



# ORIENTING NEW MEMBERS

## Why Conduct an Orientation?

People who join your club usually have a problem or a need pertaining to public speaking or leadership and are convinced that Toastmasters can help. It's now time to begin delivering the benefits of Toastmasters membership.

Before new members can become integral components of your club's membership, they must confront two types of anxiety: One is the idea of standing before an audience and presenting a speech or leading a meeting. The second anxiety is the normal human concern associated with joining any unfamiliar group and seeking acceptance.

New members need an opportunity to discuss their problems and needs before embarking on a self-development program. They need reassurance that they have made the right decision in joining a Toastmasters club. They need specific information about the Toastmasters program: how it works, how to get the most from it, what is expected of them, etc. Finally, they need to feel welcome and at ease—to sense that the club really cares about them and wants to help them.

An orientation helps new members feel less anxious and more confident so they can solve their problems and meet their self-development needs. New members who understand the club's purpose and structure will identify more readily with the club and its members. They will also develop a sense of pride and belonging. If they feel that the club cares about them, they will instinctively associate themselves with the club's goals and will be less likely to leave.

## Creating a Social Contract

Whether you think of it in these terms or not, the act of someone joining your Toastmasters club implies a social contract.

When accepting a new member, your club is agreeing to provide an enjoyable environment in which the member can learn, grow, and achieve. In return, the new member is expected to behave in agreement with A Toastmaster's Promise and Policy 3.0: Ethics and Conduct.

When both parties live up to this social contract, your club will have a loyal, valuable member who will obtain meaningful benefits from membership. If either party breaks the social contract, the member-club relationship will be neither satisfactory nor long-lasting.

The orientation is an excellent opportunity for both the member and the club to learn what is expected of them. A good orientation can, without mentioning it as such, establish a social contract that is firm, satisfying, and mutually beneficial.

## The Orientation Interview

The recommended format for the new member orientation is a two-way interview led by the vice president education. If you wish, you may include the new member's sponsor or mentor.

Here are some tips for a successful orientation interview:

- ▶ **Create a favorable climate.** Don't conduct an orientation interview during a club meeting. Instead, hold it in a quiet, pleasant place where all participants feel comfortable and at ease. The interview doesn't have to be lengthy—15 or 20 minutes should be adequate.
- ▶ **Develop a personal rapport.** Take a few minutes to get acquainted. You may wish to share some of your own Toastmasters experiences with the new member and discuss how your club membership has benefited you.
- ▶ **Be attentive and show genuine interest.** This is important in convincing the new member that your club cares about them and wants to help.
- ▶ **Be positive and enthusiastic.** Enthusiasm is infectious. If you reflect confidence that Toastmasters can significantly benefit the new member, some of your confidence will rub off. The new member's negative anxieties will be replaced by positive self-confidence.
- ▶ **Be knowledgeable.** Prepare yourself for the questions a new member might ask about Toastmasters or your club.

## Conducting the Orientation Interview

There are four major steps to a successful new member orientation interview. First, you determine why the individual has joined Toastmasters and what that person seeks to gain from membership in your club. Second, you establish a social contract by discovering the member's objectives and relating specific obligations assumed by the member and the club. Third, you explain the Toastmasters program—how it works, how meetings are run, how the club operates, and what each member's role is. Finally, you take specific actions designed to actively involve the new member in the club's programs and ensure that the member begins to benefit immediately.

### STEP ONE: Determine the Member's Needs

After taking a few minutes to get acquainted, focus on the reasons the new member has joined Toastmasters. The New Member Profile (Item 1162F) can be used to help collect this information.

Your first task is to identify what can be called the performance discrepancy. Simply put, this is the difference between how someone would like to appear before a group of people as a speaker or leader and how that individual actually performs. This discrepancy is multifaceted—there are several areas in which improvement is warranted.

Ask these questions:

- ▶ What objectives do you hope to accomplish as a member of this club?
- ▶ Are public speaking or leadership skills a requirement of your job or profession?
- ▶ How would you describe your current skill level as a speaker or leader?
- ▶ Do you have any specific fears relative to public speaking or leadership?
- ▶ Why did you choose to join a Toastmasters club?
- ▶ What can the club do to help you accomplish your goals?
- ▶ Do you wish to improve your ability to . . .
  - Persuade and convince others?
  - Put ideas across clearly and understandably?
  - Improve your self-confidence before a group of people?
  - Think quickly and clearly under pressure?
  - Become skilled in group leadership?
  - Listen effectively and critically?
  - Tactfully evaluate someone else's efforts?
  - Gracefully accept helpful criticism?
  - Other (List on New Member Profile)

### STEP TWO: Establish the Social Contract

This step involves three processes. First, you relate the new member's performance discrepancy to participation in your club's programs and activities. Second, you explain what the club will do to help narrow or eliminate the discrepancy. Third, you discuss what the club expects from each member.

The first process is probably the most difficult part of the orientation interview, because you can't prepare for it. You will essentially be reacting to what the other person has said during the first step. As you listen to the new member, ask yourself, "Is it reasonable to expect the results this person seeks? Can Toastmasters training help this individual become the speaker or leader he or she wants to be?" In most cases, the answer will be affirmative.

Be positive yet realistic. For example, if the new member has recently been promoted to a job that requires delivering a verbal report at the company's weekly staff meeting and wishes to do so in a clear, concise manner, you can feel confident that Toastmasters can help meet this person's needs. On the other hand, if the new member wants to be a well-paid performer on the speaking circuit within one year, it's unlikely this will occur unless the individual is already a highly skilled speaker.

The second process is an explanation of the club's responsibilities in the social contract, although you shouldn't describe it in these terms. Instead, explain that the club will help the new member achieve results by:

- ▶ Providing the member with opportunities to speak and lead.
- ▶ Providing helpful, supportive evaluations.
- ▶ Providing a positive atmosphere that builds self-confidence and helps members overcome fear and nervousness.
- ▶ Providing education programs that are stimulating and enjoyable.
- ▶ Providing each new member with a mentor, who is an experienced Toastmaster assigned to guide the new Toastmaster through the first few assignments.

In the third process, you complete the social contract by explaining what the club expects from each member. Upon joining the club, members are committed to:

- ▶ **Attend meetings regularly and fulfill all assignments.** They must notify the club in advance when they cannot attend a meeting.
- ▶ **Work from the education program and fulfill the objectives of each project assignment.** The Toastmasters education programs comprise a professionally engineered progression of learning experiences.
- ▶ **Achieve education awards.** The Toastmasters recognition system is the means to measure members' self-development success.
- ▶ **Participate in all club programs and activities.** A group can be successful only when each member supports it.
- ▶ **Evaluate others in a positive, constructive manner.** Individual improvement is achieved through the help and encouragement of other members.
- ▶ **Build open, friendly relationships with fellow members.** Spirit, camaraderie, and genuine caring are the catalysts that make meetings both educational and enjoyable.
- ▶ **Help bring new members into the club.** It is each member's responsibility to keep the club strong and dynamic. It is also satisfying to share the benefits of a Toastmasters membership with others.

### **STEP THREE: Explain How Toastmasters Works**

In this step, you provide the new member with the practical aspects of Toastmasters. Cover the following topics, using your own words.

- ▶ **Toastmasters International**—Toastmasters is a worldwide organization devoted to empowering individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders. Toastmasters was founded in 1924 by Dr. Ralph C. Smedley and is headquartered in Rancho Santa Margarita, California. Toastmasters offers its members a learn-by-doing workshop in which they can learn and practice skills that are directly related to success in business and other areas of life.
- ▶ **Your Club**—Briefly explain how your club operates, when and where it meets, its administrative policies, dues structure, etc. Some clubs provide new members with printed handbooks and/or copies of their bylaws; if your club does, now is an appropriate time to do so.
- ▶ **Meeting Assignment**—Describe the various functions performed by members at each meeting: Toastmaster, Topicsmaster, General Evaluator, grammarian, etc. Explain how often members fulfill each of these functions and review the standard agenda for a club meeting.
- ▶ **Club Officers**—Briefly describe the duties of each club officer. Explain that members are encouraged to seek these offices, each of which offers leadership training that relates to vital management skills.
- ▶ **Evaluation**—Explain the Toastmasters evaluation system: who performs evaluations, how long they are, their structure, and the elements of a good evaluation.
- ▶ **Involvement Opportunities**—Describe the many additional opportunities available to members, including speech contest participation, district conferences, the International Convention, Speechcraft, and leadership opportunities above the club level (area director, etc.).
- ▶ **Education Program**—Describe the Toastmasters education program, reviewing the milestones and obtainable awards, and emphasizing that the awards are worthwhile self-development goals. Inform the member they will soon receive a welcome email from Toastmasters International, which contains more information on getting started.

## Traditional Education Program

The traditional education program is an important part of every Toastmaster's journey and is a critical aspect of every club meeting around the world. It is based on a proven curriculum that enables you to develop your communication and leadership skills one step at a time. The program is built on four guiding principles that have been in place since Toastmasters was founded in 1924:

- ▶ **Experiential Learning**—we learn by doing; by giving speeches and fulfilling leadership roles, we practice and improve
- ▶ **Self-paced Program**—we learn best at our own pace and comfort level
- ▶ **Peer Feedback**—through honest and supportive peer evaluation, we grow and improve
- ▶ **Mentoring**—experienced members encourage, guide and support us in our goals and help us to achieve more than we thought possible

## Toastmasters Pathways Learning Experience

The Toastmasters Pathways learning experience is a self-paced program designed to help members meet their goals. The speeches you give in your club will be based on assignments in Pathways; every project assignment concludes with a speech you deliver in front of your club.

By completing projects and giving speeches, you challenge yourself to build and refine skills in different areas—communication, leadership, management, strategic planning, service to others, public speaking and more. You have the opportunity to complete projects that range in topic from persuasive speaking to motivating others to creating a podcast to leading a group in a difficult situation.

Learn more about the education programs at <http://www.toastmasters.org/education>.

## STEP FOUR: Take Action

- ▶ Assign an experienced club member to serve as the new member's mentor. Arrange for the two to get together prior to the new member's Ice Breaker speech.
- ▶ Schedule the Ice Breaker speech, and give the new member a copy of the Ice Breaker project, available at [www.toastmasters.org/icebreaker](http://www.toastmasters.org/icebreaker).
- ▶ Schedule the new member's induction ceremony and notify the club president.
- ▶ Arrange a follow-up interview after the fourth project. The purpose of the follow-up interview is to discuss the member's progress and reaffirm their commitment to continued self-development.

