handcrafting each one – for all kinds of special occasions.

But despite her confidence as a maker of edible art, she's been crippled by anxiety when it comes to communicating with people. She says she's always felt highly self-conscious whenever meeting strangers or feeling out of place in a situation. And she admits she's



Micheline Cummings

passed up business opportunities when it's meant veering out of her comfort zone.

For example, one of her customers has a contact at the Food Network, and for years she has urged Cummings to reach out to that person. "I've avoided it like the plague," says the shop owner. Cummings hasn't wanted to teach cake-decorating classes or compete in contests, and she still feels nervous sometimes talking with newer customers.

She also says she has used her boyfriend, Terry, as a business crutch. He is everything she's not: socially confident, assertive and a talker. So when it came to business-related errands, such as visiting venues where she would be delivering cakes to a client, Cummings had Terry get out of the car and do all the interacting, ask all the questions.

"I realized I was using him like a front man," she says.

A Friend, a Pep Talk and...

One day Cummings' good friend came into the shop.

"She's very outgoing and we got into this discussion about my fear of public speaking and how it's kept me from doing certain things. She gave me a pep talk: She said,

"You're 35; it's time to get past it; don't let it stop you from doing the things you want."

The very next day, Cummings heard about a contest being sponsored by the *Rachael Ray* program: The show wanted to help someone with a fear of public speaking. "I felt it was sort of like fate," Cummings says. So she decided to be brave, take a chance and send in an entry form.

Two weeks later, she received a call. The *Rachael Ray Show* had selected her.

"I thought, 'Oh, God.'"

Ray recruited the actress Valerie Bertinelli to help Cummings conquer her fear. The show's activities were filmed over a few days in February and the program aired March 3. (Part of the episode – although not the part featuring the Toastmasters meeting – can be viewed on the archives section of the *Rachael Ray* Web site: <http://www.rachaelrayshow.com/show/segments/view/conquer-your-biggest-fears/>.)

Bertinelli gave Cummings particular challenges to help her grow and gain confidence. She didn't know what any of the activities would entail before she arrived at them. One was visiting a hypnotist, which Cummings says was extremely helpful. The hypnotist helped her work through some issues and gave her some strategies to deal with anxiety.

Another activity was participating in an improvisation class with a group of actors. That didn't go as well – to say the least. It pushed all the buttons that made Cummings feel uncomfortable and anxious again.

The third test sent her to the SEC Roughriders Toastmasters meeting. Cummings arrived at the downtown New York building on February 13, and after a while of waiting and wondering what she was there for, she was introduced to club president Jerry Wolf. He welcomed her to Toastmasters. Suddenly, Cummings' mind was racing. *Toastmasters?*

"I thought, 'Am I going to a toaster convention?'" she recalls. "Then my brain sort of kicked in. 'Toastmasters, wait, I know that phrase – one of my customers told me about it. Her brother is a member in California, I think.'"

While the cameras rolled, Cummings watched the Toastmasters meeting in rapt attention. Then came Table Topics, and suddenly she was called on to answer a question. The topic? "Octomom" – the California woman who sparked major media attention and controversy after giving birth to octuplets earlier this year.

Cummings decided to try responding. She stood up...and couldn't think of a word to say.

"I had a moment of intense panic," she says, "but then a little bit came to me. And then everything clicked, and I started speaking, and I was shocked that I was speaking and making sense, actually, and I was proud of the fact that my hands weren't shaking."

In fact, she spoke for a full two minutes.

Witnessing this triumph was Rande Gedaliah, a veteran mem-

ber of the SEC Roughriders. She was sitting right next to Cummings at the table – and holding her hand for moral support during the entire Table Topics talk.

"She gave a wonderful answer," notes Gedaliah, who is a professional speaker and runs a communications and coaching firm with her husband, Robert. "Obviously, her voice was shaking a little bit and she wasn't loud – but she did it!"

Toward the end of the meeting, Cummings spoke again. She gave a short talk about her business career: how she got into cake decorating, started Madame Butterfly and what other ventures she has pursued. As was clear to both club members and TV viewers, Cummings displayed a warm, likeable manner and a gently self-deprecating sense



Cake designer Micheline Cummings displays her artistic creations. She has operated Madame Butterfly Cakes since 2002.

of humor – even poking fun of her own nervousness.

Gedaliah presented an evaluation, mainly so Cummings could have some feedback before tackling her final challenge: giving a speech about her custom cake business on the *Rachael Ray Show*.

"I mainly pointed out her courage, her humor and the fact that we couldn't tell she was nervous because she was always smiling," Gedaliah says. "I can't tell you how proud I am of her."

The New York food artist says she's grateful for how supportive and positive the members of the SEC Roughriders were. They made her feel accepted, she says. "These were Financial District people; I thought I would feel intimidated. But they were so welcoming and just so encouraging. Right away, I got that feeling that I was in a safe place."

Cummings admits that a few months earlier, her fears made her miss an opportunity. She had been invited to a meeting related to a new business enterprise she's aiming to become involved with. There were going to be various branch managers meeting around a 20-foot table. Just the kind of thing that intimidated her. So she bowed out, saying she was too busy to attend.

"After the Toastmasters experience, I felt like, 'I could do that business meeting now,'" Cummings says.

She also feels like she wants to make herself more of a communicator. "I'm playing around with the idea now of going ahead and teaching classes and maybe having an interactive presence – putting myself out there in a bigger way to interact with people and teach." It's clearly the attitude of someone with a newfound confidence and ambition.

Cummings was also so encouraged by her Toastmasters experience that she plans to join a club. She says she'd love to join the SEC group but it's located a little too far away from where she lives. So she's looking at clubs in the nearby Long Island area of New York. She's already done some research and talked to a couple of people to find a group that will be a good fit.

"I really feel that I gained so much from going through that Toastmasters meeting and actually standing there being part of that group," Cummings says of her TV experience.

"I know that if I can gain so much from Toastmasters, there are so many other people who could gain from it, too." ■

Paul Sterman is an associate editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

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Effective Solutions for Team Conflict

No matter how skilled you are in getting along with people, you aren't going to get along with everyone all the time. The bottom line is that whenever people spend a lot of time together, conflicts are going to arise.

Conflicts at work can be tough to handle because you don't have the same comfort level you do when problems occur with your family or friends. At work, it is important to maintain composure and self-control; people who do so are viewed more positively by their co-workers.

If you are uncomfortable facing conflict, you are not alone. Most people feel uncomfortable when dealing with any conflict, especially when it occurs in the workplace. We often ignore these situations, hoping the problem will go away. The bad news is that ignoring conflict will only allow it to grow, often becoming unmanageable. If left unresolved, conflict causes employees to become disgruntled and bitter, it causes relationships to break down, customers to quit doing business with you, and members to leave your club.

When you arm yourself with the skills to meet conflict head on and work quickly and effectively to resolve problems, you will gain respect as an involved leader who is committed to being part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Learn the steps below to resolve conflict in order to maintain strong, cohesive and productive relationships with others.

View every conflict as an opportunity. Conflict is a natural component in all relationships and should be welcomed. No matter how hard you strive to keep your work environment positive, problems are going to occur. Richard Selznick, a psychologist and author of *The Shut-Down Learner*, says, "Without resolution,

resentments stay below the surface and magnify. When conflict resolution allows for good discussion, those involved can begin to move ahead." Good discussion clears up confusion, channels positive energy, boosts confidence, improves the cohesiveness of the employees and opens the door to resolution.

Conflict arises when there is poor communication, a misunderstanding or a disagreement between people. Someone may feel slighted, left out of the loop or unfairly treated. In high-producing teams, conflict often comes about when people are creative, productive and passionate about their work. Tom Sebok, director of the Ombuds Office at the University of Colorado at Boulder, says, "Almost any team is likely to view a situation from different perspectives, which can lead to conflict. Recognizing this and encouraging discussion of different points of view can help groups make more thoughtful and informed decisions."

Think about this: Without disputes, people might become bored, complacent or stagnant. When you view conflict as an opportunity, you will look for resolutions that allow for growth and development. Effective resolution gets people back on track, opens the door to creative thought process, and paves the way to open, honest communication.

Anticipate problems and deal with them immediately.

In any conflict, someone must take ownership of the issue and work to resolve it positively. If you are the

one taking ownership, there is another element of conflict resolution: the time factor. Once you become aware of a conflict, you do not have the luxury of time to wait and see what will happen.

Learn to be on the lookout for problems, and resolve issues when they are still manageable. Become an active observer and communicator; stay involved and watch for

“People are going to be emotional when talking about conflict; observe the message behind the words. Is the person angry, hurt or embarrassed?”

things that are not right. Ask your team members, co-workers and friends to tell you when a problem is brewing. Be aware of co-workers who suddenly become negative, quiet, agitated or upset, as this is often a sign of conflict.

Communication is key to resolving conflict. Miscommunication is often at the root of arguments, so it makes sense that good communication is the key to resolving them. Resolving conflict effectively is as simple as 1-2-3: 1 – Listen and Question; 2 – Decide and Plan; 3 – Respond and Resolve.

1 Listen and Question. Before attempting to draw conclusions or make decisions, listen carefully to all sides. Sebok says, “Listening gives you the best chance of understanding another’s perspective. You don’t have to agree, but it almost always helps to understand someone else’s perspective. Also, listening helps people to feel both safe and understood, and sets the stage for a more constructive dialogue.”

Allow everyone, individually, to tell their version of the story. An effective way to approach this, adds Selznick, “is to stay away from ‘you statements.’ It’s more honest to focus on ‘I statements.’” Seek information by using non-judgmental words and phrases, such as *I noticed...*, *I feel that...*, or *I need to talk to you about something that concerns me*. Follow up by asking questions to enhance your understanding.

Pay attention to the non-verbal messages you are receiving – and those you are sending. People are going to be emotional when talking about the conflict; observe the message behind the words. Is the person angry, hurt or embarrassed? What is the person really telling you? Be aware, also, of the signals you send out. Show concern in your facial expressions by maintaining eye contact and don’t frown, laugh or send other improper messages.

2 Decide and Plan. When you are confident you have enough details to work toward resolution, take time to think through the situation before deciding how to respond. It may help to rest the problem for a short time so you can make the best decision. When you have drawn your conclusion, plan what you will say when meeting with the person or the group. Think about how those involved are going to respond to you. Who will be confrontational? Who will refuse to take responsibility? Who will be passive and give in? Plan how you are going to answer these responses.

Include in your planning who needs to be at the resolution meeting and where the meeting will be held. If the conflict is between two people, you most likely do not need to involve your entire team to resolve the issue. Find a private location for your meeting.

3 Respond and Resolve. The most effective way to resolve conflict is to allow those involved to jointly reach consensus. There will be times, though, when you must make the final decision for your team. In either situation, resolution occurs when you can find a win-win solution where all involved feel valued and can accept the solution.

If your role is to facilitate the discussion and guide your co-workers to reach consensus, make sure all members are present when you meet to resolve the issue. Describe the problem and ask for ideas to resolve it. Sebok makes two important ground rules in mediation situations:

- No interruptions and no button pushing through insults or personal attacks.
- Focus on the solution rather than the problem.

When you encourage everyone to offer their suggestions and analyze the consequences of each, you will be able to stay focused on the issue at hand and find the best resolution.

As the group leader, show that you value each person involved in the dispute by displaying interest, care and concern. Incorporate positive words, such as, *That sounds good; I can see you’re trying hard to find a solution. Or I’m glad you thought of that.* Such words can help the mending process.

Work toward consensus and a solution that everyone can buy into. When complete agreement is not possible, make sure everyone accepts the outcome before ending the meeting. If tempers flare, or if you cannot reach

(Continued on page 28)



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How to handle – and even embrace – club transition.

Be a Champion of Change

Is your club going through changes? And are your members struggling to cope? Change can be difficult and scary, but it's something we all need to learn to navigate if we want to be successful in our personal and professional lives. In my home club – the Fyrebyrde Toastmasters in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada – we dealt with a major transition period, and these are some key strategies we developed and implemented in the area of change management.

I can still remember how impressed I was with the caliber of speakers when I joined Toastmasters back in 2006. I made it through my speeches one at a time with the support and encouragement of our club's core members. I came to rely upon them. As time passed, I noticed changes were taking place within our club. Some of our core group had moved away; we were growing quickly, with more new members with different cultural backgrounds. Our Toastmasters group was evolving into a large, multicultural melting pot!

This cultural makeup reflected the growth patterns of our city. Vancouver has become an extremely diverse place; it's a cosmopolitan city known for its multicultural population. Many Vancouver residents are non-native English speakers. Such changing cultural dynamics can bring difficulty – people have trouble understanding each other, and there are conflicts

in cultural beliefs – but such diversity also enables people to grow and broaden their minds, which is a good thing.

As older members left our club, younger ones came in, and we had members from Brazil, Africa and Asia. This brought up all kinds of issues. For example, one member gave a talk defending human rights in China, while another gave a speech criticizing China's human-rights record. That kind of debate was very healthy.

My husband and I are a prime example of cultural contrasts. I grew up in the United Kingdom but my husband is Greek-American. When we first got married, we would watch CNN and our perspectives were so different! But we grew to embrace our differences.

Change is scary. You can get safe in your little comfort zone. But differences benefit everyone.

For our club, coping with our sudden growth spurt as well as the departure of some of our longer-term members and the influx of so many new members was, at times, pretty challenging. But we pulled together, worked through it and went from strength to strength, becoming a role model for other clubs.

When your club is going through changes, you need to remember that everyone responds in a different way. So it's important to help your members cope in the healthiest way for them. Here are some steps you can take to help your members embrace change:

1 Collaborate to create a club identity. Your club needs a vision and mission that goes well beyond any individual members. Have a strategic planning session open to all members at least once a year to re-evaluate this vision, and have a club identity that reflects everyone's values. For the same reason I don't wear the same clothes I did as a teenager (My style – not to mention my dress size! – has evolved with age), your club identity also shouldn't be static. It should evolve as the club moves forward into new phases. Once you have worked together to create your mission, don't keep it a secret: Publish it on your Web site's home page, on your club flier if you have one and on your district's page for your club.

2 Be open to new friendships. People move on – that's the nature of life. They move from one city to another, change jobs or join a Toastmasters club for a specific objective. Always welcome new members with open arms and an open heart. I have to admit that I found this particularly difficult since I relied so much on our core group and was sad to see some of them go. But soon I learned that there were wonderful new people just around the corner, waiting for me to reach out my hand in friendship.

3 Get everyone involved. New members are often apprehensive



about taking on club and meeting roles they haven't performed before. It's the job of experienced members to coach them through those early days and familiarize them with club responsibilities. When our club held its last International Speech and Evaluation Contest, I was delighted to see how many of our contestants were new members. I was so proud of the open and welcoming environment we were able to provide.

4 Encourage new members to step up to leadership roles. Your club needs an executive committee that is representative of your members. Learn to recognize potential and nurture

enthusiasm. Positive energy is the single most important ingredient in leadership; everything else people can learn. Have your club elections early so the new executive committee members can shadow the existing ones.

5 Encourage an open dialogue. When there is change, your members will have questions and concerns. When someone says, "Hi, how are you?", how often do you answer, "Fine, thanks" – even when you're not? The best way to address the members' concerns is to encourage everyone to open up about how they feel – how they *really* feel. A good way to do this is to

create a blog or online forum on your club's Web site. (If your club doesn't have a Web site, visit **freetoasthost.org** and set one up for free.) Appoint a mediator, an experienced member of the club, who will answer questions and address concerns. Another option is to hold an open forum meeting and invite all the club members to attend and talk it out. Again, a chairman or mediator is essential.

We've looked at five simple, yet powerful strategies that you and your club can put into practice to handle change more effectively. In Toastmasters what ultimately brings us together is a common goal: to change our world for the better, one member at a time, through the development of world-class communication and leadership skills. Change and evolution is a necessary part of that. Learn to embrace change both in your life and at your club and see how you can thrive beyond your wildest dreams. **T**

Narges Nirumvala, ACB, CL, is a member of Fyrebyrde Toastmasters in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Reach her at **www.nargesnirumvala.com**

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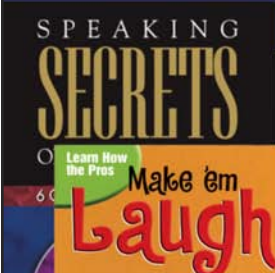



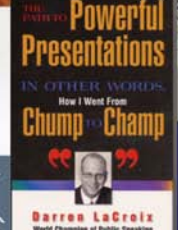
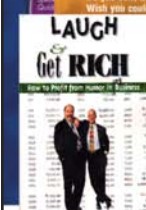

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Cultivating Hope

Eric Aronson founded a highly successful brokerage firm and was enjoying a fast-paced, luxurious lifestyle when it all came to an abrupt halt. At 31 he was convicted of fraud and spent three years in a federal prison. At that point, Aronson felt his future looked very bleak. But while in prison he vowed to turn his life around. There he read more than 600 books to stimulate his mind and energize his will. Upon release, he lost 60 pounds, stopped smoking and quit gambling.

Ways to expect the best, not the worst.

By Victor Parachin

Today, he is an author, speaker, life coach and president of a small corporation devoted to helping others.

Aronson's example demonstrates the reality that hope – the tendency to focus on the best of possibilities – can be cultivated even in the midst of life's most challenging conditions. In his book *Dash*, he recalls how hopeless he felt when he first landed in prison. Aronson wondered how he could survive the ordeal of "being away from everyone and everything I loved." What he found tremendously helpful in boosting his spirits was regularly saying these words to himself:

Things may not seem to be working out for me right now, but I know that I will make the best of the situation. I know that I will do everything that I can, one day at a time... I will not worry but rather look at what I am going through as a challenge: a time to develop patience and

self-confidence and realize that I can change my attitude even if I can't change my circumstances. I am a survivor! I am going to handle this. I am going to find strength I didn't know I had.

No matter what happens to us in life, feelings of despair and defeat can be minimized and offset by the power of hope. Tapping into that emotion is a critical life skill because hope has the power to pull us through just about any kind of dark, demanding time. In the extreme, it can mean the difference between life and death.

Hope is a learnable practice. Here are some words that offer insight on the subject:

■ **Surrender.** This is the remarkable ability to go with the flow without expecting predetermined outcome. It is a willingness to let events unfold in their time – not *our* time. Paul McCartney was drifting and feeling



“No matter what happens to us in life, feelings of despair and defeat can be minimized and offset by the power of hope.”

despondent in the fall of 1968, a time when the Beatles were close to breaking up. One night he had a most comforting dream. His mother, Mary, who died when he was 14, appeared to him.

“There was her face, completely clear. She said to me, very gently, very reassuringly, ‘Let it be,’” he has said of that experience. Being a musician, McCartney began writing a song based on his dream. The result was some of the most famous lyrics in the history of pop music: *When I find myself in times of trouble, mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be...there will be an answer, let it be.* McCartney notes that his song has since become almost like a hymn. After the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York’s Twin Towers, radio stations played it frequently. That prompted McCartney to sing it at a benefit concert in New York City. “Not only did these words help me through a difficult time in my life,” he has said, “but they’ve become a reassuring, healing statement for other people too.”

■ **Vision.** When hope is fading, it’s easy to think negatively. Dispute your thoughts during adversity. Work to keep the bleak aspects of your life in perspective. Reject negative assumptions. Seek ways to enlarge your vision of your life and circumstances. Rather than say to yourself, “My world is falling apart,” try saying and thinking, “This is a very difficult time for me, but I will take on the challenge and see it through.” Rather than think, “This is hopeless,” focus on options that can help you shape, manage and downsize the issue. One way of doing this is to ask yourself: “What information do I need to better understand or deal with this?” “What experts can guide me through this difficulty?” “Who among my family and friends can be a trusted, supportive source at this time?” “What steps do I need to take in order to strengthen myself for these challenges?”

By enlarging your vision of the possibilities, you will discover fresh insights and greater options. The vision that emerges is the one that will pull you forward.

"A very good vision is needed for life, and the man who has it must follow it – as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky," said Sioux Chief Crazy Horse.

■ **Persistence.** This is the determination to keep moving forward no matter what happens. This quality was fundamental in the career of Jack Welch, the highly regarded former CEO of General Electric. Now retired, Welch was asked by an interviewer: "Have you made any mistakes?" His answer: "I could fill a room with them all!

"Rather than say to yourself, 'My world is falling apart,' try saying and thinking, 'This is a very difficult time for me, but I will take on the challenge and see it through.'"

I didn't make the right deal. I waited too long to move on something. I even blew up a factory early in my career. But I always went to bat. I didn't wait in the dugout." Life rewards those who are persistent – those who don't quit, give up or readily accept defeat.

■ **Humor.** No matter how difficult and complex your circumstances may become, work to retain a sense of humor. The ability to identify reasons for smiling and laughing can lighten life's loads. A deputy sheriff once found some humor in his work. He was assigned to courthouse security and as part of his job he had the duty of explaining the court process to visitors.

One day he was giving a group of ninth graders a tour. The court was in recess and only two people were in the courtroom: the court clerk and a young man in custody wearing handcuffs. "This is where the judge sits," the deputy said, pointing to the bench. Next, he pointed out where the lawyers, court clerk and court recorder all sit. He also pointed out the witness stand and the jury seating area. "As you can see," he concluded, "there are a lot of people involved in making this system work."

At that point the prisoner raised his cuffed hands and said: "Yeah, but I'm the one who makes it all happen."

■ **Present Tense.** Live in the present tense, not the past tense nor the future tense. Another way of saying this is: *Live in the moment.* The Buddha taught that health, happiness and hope emerge when we live in the present moment: "The secret of health for both the mind and the body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, nor to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly." Learn from the past but don't limit hope by constantly reliving unhappy

yesterdays or fearing the future. One man, tormented by betrayal from a business partner, finally came to the point where he repeatedly reminded himself: "I have to give up all hope for a better yesterday!"

■ **One Step at a Time.** Whenever you're feeling pessimistic or hopeless, remember the number "one." Tackle events *one* step at a time. Author Brian Tracy tells of being 21 years old when he and a companion decided to go off and see the world. While most of their friends were hitchhiking through Europe, Tracy and his friend decided they wanted a different experience, so they chose to cross Africa. Their choice meant crossing the enormous Sahara desert.

They set off from London, riding bicycles across France and Spain. In Gibraltar they sold their bikes and invested their meager funds in an old Land Rover, using it to cross from Gibraltar to Tangier and into Algeria. Between them and their destination was the mighty expanse of the Sahara desert. They had no idea how difficult and dangerous that journey could be. "As we moved south across the desert, we encountered endless problems, any one of which could have ended our trip and probably our lives," Tracy recalls. Yet it was during that desert crossing that he learned a vital life lesson.

The French, who had governed Algeria for many years, had marked a path across the desert with black 55-gallon oil drums. The drums were spaced exactly five kilometers apart. As Tracy and his friend drove and came to an oil drum, the next drum – which was five kilometers ahead – would pop up on the horizon, and the last oil drum, which was five kilometers behind, would fall off the horizon. No matter where they were in the desert, they could always see two oil drums at a time: the one left behind and the one they were headed toward. Here was the invaluable lesson Tracy learned: "To cross one of the greatest deserts in the world, all we had to do was take it *one barrel at a time*. We did not have to cross the entire desert at once."

That insight is a metaphor for life: *Today, all you have to do is take one step, one oil barrel, at a time.*

Whether a challenge is personal, financial, business-related or all three...these words and the wisdom they carry can save lives. One must not forget that others have survived seemingly impossible situations in the past. The first step, for all, was a sense of hope. **T**

Victor Parachin is a freelance writer living in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Reach him at vmp5@cox.net.

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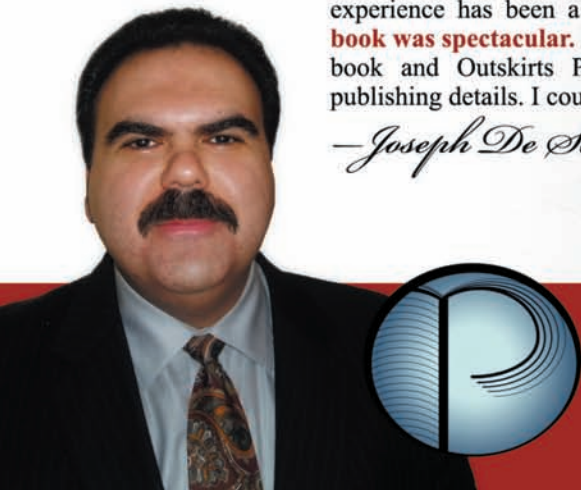
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Effective Solutions for Team Conflict

(Continued from page 20)

agreement, give everyone time to calm down by adjourning and meeting later. If, after meeting again, it is still impossible to reach group consensus, you may have to make the final call in order to move forward.

In the event that you are the decision maker, Selznick stresses, “It will help to begin by saying something like, *I’ve taken all of your opinions into consideration, but ultimately someone has to decide. It’s not an easy decision but I’m going with X.* The important point is to let everyone know you listened to their view.” Sebok feels that it helps to tell the group that this is not ideally the way you like to make decisions.

After saying that you listened to everyone’s view, gain consensus that each person understands your reasoning. This step is crucial to resolution: Even though some might not agree with your decision, helping them understand *where* you are coming from and *why* you came to that conclusion should help them buy into the solution.

Always remain calm and in control. If the issue does not directly involve you, it should be easy to stay composed. What happens, though, when you are involved in the conflict and have trouble controlling your emotions? When this happens, maintaining self-control and objectivity is an unrealistic expectation.

According to Selznick, “We often think that just because there’s a stimulus we don’t like, we have to instantaneously react. You can learn not to be so reactive. My suggestion is to back up, take a deep breath, and consider your response.” Learning not to be reactive will help slow your racing heart and racing thoughts. Make it a rule to always take time to think through a situation. If you have to, walk away rather than lose control of your emotions. This will keep you from saying something you will regret.

Sebok puts into practice three calming strategies: **physical**, **self-talk** and **visual**. “Physical techniques include deep breathing, drinking water or tensing and relaxing your muscles. Self-talk techniques involve recognizing your own negative self-talk that makes you upset, and substituting those messages with more rational thoughts. Visualization techniques involve things like imagining that the other person’s comments are flying past you and hitting the wall. The point of these techniques is to reduce the intensity of emotions you are feeling so you can regain control and use your best conflict management skills.”

Even if you are not involved in the conflict, you may still get caught up in the emotions. When dealing with

an angry or upset person, your reaction may be to emulate the person’s emotions, become defensive, or downplay the event.


Before reacting, allow the person to vent. Notes Sebok: “One of the best strategies if others become angry or defensive is to listen. The natural temptation is to interrupt. Listening respectfully in this situation can help an angry person calm down.” When it is your turn to respond, remain patient, calm and in control of your emotions.

If the person appears to be losing control, maintain your composure and speak in a calm voice. Say something like, *I can see that you’re really angry. Let’s take a walk so you can compose yourself. When you can talk about this calmly, I’ll do everything I can to help you.* Acknowledging that you are going to help should enable the person to calm down.

If the person speaks or acts inappropriately, focus on the behavior. Stress why it is inappropriate and assure that you will help. *I’m going to help you resolve this but I need you to stop yelling. Customers might hear you, and that is unacceptable.*

One final thought on this subject: If you find yourself in a situation where someone intimidates or threatens you, ask for help or get away from the person. Never remain in a situation in which you feel threatened.

In conclusion, handling conflict – whether it involves an unhappy customer, a problem performer on your team, a club member or a disagreeable co-worker – is not an easy skill to master. Sebok offers the following advice: “When you recognize your new strategies and skills begin to result in positive outcomes, your confidence grows. Anyone who has tried to learn a new skill will tell you that you have to allow yourself to feel uncomfortable and make mistakes. Learning to manage conflict well is no exception. Getting good at it takes both patience and practice.”

As your confidence grows, others will see you are a person of action and will respect your forthrightness and leadership. Whenever you can, allow others to become part of the solution and when you can’t, discuss the reasons behind your decision. That is the key to maintaining strong relationships, and strong relationships can weather any conflict. 

Editor’s Note: Want to learn more about conflict resolution? Try *Resolving Conflict* (Item 321), offered by Toastmasters International at www.toastmasters.org/shop.

Renée Evenson is a writer specializing in organizational psychology. Her latest books, *Customer Service Training 101* and *Award-Winning Customer Service*, are available in bookstores, online sites or at www.reneeevenson.com.

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FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT!

By John Cadley

In Times Like These

† The next time I hear someone start a sentence with “In times like these,” I’m going to make a citizen’s arrest for creating a public nuisance.

“In times like these”! And exactly what kind of times would “times like these” be like? You mean times when the entire world economy – including my job, my house and my retirement – rests on what is essentially a global Ponzi scheme?

I’m trying to *forget* I live in “times like these,” thank you very much. When someone starts with those four cretinous words, I know I’m about to get heartburn, stomach upset and painful itching.

“In times like these...”

...you better have a credit rating like Warren Buffet;

... the experts who created this mess don’t even know how they got us *into* it, much less how to get us out;

...your life savings look like tips from a paper route;

...it’s a great time to buy a house, purchase a car or take a vacation – but you can’t, because you don’t have any money;

...your retirement plan is basically death.

Why would I want to be reminded about all that, not to mention a swine flu pandemic, melting polar ice caps, holes in the ozone layer, the world ending in 2012 (great – just when I finally pay my house off) and Britney Spears seeking inner peace through gardening? “In times like these” you get oxymorons like “toxic assets.” *Toxic* means bad and *asset* means good. Since when do they go together? Toxic assets are

liabilities, OK? And a liability is a bad thing, OK? So please don’t give me a phrase that says, “You still have a good thing but it’s a bad thing.”

“In times like these” you hear the economy is in a “crisis,” a “free fall” and a “meltdown,” which *scars* you half to death, and that the reasons for it are “credit default swaps,” “collateralized debt obligations” and “derivatives,” which *confuse* you half to death. That’s one half death plus one half death. Do the math.

“In times like these” you are informed about countries being trillions of dollars in debt and that the solution is a “stimulus package” – sort of like a good, strong cup of coffee. Now mind you, this money is going to multi-billion-dollar corporations who have told the government in effect: “If we go down, the whole world economy is going with us.”

Stimulus package? How about “ransom money”?

“In times like these” we hear about CEOs of bankrupt companies getting “bonuses,” a word that comes from the Latin word meaning “good” and which reminds us of how good our ruined economy has been to the people who ruined it. The Latin opposite of *bonus*, by the way, is *nocens*, meaning bad/evil/wicked/injurious, and that too is appropriate, since the idea of these boneheads getting bonuses makes *nocens* to the rest of us.

The biggest problem I have with “In times like these” is that the person saying it acts like he or she is about to impart some pearl of wisdom begotten of a sweeping histori-

cal perspective, like Charles Dickens opening *A Tale of Two Cities* with “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” They’ll give me this sage, avuncular look and say, “You know, John, in times like these you should have a portion of your portfolio invested in gold.” I don’t tell them that a “portion” of my portfolio is all I have *left*. I just nod and say, “Good idea, I’ll look into that,” and we both go away happy.

However, if I were giving advice in times like these it would be this:

In times like these we should require that every professional economist go sit in a booth with a cape, a crystal ball and a sign that says, “Fortune Telling: 25 cents.”

In times like these the leaders of the G-8 Economic Conference should present their plans for global economic reform to a classroom of fourth graders, and when a student raises his or her hand and says, “My mom and dad say I should never borrow more than I can’t pay back and I should never spend money I don’t have” – *they should listen*.

Finally, in times like these do *not* open any investment statements or other financial reports regarding the status of your current net worth, as this could lead to spontaneous hair loss and uncontrollable weeping. Furthermore, if this occurs, do *not* seek medical attention, as your physician will probably preface his or her diagnosis with, “You know, in times like these...” **T**

John Cadley is an advertising copy-writer in Syracuse, New York. Reach him at jjcadley@mower.com.

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