TOASTMASTER

March 2009



Walking a Fine Line

How much personal information should speakers share?

Different By Design

Analysis of President Obama's inaugural speech

Special Speech Contest Issue!

Why You Should Compete

Thinking Like a Loser

How to conquer the psychology of the speech contest.



The Courage to Conquer the Next Step

March is a busy month for Toastmasters. Club dues are collected. The Talk Up Toastmasters Membership Drive is wrapping up. World Headquarters mails club proxies and proposal information to the clubs. But something else is happening that is vital to the existence of this organization: District Nominating Committees are meeting to nominate potential district leaders for the next district year.

Now, before you think, "Well, this doesn't concern me" and turn the page, please consider this: Toastmasters depends on nearly 4,000 volunteer leaders every year to manage the work of our districts. If we did not have all those members willing to move beyond their clubs and conquer that next step of district leadership, we would not be able to accomplish what we do today or what we hope to accomplish tomorrow. Club officers would not have the training they do. Members would not have district conferences to attend, and thousands of Toastmasters would not have the opportunity to further their leadership development.

If you are like me, you never joined Toastmasters to become a leader. You might ask yourself why you would want to take that step. You feel your needs are being met within your club setting. I encourage you to think about this: Individuals who develop their communication skills are considered to be more effective leaders. However, that doesn't automatically make them more effective. By accepting district leadership positions in Toastmasters, it affords you the opportunity to build, practice and sharpen leadership skills that can truly set you apart.

In the fall I visited a group of State Farm Insurance clubs. While there, one of the executives told me that she now looks to Toastmasters for the company's leadership training. That was exciting to me! It was yet another affirmation that we have what people are looking for – not only for communication skills, but for leadership as well.

I am reminded of a favorite saying: "When you're green you grow, when you're ripe you rot!" In other words, don't ever allow yourself to settle for comfortable. It's only in continually stretching ourselves, challenging ourselves to move beyond our comfort zones, that we continue to grow and find the courage to conquer things we never dreamed we could. As the Chinese proverb states, "Be not afraid of growing slowly; be only afraid of standing still."

I challenge you to not be still. Don't settle for being comfortable within the confines of your club. Take that next step and become a district officer. Is it difficult at times? Yes. But don't let that scare you. If there were no challenges, where would the growth opportunities come from? The experience you gain will reap huge benefits and open doors you may never have imagined. So go ahead! Become a district officer. Have The Courage to Conquer the Next Step!

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.**

Just Asking

Great article on Ted Sorensen in the January *Toastmaster*. We in Nebraska are very proud to call him one of ours.

A few years ago on one of Sorensen's visits to Nebraska, I had the opportunity to ask him if he or John F. Kennedy wrote the words "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

His answer was: "Ask not!"

All in Toastmasters can learn from him and Paul Sterman's article.

Jim Otto • Southeast Toasters • Lincoln, Nebraska

Conquering an Old Terror

My terror of public speaking began 20 years ago during my final year of university. I can still recall the total and uncontrollable sense of panic I felt when I realized I would be unable to continue reading in front of my group. It was as if I were being choked and literally unable to speak; I was coated in a cold sweat.

For 20 years I was unable "to get back on the horse" and passed up more promotions and opportunities than I care to recall. Joining Toastmasters nearly two years ago has been a true revelation, and I'm well on the way to finally ridding myself of this debilitating "monkey on my back." I wish to express my undying gratitude to Toastmasters and especially my club, Riverside, in Brisbane, Australia, for giving me a second chance to be the person I always wanted to be.

Brian Clayton • Riverside Club • Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Hearing Strikes a Chord

I like Rick Moore's suggestions for both the listener and presenter in his article "Speak Up!" (February). As a hearing-impaired listener, I've practiced his suggestions. As a hearing-impaired presenter, I've been blessed with a resonant voice and receive compliments from hearing-impaired listeners because I know what they are going through.

The author spoke from experience. Hearing aids are very good amplifiers with the downside being all noise is amplified.

One aspect I'd like to add is the speed of the presenter's delivery. It takes me time to take in what is being said, let my brain process it and then catch the next thought. In my experience, most presenters speak too quickly. (I'm so glad for closed captioning on TV and movies).

Executive meetings in Toastmasters and other organizations are also very stressful. I can't count how many times I've spoken over someone who hadn't finished speaking, but made the mistake of dropping their voice below my auditory limits. Ouch!

Larry Hurley, ATMB • Bay of Quinte Toastmasters
Quinte West, Ontario, Canada

On the Right Track

I just received my February 2009 issue and I truly appreciate Rick Moore's article "Speak Up." Not everyone wants to admit he or she has a hearing problem.

I am reminded of a past speech evaluation from a guest who felt I spoke "too loudly." While I disagreed with his comments, I did consider the fact that this *guest* did not know the Toastmasters techniques learned in the basic manual. Neither did this guest know we had a hearing-impaired student in our midst. Even though she wore a hearing aid, members were not speaking as loudly as she needed.

Perhaps the assumption was, "She has a hearing aid. I'm sure she can still hear me." I think we need to take the audience's cues seriously, especially if they start cupping their ears or leaning forward to hear what the speaker is saying. Great article!

Martha A. Moore, DTM • GVSU Club • Allendale, Michigan

Great Suggestions for Any Listener

As a Board Certified Hearing Instrument Specialist, I suggest looking into Wide Dynamic Range Compression (WDRC) hearing aids. These digital signal processors are among the most advanced amplification devices available. Simply put, they make soft sounds (consonants) loud, while loud sounds are compressed. This allows you to hear loud sounds, but your specialist can program how much the hearing aid lets through.

Many new hearing aids come with multiple memories which would allow a specific program just for meetings, lectures, etc. Many public places like airports and theaters are incorporating inductive coil loop systems that communicate directly to your hearing aid.

There are far better options available than cupping your hand over your ear. What you described was consistent with older linear hearing aids, where all sounds are amplified equally. I have not fit a linear hearing aid in years for the reasons you described.

Gene Lipin, ACS • Burbank Toastmasters • Burbank, California

Thanks for the Timely Advice

Thank you for John Cadley's recent column, "Big Words, Big Deal." I especially appreciate his admonition, "If you're going to use big words, study the master and do it right."

Cynthia Parkhill, CC • Tenacious Talkers • Lakeport, California

By Angie Palmer, ACS, ALB

Don't shy away from speech competitions just because you're new.

How I Conquered My Contest Fears

When the contest season comes, new members or even new clubs start to wonder if they should participate. "Contest" can be a frightening word to those newer members who don't have many opportunities to speak in front of a group. They feel public speaking is intimidating enough and dread the thought of speaking *and* competing at the same time. Indeed, I secretly had the same reaction last year when I first heard from my club in Alamogordo, New Mexico, that it would be organizing the Humorous Speech and Evaluation contests. Speech contests can be nerve-racking.

Of course, not every member shares the same sentiment. My husband, Keith, had been a member for only a few months – with just his Ice Breaker under his belt – when he jumped right into the Humorous Speech Contest last year. His speech was called "Selling Your Wife" – a title you can imagine I was not entirely impressed with. I wasn't sure what he was going to talk about until he made his debut at our club contest. Keith caught the audience's attention right from his opening line: "Selling your wife has become one of the more difficult things in life to accomplish." I was wondering what was up his sleeve.

He went on to explain that he was there to help his fellow men *sell their wives* – a humorous play on words based on a colloquialism meaning "to sell an idea to…" – on purchasing the latest "toys" on the market. The audience and judges loved him…including the women. My husband made it all the way to the district contest – the first member in our club's history to have advanced that far. He didn't win there, but having a brand new member competing at the final level completely changed our club members' perceptions about participating in contests. Keith was an excellent example of how new members should not shy away from competing.

Giving It a Try

My husband and I joined the Moundbuilders Toastmasters club in August 2008 after we moved to Heath, Ohio. It happened to be contest season again. When our club's vice president education asked for volunteers to enter the contests, I bravely raised my hand for both the Humorous Speech and Table Topics contests, along with some other members.

I was nervous a year ago and didn't think I was proficient enough to enter any speech contests. A Humorous Speech Contest, in particular, was an item on my *impossible* list. After all, humor can be culture-specific and subjective. Being a person of Hong Kong Chinese heritage living in the United States for only three years, I find it difficult to see eye-to-eye with some of the American stand-up comedians.

To find jokes that appeal to a large, general audience is a skill that needs to be built day by day. I wanted to take my first step to surmount this hurdle, and so I made my debut with a speech titled "My Culture Shock." The theme touched on a combination of the culture shock I had in the United States and the subcultural shock experienced between husbands and wives.

I did my best and did not expect to be the first-place winner – but that's exactly what happened. After winning at the club contest, I became more confident in my humorous-speaking skills. Things I thought I could not do suddenly became possible.

I gained valuable speech contest and stage experience throughout the whole process. I learned how to rewrite my speech to get the audience reaction I wanted. It was also in these two speech contests that I observed and learned from proficient speakers, gaining valuable insights on how to perform humorous and Table Topics speeches. It was also a perfect opportunity to network with other Toastmasters and share our experiences. Moreover, my club helped groom me to be a more competent speaker as I competed and advanced in the competition.

So, how did I do in the two contests? I came in second in both – at the division level! Things happen when you least expect it. I entered the speech contests mainly to conquer my fear of trying humor in front of the American audience, but this exciting experience gave me much more than I ever expected. T

Angie Palmer, ACS, ALB, is a member of the Moundbuilders Toastmasters club in Newark, Ohio. She is the owner of Skye Public Relations Ltd. and can be reached at **www.skyepublicrelations.com.**

By Julie Bawden Davis

Disaster expert advises and assures communities in a crisis.

Fighting the Floods

In the fall of 1992, when Robert Riebe took over as the flood area engineer for a large metropolitan region in the U.S. states of Illinois and Iowa, the job was described to him as "quiet." Just six months later, though, the Midwest experienced massive flooding that would go down in United States history as one of the most significant and damaging natural disasters to hit the country.

Riebe suddenly had to help residents and business owners manage the catastrophic situation. In addition, he had to deal with a deluge of media members who all wanted answers – *now!*

"They wanted to know how high [the flood] was going to get, how soon it was going to get that high, and what could be done about it," he recalls.

This was the "quiet" job he had been told about?

As the crisis surged, reporters from local and national newspapers and TV outlets pressed more urgently for Riebe's assessment. TV trucks lined the streets, the media trying to gather as much footage as it could. "There was plenty of water to see," says the longtime Toastmaster, a civilian who is the flood area engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Rock Island, Illinois. Most of the national media converging on the area during the 1993 disaster, adds Riebe, were not familiar with its flooding history and issues. "The newer reporters asked 'interesting' questions," he notes wryly.

In the midst of the media frenzy and the epic flooding conditions, Riebe had to maintain his cool. Communicating with composure and intelligence was a must in this trying situation. His experience as a Toastmaster was a key asset, he says – and has continued to be so in the many similar situations he's handled since. "Thanks to my Toastmasters training, over the years I've been able to field difficult questions at a time when emotions and water levels are running high."

Intense Work Weeks

During a flooding event, of which there have been many over the years, Riebe generally works 12-hour days seven days a week. He oversees a population of 350,000 to 400,000 for the Rock Island district. Along with his media duties – doing press conferences and answering inquiries about how high and quickly the water is expected to rise – Riebe updates high-ranking military personnel, city engineers, landowners and government officials on flooding conditions. He also sets up temporary levees along the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi looms large in Riebe's life. A resident of Davenport, Iowa, he crosses the legendary river on his way to work in Illinois every day, and then travels back over it on his way home. There's always an awareness that the Mississippi River – a place of literary lore – is capable of overflowing and inflicting flood damage. "We have a lot of respect for the river," Riebe says. "We don't have it tamed, but we have a little bit of a handle on what we can do about it."

When the water rises and nerves fray, Riebe's services are at a premium and he finds himself juggling media interviews and disseminating detailed verbal and written instructions to property owners on how to build a temporary levee to keep out rising floodwaters from the river and its tributaries. The work to construct a five- to six-foot-high sandbag levee against fierce floodwaters is tough, but the result – saving a home – is well worth it. In some areas of his territory, including the Davenport flood, in 1993, he's seen three- to four-foot-deep water flow through the streets unabated. Without levees, Riebe notes, the water ends up pushing at people's windowsills and door handles.

Riebe always tells people to be very cautious when they're working around a levee, where it's easy to slip and fall into the water. Last summer, when there was record flooding in Iowa, he went with a television crew out to Davenport: "I asked one of the Davenport city [officials] to go out on the levee with me, and he said, 'We can't go out there without a life jacket – and you better have one, too.'"



▲ **Toastmaster Robert Riebe, flood area engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, on duty during last summer's record flooding in Davenport, Iowa.**

Along with doling out practical advice during a crisis, Riebe must remain calm and assuage people's fears. "When flooding occurs, emotions run high," he notes, "so it's important to calm people down and give them good, understandable advice as to what they can do to better their situation."

This is known as "risk communication." And Riebe's Toastmasters training makes him very good at it, says Sarah Jones, an emergency management specialist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who has seen him speak. "He presents himself as trustworthy and comes across as very knowledgeable and understanding."

Chartering a Toastmasters Club

Riebe started with Toastmasters in 1985, when he helped charter the Esprit De Corps club in Rock Island, Illinois. Today he is the only founding member still in the club, and he is currently serving as the group's president. Riebe, who has attained DTM status, has held every club office but secretary and has also been an area and division governor.

When he initially joined Toastmaters, Riebe wanted to improve his communication abilities because of his involvement in a Methodist church program that had some lay people filling in for ministers. However, he soon found that Toastmasters also helped him professionally.

Whenever Riebe appears in front of the camera or talks to a reporter, he imagines that he's answering a serious Table Topic question affecting people's lives, homes and personal property.

"It's important to be sensitive to people's situation, so that you don't say something that would offend them….For instance, a levee running through a neighborhood might be the best solution for the common good, but the people in that area aren't going to want to hear that."

Other advice he offers about appearing in front of the media is to admit when you don't know the answer to a question, and to always be civil, even when someone asks what might seem like a silly question.

Developing a Polished Presence

Michael R. Cummings is another colleague of Riebe's at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – and also a fellow member of the Esprit De Corps Toastmasters. He talks about the poise that Riebe developed through his experience in Toastmasters.

"Toastmasters provided Bob with the confidence to stand in front of a camera and listen to media questions – even sensational ones – and answer them in a cool, logical manner," he says. "He offers them just enough information, but no more than necessary. That takes a lot of discipline and finesse."

Jones, the emergency management specialist, adds that Riebe is also very effective during briefing sessions with the flood-crisis management team – another skill she attributes to his Toastmasters training. "During flood incidents, we gather to brief the Army commander, and Bob is always one of the first people to speak up," she notes. "He relays activity in the flood area in a comprehensive, calm, explanatory manner. He's always concise and to the point, and he's a great storyteller."

Riebe also gives speeches about flooding and disaster preparedness, appearing before Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, as well as local schools and community centers. "We have a speakers bureau in our office, and since I'm a Toastmaster and don't mind going out and talking, I do it," he says.

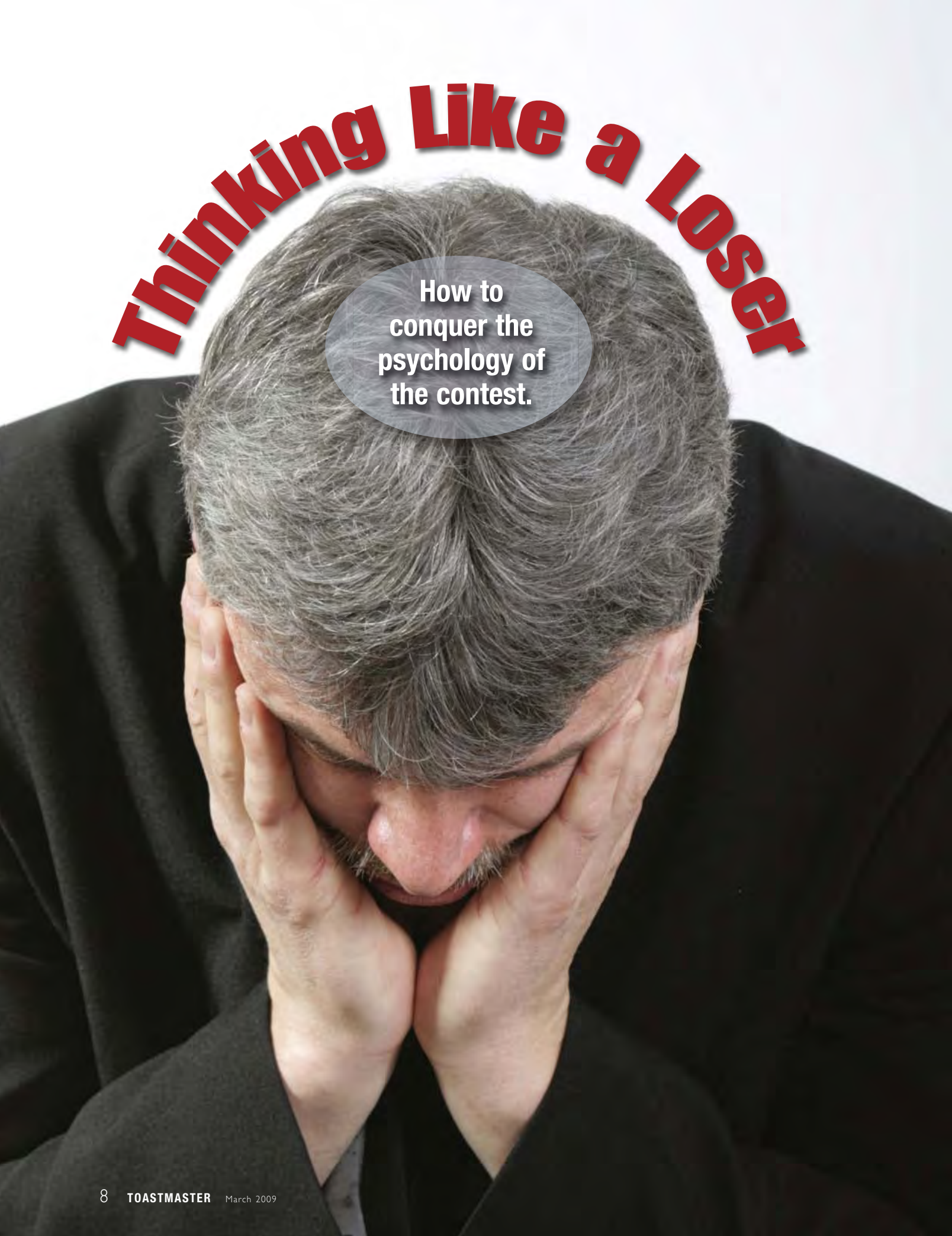
Looking back, Riebe says he's glad the "quiet" job he took in 1992 turned out to be much more active than he ever imagined.

"When a reporter sticks a microphone in your face and asks you sensitive questions about people's well-being and safety, you may not have much time to prepare," he says, "but it sure is exciting." T

Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California and a longtime contributor to the *Toastmaster*. You can reach her at **Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com**.

Thinking Like a Loser

How to conquer the psychology of the contest.



By John Kinde, DTM, Accredited Speaker

If you've ever been frustrated by speech contest judging...join the club. It's a big one. You'll meet lots of friends.

Here's my take on winning and losing speech contests. It's the perspective of someone who has been hanging around Toastmasters for 35 years. I'm an eight-time district contest winner. But let's put that into perspective: I've lost more contests than most people you've met. I don't qualify for the Guinness Book of World Records, but when it comes to winning and losing, I've been there, done that.

I was recently introduced to two winning speakers: Jock Elliott from Australia and Kiminari Azuma from Japan. Elliott has competed five times on the World Championship stage; Azuma has competed in five district contests and two Inter-District competitions, including the 2008 competition in Calgary. They are winners. But along the way, they've had their share of losses. What keeps them in the race?

I discovered that the wisdom they shared about surviving a contest loss matches what I've learned over the years. Frustration with competition results is a common experience. Sometimes the frustration is caused by faulty thinking, sometimes it's the result of factors that are simply out of our control. Here are some points to consider the next time you're unhappy with the results of a speech contest:

Judging and Bias

Judging is subjective. It's not a precise science. In the end, contest results reflect the subjective opinions of the judges. Any one judge will not likely agree with the opinion of every audience member, nor will he or she agree with the opinion of every other judge.

Furthermore, a small minority of judges won't like certain topics. Some judges tend to prefer the speeches of people they know. Some judges carry a chip on their shoulder because *they* think they should be competing on that stage instead of you. Since their bias is different from yours, that means you sometimes won't agree with them. And you can be absolutely guaranteed that when you *do* win, there will be at least one person, and probably more, who will think that the judges got it wrong!

The subjective nature of judging means sometimes the winner is genuinely the best speaker – and sometimes not. That's life in the world of speech competitions. As Jock Elliott says, "That's the game. Live with it or play something else!" If you weren't picked as the winner, it doesn't necessarily mean you weren't the best speaker. And if you were picked as the winner, it doesn't mean you were the best speaker. The winner is just the winner.

"I'm a good judge of my own performance." Of course this is faulty thinking. We're actually bad judges of our own performance. We're also bad judges of the performance of someone we like or don't like. We're bad judges of the performance of someone expressing an opinion we don't agree with. We do have blind spots.

So allow the judges to have their opinions. They're entitled and that's okay.

Judges have good intentions. I'm a firm believer that the judges honestly try their best to be fair and do the right thing. If their vote is swayed by bias or favor - itism, it's not intentional. Believe in the goodness of people. Doing so is closer to the truth, and makes it easier to be happy with the results.

They're volunteers. Let's face it, your average contest is being judged by volunteers. Ask yourself: How many judges have won contests in the past? If you're lucky, maybe a few. That doesn't make their opinions less valid – it's just a perspective to help you not take the results too seriously when you lose … *or* when you win.

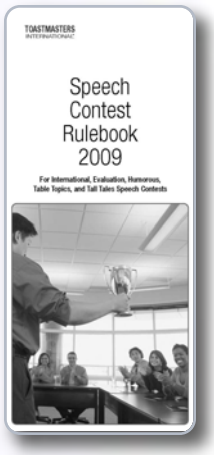
Ten Good Reasons To Lose a Speech Contest

1. If you wait until you definitely win, you'll never enter.
2. The best way to get better is by being bad.
3. You'll be more popular. People won't resent the fact that you won.
4. You don't have to waste time being nice to the judges.
5. Your friends will tell you, "You were robbed! You should have won." That's what friends are for.
6. The contestant interview is fun enough.
7. Being a good loser develops character.
8. Trophies collect dust.
9. When you win there will be nothing more to look forward to.
10. You can do your best Arnold Schwarzenegger impersonation: "I'll be back!"

If You Must Protest…Know the Rules!

Toastmasters International does everything in its power to ensure that all speech contests are conducted fairly. However, if *before* you enter a speech competition, you have concerns relating to a contest rule, here are some steps you can take:

1. Read the Speech Contest Rulebook carefully.
2. Check the Speech Contest FAQ page on the Toastmasters Web site, **members.toastmasters.org**, found in the Member Experience section.
3. Discuss the matter with a club officer or someone in your club with contest experience. If you still have concerns, contact your local area or district level leaders.
4. If your problem still isn't solved, e-mail Toastmasters World Headquarters at **speechcontests@toastmasters.org.**



There are only two issues you can protest *during* a speech contest: eligibility of the speaker and originality of the speech. No other issues will be considered. So for example, it doesn't matter if the speech offends people – as long as the content of the text is the speaker's own, and the speaker is eligible according to contest rules.

In addition, only two groups of people may lodge a protest: contestants and judges. If you're not in one of those two groups, please do not disrupt any contest. Any protest must be lodged with the chief judge and/or contest chairman.

Also, be aware that once the winners of a speech contest are announced, it's too late to make any protests. The chief judge may correct any errors in the contest chairman's reading of the winners, but once they've been read, all decisions regarding contest results at that point are final.

Attitude and Perspective

Winning is important. Not really. Take the International Speech Contest. One person wins, tens of thousands lose. So you're in good company. It's not about winning – it's about growth. The primary goal of entering a contest is to grow. If you lose and grow, you've come out on top.

If you win and don't grow, you've wasted your time. My slogan is: I learn more when I finish in second place. You tend to think you were pretty good when you win. Your analysis goes deeper when you lose.

Elliott's perspective is this: *"Competition is the best training ground because you are under pressure and out of your comfort zone, so you try harder. If I win, great. If I lose, then I've learned something about myself, or the contest, or the judges, or the audience, and next time, I'll be better prepared."*

Let it pass. If you feel frustration with the contest results, that's normal. I've been there. I'll be there again. And if you compete, you'll eventually feel frustrated too. The key is your bounce-back-ability. How resilient you are is a measure of your strength and character. There's another contest just around the corner. And if you were truly the best speaker who didn't win, you don't need to announce it to anyone; most people will already know it.

Have fun. Enjoy the experience. The goal of the contest is to get better…not to get bitter. If you've grown in the process and have become a better speaker, you're a winner. Kiminari Azuma says, "On my way back from the 76th International Convention, I was thinking about the Inter-District and International contests and realized that there are no losers in a Toastmasters contest." It's true. The only losers are those who never enter the contest in the first place!

Winning is hard. Maybe winning is hard, but so is – being a graceful loser. The magic is in cultivating the right attitude.

The Heat of the Moment

When the wound is fresh, the sting of losing clouds our judgment. Elliott and Azuma both say your opinion right after the contest of how well you performed will be different from your opinion weeks later. Azuma reflects on his reaction after one particular contest: "I didn't win. I was shocked. Several weeks

later I watched my contest performance on video. I was shocked again! I was a monotonous robot and was speaking too fast. I found lots of room for improvement."

Elliott expresses similar thoughts about watching himself on video in the aftermath of a contest. "When you look at the tape later on, you begin to see the justice of the [contest] result." He adds, "Experience actually counts for a lot, and you become tougher and begin to realize that losing won't kill you and that maybe, just maybe, the judges were right, and win or lose, you got the result you deserved. You are able to gain a sense of proportion, so that losing at a club contest is not grounds for suicide."

The insights of Elliott and Azuma suggest that at the moment the results are announced, you're too close to the event to have a clear focus and opinion of how you really performed. You'll need some processing time to arrive at a more accurate perception of reality.

The Real World

Have you ever wondered why you're not winning more contests if you've been steadily improving your speaking performances? It might be that your competition keeps getting better too!

Last November I competed in the District 33 Fall Conference Humorous Speech Contest.

"The primary goal of entering a contest is to grow. If you lose and grow, you've come out on top. If you win and don't grow, you've wasted your time..."

In my previous five district humor competitions, I finished in first place four times and second place once. In the November contest, I had an excellent speech that drew great audience response. A fellow member of my club said he counted 32 laugh lines in my speech.

First place went to Colin Saunders from Las Vegas.

I had Colin picked as the winner before the results were announced. His speech was a work of art, with the

(Continued on page 28)





No One Loses
in this Speech Competition



Colin T. William with Contest Chairman Gary Schmidt

By Colin T. William, DTM

A championship finalist applauds the international contest experience.

You've seen them at conferences. They are our rock stars, our icons. They are so famous within Toastmasters that, like Pelé or Madonna, sometimes we just refer to them by first name – Darren, Jim, Vikas and in 2008, LaShunda. They are…The Champions.

But have you ever wondered about the people they defeated?

In 2008 I competed in the Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. I did not win, or even place in the top three. So how does it feel to advance in the competition, from club to area to division to district to region, and all the way to the championship round of 10 finalists, only to see someone else take the trophy?

It feels…*awesome!*

Many of us enjoy competing in the speech contest. Some of us aspire to make it all the way to the very top. Still, if 25,000 people enter every year, 24,999 of us will fall short of the championship trophy. Thus, for the vast majority, the competition will fall into that nebulous area we often call "learning experiences." In all honesty, that phrase can sometimes feel a little hollow, a euphemism used as consolation when we don't achieve our goals. But with the odds stacked so heavily against winning the top speech title, it's important for all who compete to place that goal in the proper context and take as much as we can from the process.

Last year was my fourth time participating, after stalling at the district level three times. In 2007 I'd drawn a blank in the middle of my district speech, an experience that haunted me when entering last year's contest. But 2008 was different. I started with a speech I'd written in one afternoon for a club meeting the previous November and subsequently refined for the contest. I altered and improved it at every level until the district round, at which point it barely resembled that hastily prepared manual speech from the winter before. At each level I felt the fear many of us experience during our Ice Breaker speeches, but, as we all know, the only way to conquer that fear is to keep speaking.

I was fortunate to finally break through against some strong compe-

tition at district. For the region event, I revived and improved the speech I'd blanked on in 2007. A last-minute inspiration on the morning of the region contest led to a revision that made the speech distinctive, and I barely edged out some talented speakers. And so, although I'd never anticipated the possibility, I'd qualified for the championship final.

Wild Ride

Past champ Darren LaCroix warned me that the two months leading up to the final would be a roller coaster, and he wasn't kidding. I wrote, I re-wrote, I second-guessed, I third-guessed, I rehearsed locally, drove out of town to rehearse in front of less familiar audiences, discarded speeches and started over. I watched DVDs, took notes and e-mailed people so many drafts that my "Sent Mail" box now serves as an archive of obsessive neurosis. I lost sleep, lost weight and lost my summer. And then I went to Calgary and was defeated.

And it was a blast.

I did not win – but I did not lose. It feels wrong to describe what I experienced as "losing." I learned more in half a year than I ever could have dreamed. I experienced a wild ride. I shared stories from my life, stories about my son and messages I believed in with audiences who cheered me on. Many, many people were generous with their time in helping and supporting me. At the championship, I shared the big stage with nine amazing people, and made friendships I will always cherish. Afterward, I had people stop me at the Calgary airport and on the plane to tell me they loved my speech. I felt many things, but I sure didn't feel like a loser.

So what can you take from competing in this event? Whether you reach the final round or are defeated at the club level, the potential rewards are rich and varied. They include benefiting from the following kinds of experiences:

- Speaking under pressure, and challenging yourself to be even better than you think you could be.
- Sharing a message you truly believe with an audience that needs to hear it.
- Meeting other strong speakers, and learning from their styles.
- Refining a speech, making it better every time you deliver it.
- Giving a speech to different audiences, from club up to district.
- Speaking in front of large and unfamiliar audiences.
- Developing and perfecting entirely new speeches if you win at district and then again at region – and doing them in a relatively short period of time.
- Handling defeat gracefully, which all of us except one person – the ultimate winner – will have the opportunity to do.

You might be the next Darren, Jim, Vikas or LaShunda. Or, you might be one of the other 24,999 of us who leave without the big trophy, but with a growth experience. However it turns out, by competing in the speech contests you will challenge yourself, you will grow, you will practice everything you've learned and you will be a better communicator. You will accomplish many amazing things. And you will not lose. T

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Special Announcement Regarding April 2009 Dues Renewals

Club Officers:

Look for Your Renewal Invoice in Your E-mail Inbox!



Organizations around the world are becoming more focused on environmental concerns, and Toastmasters International is no exception. In an effort to combine first-rate service to members with environmental stewardship, WHQ will send the upcoming member dues renewal invoice via e-mail, rather than through the postal service.

Members will benefit from this change in several ways:

- Renewal invoices will be delivered faster and more efficiently.
- E-mail delivery is cost-effective, saving the organization (and its members) from unnecessary spending.
- Delivery by e-mail is more convenient for many members.

Club officers, please look for the April 2009 dues renewal invoice in your e-mail inbox the first week of March. Remember, member renewals are due by April 1, 2009. Club officers will be able to submit renewals online through the Club Business login: **www.toastmasters.org/clubbusiness** starting the first week of March.

We welcome your support in helping Toastmasters International be more environmentally responsible!

By Paul Sterman

Try out your comedy chops at Humorous Speech Contests.

Filled With Funny

When John Zimmer of Geneva, Switzerland, gave his speech last November, he donned a pair of black shades and broke out a nimble Arnold Schwarzenegger accent. Not only that, but The Terminator's timing was spot-on.

The occasion was a Humorous Speech Contest, an event that Toastmasters International presents every year. The competition is held at various Toastmasters venues throughout the world, and it produces loads of laughter and fun for everyone involved.

Zimmer's award-winning presentation, delivered in Bamberg, Germany, was broadly satirical. With a figurative wink, he suggested that Toastmasters audiences need to be toughened up – and that speakers should take their cue from Schwarzenegger's scary action-film persona. Who better to intimidate an audience into listening?

Therefore, instead of the traditional Ice Breaker speech to introduce yourself, you'd now be giving a "Bone Breaker" speech, noted Zimmer (channeling Schwarzenegger). As for hand gestures, repeatedly pounding your fist into your palm in a threatening manner would do just fine. And facial expressions? Well, there's pretty much just the one, if you recall Schwarzenegger's acting range: Look mean.

Zimmer, a Canadian attorney who lives and works in Geneva, had his audience in stitches.

Comical Coffee and More

Then there's Sid Davis, who riffed and ranted about coffee in his contest speech in 2005. More specifically, Davis, a member of the Lake Norman Toastmasters in Mooresville, North Carolina, playfully dissed the Starbucks crowd – or at least those patrons who order the "mocha, frappe, latte, venti, pony expresso, whipped cream sissy drink." "If you want a milkshake, go to Dairy Queen!" he growled.

A wealth of topics can be mined for humorous material. While coffee provided Davis with a playful subject, a clash of cultures was the comedic fodder for Nahid Kasra. The Southern California Toastmaster moved to the United States from Iran at age 17. In her contest speech last year, she talked about those first days in America:

"People would ask me where I'm from and I'd tell them, 'Iran.' They'd say, 'Oh, did you ride camels?' I said, 'No, I came here by plane.'"

In fact, says Kasra, she never once saw a camel in her life – a funny comment on stereotypes.

The contest speeches are five to seven minutes long. Each competition features a panel of judges, and winners at each level (club, area and division) advance until a final round is held at the district level.

Participants say they have fun performing humorous material; they get a chance to develop their comedy chops and enjoy making people laugh.

"When the laughs start coming, you think 'Yes! That's it – I'm in the zone now,'" writes Zimmer in an e-mail from Geneva.

And the speakers also have a blast listening to others perform.

It's Fun!

"I always encourage my fellow Toastmasters club members to enter these contests – just going there to hear these other speakers is great," says Cliff Shimizu, a member of the UniMasters club in Lake Forest, California, who has entered the Humorous Speech Contest nearly every year for the past 10 years. "Number one, it's entertaining – they're humorous speeches; everyone loves that. And you learn so much about what to do – how you use props, how you structure speeches. You pick so much up from other speakers."

Shimizu says the contests are rewarding on a number of levels: "Growing up, I was sort of introverted and a shy person. I always wanted to be the center of attention and tell jokes. I always had a humorous streak to me, but I never knew how to express it." With Toastmasters, he found his chance. "When I joined Toastmasters, I had a captive audience; people actually laughed at these things I was saying."

Shimizu gave humor-oriented presentations to his club, but when he entered the Humorous Speech Contest, that kicked things up a notch: He really had a chance to shine.

And he rose to the opportunity. One year, he won at the area level, and in 2004 he finished in second

place in the Founders District contest. But Shimizu – and others – say the events are more about the confidence, the personal growth and the enjoyment to be gained than any trophies picked up along the way.

"The humorous contests opened my eyes to a whole other world outside of our club," says Shimizu, a Toastmaster since 1998. "I saw how there was such a great diversity in speakers – all different kinds. I became hooked on the world of speech contests."



John Zimmer, shown here with his daughter, Kristen, won the District 59 Humorous Speech Contest.

It's More than Fun

In contrast to Shimizu always believing that somewhere deep inside of him was a funnyman waiting to get out, Nahid Kasra felt just the opposite: She always believed she *wasn't* funny. The only speeches she had delivered to her club were serious and earnest. So when her fellow club members urged her to enter last year's humorous contest, that was the last thing she wanted to do.

But ultimately she decided to take the challenge.

"I thought, 'Why not? So I'll make a fool out of myself – what's the worst that can happen?'"

It was an excellent decision. Because what Nahid discovered was that she *is* funny. She told stories and jokes about her life as an American from Iran – and her humorous speech was voted the best of her club. She finished third at the area level.

"It was such a pleasure to do this," she recalls. "I worked with a mentor, and then when I did my speech, the audience laughed."

"I didn't even know that I had this talent for humor," adds Nahid, a member of the Rancho Speech Masters in Rancho Santa Margarita, California.

In fact, she's so enthusiastic about this revelation that she hopes to develop a career using humor in some form.

The Humorous Speech Contest was also a professional inspiration for Sid Davis, the North Carolina resident. His coffee-themed comedy routine took first place in the 2005 division round. These days, Davis is touring comedy clubs across the United States, working as a professional comedian. He says his training and success in Toastmasters was a driving force in his becoming a stand-up comic.

Last year, Davis served as the contest chairman for his district's humorous competition, meaning he hosted the contest but didn't participate as a contestant in the event. He says the experience reminded him once again of how many entertaining presentations there are to see at these programs.

"There are very, very funny folks who come here," Davis says.

There's also a real camaraderie between competitors. Participants want each other to do well, notes Zimmer, whose speech last year won first place in District 59, which encompasses 18 countries in Continental Europe.

"My fellow contestants were all wonderfully friendly people," he says. "One would think that watching them would result in a moral dilemma – you want them to do well, but you also want to win yourself. However, I have found that the whole philosophy of Toastmasters usually results in healthy rivalry where everyone supports everyone else."

The contest can also be a fun family experience. Zimmer's 13-year-old daughter, Kristen, has a keen interest in public speaking, so she was only too willing to provide her dad with personal coaching as he prepared his humorous speech and continued to advance through each round. And Kristen didn't take it easy on the old man:

"She insisted that I rehearse the speech in front of her countless times," notes Zimmer, a member of the International Geneva Toastmasters club. "She would look at the script and suggest changes here and there, many of which I gratefully incorporated."

The father-daughter bonding grew even more special when Zimmer made it to the district finals in Germany – and took Kristen with him. She saw her dad perform in front of 225 people – and emerge victorious. At the awards ceremony, when John's name was announced as the first-place winner, both he and Kristen were called up to the stage. John had the presenters put the medal around Kristen's neck.

"It was a great experience," he says, "and one which we will both remember always." T

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"How to break through the teen barrier? Recognize that technology is here and use it to stay connected."

Crucial Conversation

Tips on talking to the key people in your life.

There's something satisfying about saying just the right thing at just the right time – and if it's in front of the VIPs in your life, all the better. But sometimes even Distinguished Toastmasters find themselves caught up in a failure to communicate. Fortunately, experts in the field of interpersonal communication can offer a few scientifically

By Barbara Neal Varma

sound strategies for what to say when: Your boss asks you how that important project is coming along, or your significant other starts a significant squabble, or that special someone you've adored since the third grade suddenly walks into your Toastmasters meeting.

Hollywood has its scriptwriters; politicians, their pundits, and now you've got science on your side. Here are a few well-spoken words from the experts to help you with this crazy little thing called communication:



What can I do to become a better communicator today?

Simple: Think about it. "I've found that people don't reflect enough on their communication and proceed on the assumption that they're doing it quite well," says Gary Ruud, a professor of speech communication at California State University at Fullerton. "They assume what they're thinking is what people are getting." To be a better communicator, Ruud contends, you have to be brutally honest with yourself – a truth that Toastmaster Diana Ewing discovered early on.

"You can't let nervousness get in the way of projecting your message," says Ewing, who is president of the UniMasters club in Lake Forest, California. "No matter how much someone likes your speech, they have to be able to hear and understand what you're saying. You can't assume it's automatic."

Ruud says to improve your communication in general, you must first understand there are a variety of ways to say the same thing. You can choose to phrase it in a way that will have the best possible outcome. "Maybe that's why I got into this discipline," he says. "When I was a kid, I would sit in my room and think of ways to get things from my parents. I was doing it intuitively, but as we grow older we forget all the options we have. To be better communicators, we need to recognize how creative we are."

Don't forget to listen, too; but go beyond mere words. "Listening is important, but people tend to pay too much attention to content," says Ruud. "They should listen more holistically to include feelings and emotions and the unstated things in a conversation." *Unstated things?* "Is the other person nervous, happy, bored? We don't communicate in isolation. It's about two or more people working together to create a mutually beneficial outcome."

What do I say to make a good impression at work?

Experts say it's not so much *what* you say – although that's important, too – but *how* you say it, especially in the world of business. Exact numbers vary, but most communication studies reveal that a message's meaning is interpreted through nonverbal cues (body language, facial expressions, etc.) more than 50 percent of the time – more so if the speaker's message is perceived to be ambiguous. Suppose you sound surly when you say, "I love this job." It's obvious you mean the opposite, right? The savvy businessperson understands the rules of communication and uses them to his advantage, adding a note of confidence to his walk, his talk, his direct gaze from across the boardroom.

"The interviews I do with homebuyers for my business are better because of the skills I've learned in Toastmasters," agrees Ewing, a freelance writer. "I'm more relaxed conducting interviews than I used to be, and I try to relate to the people I interact with."

Ewing also believes there's an extra business-speak benefit to be gained from the spontaneous practice afforded by Table Topics: "It's surprising how much I like the off-the-cuff speeches. I found I can think on my feet, and now I welcome the challenge of doing that."

What do I say to the one I love?

In the movie *Shrek*, the ogre tells his sidekick, Donkey, that ogres are like onions, having many layers to their personality that when peeled away reveal a sensitive inner core. If ogres are like onions, then people in love are like ogres, revealing themselves layer by layer in a disclosure dance that psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor have proved is bonding. "Closeness develops," they contend in their landmark study on relational closeness, "when the participants proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchange."

Ruud, the professor, says the "it-takes-two" view is vital for romantic relationships. "Don't think of communication as an individual activity. It's a relational activity – you don't communicate in isolation," he explains. "It's about both of you working together to create a mutually beneficial outcome."

Dating tip: Use listening cues – lean forward, make eye contact and nod your head once in a while – to let your date know you're paying attention. The object of your desire will believe you're a great conversationalist even though you barely said a word.

What do I say during a conflict?

"Don't say 'calm down,'" Ruud advises. "That has the opposite effect."

So what do you say in a clash of words? Employ the almighty "I." Here's how it works: When you're in a conflict situation, ignore the instinct to lay blame and use "I" messages instead. An "I" message is a statement that tells the listener what you see, think, feel or want in an objective way that doesn't assign blame. Resist saying, "You're late again – is that watch just a paperweight on

your wrist?" and offer instead: "I would like you to join us at the dinner table on time."

Then, still calm, express how you interpreted the action you observed: "When you're late, I feel like you don't consider family dinner time important." Follow up with a request for confirmation or clarification: "Is that right, or…?" Using the "When you do X, I interpret it to mean Y" formula gives the gift of insight to the other, a potent step toward conflict resolution.

Ruud adds, "Try and understand why they feel the way they do and say something to acknowledge that such as, 'I understand you're frustrated.' Also, practice the art of nexting." Come again? "If during a conflict, [the people arguing] asked themselves what they could say next to make this a more positive outcome, they'd cut the discord down by half."

What do I say to my friend?

To foster a friendship, say things that indicate interest, care and support. Inquire about your friend's latest life adventures, ask about the things you know interest your pal, and, when he's feeling down, offer to help. Listening is an important part of effective communication. In times of trial, utter words of both sympathy (genuinely feeling sorry for someone) and empathy (trying to feel how someone else feels). "Part of being attentive is knowing what your friend needs and providing that," Ruud says.

Just as Toastmasters start their critiques on a positive note, celebrate your friends by saying things to affirm your respect and affection for them such as "I'm really glad we had a chance to get together today. You can always make me laugh." (Gentlemen, if that's too *Oprah*, try, "Hey, good to see you again" and then get back to watching the game.)

"That's the thing that makes Toastmasters work," Ewing says, remarking on the program's camaraderie and support. "You feel comfortable to go in there and make a mistake, because no one's judging you. They want you to succeed. Even shy speakers start to blossom after their third or fourth speech and all the encouragement."

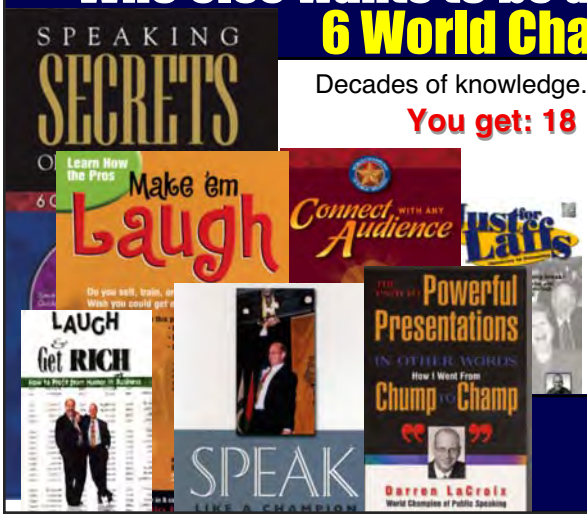
What do I say to my kids?

Children's level and quantity of communication will change over time – no *flash* (teen-speak for late-breaking news) for anyone who's raised a child. Parents already know that as language forms, a child is eager to express herself, shouting out the latest learned word with enthusiasm, especially when in a fancy restaurant or smack dab in the middle of the congregation. But then, like a fog, the silent teen years descend and Mom and Dad might find themselves eager to hear those gleeful shouts again instead of the morose monosyllabic replies to questions raised at the dinner table.

Some say the availability of the latest in communications technology is partly to blame, causing kids to text rather than talk – and in an abbreviated, symbol-filled lingo all their own, designed to KPC (Keep Parents Clueless). So how to break through the teen barrier? "Recognize that technology is here and use it to stay connected," says Ruud. "Cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging; in some ways they've increased communication. If a family has a healthy relationship, technology can actually help. My friend's daughter texted her the other day to say, 'You're the best, Mom.' She was thrilled." T

Barbara Neal Varma is a freelance writer based in Southern California. Visit **www.BarbaraNealVarma.com** for more of her articles on the art of communication.

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Different by Design

By David Brooks, DTM

How President Obama's inaugural speech helped the world take a step forward.

It was neither written nor delivered in a style that most expected. It was light on oratorical flourishes. It was, instead, austere. It was President Barack Obama's inaugural address and it was different by design.

Some may wonder, "Since Toastmasters is an international organization, why focus on an American president's speech?" I've done so because this was a speech designed to transcend national boundaries. This was a speech *to* the U.S., but a message *for* the world.

Just as Nelson Mandela did in his 1994 inaugural ("…reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul..."), and as Sir Winston Churchill did during and after World War II (his 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech, for example), President Obama delivered an address for a global audience.

And that is why the first address by Obama the president was different from those given by Obama the candidate. Applying a rapid-fire rhythm, candidate Obama whipped crowds into a frenzy with the fervor of an evangelist. His speeches were crafted into a crescendo, a steady increase in intensity climaxing with his familiar refrain: "Yes, we can!"

This was the style some expected in his inaugural address. Yet in his first address as president, Obama sounded different. He was restrained. Why? Campaign rallies are raucous events, so his campaign speeches were designed to motivate; his inaugural address was, instead, designed to *differentiate*.

In substance and style this was a speech to draw distinctions between Obama the candidate and Obama the president. It was also a speech to contrast old ideas with new ideals. Obama campaigned on a promise of change, and his speech reflected that theme in three distinct ways:

1 **Change of tone.** Inaugural addresses, though celebratory, are dignified occasions. As all good

speakers know, your message and manner should match the moment. Obama's signature campaign-speech style would have been considered as inappropriate as a sales pitch at a funeral. He dignified the occasion by appropriately replacing flamboyant exuberance with subtle eloquence.

For example:

- *"…we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned."*
- *"… we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united…"*
- *"We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."*

While reminding us greatness is not a given, it must be earned, he was humbly eloquent.

When he acknowledged problems of our past not with condemnation but with hope, he was reverently eloquent. And, when paraphrasing Indira Gandhi's famous statement of peace, "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist," he was respectfully eloquent.

As an artistic speaker, on this day he wisely chose to paint his delivery in muted colors. Lesser-skilled speakers fail to adjust and adapt as circumstances and settings change. Yet, in this speech of differentiation, the change of tone from candidate Obama to President Obama appeared to be a message itself.

2 Change of direction. If President Obama's difference in style was noticeable, his differences in substance were inescapable. Here he cited numerous differences between his policies and principles and those of the previous administration.

It was a striking contrast. Examine these statements:

- *"… we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals."*
- *"Our founding fathers…drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man…. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake."*
- *"…our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions – that time has surely passed."*
- *"We will restore science to its rightful place..."*
- *"What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them – that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply."*
- *"And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders…"*

These are all statements to differentiate. There is no doubt that collectively they shout: "Changes will be noticeable and numerous."

The fact that he made these extraordinarily pointed distinctions is unusual. But the fact that he made them without implying they were personal rebukes is remarkable. He spoke with finesse rather than force.

Once again, President Obama said more by saying less. Yes, he refuted philosophies and principles and policies of the previous administration, and yes, he defined a dramatic contrast between past and present. Yet, he did not denigrate the occasion by placing blame.

Instead, he invited us to join him in a new era of responsibility and accountability with these words: *"Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices…"*

And that invitation led to the third change:

3 Change of attitude. President Obama signaled change with statements of unprecedented inclusiveness: *"…our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus – and non-believers."*

"In substance and style this was a speech to draw distinctions between Obama the candidate and Obama the president."

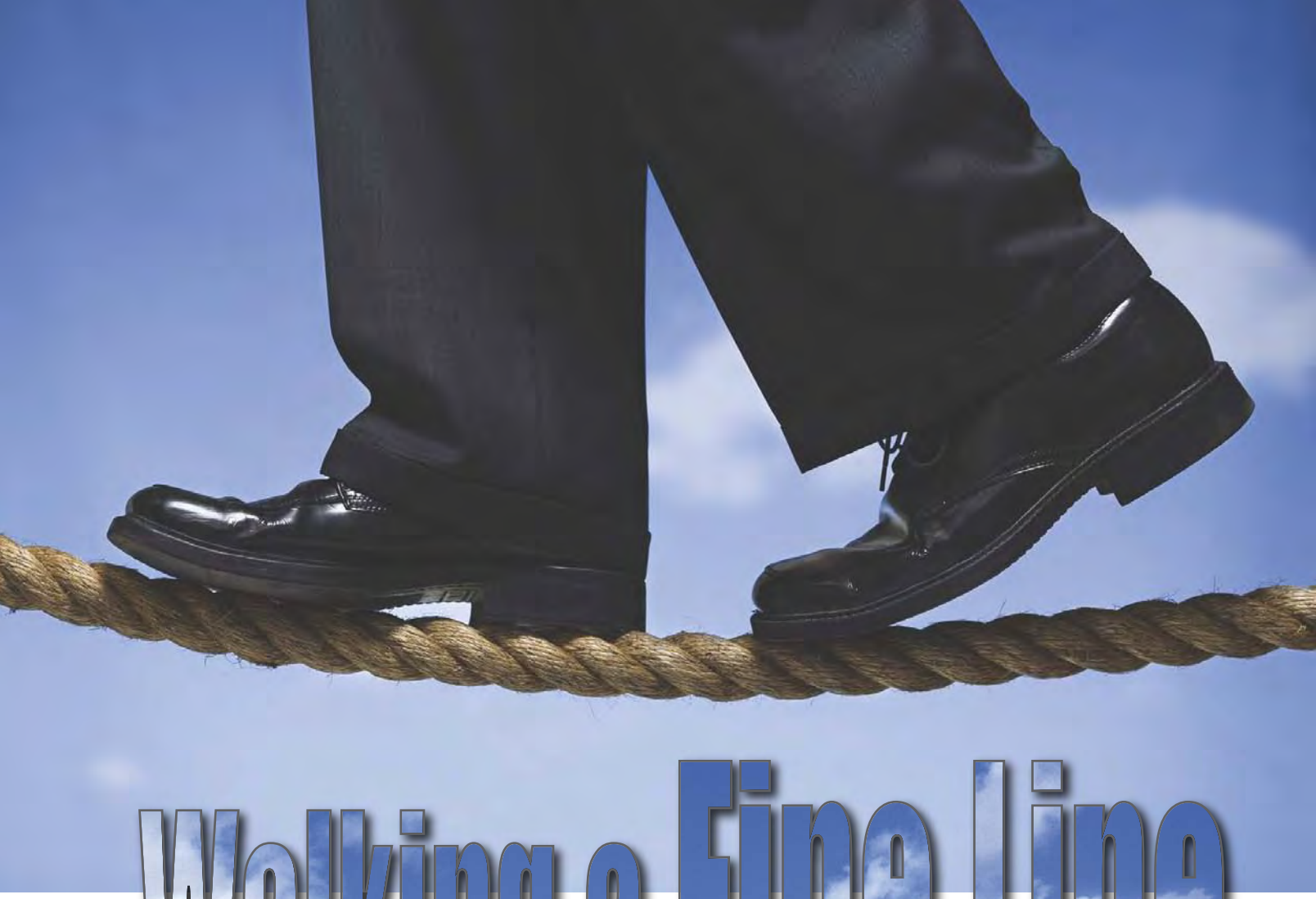
He signaled change with statements of respect: *"With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat...."*

And he signaled change with statements of responsibility: *"…know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more."*

Some have suggested that this speech lacks one ringing line that will resonate as loudly as John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you…" or as eloquently as Lincoln's "With malice toward none and charity for all…"

And though President Obama's address may lack that single spectacular sound bite, in a mere 2,393 words he made his point: This speech was a signal that his presidency will be different by design. T

David Brooks, DTM, is a member of West Austin II Toastmasters in Austin, Texas, and the 1990 World Champion of Public Speaking. Reach him at **DavidBrooksTexas.com**.



Walking a Fine Line

How much personal information should speakers share?

By Judith Tingley, DTM, Ph.D.

We've all heard presentations by professional speakers, facilitators and trainers who seem distant and impersonal. We never get to know much about them, even if we learn about their topic. Audience involvement and connection is limited. There's a low level of energy between speaker and audience.

Then there are other presenters who are telling us the third story about their second marriage or the fourth story about their last ski trip within the first 30 minutes of their presentation about alternative fuels. Now, some buzz may be produced – but it's the hum of participants complaining that the speaker is too into himself.

This is another balancing act for speakers, another fine line to step toward gingerly and back from carefully, crossing rarely. When Toastmasters evaluate speakers, they often provide suggestions such as: "That was a good story about your unusual Aunt Margaret, but I would liked to have known more about *your*

relationship with her and *your* particular feelings toward her." This comment asks for more "I" – more personal reaction and perspective, perhaps more passion. The evaluator is suggesting that the speaker bring the topic closer to herself and consequently produce more of an impact on the audience.

When a too-little-"I" speaker says, "Aunt Margaret was an early feminist in the late 1960s," nothing much happens with the audience. The fact itself isn't memorable because it doesn't connect the audience to the speaker or produce emotion. No emotion, no engagement.

If the speaker instead chooses to add more "I," he might say, "Although my Aunt Margaret was a legendary feminist, her behavior in the late '60s embarrassed our traditional Midwestern family. We were ashamed to have the same last name." Just about everyone can identify with feelings evoked when a family member has embarrassed or just plain upset the whole group. There's connection with the speaker and his experience. Providing the personal perspective raises the engagement and energy of the audience. Even if audience members are internally resistant to what's being said – e.g., "His [the speaker's] family shouldn't be embarrassed. They should be proud" – they're nevertheless involved. They're feeling, they're thinking, they're responding.

Let's imagine that in a travel speech, a Toastmaster says, "There were many European and Asian tourists enjoying the beautiful beaches and cloudless skies of Cancun." The evaluator, wanting more "I" material, might comment, "Cancun sounds like an interesting destination and you described it well. I wanted to know more about how you chose to travel there in the first place and what you experienced on your trip." Why does the evaluator request more "I"? Because the speaker's observations about tourists will generate little audience engagement, other than an internal, "Oh" or "Ho-hum."

If instead, the speaker says, "Being in the minority on the Cancun beaches was uncomfortable for my husband and me; there were lots of foreign tourists speaking their native tongue. It reminded us that, whether at home or away, plain vanilla Americans are increasingly in the minority." The increased "I" in this example can challenge the audience's thinking and maybe generate some resistance as well. But at least it will trigger a response.

That's Too Much Info

At the other end of the spectrum, there's the too-much-"I" speaker. As an evaluator, you may feel uncomfortable suggesting a speaker deliver less "I." The inference – the evaluator doesn't want to hear that much about the speaker – could certainly be perceived as rejection. But for the same reasons that the speaker needs to add "I" at times, sometimes he or she needs to reduce "I" in order to get the desired outcome – audience involvement.

"Check yourself out and see where you tend to fall on the continuum from too much 'I' to too little 'I' in your speeches."

Returning to Aunt Margaret, here's a hypothetical too-much-"I" comment: "I really like Aunt Margaret because she always had stashes of candy at her house when I went to visit. I was a sugar addict even at age two. Actually, I still am. And my favorites haven't changed: Milky Way and Butterfinger." Is this story about Aunt Margaret or about the speaker? Even if the speaker's sugar yearnings interest some of the audience members, many will lose the story line, the theme or the objective. They become detached from the speech and lost to the speaker.

A too-much-"I" comment about the Cancun trip might be, "The beaches were picture-perfect, with fine-white sand and turquoise-blue water. I know everyone thinks that's ideal, but I'm not really a beach person. I much prefer the mountains. Most of my guy friends think the same, although I read somewhere that women just love beaches." Some of the audience members go along, willing to follow the speaker from Cancun to his personal vacation preferences, while others are distracted and want to get back to the point. When the focus changes midstream in a short speech, the speaker and the speech often don't accomplish the objective.

Be Neutral If It's Needed

Of course, there are some speeches that require almost no "I" at all; more neutrality and personal detachment from the topic is desired. For example, if you give a speech to inform, you want to be more objective than if you give one to persuade or inspire. If you hear a speech to inform about the topic of climate change, then you might expect it to include facts and statistics from all

possible sides. A speech to persuade, on that same topic, might include facts and statistics that particularly influenced the speaker; a story about the speaker's current position; and actions that the speaker has implemented and wants the audience to take on, too.

Check yourself out and see where you tend to fall on the continuum from too much "I" to too little "I" in your speeches. Maybe you already do a good job of handling the "I" balancing act and you can toss this article – although if I knew you didn't like it, my feelings would be hurt. I don't do well with rejection, as a writer or in my personal life. Did you note the too-much-"I" detour in the last two sentences? Annoying, right?

The principles of too much or too little "I" are also true for writing and for evaluating.

If you want another opinion next time you give a speech, ask your evaluator to pay special attention. Give him or her permission to let you know, publicly or privately, whether they wanted more or fewer "I"s. Then see how that feedback works for you. T

Judith C. Tingley, DTM, Ph.D., is an author and psychologist as well as a 25-year member of Park Central Toastmasters in Phoenix, Arizona. She can be reached at **drtingley@comcast.net.**

IN MEMORY OF

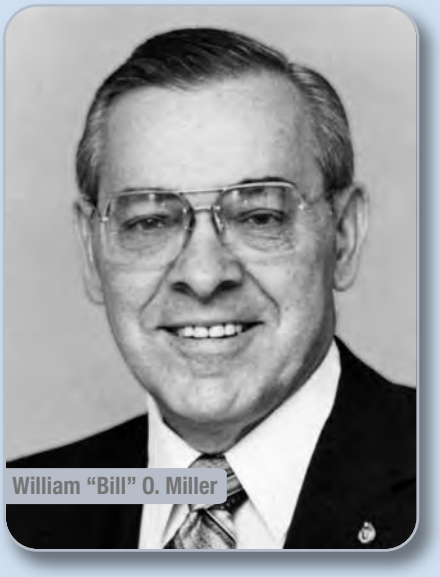
William "Bill" O. Miller (1924-2008)

By Bennie Bough, DTM, PIP

Toastmasters International mourns the loss of one of the organization's longtime dedicated leaders: former International President William "Bill" O. Miller. In December, at the age of 84, Miller passed away from congestive heart failure. We remember him for his kindness and his strong belief in the Toastmasters experience.

A resident of Rockville, Maryland, Miller was elected International President at the 1982 International Convention and chose as his theme "Learn and Grow Through Participation." It was at that same Convention that Toastmasters elected the first woman to the Board of Directors' Executive Committee: Helen Blanchard, DTM, who was tapped as the Third Vice President. She says Miller instantly made her feel part of the team.

"Being the first woman in that position, you wonder how the President is going to approach you, or you wonder how he's going to treat you as a member of the group," Blanchard recalls. "I was certainly immediately welcomed and treated as an equal member with the rest of the officers, and I always appreciated Bill for that."



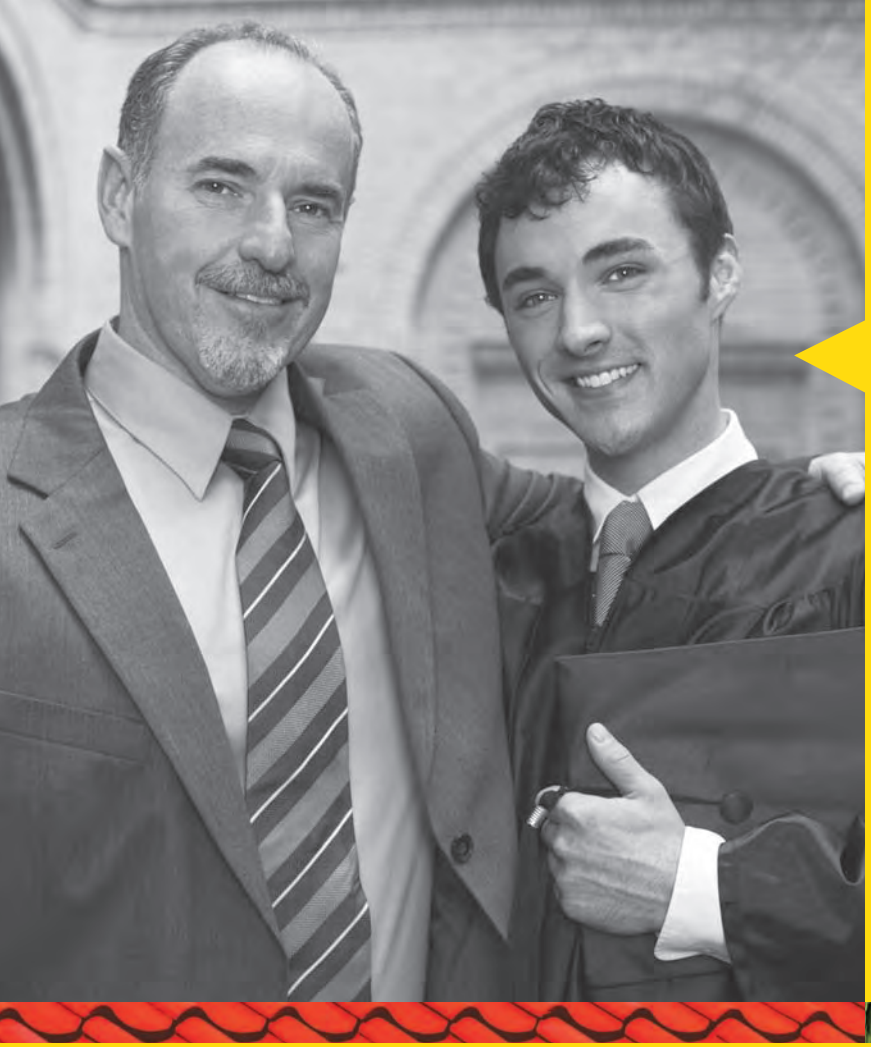
William "Bill" O. Miller

Past International President Tom Richardson, DTM, who served on the Board when Miller was President, says, " Bill had the ability to make anyone feel good about where they were. He was a great encourager – a man of great character."

Miller predicted the organization's growth explosion. In his inauguration speech as International President, he said, "This organization has awakened from its sleep and riveted its gaze on a hopeful future. There are no bounds." Since that speech nearly 27 years ago, Toastmasters has doubled in size.

Bill Miller will be missed by many of his Toastmasters friends. Along with his wife, Betty, he is survived by the couple's six children, 16 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. T

Bennie Bough, DTM, PIP, served as the Toastmasters International President in 1992-'93. He is a resident of Fairfax Station, Virginia, and a member of the Springfield Toastmasters club.



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By John Efraimson

A journey through fear – the struggle is worth it.

A Long Walk On a Short Plank

Put your imagination to work. Imagine that it's your first day on a new job, and you're standing on the top of a bridge, 300 feet above a swirling, angry river. Imagine that you're standing on a narrow wooden plank, suspended on cables strung between two beams, so the plank is swaying back and forth as you're perched there. The wind is gusting, starting and stopping, blowing you from side to side. There's some sand residue under your feet, so the surface is slippery. And you're not wearing a safety belt; there's absolutely nothing to keep you from taking a long walk on that short plank, and having gravity take you for a fatal ride to the water below.

Imagine that. Imagine how terrified you might be if you'd never done that kind of work before – in fact, if you'd never been farther off the ground than a tree in your back yard.

I was in that situation I just described to you. And though this might sound strange, that harrowing sensation mirrored the fear and anxiety I would experience when I joined Toastmasters in my mid-40s. (More on that later.)

It was 1963 in Oregon, where I grew up, and I was starting work as a high-steel bridge painter during the summer between my junior and senior years in college. My youthful braggadocio had allowed me to convince the contractor to hire me even with no experience, and on my first day he'd sent me up on one of the most dangerous jobs in a very dangerous business. The first few hours on that plank were so terrifying that the memory is still vivid to me all these years later. I was so scared that I was shaking uncontrollably, all the muscles in my body constricting.

I was sweating, I felt dizzy, my mouth and throat were dry, and I was hyperventilating as I kept staring down at the ominous water below, imagining the horrible death I would experience if I fell. Nothing I'd ever experienced had prepared me for the panic I felt performing that high-wire act up there on that swaying plank.

But even though every move I made could be my last, I stayed on that plank that day. I wanted that job so badly that I willed myself to confront my fear, willed myself to defy the part of me that was saying: "This is crazy, give it up; you can't do it, it's too dangerous, you're going to die." I stayed up there because finishing my education was an obsession with me at the time, and high-steel bridge painting was the only job where I could accumulate enough money to finish my last year in school.

Somehow, I summoned the courage to make it back up on the steel the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that. And each time I went back up, it became a little easier. A subconscious change took place in me. After a while, my mind and body seemed to work out a compromise, a physical and mental accommodation that allowed the fear to exit my brain and the tension to vacate my body, so I could relax even in that life-threatening situation. Eventually, I became so comfortable up there that by the end of summer I could walk the steel with the agility of a cat on the back of a sofa, and slide down a 200-foot vertical column like a monkey coming down a tree for its lunch.

I survived that summer, went back to school, earned my degree and moved on to tamer pursuits. But the experience on that skinny little plank gave me a great sense of pride in my ability to conquer fear and gave me the confidence I needed to succeed in other things. In the years since, I've had other fearful episodes, like everyone does, but nothing compared to the terrifying first day on that bridge.

Until, that is, 30 years later, in 1993, when I walked into my first Toastmasters meeting! There it was again, that awful fear invading my body and mind – the sense of panic, the tightening muscles, the uncontrollable shaking, the dry throat and mouth, the hyperventilating. The thought of getting up in front of a group of strangers brought all the feelings back.

What if I said something foolish? What if I didn't say anything, and everybody just stared at me, or laughed at me? What if I couldn't

even remember my own name, or mispronounced some common word, or just bolted and ran out of the room? Why did I put myself in this situation, I wondered? What was I thinking?

Back in 1963, I needed that job to finish my education, and that powerful need enabled me to push through gripping fear. Now, all these years later, I wondered if I still had it within me to push through my fear and accomplish something I knew I needed?

I had just lost a business I had struggled 12 years to build. I'd taken a serious financial hit and my self-esteem was at an all-time low. In the process, I'd shut myself off from the world as well as from friends and family, and had become an embittered, sullen soul. I'd heard about Toastmasters and thought maybe it could be the vehicle I needed to shake me out of my depression, to let me reconnect with the world and rebuild some of my lost self-esteem.

So I took that first halting step into the meeting room that day, like I'd taken the first step out onto that plank. I introduced myself and took my turn at Table Topics, but was so nervous I have no idea what I said. Because of how important my personal journey was, I forced myself back to the second meeting, and made it through all right; then I went back the next week and the week after that, and began giving speeches from the manual. And each time I went, it got a little easier. I became more comfortable with the routine and the people and myself.

The subconscious change that had occurred on that bridge was happening again. Somehow in the face of that overwhelming fear, my mind and body were working out an accommodation to allow the fear and tension to leave me. I was able to relax in front of the group, keep my thoughts clear and allow my true personality to emerge. I still don't know how or why it works, but it does. At least it did for me.

In fact, it worked so well that nobody's been able to shut me up since! I sped through the first manual and advanced manuals, and began giving speeches outside the club – at Rotary clubs, Kiwanis clubs, town hall gatherings, senior centers, anyplace where they'd give me a lectern, an audience and some time. Then I got more involved with the Toastmasters organization, holding various club offices and working on area and district matters; mentoring other speakers; helping to start several clubs; doing all sorts of things I never imagined I could do. It was the most rewarding period of my life.

And a few years later, as I stood before hundreds of fellow Toastmasters as a district finalist in the Humorous Speech Contest, I was proud that I'd taken that first step into that room to confront my fear of public speaking, just as I'd taken that first step onto the plank on that bridge 30 years earlier.



"I wanted to relate my meaningful journey through fear to anyone who might be interested in dealing with theirs."

I wanted to relate my meaningful journey through fear to anyone who might be interested in dealing with theirs. Having been through the process myself, and having witnessed hundreds of other scared souls struggling with their fear of public speaking, I can tell you the struggle is worth it. Very positive things can happen for you, just as they did for me.

So if you're thinking of joining a Toastmasters club, or are a member wondering whether you should continue, or get more involved, my advice is – to borrow an expression from a famous shoe company from my hometown of Portland, Oregon – "Just Do It." Hey, it couldn't be as bad as taking a long walk on a short plank! T

John Efraimson is a writer living in Manhattan, New York, and a former member of the Tabor Toastmasters in Portland, Oregon.

Thinking Like a Loser

(Continued from page 11)

word choices of a poet and great physical delivery. Most importantly, he was very funny.

Second and third place went to two young and energetic speakers: Jason Gordo and David Hillshafer.

This was the best Humorous Speech Contest I can remember. Reflecting on my past competitions, I've come to the conclusion that it was much easier to win a district contest in the "old days." My first district win was 25 years ago at the District 48 Fall Conference. In those days the Humorous Speech Contest extended to the regional level, where I competed three years in a row, from 1983 to 1985. The recent district contest I participated in was more competitive than any of those three region contests from the mid-1980s.

But that's as it should be. Speakers today are better trained than yesterday's speakers; with a firm grasp on the art and science of speaking. That's good. It's challenging and stimulating.

Winners Are Persistent

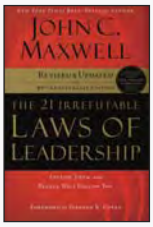
Enter every contest. Know that at some point you'll probably be disappointed with the results.

Jock Elliott says, "Ability aside, sheer perseverance and match practice will move the odds in your favor." And Kiminari Azuma says, "As I watch my 'best contest speech,' I'm glad that I'm still discovering ways to improve my performance. It inspires me to think: Yes, I can do more!"

So when the contest results have a sting… get over it. Losing is just a springboard to higher achievement. Be stimulated to thrive and grow. Accept the feedback, which is the true gift of Toastmasters. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and enter your next club contest. Challenge yourself to work harder. Work smarter. And remember: You will succeed tomorrow by exceeding the standards of today. T

John Kinde, DTM, Accredited Speaker, is a humor specialist from Las Vegas, Nevada. You can reach him at **www.HumorPower.com**.

Literature Guide

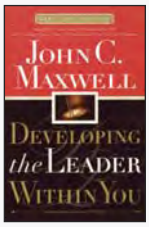


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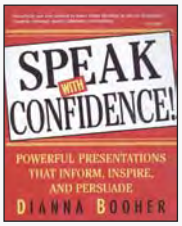


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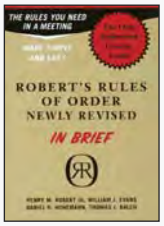


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By John Cadley

Let's Talk Sports

Athletes and sportswriters find ways to make blatant truisms sound like blinding insights.

To love both sports and language is to suffer an intense form of cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, you can't get enough pre-game interviews and post-game analysis. On the other, your left temporal lobe is assaulted by so many exhausted clichés that it feels like a mild concussion. I've actually heard a player say, "If we put some points on the board we'll be in a good position to win." Thankfully, nobody challenged that assumption.

I understand the problem. Sports are simple. Somebody wins, somebody loses, and the scoreboard tells you why. What's there to talk about? Consequently, athletes and sportswriters must find ways to make blatant truisms sound like blinding insights. That's how you get a statement like this from a sportscaster describing one coach's strategy for playing the game of basketball: "He understands the ball has two sides." Well, as the referee here, I'm going to have to call him for fouling the laws of Euclidean geometry. Obviously, he meant to say the game has two sides, offense and defense, but apparently that seemed a little, well, obvious, so he aimed for the poetic description and ended up shooting a linguistic air ball.

Football players often say that they are "expecting a physical game." Considering the 14 pounds of protective padding they're wearing, the Emergency Medical Teams standing by, and the ambulances parked around the field, I can't imagine what else they'd be expecting, unless they plan to ratchet up the violence to the point where the winner is the team with the fewest dead people. If the game is close, if they "came out flat" and then "got the momentum back," "played their game" and "got into their rhythm," they will sum it up by saying, "Today, we overcame adversity." Well, yes, athletic competitions are by definition adversarial, especially when your adversary is trying to put you in the hospital. Penalty: fifteen yards for flagrant belaboring of the obvious.

And then there's the classic observation: "They're better than their record." This is like Edgar Wilson Nye's famous saying that Wagner's music is better than it sounds. Actually, if a team is losing to teams they should be beating, they're worse than their record. And for that I'm calling two minutes in the penalty box for intentionally roughing a non sequitur.

In the days leading up to President Obama's inauguration, one retired baseball player, wishing to acknowledge the historic import of the occasion, opined, "You know, sometimes current events transpire sports." I'll give him points for recognizing that the fate of our country might be slightly more important than who's starting for the Yankees against the Red Sox. I'll even award him extra points for almost choosing the correct word – i.e., "transcend." He got the "trans" part right, so let's call it a long, well-hit ball that curved foul at the last minute.

There will, however, be no special consideration for the coach who said, "We're planning to win multiple Super Bowls and we're going to start with the first." I only wish his interviewer had replied, "Why not start with the second? Then you can win your first later." I'm throwing the flag on this one for interference with a tautology and I'm requiring that henceforth the coach's playbook include a section on propositional logic.

Even fans are guilty. Whenever a spectator becomes aware of a television camera in the area, he or she automatically waves an index finger in front of the lens to proclaim that their team is Number One. Not only is this Pavlovian response tiresomely predictable, it frequently borders on the delusional. I saw a Detroit Lions fan do it this year. While his team was losing by 21 points. On its way to an 0-16 season. Penalty: ejection from the stadium and a $500 fine for felony assault on a fait accompli.

Finally, there is the mixed metaphor. Players can get mixed up with bad people and bad situations, but when they get mixed up in a bad metaphor – or in this case, several of them – the results can be even more disastrous. To wit, this explanation from a hockey player as to why his team lost: *"Well, they just gave us a good old-fashioned whupping today. We shot ourselves in the foot and dug a deep hole and they ate our lunch."*

There will be no penalty here. Any man who's been whupped, shot and thrown into a hole with nothing to eat for lunch has been penalized enough.

John Cadley is an advertising copywriter in Syracuse, New York. Reach him at **jcadley@mower.com**.

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- One secret question that can get you a $1,500 - $6,000 bonus!
- 31 tools and forms that you need to get started quickly (they took me 12 years to develop).
- Seven different speaking business models and which is best for you.
- How to speak for free and still earn a huge income

...And much, much, much more

What people have said:

"I have received my first speaking paycheck! You helped me avoid many of the pitfalls that others make."
- Theresa Westcott, Houston, TX

"*You really helped me focus on my assets and realize that I am sitting on a gold mine!"*
- Andy Dooley, Orlando, FL

"We increased our speaking rates 150% and they didn't hesitate." - Charlotte Endorf, Norfolk, NE

Take ***your*** next step. Satisfaction Darrenteed.

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Darren

Darren LaCroix, 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking

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