

# TOASTMASTER®

November 2009

## What's Your Hook?

How to  
make your  
message  
stick.



## It's Not Just a Room

How to stage your speaking  
environment for optimum effect.

## How a Hunter Captured His Game

Mark Hunter's path to the 2009 World  
Championship of Public Speaking.



## Creating Your Legacy of Leadership

A popular American legend tells the story of a man who traveled the United States in the early 1800s giving away apple seeds to whoever wanted them, hoping to grow and nurture a love of this fruit across the new American frontier. This legend is not a myth. It is the true story of John Chapman, a nurseryman who introduced apple trees to much of the eastern and midwestern United States. This man, nicknamed Johnny Appleseed, literally planted seeds over 200 years ago that continue to reap dividends today.

How are you at planting seeds? Not vegetable or fruit seeds – but seeds of future leaders?

As Toastmasters leaders, we have two objectives this year during our term of service. The first is to motivate and assist our clubs and members to achieve in the Distinguished Club, Area, Division and District programs. The second is to create a legacy of leadership. How will your club or district succeed once your term of service concludes? Are you building the future leaders of your club or district today? The successes you achieve today are short-lived if they do not last beyond your leadership term.

To build this legacy of leadership, all you have to do is plant seeds. How does this happen? You plant seeds of encouragement with your fellow Toastmasters. You plant seeds of belief, support and faith. Help your fellow members realize the potential they do not yet see or believe for themselves.

When I joined Toastmasters in February 1995, I was focused on earning what was then called the Competent Toastmaster award (now titled Competent Communicator). When May arrived, my fellow club member, Susan Lannis, suggested I run for Vice President Education. I had no plans to serve as a club officer. With her supportive words at the end of a club meeting, Susan planted a seed that began my leadership journey in Toastmasters. Thank you, Susan!

Whatever your role in Toastmasters, whether you are a new or veteran member, plant seeds today. Let me plant seeds for you right now. If this message speaks to you – the seed is planted. *You* will be a superb... Club President, Area Governor, District Governor, Region Advisor Marketing, International Director, International President, Accredited Speaker, World Champion of Public Speaking or Distinguished Toastmaster. I believe in you! Now, believe in yourself!

Mahatma Gandhi said: "You are no followers but fellow students, fellow pilgrims, fellow seekers, fellow workers." Fellow Toastmasters – start building your legacy of leadership today. Your legacy begins now!

Gary Schmidt, DTM  
International President

# TOASTMASTER

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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](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org).*

### Clearing Up the Blog Fog

What a delight to see the May issue of the *Toastmaster* dedicated to Web 2.0, social networks and blogging. These topics have been at the top of my to-do list for the last few months. And now the *Toastmaster* has answered my prayer; the suggestions and information were quite helpful and written with such clarity that I immediately set up my own blogs.

Recently, I attended LACE (Leadership and Communication Education) training in Founder's District. One of the seminars dealt with social networking and it was standing room only: More than 100 people attended. Interest and enthusiasm were enormous.

With such timely and relevant articles appearing in the *Toastmaster*, I am constantly using the magazine as a recruiting tool and as one of the many benefits of joining Toastmasters. Thank you for being exceedingly client-driven.

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

### Speaking Normally With an Accent

I was very much inspired by the article "Turning Accents into Assets" (June) by Sher Hooker. I was born and bred in a South Asian country. Though English is my second language, I have a fairly good command of it. I migrated to Sydney, Australia, recently and have been an active member of a club in Sydney for over six months. I have delivered three speeches and participated in Table Topics sessions and in leadership roles. Given all this, I have always wondered about the impact I have on my club with my non-English accent.

This article has provided valuable insights into how regionally diverse club members can add to the learning

and humor of the club. It has also helped me identify ways in which I can make my accent better understood by my club members without "normalizing" my natural speaking style. I look forward to reading more articles from Ms. Hooker!

Gladys Jayaseelan • Deloitte Toastmasters Club • Sydney, Australia

### SaaS-y!

I am very happy to see that the topic of Web 2.0 and social networking is being addressed in the *Toastmaster* magazine! I did notice an error in the definition of the term "Web services" in Dave Zielinski's article "What's New with Web 2.0?" (May). In the article, he defines Web services as "rent-a-software" that is leased by customers, and he cites examples of financial and customer relationship management providers who make functionality available to subscribers over the Internet. Actually, the correct term for this type of software is SaaS – Software as a Service.

Birgit Starmanns, ACB, ALB • SAP Toastmasters  
Mountain View, California

### Ecstatic About Evaluation Article

Carol Dean Schreiner's article "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (August) is the best magazine article I have read since I joined Toastmasters in 2006.

I read it twice in one go with great interest as it capsulized the essence of the Toastmasters evaluation process. Immediately, I scanned

the "Handy Evaluation Checklist" that ran with the article, which I could use for my future evaluations of impromptu as well as prepared speeches. Being the current VPE of my club, I will promptly adopt Ms. Schreiner's suggestion that evaluating the speech evaluators become a standard feature of the General Evaluator's meeting role.

Gamini Senanayake, CC, CL • Wayamba Toastmasters  
Kurunegala, Wayamba, Sri Lanka

### An Attitude of Gratitude

Thank you for the information, energy and inspiration that the *Toastmaster* magazine brings me. I read every issue front to back, and the articles always motivate me to write more, practice more and continue improving my speaking skills. I have been a member of Toastmasters International for two years and I have thoroughly enjoyed having this door of opportunities opened. Thank you, each and every contributor, for sharing your stories and expertise!

Alexa Vodicka • East Coast Raconteurs Toastmasters  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

### Finding Comedy in Financial Crunch

Thanks a lot for printing columns from John Cadley. The July 2009 column titled "In Times Like These" was absolutely hilarious. It is great to hear someone poking fun at the economic crisis. We still need to laugh, even in tough times.

Rodney Hinds, ACG, CL • Raiging Toastmasters • Amarillo, Texas

## Join us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter!



To follow the latest online discussions and podcasts about Toastmasters, visit **Facebook.com** and **LinkedIn.com** and search for the term: **The Official Toastmasters International Group**. On **Twitter.com**, search for the terms: **Toastmasters** and **theTMPodcast**.

# Global Representation and Support: What It Means to You

**O**n August 14, 2009, the worldwide membership of Toastmasters International voted to pass Proposal A: Global Representation and Support.

There will be no change in ordinary club activities. What will change, however, is the global structure of the organization and how districts are supported.

Here is an overview of what those changes are, and how they will be implemented in the coming months:

## 14 Regions and International Directors

On July 1, 2010, Toastmasters districts and clubs worldwide will be divided into 14 regions, replacing the current system of eight North American regions and several districts not assigned to regions (DNARs).

International directors from these 14 regions will be elected from:

- Even-numbered regions in even-numbered years
- Odd-numbered regions in odd-numbered years

International directors from even-numbered regions wishing to be considered by the International Leadership Committee (ILC) for election in 2010 must submit a letter of intent by November 30, 2009.

## International Leadership Committee (ILC)

In September 2009:

- Seven ILC members from the future even-numbered regions

were appointed to a one-year term by International President Gary Schmidt.

- Seven ILC members from the future odd-numbered regions were appointed to a two-year term by Senior Vice President Pat Johnson.
- Beginning in September 2010, ILC members will be appointed each year to two-year terms by the President Elect.
- Each ILC also consists of three Past International Presidents. For 2010, Johnny Uy and Chris Ford will be joined by a third Past International President who will be selected by Gary Schmidt.

Between October 2009 and February 2010, the ILC will research and interview candidates for international-level offices.

In February 2010, the ILC will nominate candidates for:

- International Director from the future even-numbered regions
- Second Vice President
- First Vice President
- President Elect
- International President

In August 2010, the following will be elected:

- Seven international directors from the even-numbered regions
- Second Vice President
- First Vice President
- President Elect
- International President

In August 2010, the International President will assign the 16 interna-

tional directors (seven newly elected and nine carryover) to serve the 14 regions.

In its ongoing role, the ILC will provide input to Toastmasters International regarding the enhancement and development of leadership programs.

## Region Advisor Marketing

The region advisor (RA) marketing position will be a valuable asset to the future growth of Toastmasters International. The volunteers who serve in this role will help district officers gain more clubs and more members by:

- Providing ongoing marketing support and hands-on training.
- Coaching district leaders and advising them on marketing issues and challenges.
- Helping district teams develop and implement strategies to create new clubs and strengthen existing clubs.

All RA marketing candidates must:

- Be a Toastmaster in good standing of a club in good standing.
- Have served a minimum of 12 consecutive months as a district governor, lieutenant governor education and training or lieutenant governor marketing – or a combination thereof – or have demonstrated marketing expertise.
- Be available for training, communication and travel as needed.
- Have regular access to e-mail and the Internet.

*(Continued on page 11)*

**Canadian speaker lacks sight but inspires with his commitment.**

**By Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM**

## Overcoming a Unique Challenge

For most Toastmasters, one of the biggest challenges of public speaking is overcoming nervousness. Just the thought of being in front of an audience is enough to make nearly any new member cringe.

Darcy MacDougall wasn't nervous when he showed up for his first Toastmasters meeting. After all, he'd been a guest speaker at numerous local schools and special events. But he did arrive with one unique challenge: He is legally blind.

Toastmasters has helped him prevail over that challenge. The support and skills provided by fellow members and Toastmasters programs have had a big impact on MacDougall's life.

"I had heard people sing the praises of Toastmasters before I joined," he says. "And now I can add my voice to that song!"

A resident of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, MacDougall has been sightless since birth. But that didn't stop him from graduating from high school and then earning a degree at the University of Prince Edward Island. He's been employed with Veterans Affairs Canada for the past four years, developing policy and conducting training in computer security.

Two years ago, MacDougall's then-boss, Kin Tue-Fee, invited him to a Toastmasters meeting. MacDougall wasn't intimidated –



Darcy MacDougall

but he wasn't particularly excited, either. "I accepted his invitation, but somewhat reluctantly," he says with a chuckle. "I'd heard of Toastmasters before, but I was really going only because Kin was my boss and he wanted me to."

If MacDougall was a unique guest, the club he visited was unique, too. Most members of Club Franco-énergie – which is in Charlottetown – speak English as their first language, but club meetings are conducted in French. So in addition to providing training in public speaking and leadership, the club offered the promise of helping MacDougall upgrade and perfect his second-language skills – a critical career advantage for Government of

Canada employees. It proved to be an irresistible combination.

"I had a hunch that Toastmasters might be a perfect fit for Darcy, and my hunch was right," says Tue-Fee. "He quickly embraced the communication and leadership programs, and his self-confidence got a big boost."

"I'm not typically quick to join new groups, but it took only that one meeting to convince me that Toastmasters was just what I needed," MacDougall recalls. "I had expected that it would be rigid and serious, kind of like work – but it wasn't like that at all. Everyone was so warm, positive and enthusiastic."

Speaking without notes, a huge challenge for most members, came naturally to MacDougall: Because of the inconvenience of relying on Braille or audio formats, he was used to relying on his memory. He presented four speeches within four months, and stepped in as club secretary when a vacancy arose.

But when an evaluator gently hinted that a speech he delivered was a bit "tedious," MacDougall began to realize that effective speaking was about much more than just feeling comfortable in front of a crowd. The evaluator's words got him thinking about speech organization, vocal variety and other elements of successful



◀ Club Franco-énergie President Darcy MacDougall poses with fellow members.

communication. It also led him to confront his biggest challenge – using body language effectively. After all, having never had the visual cues that sighted people take for granted, how could he produce appropriate gestures to support his words? And how could he make eye contact with an audience he couldn't see?

Fortunately, all the help he needed could be found among the membership of Club Franco-énergie. Once attuned to his unique challenge, clubmates made a special effort to offer relevant, focused feedback. Among them, Mariette Hachey, club president at the time, stood out as a mentor, reviewing Darcy's speeches with him in advance and helping him develop a repertoire of meaningful gestures.

Still, as MacDougall worked through the *Competent Communication* manual, he chose to leave project 5 – “Your body speaks” – for last. When he finally completed that speech in June 2008, he achieved more than a CC designation: He also proved to himself that, with personal commitment and the support of others, a sightless speak-

er could indeed convey effective body language.

“That one felt really good,” he says of the speech. “My clubmates commented that I was well oriented to the group and the room, and that my gestures were appropriate – even entertaining!”

Around the same time, another breakthrough took place: MacDougall, who was born and raised on Prince Edward Island, was a guest speaker at Premiere Toastmasters Club, Charlottetown's largest and longest-established club. Even in an unfamiliar meeting room in front of an unfamiliar Toastmasters audience, he was able to use his new skills to impress.

His Toastmasters training has benefited his personal and professional lives as well. “I think I've come out of my shell,” he says. “I used to be somewhat shy, but now I feel much more at ease in networking and starting conversations with new people.”

One of his responsibilities at work has been to deliver hour-long training sessions about security policy and responsibilities. He now presents a mandatory and potentially dry subject in an interesting and

engaging way. “I know that my new skills are helping me get the message across more effectively.”

Club Franco-énergie has also provided an ideal forum for MacDougall to enhance his French language skills. Bilingualism is a critical career advantage for federal employees in Canada, as many positions are open only to those who speak both official languages. Through Toastmasters, he has attained not only the highest level of fluency but also an exemption from future re-testing in reading French.

MacDougall's progress as a Toastmaster continues. He is working on his Advanced Communicator Bronze award, served as club president, and participated in evaluation and international speech contests.

“Darcy's journey of developing confidence, leadership and language has led him to personal and professional success through Toastmasters,” says Hachey. “His success is directly reflected in the people and achievements of our club, as we all enjoyed and learned from the journey together. He's a true example of where Toastmasters can take you.”

For Darcy MacDougall, Toastmasters has opened doors of friendship, opportunity and skill. And for all Toastmasters, he is an inspiring example of how our communication and leadership programs can help members prevail over their challenges. ■

**Carl Duivenvoorden, DTM**, is a speaker, writer and environmental consultant living in Upper Kingsclear, New Brunswick, Canada. Reach him at [www.Changeyourcorner.com](http://www.Changeyourcorner.com).





# What's Your Hook?

By Kevin Carroll

## How to make your message stick.

**I**'ll never forget the time my oceanography professor said, "If you're ever swimming in shark-infested waters, always swim with a partner. That way, if the shark attacks, you'll at least have a 50/50 chance of surviving." That was more than 30 years ago and I still remember it. That teacher knew how to **hook** his students.

Take a minute to recall one or two of the most memorable presentations or speeches you have ever seen. Who gave the presentation? Why was it so memorable? What did the presenter say or do to make his or her message stick in your mind? What did they do that *hooked* you?

Advertising (the industry that I worked in for 17 years) is all about finding "The Hook." The best advertising ties the creative hook directly to the product, rather than simply acting as an attention grabber and nothing more. As a presenter, if you can successfully connect your hook to your main message, then your audience will be much more likely to remember your key point.

Today I make my living as a professional speaker and corporate trainer. My job is to help my clients prepare for important presentations and come out as winners. I teach them how to find hooks and weave them into their presentations so that their message will

get through all the clutter. That's why you should be using them, too. There are a few things to consider before you set your hook:

### What is a Hook Anyway?

A hook is any creative device that grabs someone's attention: a catchy phrase, a humorous story or an amazing statistic, to name a few. Here's my rule of

thumb: If I find something interesting, it has the potential to be a hook.

### What are the Benefits of Using Hooks?

There are many, including:

- They grab your listener's attention.
- They make your message easier to understand. (This is great when you need to talk about intangible concepts like insurance.)
- They make your message more memorable.
- They make your message more persuasive.

### What Makes a Hook Work?

Given the fact that humans are highly emotional, inquisitive, creative beings, anything that's different, intriguing or relatable on a gut level has the potential to grab their attention.



## **“Personal stories are an *emotional hook* and, when done right, are magic.”**

### **What are the Best Kinds of Hooks?**

I have three favorites:

**1 Tell Personal Stories.** A personal story is one where you take an incident from your own life and you *draw a parallel* between that incident and the point you're trying to make in your presentation. Personal stories are an *emotional hook* and, when done right, are magic. Audiences understand them, they relate to them and they remember them. This, in turn, helps them remember your point.

Here's a story I often tell in my *Breakthrough Thinking* workshop:

*A number of years ago, while working at an advertising agency, I was talking with one of the guys who handled a camera account. I asked him if he was working on anything new and he told me that his client was involved in a whole new type of picture-taking method called digital photography. He said that there would come a day in the not-too-distant future where people wouldn't even use film in their cameras. Well, I didn't know what he was talking about because I couldn't get my head around the concept that cameras wouldn't use film. In fact, I thought that the whole idea sounded like a complete waste of*

*time. As I walked away, I sort of snickered and said, “Well, good luck with that project.”*

This story always gets a laugh and sets the tone that the class will be fun and that no one has all the answers.

**2 Show Off Props.** The most advantageous of visual aids, props are any three-dimensional object that a speaker uses during a presentation to help illustrate a point. Props could include just about anything – a newspaper, a hammer, a mouse (computer or otherwise), a plant, a beach ball, a pumpkin... the list is endless. A prop is *anything* that you can somehow relate to your message, either directly or indirectly. Props, because they're tangible, add visual and tactile anchors to verbal concepts.

The chief executive officer of a software company had an ongoing problem. A number of his customers had received his company's software without all of the instructions. He had talked with his team about the issue many times, but it was still a recurring problem. He found a creative way to make his message stick using props:



*At a recent staff meeting I announced, “Let’s try a little friendly competition. I went to the bank and took out three \$100 bills. I also went out and bought identical puzzles for everyone in the room.”*

*I continued, “On the count of three, open your box and solve your puzzle as quickly as you can. As soon as you put it together, run up here and if you’re one of the first three people, you’ll win \$100.” I then counted to three and everybody ripped into their puzzles, working on them. After a minute or so, one person yelled, “I got it!” and ran up and collected a reward. Moments later two others ran up and grabbed their money as well. With that, everyone let out a big groan. One employee turned to the winners and asked, “How’d you do it so quickly?”*

*The three winners explained that they’d simply read the instructions. With that, the room erupted. The losers complained that the winners had received instructions and they hadn’t. They said the game wasn’t fair.*

*When the moaning died down, I said, “Now we all know how our customers feel when they get our software and they don’t receive all the information they need...it’s just not fair.”*

This is a great example that shows the power of using props as hooks. His approach was simple, emotional (feeling cheated is *very* emotional) and *directly* connected to the point he wanted to make.

**3 Share Surprising Statistics.** While numbers are important, because they can communicate pertinent information, numbers are also abstract and can bore people. Rather than dumping mounds of mundane stats on your audience, you’re better off cutting back on the numbing numbers and instead finding surprising statistics. The key

**“A story is nothing more than an incident that happened to you that’s funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual.”**

word here is *surprising*. Your goal should be to present your data so that it’s both interesting and provocative.

Here’s an example of the way a *Forbes* magazine reporter used statistics to communicate the awesome processing power of a network switch that Cisco Systems was developing:

*On Monday, Cisco announced the development of the Nexus 7000, a network switch that’s capable of routing*

*15 terabits of data per second – the equivalent of moving the entire contents of Wikipedia in one-hundredth of a second, or downloading every movie available on Netflix in about 40 seconds.*


Had the reporter stopped at “15 terabits of data per second,” that would get a big yawn from the reader. However, by equating it to examples anyone could relate to, the reporter made the statistic understandable and interesting.

While it’s great to find surprising statistics that are directly related to your topic, you can often find some amazing numbers that are indirectly related and they can work just as well. For example, let’s say that you wanted to make the case that in any organization there are an endless number of ways to save money and cut costs. You might share this little fact: Back in 1987, American Airlines saved \$40,000 by eliminating one olive from each salad served in first-class!

### Where Do You Go from Here?

**Start a Keeper Folder** – A keeper folder is simply a manila folder marked with the word “KEEPERS” big and bold on the outside. Any time you come across something that grabs your attention and you find it interesting (it could be a newspaper or magazine article, a photo, a quote, an amazing statistic or whatever), put it in your keeper folder. That way, the next time you have to communicate an important message and you’re looking for hooks, you’ll already have a few in your folder. Along the same lines, when someone tells you to check out an amazing Web site or they e-mail you something funny, save it in an electronic version of your Keeper folder.

**Write it Down** – Start writing down your stories and anecdotes, both the ones from your past as well as the ones that are yet to come. A story could be about the time you backed your dad’s car into your mom’s car. It could be about a stranger who said a kind word to you when you needed it most, or about the time you hit a hole-in-one golf shot. A story is nothing more than an incident that happened to you that’s funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual. Stories can be as brief as 10 seconds or as long as five minutes (although it better be a truly amazing tale if it’s that long). Start writing down your stories now, so when you need them, you’ll have them.

Remember: Use a hook – with stories, props or stats – to grab your audience, and you’ll see how fast they grab your ideas! 

**Kevin Carroll** is an author and professional speaker. His most recent book, *What’s Your Hook?*, is available on Amazon and on [www.kevincarroll.com](http://www.kevincarroll.com).



## Global Representation and Support: What It Means to You

(Continued from page 5)

**Note:** Nominations for the first RA marketing positions closed on September 30, 2009.

If you have questions about the RA marketing position, please send them to [ramarketing@toastmasters.org](mailto:ramarketing@toastmasters.org) or visit [www.toastmasters.org/ramarketing](http://www.toastmasters.org/ramarketing)

### District Officer Training

For the 2009-2010 year, mid-year meetings will be held in the existing eight regions. No expenses will be paid by Toastmasters International.

Beginning in August 2010, district governors and lieutenant governors will receive training during the International Convention in Palm Desert, California. Travel

(airfare or mileage) will be paid by Toastmasters International.

For the 2010-2011 year, seven mid-year meetings will be held for the 14 regions. Travel (airfare or mileage) will be paid by Toastmasters International. A final determination of which regions will be combined for mid-year meetings has not yet been made. Please consult [www.toastmasters.org/future](http://www.toastmasters.org/future) for updates.

Beginning with the 2009-2010 year, e-learning modules, which supplement in-person training, will be made available to district officers to enhance their learning.

### Speech Contests

Each district will be assigned by random draw to one of nine semifinal contests to be held in August 2010.


The semifinal speech contests will be held on the Thursday evening of the International Convention. The

winners will move on to participate in the International Speech Contest finals on Saturday. In addition, beginning with the 2009-2010 contest year, contestants no longer are required to present entirely new speeches until the final round. The speech given in the speech contest final may not have been given in any other International contest since January 1 of the contest year.

Travel (airfare or mileage) for all those participating at the semifinal level will be paid by Toastmasters International.

### Any Questions?

If you have further questions about Global Representation and Support, send an e-mail to [governance@toastmasters.org](mailto:governance@toastmasters.org), visit [www.toastmasters.org/future](http://www.toastmasters.org/future).

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# The Power of Observational Humor

*The district competitors in the Evaluation Speech Contest were ready to present their evaluations. As I was introduced, someone opened a door in the back of the meeting room, which was next to a parking lot. Suddenly, we were distracted by something that sounded like a loud warning beeper from a truck: Beep. Beep. Beep. This was happening*

exactly as the Toastmaster said, “And our next evaluator and contestant is John Kinde.” By the time I reached the podium, someone had closed the door.

When there is a significant distraction in the room, my approach is to address it with humor. It takes some practice and some quick thinking. My first words after taking the podium: “Pardon me while the forklift brings in my notes.” I was instantly connected to the audience and on my way to an effective evaluation.

Observational humor is that fresh, customized humor you create only seconds before you deliver it. It is sparked by what you hear or see before you are introduced to speak. It’s normally a piece of humor that you didn’t bring to the event but is inspired by your observations once you’re there.

Observational humor is powerful. Here are a few reasons why:

- **Common experience.** The forklift example was effective because it

recognized something that everyone noticed. The foundation of a good joke is common experience – the you-had-to-be-there factor. This explains why a funny, spontaneous line, when you later tell it to a friend, doesn’t get the same response as it did when it first happened. You had to be there.

- **The power of tension.** One of the functions of humor is to relieve tension. A distraction during a meeting creates a bit of tension that begs for relief. A well-placed observational joke lets people laugh and release the tension caused by an interruption.

- **The element of surprise.** The immediate nature of the forklift line also added power to the humor. There is great value in being in the moment. The line is unexpected, but at the same time the audience is thinking, “Yeah, I noticed that beeping sound, too.” They love being surprised with a totally unexpected observation.

- **Making connections.** In a speech evaluation contest, the more positive points and suggestions that you make, the more competitive you will be. Someone who makes one suggestion may be at a disadvantage to someone who makes three suggestions. What about someone who made so many points that they needed a forklift to bring in their notes? Making the connection between the notes and the forklift was the key to making the humor tick in that line.

- **The illusion of freshness.** A great opening line can make the audience feel that your entire speech is fresh and prepared just for them. Compare that to opening with a time-worn joke that everyone has heard and you’ll see the impact of observational humor. One of the key reasons to practice observational humor is to add a fresh touch to your talks.

- **Audience bonding.** When you are in the moment, the audience connects with you because they know that you are really present and you are there just for them.

Saranne Rothberg, founder of the ComedyCures Foundation ([www.comedycures.org](http://www.comedycures.org)), hones her observational humor skills by hosting more than 50 therapeutic comedy programs each year for people fighting devastating illness. “Observational humor is powerful





because it lets me be incredibly playful and intimate on stage,” says Rothberg, who also presents a live weekly radio broadcast. “It goes beyond the joke-joke-joke format. The audience immediately trusts that I am listening and care about their interests. They understand that they are not getting a cookie-cutter presentation.

“By integrating observational humor with their content, you earn their full attention! Then, anything is possible.”

Here are a few more examples of observational humor that may trigger your creativity:

### **Word Play**

A great way to uncover humor is to watch for alternate or double word meanings. At one of the meetings of my home club – PowerHouse Pros in Las Vegas, Nevada – the theme was “Presidential Trivia.” Darren LaCroix, Toastmasters’ 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking, shared his mantra of “Stage time. Stage time. Stage time.” Later in the meeting, I was able to connect his thoughts to a current discussion:

**“The truth is funny and sometimes all you need to do is look for it.”**

“Here’s a piece of presidential trivia. Zachary Taylor logged more miles campaigning by stage coach than any other president. His campaign advisor told him the key to success was... Stage time, Stage time, Stage time!”

### **Self-Deprecation**

Poking fun at yourself is a safe way to get a laugh. At a club meeting, a member referred to a celebrity speaker who talked fast and delivered high content. This frustrated the audience, the member said, because they couldn’t take notes fast enough. My observation later in the meeting: “If you haven’t seen me before, I’m a slow speaker, which I know will frustrate many of you because I won’t say anything you’ll want to write down.”

### **Something Funny**

If you hear someone say something that gets a laugh, you might be able to piggyback on their joke to get a

laugh of your own. At a club meeting, a speaker told an old joke about a fence around a cemetery: The fence was there because people were *dying* to get in. Later in the meeting I delivered an observational humor line: “There must be something wrong with me. Today I passed by a cemetery with no fence around it... and I had no urge to get in.”

### **Look Around the Room**

Always keep watch for anything unusual that can lead to a humor connection. Before you are introduced to speak, be observant. Is there anything in the room that is strange, interesting or funny? I was speaking at a Toastmasters contest and noticed something unusual about the speaker platform. There was a short, 12-inch safety railing attached to the front of the platform. I guess it was

*(Continued on page 19)*

**What to do when speaking conditions are less than ideal.**

# Be (A)ware of 'The Room'

Tell a story to a group of 15 or 20 people crowded into a living room at a party. If the anecdote is genuinely funny and you tell it well, you'll hear glorious, spontaneous laughter. Deliver that same story with equal enthusiasm and skill to a group of 15 or 20 people scattered in small groupings around an auditorium that seats 400 and you'll hear only a nervous chuckle or two, or perhaps even stony silence. "The Room" has an influence on the effectiveness of a speaker's presentation.

what is going on outside the room while you're presenting. All of these are considered part of "the Room." Good speakers should be aware of and control as many of these conditions as possible.

Many professionals write restrictions into their contracts that help control the room. One entertainer I worked for stated in his agreements that there should be no dance floor separating the stage from the audience. That distance, he knew from experience, destroyed the intimacy and impact of his

cific presentation. And you can control the ambience that you'll work in, to a large degree.

There are three prerequisites for blending your talk most effectively with your surroundings. First, you must know the room. Second, you must know which conditions work best for your presentation. Third, you must know how to alter existing conditions, if necessary, to maximize your audience reaction.

How can you, as a speaker, get to know and control the room where you'll speak? You begin the process well in advance of your engagement. In arranging the logistics of your talk, along with the date, time and place, you can ask questions and politely and respectfully list your requirements.

You may want to know how large the hall is and how many people are expected to attend. Will there be theater seating or banquet seating? How are the tables expected to be arranged? Will you speak from a head table or be alone on a stage? In short, ask anything that you think might help you get a feel for "the Room" and how it will influence your presentation. If you spot any problems from the sponsor's reply, tactfully suggest alternatives and ask if the conditions might conveniently be adjusted. For instance, suppose the sponsors have you scheduled to speak from behind the head table and you have placards that you display as you speak. You might mention this and see if

**"Many problems can be easily corrected if they're discovered and pointed out early enough."**

Well-prepared speakers should know their material and their audiences. To guarantee the most effective presentation, though, that speaker should also know and control "the Room."

"Wait a minute," some may argue. "The room is hardware. It's four walls, a floor and a ceiling. The stage is where it is. It's size and height is permanent. There is no way to change the room." But there is.

"The Room" for a speaker is not only the physical dimensions of the lecture hall, but all of the conditions associated with it – the lighting, the sound system, the seating arrangement, the activity in the room during your speech...even perhaps,

performances. Other entertainers explicitly request that no food or drinks will be served or tables cleared during the performance.

One highly regarded comedian performed at an outdoor football stadium during half-time to a crowd of about 50,000 people. It was the first time she presented her comedy in such a venue. After the performance, she said, "Comedy was not made for the out-of-doors." She never appeared under such conditions again.

You may not have the clout of these celebrities, but you can still get to know the location where you'll speak. You can learn which conditions work best for your spe-



they can arrange a microphone off to the side, or perhaps on a stage.

At this time, you should also list your requests. Know what your presentation requires and ask for it. Personally, I usually request a lighted lectern with a removable handheld microphone – either wireless or with a generous amount of wire. I like the anchor of the lectern but enjoy being able to roam the stage should I choose. Whatever preferences you have, it's best to let the sponsors know of them well in advance of your presentation so they can have time to prepare.

Next, you can exert control immediately in advance of your appearance. When you arrive on site, ask to see the room where you'll be presenting. Often you will spot hazards that can be eliminated before the event. Many of these may simply be fine-tuning adjustments. You may be able to meet with the sound technician and switch from a lavalier microphone to a hand-held, if that's what you prefer. Or you could arrange lighting that would enhance your presentation. You may simply request that when the program begins, the doors at the back

of the hall be closed to eliminate distracting conversations.

Sometimes you may want more substantial changes, but ones that can be made if requested early enough. For example, I once was scheduled to give a talk to a relatively small group at a banquet. I always prefer that a room be on the crowded side. As mentioned earlier, the impact is lessened when the crowd is scattered around the hall. In this instance, although the tables were all near the stage, there was so much emptiness in the rest of the room that any audience enthusiasm would have dissolved into the vacant space. However, when I noted this, the staff at the event brought in large plants and room dividers, and miraculously transformed a large, mostly empty banquet hall into a small, intimate dining room. The adjustment worked perfectly, but only because it was noticed and corrected in advance.

Suppose you discover you're to speak in a room that is too large for your expected audience. Again, you want to avoid scattered listeners, so in a half-empty room, you'd prefer to have the listeners grouped togeth-

er near the stage. If you discover this problem early enough, the event staff can tape off rows of seats in the rear of the room with "reserved" signs. Now you and the cooperative staff have forced the attendees to fill the front portion of the auditorium, where they'll be a more responsive audience.

Some performers and speakers prefer to work to the crowd "out front." They dislike having audience to the sides of the stage. If the presenter discovers that some tables have been positioned to the side, he or she might be able to work with the set-up staff to reposition those tables out front.

Many problems can be easily corrected if they're discovered and pointed out early enough. So it's wise to take a look at your room before the actual event.

However, speakers quickly learn that conditions are rarely ideal. Despite your diligence in trying to control "the Room," requests may be misunderstood, forgotten, simply ignored or impossible to implement. What do you do when that happens?

*(Continued on page 19)*





# It's Not Just a Room

**How to  
stage your  
speaking  
environment  
for optimum  
effect.**

**Y**ou reach into your closet and select your navy blue suit. You gather up an appealing French blue shirt and the appropriate accessories. You even take an extra moment to find, and shine, your dress shoes, putting them on the table on which you've placed everything you'll need for tomorrow – keys, wallet and note cards. You've been preparing this speech for weeks. You've conducted the necessary research and your outline is solid. You even gave the speech twice – to your reflection in the bathroom mirror – something you typically don't do.

Many of us may read that scenario and think the speaker has completely prepared for success. Others, however, recognize there is much more to be done. It's important not to overlook one of the most critical elements in our success or failure as speakers: the room – and all factors that make up the speaking environment. When we learn to manipulate

**By Angela  
Hatton,  
ATMS, CL**



this environment, it becomes more than just a room – it is a setting, a place where great things can happen.

Setting the stage is an important part of every production, whether a grade-school play or a Broadway musical. As speakers, we can shape our speaking environments to better connect with and captivate our audiences.

### Defining the Stage

Many of us may walk into a room for the first time and take note of that center spot in the front where all the chairs are facing. “Aha,” we may think, “I see an area in the front of the room large enough for me to stand in, and that’s where I will speak.” That four-foot by four-foot area may not be the best place, but the truth is that speakers are more in control than we may realize. Just as we try to “think outside the box” in life, we can live up our communication performances when we learn to speak outside the box.

Tim Birchers, interim dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at Minnesota State University Moorhead, says, “The stage is whatever and wherever the speaker makes it to be.” When a speaker runs from the front to the back of the room, continuing her message while deeply engaged audience members follow her with their eyes, that speaker shows her skill (and courage) in expanding the definition of the stage. Presenters must use every available speaking area appropriately to deliver vivid and powerful presentations. However, sometimes the most appropriate use of the room is to limit it.

Elliott Fischer, a speech instructor at Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wisconsin, offers this advice: “The amount of space that you use must be in scale with the size of the room and the size of the audience. If you are speaking in a large auditorium that is only one-fourth full, keep your movement and gestures in scale to the size of the audience rather than being bigger, as the space would indicate.”

Another way to shape the environment is to invite the audience to be seated up front. It can be disheartening to speak to rows of empty chairs when most of the audience is seated in the back. “It’s important to bring your audience to you,” says Frank Kurtenbach, a member of the Eastside Toastmasters corporate club at Daktronics in Brookings, South Dakota. “It builds a more personal atmosphere that allows the audience to better connect with each other, and you with the audience. It’s what communication is all about.”

### Staging the Room

As Toastmasters, we speak in the same room regularly, but we still can set the stage by re-arranging the room to fit the goals of a particular speech. “As the speaker, you get to control the space; the space does not control you,” says Fisher. “You have the responsibility to create the best environment for you and your audience.”

Think of the flexibility and audience-to-audience interaction that is fostered when the chairs are arranged in a circle. That’s a great arrangement for small-group problem solving, as it helps promote discussion between audience members. However, newer discussion leaders may be intimidated by the free-flowing atmosphere. A good compromise is the U-shaped layout, which provides a visual connection between audience members while maintaining significant focus on the speaker.

For larger groups and more formal presentations, a traditional classroom layout is best. Rows and columns help to create a sense of order and control. The focus is sharply on the speaker, which is critical for briefings and other formal presentations.

When the audience members need to learn from one another or work as a group, space clusters of four to six

**“As the speaker, you get to control the space, the space does not control you.”**

seats work best. Depending on your primary objective, these seats can face the speaker or each other.

Different room arrangements invite different audience responses, so be sure to consider your goals in advance. What are you trying to achieve? Then determine the best way to organize the space to accomplish your goals.

Sometimes the room layout is fixed. If you have the opportunity to speak before a large crowd of more than 600 people, for example, auditorium seating is the best, and often only, option. Don’t worry if that is the case; just make the best of the situation and take advantage of other ways to enhance the room environment.

Once seated, individual audience members have little choice in their location, but the speaker has great flexibility. Skilled speakers walk across a stage with great confidence and ease. Less-skilled speakers often reach the lectern and stay within six inches of it throughout the entire presentation. Before condemning the latter, remember that the goals of the speech drive each choice. Speaking from behind the lectern can be very effective.

Consider American President Barack Obama, who is renowned for his oratorical skill. He stood firmly behind the lectern when delivering “A More Perfect Union,” his famous speech on the issue of race. Yet at town hall meetings, campaign rallies and other events, he built connections with his audiences by walking confidently across the stage area.

Likewise, carefully consider your goals with each new speaking opportunity. Is it important to create a spontaneous feel? Is there value in building a stronger sense of authority? Is there a desire to gain sympathy? Is it more important to appear powerful or relaxed? There is no best solution for every situation. Every choice depends on the goal.

# Tips for Staging Success

**S**peaking is sensory, which is one of the reasons we pay close attention to using appropriate gestures and vocal variety. However, all our hard work will be lost if the room is not comfortable for the speaker as well as the audience. Speakers should arrive at least 45 minutes early to the site of the speech to get a feel for the room and make adjustments as needed.

- Consider the temperature. If the room is too hot, members of the audience will become drowsy. If it is too cold, most won't be comfortable. Check with the event host to see if the air conditioning can be adjusted or if a door can be opened.
- Listen to the room. Is there an annoying hum? Perhaps the HVAC system is too loud. If nothing can be done about it, plan to speak louder to overcome the distraction of the noise.
- Select the most appropriate microphone. A wireless lapel microphone allows you to hold a presentation remote in one hand while the other hand remains free for gesturing. The wireless handheld microphone is more cumbersome, but still preferable to the traditional wired mike that limits mobility.
- Consider amplifying the audience. When the program calls for a question-and-answer period, microphones placed in the audience will help them be heard. Plan to have an assistant circulate the mike throughout the audience or be prepared to help control those lining up to ask questions.
- Check the microphone. Test it to ensure that everything is cued correctly and in working order.
- Determine your ideal lighting. If you are using a PowerPoint presentation, or other visual aids, consider the best way to adjust the lighting so your slides can be seen without your having to speak in the dark. You may have front and back lights that can be adjusted separately. The lights over the screen should be turned down while the lights directly above you should be lit.
- Identify the speaking area. Are there cords in the way that could cause you to trip? Is there visual clutter that would distract the audience from your speech?
- Consider the seating. Is the layout appropriate for the message you will be giving? Seek out the site host for help re-arranging tables and chairs if necessary.
- Consider the smell of the room. Coffee is one thing, but if the room is musty or foul briefly open a door or window for ventilation.

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## Consider Proxemics

Many speech professionals use the term “transitional movement” to refer to purposeful movement within the speech.

Transitional movement serves another important purpose: Cultural researcher Edward T. Hall determined in 1963 that different communication relationships have different spatial expectations. He used the term “proxemics” to describe these perceptions of space. Intimate distance (from six to 18 inches) is reserved for those people we know extremely well. Personal distance (between 18 inches and four feet) is best for acquaintances in small, yet professional settings. Social distance ranges from four to 12 feet. Hall defines any distance greater than 12 feet as public space.

These are general guidelines and they vary from culture to culture, yet great speakers recognize the power of proxemics. Perceptions of space have great meaning and can help a speaker drive specific emotional responses. It is important to speak within the

appropriate public space, but we must also recognize the value of varying our speaking positions to build intimacy with the audience. It can be very effective to come close to the audience to deepen the intimacy just as the content of the speech becomes more thoughtful and emotional. Varying distances adds interest and helps us connect with our audiences.

If we are to succeed in our communication performances, we need much more than notes in our heads or note cards in our hands. When we start to make choices based on our goals, and control our speaking environments, we can more successfully connect with and captivate our audiences. **T**

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## The Power of Observational Humor

*(Continued from page 13)*

there to keep someone from falling off the risers.

During the contestant interviews, I shared this observation: “You may have noticed the railing along the front of the risers. It’s not high enough to keep you from falling off, but just high enough so that if you do fall off...it will guarantee that you don’t land on your feet!” The line received a huge laugh as people were thinking, “He’s right!” The truth is funny and sometimes all you need to do is look for it.

### Combining Your Observations

During another meeting, someone commented that I looked like a mortician in my black suit. Another speaker talked about book publishing and mentioned how ISBN numbers were used on the back of books to track sales. He also encouraged us to write a book, closing with the advice: Don’t die with a book still in you. Later, I combined three observations in a quip: “Someone mentioned that I looked like a mortician in my black suit. Actually, I do own a mortuary. We offer coffins with ISBN numbers on them for speakers who die with a book still in them.”

### Courage and Risk

Rothberg shared with me a powerful observational-humor moment. “The key to developing on-the-spot humor is fearlessness, commitment and the skill of profound listening. Let me give you an example. I spent seven hours in a military van with two Marines en route to a ComedyCures Veterans program. During that ride I was like a fly on the wall, observing their vocabulary, content, tone and how they joked with each other.

“The next morning at our live event, I was able to immediately draw from those observations. As I opened the show, a blind and paralyzed 83-year-old veteran with a malfunctioning hearing aid cried out that he wanted to commit suicide. He couldn’t hear the show. His name was Joe. I joined Joe in his wheelchair, gently cupping his face and his hand with the broken hearing aid. ‘Joe, sweetie, I’m not going to continue this program until we fix your hearing aid.’ Then in my best military voice I yelled: ‘Joe! We leave no man behind, Joe!’ Joe and his fellow injured comrades laughed for about five minutes. And then Joe proposed to me!

“I bonded with my audience and created a spontaneous comedy platform that permeated the rest of the show. Observational humor had an impact stronger than anything else I could have done.”

### Learning Observational Humor

When it comes to learning observational humor, there is no substitute for discipline. Challenge yourself to create an observational humor line every time you attend a Toastmasters meeting – or any kind of meeting, for that matter. Much of my early practice came at Chamber of Commerce networking meetings. As you sit with paper and pen in hand, keep your eyes and ears open for humorous connections. Look for other people’s comments that get a laugh. Try piggybacking on their lines.

Look for spots in the meeting where you have a chance to speak, then use an observational line. Perhaps you’ll be introducing a guest, making an announcement or giving an award. Drop in your line, then segue to your official business.

With observational humor, the less-is-more principle comes into play. If you are able to come up with three observational lines, pick your best one and use it. If you can create 10 lines, use just two or three of the best ones. Making a quality cut and using only your best lines can make the difference between having a reputation as someone who is always funny and someone who is funny only 30 percent of the time. **T**

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## Be (A)ware of ‘The Room’

*(Continued from page 15)*

You must rely on your creativity and your training as a speaker. It’s your obligation to adjust your presentation to the conditions as they exist.

You might have to change from the flamboyant, theatrical production you planned to a more intimate “chat.” You may have to drop your slide presentation (since the bulb in the projector burned out) and replace it with a question-and-

answer period. If dinner was delayed and you have to present while dessert is being served, you may have to speak louder and more forcefully to overpower the clatter of plates and silverware, and the distraction of the servers roaming about. In short, you must exhibit your professionalism.

One thing you don’t want to do is highlight any problems by complaining about them. This not only labels you as a whiner, but it could also be construed as offensive to the sponsors of your talk.

Simply deal with the existing conditions courageously and to the best of your ability. Most audiences will applaud your grace under pressure. But do make a note of it and remember it for future presentations. It then becomes another thing you should consider when you’re trying to be aware of and control “the Room.” **T**

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**Gene Perret** is a three-time Emmy winner who has written for Carol Burnett and Phyllis Diller, and was head writer for Bob Hope. Visit **[www.writingcomedy.com](http://www.writingcomedy.com)**.

## Mark Hunter's path to the 2009 World Championship of Public Speaking.

By Beth Black

# How a Hunter Captured His Game

*If you're looking for proof in this world that tenacity, spirit and love will triumph in the end, that proof is Australian Mark Hunter, Toastmasters International's 2009 World Champion of Public Speaking. His road to the championship*

was filled with challenges and smaller victories, yet he never gave up his pursuit, that is until the warm August day in Mashantucket, Connecticut, when he was named the new World Champion.

That day, Hunter wowed the judges and the audience alike. In his intricate-yet-graceful speech, "A Sink Full of Green Tomatoes," he shared hard-earned insights about life following a water-skiing accident that left him in a wheelchair more than three decades ago.

### Spreading His Toastmasters Wings

It all began in 1994 when he joined the Bribie Toastmasters club on Bribie Island in Queensland, Australia. "I received a phone call after my first visit that was so supportive, acknowledging and enthusiastic, it was hard to say 'no' even if I wanted to. I soon learned this club offered an environment that was supportive and encouraging," says the Brisbane resident. "It was also an environment in which I could be myself and be challenged."

Once in, Hunter found even more reasons to stay. "In the club, there was a belief that members could better themselves – this was done through a mentoring process that

not only supported me but also challenged me to take on roles of responsibility and ultimately compete," he says.

The personal development that Hunter achieved through Toastmasters' leadership training led to professional growth in his career as a school principal at Underba State School, north of Brisbane. Yet ultimately, it was the sheer enjoyment of the meetings and speaking that made Hunter return. "I gained so much from seeing the growth of others and hearing their stories," he says. "The fun that seemed to permeate each meeting" made Toastmasters a regular part of his life.

Nearly 15 years later, he is the ultimate competitor, crowned Toastmasters' World Champion of Public Speaking over nine other world-class contestants. He credits Toastmasters with helping him keep track of his development. "I have not come across an educational organization that so readily, easily and accurately measures the growth of an individual," he says.

### Entering the Competitions

In 1996, Hunter entered his first speech contest and reached the Interdistrict level. "My initial motivation

was the Holy Grail [World Championship of Public Speaking]," he says. Eventually, however, he saw an opportunity to do more than simply win a trophy. Hunter says, "That desire to win morphed into acknowledging, and taking, the amazing opportunity of sharing something of significance with audiences through the process of competing."

From there, he competed in several International Speech Contests, placing second at the Interdistrict level in 1999 and in 2005. He reached the World Championship stage in 2001, 2007 and again this year.

### Learning to Weave Themes with Subtext

With each competition speech, Hunter sifted through personal stories that would have relevance to others. He made it to the International Convention several times with major themes examining physical perfection, wisdom, the past, failure and love. But he discovered through experience that a championship-level speech must be laced with deeper levels of subtext to surround a theme and intensify its impact.

His life's struggles played a part in his winning presentation. "The theme of the speech came from my personal experience of trying to change the world in the context of discrimination around disability," he says. "There were times when I would be a quixotic knight in shining armor – ready to fight the good fight – but these were followed





by times of exhaustion. Coming to the conclusion that there are other ways of changing the world, apart from charging around, was not easy but was informed by a wisdom that comes with age."

This epiphany – that there are other ways of changing the world – became the central theme of his winning speech, which he enriched with subtexts about opportunity, wisdom, age, finding answers and acceptance.

### Winning Takes Team Effort

While stalking the prize, he was no lone hunter. Several people helped him by acting as sounding boards for his deliberations – challenging his ideas – yet allowing him to be true to himself throughout the process.

Also, this past year Hunter visited clubs in his district to gather feedback. He says, "It has become clear to me now, that while it takes a club to raise a member in our remarkable organization, it takes a district to raise a champion – thank you, District 69!"

### Enjoying International Stage Time

Back on the World Championship stage, Hunter's experience helped him create rapport with the audience. "There is an amazing amount of palpable positive energy from the audience at this contest," he says. "I was able to use this energy more successfully this time than perhaps the first time around."

This level of the contest experience was different from earlier rounds. "At club level everyone knows you well, and I work to ensure that everyone feels as though I am speaking to them personally," says Hunter. It's more of a challenge, he says, when the audience expands. "Moving a larger audience is dependent upon my capacity to create a relationship straight away. Humor helps."

During his championship speech, Hunter expertly focused the audience's attention with his use of a wheelchair. Rather than allow it to upstage his presentation, he took control. "I park the wheelchair issue so an audience is not focused on the set of wheels, and I use self-

deprecating humor to do this," he says. While the wheelchair partially defines who he is, Hunter was careful to avoid using it to draw sympathy. He did, however, choreograph his wheelchair movement to make his message more effective. "It can add elements of surprise, mischief and fun," he says. This was his plan when he struck a pose familiar to all. "I thought the body language imitating Rodin's *The Thinker* was particularly mischievous!"

And for this occasion, he enjoyed a little more wheelchair humor. One of his favorite moments of the speech was when he lifted the front wheels of his wheelchair, imitating a horse rearing up, and then shouted, "Yee-Haah!" The audience loved it. "This got a response beyond what I had even dared to imagine," Hunter notes.

### Paying it Forward

Hunter would like to give back to the organization that gave him this opportunity. He plans to visit districts in Australia and elsewhere, providing educational sessions and keynotes, as well as supporting those who dare "to dream the (im)possible dream." He'll also train organizational leaders in the science of coaching as a leadership tool.

Hunter believes he has gained three important things from his membership in Toastmasters: The first has been his personal development. Then, he discovered an appreciation of others and their journeys. But perhaps the most important gift from his membership has been the chance to see his dreams come true. He calls it "an amazing opportunity to leave a legacy through competing, which is, as [Dr. Stephen] Covey says, 'the essence of human fulfillment.'" 

**Beth Black** is an associate editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine. She can be reached at [bblack@toastmasters.org](mailto:bblack@toastmasters.org).



# Memories of Mashantucket!

*Attracted by the opportunity for self-improvement and international fellowship, more than 1,500 Toastmasters from around the world enjoyed all the aspects of Toastmasters' annual International Convention August 12–15 at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods in Mashantucket, Connecticut. Featuring pageantry and drama, education and elections, the program offered something for everyone. First-timers and veteran Convention-goers alike attended seminars on communication and leadership, networked and watched talented contestants in the International Speech Contest. The photos on these pages highlight the four-day event. Make plans now to attend next year's Convention, at the Desert Springs JW Marriott Resort and Spa in Palm Desert, California, August 11–14, 2010.*



**Highlights from  
the 78th Annual  
International  
Convention  
in Mashantucket,  
Connecticut,  
August 12–15, 2009.**







### Photo Captions (pages 22 & 23):

1. World Champion of Public Speaking Mark Hunter shows off his trophy.
2. 2008-2009 International President Jana Barnhill thanks Past International President Chris Ford for his service to the organization.
3. Newly elected International President Gary Schmidt speaks during the President's Dinner Dance.
4. Oscar Alejandro Gomez Raynal from Mexico presents his speech at the Interdistrict B contest.
5. First-time Convention attendees Heather Ahlbin of Charlotte, North Carolina (left), and Diana Watson of Yeadon, Pennsylvania.
6. International President Jana Barnhill chairs the Open Board Briefing, surrounded by Executive Director Daniel Rex (left) and 2009-2010 President Gary Schmidt (right).
7. John Lau of Kuching, Malaysia, thanks delegates after being elected Toastmasters' Third Vice President.
8. Keynote speaker Sam Silverstein shares his message of "No More Excuses" during the Opening Ceremonies.
9. Toastmasters' 2009 Golden Gavel recipient Bruce Tulgan gives his acceptance speech on the topic of "It's OK to Be the Boss."
10. Modeling Toastmasters-branded hats are, from left: District 85 Lt. Governor Education and Training Yingdan Liu; District 85 Lt. Governor Marketing Ligo Wang; District 82 Governor Deepak Menon; and District 85 Governor Rebecca Hong.
11. 2008-2009 District 36 Governor Sandra Coles-Bell (right) and her daughter, Tamara Bell, at the Opening Ceremonies' Parade of Flags.



## Photo Captions (page 24)

1. International President Jana Barnhill chairs the Open Board Briefing.
2. The stage displays flags from countries where Toastmasters is represented.
3. Bo Bennett and Ryan Levesque host the official Toastmasters Podcast. Listen at [www.toastmasters.org/podcast](http://www.toastmasters.org/podcast) or follow them on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/theTMPodcast](http://www.twitter.com/theTMPodcast).
4. International President Gary Schmidt, Senior Vice President Pat Johnson and Second Vice President Michael Notaro share a moment.
5. Past International Director Tammy Miller leads a session on "Mastering Public Relations."
6. Delegates cast their votes during the Annual Business Meeting.
7. Toastmasters audience enjoys educational session.
8. 2008–2009 President's 20-Plus Award recipients District 82 Governor Balraj Arunasalam, District 71 Governor Teresa S. Dukes and District 85 Governor Victor Yu.





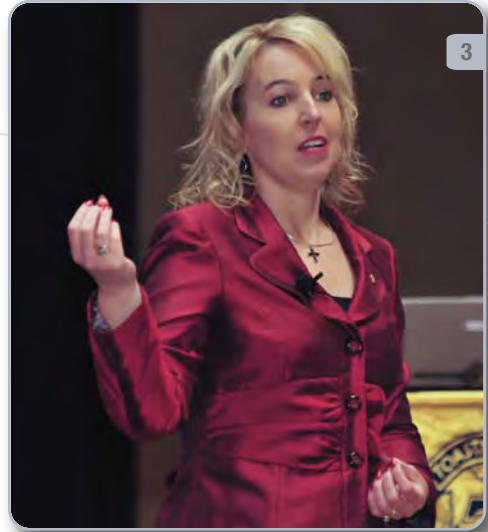


### Photo Captions (page 25)

9. The three winners of the World Championship of Public Speaking, from left: Mary Cheyne (second), Mark Hunter (first) and Erick Rainey (third).
10. Accredited Speaker Johnny Campbell offers leadership tips.
11. Members of District 47 are recognized for earning President's Distinguished District.
12. Luncheon speaker Morgan McArthur, the 1994 World Champion of Public Speaking, helps attendees discover the delights in the details of life.
13. Timers get ready for the International Speech Contest.
14. The hall is set for another exciting event at the International Convention.
15. Jan McInnes recites the "Humor-cratic Oath" for attendees, helping them create "humor that hits but doesn't hurt."











9



10



11

### Photo Captions (page 26 & 27)

- 1-2. Burning up the dance floor at the President's Dinner Dance.
3. Session presenter Darcy Keith shares how to thrive through life's changes.
4. The World's Fastest-Talking Female, Fran Capo, encourages the audience to accomplish their dreams with humor, creativity and passion.
5. Herminigildo (Hermie) Garrobo from the Philippines wins the Interdistrict A speech contest.
6. Friends gather for the President's Dinner Dance.
7. Audience member makes a point during educational session.
8. Members from District 80 celebrate their Distinguished District status with International President Jana Barnhill.
9. Smiling host district volunteers help an attendee with Convention registration.
10. Toastmasters mix and mingle before an event.
11. Friendly Convention attendees meet and greet between activities.

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**Foxwoods in Mashantucket, Connecticut ■ August 12-15, 2009**

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District 82, led by District Governor Balraj Arunasalam, DTM (right), is recognized by President Jana Barnhill for being the top district in the Distinguished District Program in 2008-2009.

# International Hall of Fame

These awards are for the 2008–2009 program year.

## President's Distinguished Districts

**District 82**  
Balraj Arunasalam, DTM

**District 79\***  
Karantharath Radhakrishnan,  
ACG, CL

**District 85**  
Victor Yu, ACS, CL

**District 14**  
Cynthia B. Cannon, DTM

**District 47**  
Antionette Maria Fox, DTM

**District 51\***  
Joseph Gomez, DTM

## Select Distinguished Districts

**District 81\***  
Donna M. Knight, DTM

**District 37**  
Charles H. Harvey, DTM

**District 71\***  
Gary Sander, DTM

**District 67\***  
Marian Hsiao, DTM

**District 55\***  
Stanley E. See, DTM

**District 60**  
Janice E. Weir, DTM

## Distinguished Districts

**District 30**  
Patricia Martin, DTM

**District 28\***  
Kevin P. Olmstead, DTM

**District 33**  
Kay Collis, DTM

**District 84**  
David W. Hollingshead, DTM

**District 59\***  
Greg Palmer, DTM

**District 73\***  
Bernard M. Marmion, DTM

**District 1**  
Michael J. Jue, DTM

**District 76**  
Shoko Takimoto, DTM

**District 86**  
Lori Lococo, DTM

**District 8**  
Tony Gartner, DTM

**District 66**  
Christine S. Al-Amin, DTM

**District 27\***  
Lillian O. Cooke, DTM

**District 80**  
Goh Wei Koon, DTM

**District 24**  
Patricia A. Hannan, DTM

**District 9\***  
Brenda M. Pangborn, DTM

**District 7**  
Ann E. Snelling, DTM

**District 12\***  
Thomas Arthur Jameson, DTM

**District 43**  
Mary F. McClendon, DTM

**District 72\***  
Christine Meyer, DTM

**District 61\***  
Frank J. Schilder, DTM

**District 26**  
Bob Baxter, DTM

**District 35**  
Andrew N. Little, DTM

**District 49\***  
Lisa A. Foster, DTM

**District 2\***  
Michael C. Sun, DTM

**District 62**  
Lowell F. Johannsen, DTM

► Sheryl Roush, DTM, AS, (left) receives a Presidential Citation from President Jana Barnhill for her contributions to Toastmasters International.



**Suezy Proctor, DTM**  
Kent, Washington

**Leni G. Richardson, DTM**  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

**Mercedes Balli, DTM**  
Honolulu, Hawaii

**Sheryl Roush, DTM, AS**  
La Mesa, California

**Nancy Starr-Cassidy, DTM**  
Tempe, Arizona

**Maurice & Delores Myles, DTM**  
Lawton, Oklahoma

**Daniel T. Jackson, DTM**  
Live Oak, Texas

**Cliff Heinsch, DTM**  
Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

**Gregory Gazin, DTM**  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

**John L. Lloyd, DTM**  
Lebanon, Tennessee

**John T. Willison, DTM**  
Freeport, Illinois

**Bruce Frandsen, DTM**  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Chris K. Ford, DTM**  
Casselman, Ontario, Canada

**Tammy A. Miller, DTM**  
Port Matilda, Pennsylvania

**Radhi Spear, DTM**  
Piscataway, New Jersey

**Brian Cavanaugh, ATMG, CL**  
Wellington, New Zealand

**Joy A. Lewis, DTM**  
Cumming, Georgia

**Richard & Karen Stacey, DTM**  
Randwick, New South Wales, Australia

**Johnny Uy, DTM**  
Cebu City, Philippines

**Alain & Odile Petillot, DTM**  
Paris, France

**Howard Chang, DTM**  
Youngho City, Taipei County, Taiwan

**District 68**  
Frances T. Morrison, DTM

**District 31\***  
Bash Turay, DTM

**District 4**  
Tony De Leon, ACG, CL

**District 15\***  
James Jackson, DTM

**District 39**  
Debra L. Ledsinger, DTM

**District 54**  
Robert H. Grenier, DTM

**District 70**  
John Inglis, DTM

**District 6**  
Joan R. Watson, DTM

**District 83\***  
Paul J. Scharf, DTM

**District 13\***  
Sallie S. Boggs, DTM

**District 5\***  
Emily Louise Corcoran, DTM

**District 42**  
Joan P. McAulay, DTM

**District 77\***  
Doris D. Bentley, DTM

**District 36\***  
Sandra Coles-Bell, DTM

**District 38**  
Ronni Laino, DTM

**District 18**  
Ann F. Larrow, DTM

**District 78**  
Arlene Epp Pearsall, DTM

**District 10\***  
Fay Gilbert, DTM

**District 64**  
Monique Levesque-Pharoah, DTM

\* District received "Excellence in Leadership Award" for achieving Distinguished status for three or more consecutive years, including 2008-2009.

## International Speech Contestants

**Region I**  
Erick Rainey • Club 3681

**Region II**  
Carl Walsh • Club 115

**Region III**  
Byron Embry • Club 5481

**Region IV**  
Jack Ackerman • Club 101

**Region V**  
Stephen Cornwell • Club 966806

**Region VI**  
Maureen Zappala • Club 1424

**Region VII**  
Mary Cheyne • Club 5525

**Region VIII**  
Chakisse Newton • Club 7735

**Districts Not Assigned to Regions**  
**Mark Hunter**  
Club 810587 • District 69  
Albany Creek, Brisbane, Australia

**Herminigildo V. Garrobo**  
Club 7739 • District 75  
Baguio City, Philippines

## International Taped Speech Contestants

**1st Place**  
**Angela Rarieya**  
Club 4863 • Nairobi, Kenya

**2nd Place**  
**Kevin Parent**  
Club 583329 • Daejeon, South Korea

**3rd Place**  
**David D'Souza**  
Club 689391 • Nairobi, Kenya

## President's 20+ Award

**District 82**  
Balraj Arunasalam, DTM

**District 79**  
Karantharath Radhakrishnan,  
ACG, CL

**District 14**  
Cynthia B. Cannon, DTM

## President's Extension Awards

**District 85**  
Victor Yu, ACS, CL

**District 71**  
Gary Sander, DTM

**District 82**  
Balraj Arunasalam, DTM

## 2009 Presidential Citations

**Steven J. Kennedy, DTM**  
Des Moines, Washington





## FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT!

By John Cadley

# It's Academic

**When school isn't cool,  
just who is the fool?**

I'm leading a movement to have the phrase "It's academic" stricken from the English language. I say this because I have a 16-year-old son who berates the importance of education by insisting that nothing he learns in school will be of use to him in real life.

Which is exactly what "It's academic" means.

If he learns that phrase, I will be hard-pressed to stress the value of all things "academic" – grades, honors, degrees – without him pointing to the dictionary and smugly quoting one of the prime definitions of that very word: "Pertaining to areas that are not vocational or applied; not practical, realistic or directly useful; lacking in worldliness or common sense."

Just to be safe I'm keeping him away from the dictionary, too.

What happened here? How can a word make reference to the highest levels of scholarship, learning and knowledge while simultaneously declaring you're better off knowing how to work a can opener?

The word comes from the Greek *academe*, the public grove where Plato taught. Local philosophers would gather to debate the finer points of human reason, moral ideals, objective reality and universal absolutes – which at the time served as a kind of entertainment since there was no Comedy Central on TV and people needed something to laugh at. Plato would ask, "Is there an objective reality independent of subjective perception?"

Another philosopher would try to answer him seriously and the entire place would erupt into riotous glee. Plato would remind the crowd

that the discussion was not for amusement but for education. At which point someone would shout back: "Oh yeah? What does it have to do with pillaging, sacking, conquering and enslaving?"

This, of course, would stump Plato, and since he was the smartest man in the world, academe came to be known as a place where smart people talk about stuff that doesn't make you smarter. If further proof was needed, it was underscored by the great fire at the Library of Alexandria in 48 B.C., where 400,000 scrolls containing all of human erudition and scholarship were destroyed – and the world never missed a beat. In fact, when a local shepherd was informed of the catastrophe by a crestfallen trustee of the library, the shepherd said, "What's a library? And you're standing in sheep dip."

Academicians will take issue with this, as well they should. Is knowledge for knowledge's sake really so useless? Let's say you're at a party and someone remarks that the time is 12:15. "1215?" you say. "Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were referring to the date the Magna Carta was signed, which effectively established the writ of *habeas corpus* and prepared the ground for the slow but inexorable rule of constitutional law over monarchical despotism. And speaking of the Magna Carta – which means Great Charter, by the way – it's a good thing the clock doesn't have a 12:97 on it or I would have thought you were referring to the date of the later, amended version, the one that's actually on the statute books in England and Wales even as we speak."

Tell me there is not some practical value in this. The stunned looks of surprise, admiration, envy – even the suspicious squint that barely conceals a wish for you to choke on your toothpick hors d'oeuvre of scallop and bacon – don't they give you a real, palpable lift that can make the next few quotidian hours seem like you're floating on air?

I'm thinking of using this strategy on my son. When he asks me what's the point of memorizing Shakespeare's sonnets, I might tell him to quote this couplet to his girlfriend: "For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings / That then I scorn to change my state with kings" – and see how she reacts (although I'm not at all sure I'd want to know). Or I could tell him how he could win thousands of dollars on *Jeopardy* just by knowing the capital of Indonesia. Or he could be a fact-checker for the *New Yorker* and tell smarty-pants writers how many mistakes they made.

Or I could just tell him the truth: You go to school to learn how to *think*, because thinking is what sets us apart from the brute animals. In your case, my boy, it may be the *only* thing.

On the other hand, this whole discussion could be, well, academic. Anyone who has teenagers knows how much they listen. And there's always the chance that my son is right about not needing to learn. After all, he's 16. He knows everything. ■

**John Cadley** is an advertising copywriter in Syracuse, New York. Reach him at [jjcadley@mower.com](mailto:jjcadley@mower.com).



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