

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | DECEMBER 2022

# TOASTMASTER®



*Communicate!*

Your inside guide to cultivating connections.

# Soft Skills Solve Hard Problems

## Company skill gaps

are identified by 55%  
of HR employees<sup>1</sup>

1. <https://universitieservices.wiley.com/reimagining-the-workforce-2021>

## Miscommunication

costs companies an average  
of \$420,000 USD per year<sup>2</sup>

2. Top Ten Email Blunders that Cost Companies Money, Debra Hamilton



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## Leadership Lessons From the Tour de France

I have been an amateur cyclist for more than 40 years. One of my favorite times of the year is July, when the famous Tour de France bicycle race occurs.

Despite the accolades given to the team leader, the Tour de France is a team sport. Every winner is supported by a team of fellow cyclists who have worked together to deliver victory. I have learned a lot of leadership lessons as a cyclist, and by watching the Tour de France.

One of those lessons is the role of the team compared to the role of the leader. If you've ever taken a management class, you may have heard that the role of the manager is to remove obstacles from the team members, so they can accomplish the mission. There is a lot of truth in this statement. However, cyclists look at leadership a little differently.

On a cycling team, the role of the team is to protect the leader. The role of the leader is to protect the mission. If you watch the Tour de France, you will notice that the team leaders are rarely in front. Most of the time, they are behind their teammates. The team is breaking the wind, protecting the leader from fellow cyclists, and responding to breakaway attacks on the road—based on the instructions from the team leader.

The team leader's role is to protect the mission for the day, and for the overall race. They are the ones who decide which breakaway attacks need to be followed. They are the ones who adjust the plans based on what is happening during the race.

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On a cycling team, the role of the team is to protect the leader. The role of the leader is to protect the mission.

What would that look like in Toastmasters? It might look like team members staying focused on accomplishing their tasks so the team leader can stay focused on the mission. It might look like team leaders truly empowering teams to accomplish their roles without micromanagement. Perhaps it might look like everyone providing positive support to one another in the same tone and manner as we provide speech evaluations.

What about you and your team? How are you operating? Are you removing obstacles from your team's path? Are you empowering them to accomplish their job without micromanaging them? Are you providing positive and supportive feedback to each other?

I encourage you to explore this concept in your team. If you do, you may find some great opportunities to work together even more effectively than you do today.

**Matt Kinsey, DTM**  
International President

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## News



### Let's Talk Holiday Talk

Toastmasters International recently held a [webinar](#) on the topic of party talk, toasts, and awkward conversations. This time of year, when gathering with friends, family, and colleagues, find out how you can make the most of your conversations and overcome communication obstacles. Also, find helpful tips for casual conversations on page 26 in this issue.

### Say Hello to Your New Home Page

When you log in to the Toastmasters website, your home page will now be personalized to fit your membership needs. It is more streamlined for members—particularly new ones—on where to get the information you need.

The information available on your home page, about topics such as Base Camp, dues, and officer resources, is tailored primarily to whether you're a new member, current (or returning) member, club officer, or District leader.

### Follow the New Toastmasters Instagram Page

Join and connect with your fellow Toastmasters by following our new Instagram account, [@toastmastersofficial](#). The old account, [@toastmastersinternational](#), is no longer active, but we can't wait to share more inspiration, insights, and Toastmasters news with you through the new page.

## Resources

### Create Promotional Materials for Your Club

Many clubs have already had promotional success using [Canva](#) to create event fliers, social media posts, and more. To make it even easier for your club, utilize [these templates](#) created on Canva by World Headquarters. Just remember, all content must be brand compliant. You can also use the Brand Manual to learn best practices. Have fun and submit your designs to [brand@toastmasters.org](mailto:brand@toastmasters.org) for review/approval.

### Help With Hybrid Meetings

A hybrid club meeting combines both in-person and online attendance. Many clubs have opted to adopt this meeting format to allow members to continue their Toastmasters journey. Visit the [Hybrid Meetings webpage](#) for resources and articles to support your hybrid club and members. Resources for online participation can be found on the webpage's Online Meetings tab.

### Invite a Friend to Toastmasters

Are you uncertain of what to get your loved ones this holiday season? Why not give the gift of Toastmasters? Invite a friend, family member, or coworker to your next club meeting so they can see the supportive environment where they would hone their speaking and leadership skills. The [My First Meeting](#) page has all the resources they need to get started on their journey.



## Reminders

### Find and Share Articles

The [Explore page](#) on the *Toastmaster* magazine website is a tool to help you find articles by category, author, or month and year. Select a category on the left-hand side of the page to easily track down the topic you're looking for. Once you find it, don't forget to share the article link with a friend or coworker who could use some tips or inspiration.

### Do You Know About *The Toastmasters Podcast*?

Yes, Toastmasters International has an official podcast! Since 2009, Distinguished Toastmasters and co-hosts Greg Gazin and Ryan Levesque have interviewed more than 200 members and experts from around the world. Published twice a month, you'll hear enlightening interviews covering a wide variety of topics related to communication, public speaking, leadership, and more. Find all episodes at [ToastmastersPodcast.com](#), the [Toastmasters website](#), and embedded within online *Toastmaster* articles, as well as the last 25 episodes on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and other players.

## Personal Growth

# Create a Conversation Resume

Patrick King, author of *Better Small Talk*, recommends creating a conversation resume to lean on when attending events any time of year, but it can be especially handy during holiday parties. It should include talking points about your daily life, personal background, notable experiences, and current events. Remember to review this resume before you head to social events, and you'll be able to keep up with just about anyone. Find additional tips for small talk on page 26 in this issue.

Below are a few questions King recommends asking yourself when creating your conversation resume.

### Daily Life:

- What did you do over the weekend?
- How is your week/day going?
- How is your family/significant other?
- How is work going?

### Personal:

- What are your hobbies?

- What's your biggest passion or interest outside of work?
- Where are you from?
- How long have you lived at your current location and worked at your current job?
- Where did you go to school and what subjects and activities were you involved in?
- What do you do for work?

### Notable:

- What are your five most unique experiences?
- What are your five most personally significant accomplishments?
- What are 10 strengths—things you are above average at, no matter how big or small?
- Name 10 places you have traveled to in the past five years.
- Name the past five times you have gone out to a social event.



- Name 10 things you cannot live without—don't take this too literally. It is about your interests, not household staples.

### Staying Current:

- What are the top five current events of the week and month? Learn the basics and develop an opinion and stance on them.
- What are four funny personal situations from the past week? Be able to summarize them as a brief story.
- What are the four most interesting things you've read or heard about in the past week? Be able to summarize them as a brief story.

## Traveling Toastmaster



**SMITA MISHRA, DTM**, of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, and **MAYURI ASSUDANI, DTM**, of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, travel to Hanoi, Vietnam, together.



**LANDON JOHNSON, DTM**, of Snellville, Georgia, visits Piazza del Popolo in Rome, Italy.

## Snapshot



Aurora Toastmasters Club of Curepipe, Mauritius, hosts an outdoor event at Domaine de Labouronnais, a popular historic destination for the country.



## Presentation Skills

### Tips for Toasting

As a Toastmaster, you're more likely to be called upon to deliver a toast at an event than others. Review these tips to ensure you're prepared to answer the call to ring in the new year or applaud the host of a holiday party.

- **Get their attention.** Tap your glass with a fork or stand up and ask for people to turn their attention to you.
- **Seize the right moment.** Before getting the audience's attention, read the room. If energy levels are high, the time might be right, but always be sensitive to the host if there is one. They may prefer to give you a cue.
- **Give a brief introduction.** Don't assume everyone in the room knows who you are,

especially at a large event. Give your name and share either your job title or how you are related to the host.

- **Keep it short.** Somewhere between two to three minutes seems to be the sweet spot.
- **Mean what you say.** Be sincere in your message and delivery. Your intention is more important than anything else.
- **Toast, don't roast.** If your toast is focused on a particular individual, don't dwell on the negative or make anyone feel uncomfortable. Keep it positive and inclusive.



- **Stick to a single theme.** Decide what your focus will be for the toast, like the host or the event. Then stay on that track, just as you might do with a Table Topic. Don't make it more complicated than it needs to be.
- **Raise your glass.** Toward the end of your toast, lift your glass to encourage others to join you.
- **End with a call to action.** Keep it light and celebratory. Something like, "To the coming year!" or "Cheers to our hosts!"

# A Song of Brotherhood

A devastating childhood experience helped me find my storyteller's voice.

By Ankur Bora

Just over two years ago, I began my dream with a small step. Initially, I started by doing what I thought was necessary. Then I began to see what was possible. Suddenly, I was doing the impossible. If I can do it, you can. Anybody can.

In 2019, I gave a speech at Highway to Excellence (HTE), the Bedford, Texas, club I'd joined a few weeks before. My speech, "Same Boat Brother," was about growing up in India—including the sweet childhood memories of walking to school with my best friend. And how, during a local community uprising, I unintentionally became part of a mob that threatened my friend and his family. And how, eventually, a song of brotherhood brought us back together.

After the speech, I received a brown bag filled with handwritten notes of positive feedback. The compliments and appreciation boosted my morale and eventually sent me on a higher journey.

At HTE, I found Emily Murray, DTM, a special person who agreed to become my mentor. We met weekly for six months, and Emily taught me the craft of public speaking. I learned to animate my body and express emotions, to leverage hand gestures, and stir audience emotions with vocal variety.

Emily told me my speech had a universal message and asked if I would carry it to a larger audience. Her guidance and the beauty of the Toastmasters mentoring program triggered something so fierce in me I could not stop it. Thanks to Toastmasters, I began publishing my speeches and stories to social media sites. I received a tremendous response from fellow Toastmasters. In the fork of my life's journey, I began to see infinite possibilities.

In early 2021, the USA TODAY Network accepted "Same Boat Brother" for its 2022 Storytellers Project. The project produces shows in 20 cities across the United States, and



Ankur Bora on the USA TODAY Network stage.

features a diverse line-up of people sharing true stories that affirm a belief in hope, perseverance, love, and compassion.

The USA TODAY Network coaches recommended some changes to my speech. I had an intense conversation with one, who asked,

but my Toastmasters training, including eye contact, vocal variety, and body language, gave me the edge.

"Your speech was touching ... with a moral that is very much relevant in today's times," one of the audience members wrote me.

The beauty of the Toastmasters mentoring program triggered something so fierce in me I could not stop it.

"In your story, when you joined the mob and started shouting, what happened to you?" I reluctantly replied, "The compassionate comforting, caring me was suddenly overpowered by a beast." Ultimately, her advice helped to unlock my authentic voice and engage with the audience during the program.

In early 2022, a reporter with the *Austin American-Statesman* newspaper in Austin, Texas, wrote a story about me and some of my fellow storytellers. In April 2022, I gave my USA TODAY Storytellers speech to a boisterous sold-out crowd in Austin. I was speaking to a non-Toastmaster audience for the first time

My speech at the Storytellers event was covered by local and national media and was a great moment of pride for me. Along my way in this journey, I discovered the power that had been within me all along.

If I can do it, you can, anybody can. Dear fellow Toastmasters, don't you agree with me?

**Ankur Bora** is a member of three Texas clubs: *Out On The Town*, *Thumbs Up Toastmasters*, and *TNT Toastmasters Club*. He is a software professional and lives with his family in Irving. To read Bora's speech and a Toastmaster's evaluation, visit [www.sameboatbrother.com](http://www.sameboatbrother.com).

# Lessons From the County Fair

Keep your cool and your focus, whether presenting steers or speeches.

By Bill Brown, DTM

When I lived in the big city, county fairs all looked alike. There was the big carnival with the tall Ferris wheel. There were vendors selling cotton candy and strange-sounding food. Fried what? And, to add a touch of authenticity, the fairs had a small pen of piglets, probably trucked in from 300 miles away.

When I recently attended the local county fair in my small, rural town, the carnival was nowhere to be seen. The vendors had food you actually wanted to eat. And there were two pavilions full of animals, all waiting to be judged and, perhaps, sold. The action in these pavilions revealed lessons that can also apply to public speaking.

The animal judging was a big deal. This was all new to my wife and me, so we just had to check it out. Steers were the featured animals on the day we attended. Fortunately, we sat next to some friends who were quite knowledgeable about the entire process.

The category that I observed was for showmanship—how well the kids presented their animals.

As we walked into the arena, I first noticed that each contestant had a long pole with a hook at the end of it. And they were scratching their steer's belly to keep the animal calm. More on that later.

As the competition went on, I noticed that some aspects of the presentations reflected principles also important in public speaking. Perhaps these examples will serve as reminders to us as we approach the lectern.

I noticed that, as the judge walked around, the presenters kept their eyes glued on him. Even when the kids were parading their steers around the arena and were walking away from the judge, they never lost their focus. One of our friends explained that that was one of the judging

criteria. My immediate thought was, *How well do we, as speakers, keep our attention on our audience members?* Perhaps we need to work on our focus.

At one point in the competition, the steers were lined up, side by side. Occasionally, one of the animals would get a little impatient, so the presenter would walk them a few paces then turn them back into line. Once, my friend said of one of the presenters, "He turned his animal incorrectly." Seriously? My tutor explained that the



Perform calmly and professionally, even if there is total chaos around you.

presenter must never get between the steer and the judge. The judge must have a clear view of the animal at all times. This presenter didn't do that.

That, too, is a public speaking reminder. Our audience members must have a clear view of our message at all times. Do we have a nervous habit that distracts their attention? Do we like to go off on rabbit trails, running away from our main point? Are our words so convoluted that our audience members don't know

what we are saying? Always make sure that your audience has a clear view of your message.

One key factor in the judging is how well the presenters keep their cool, even if their steer is not cooperative. At one point in the competition, one of the contestants got frustrated, took that long stick, and whacked the animal on the back. There was an audible gasp from the audience. When they handed out the ribbons, that boy came in dead last.

Things don't always go as planned for us either, do they? Sometimes we forget our lines. Sometimes the technology doesn't work as planned. And sometimes an audience member causes a distraction. One time I was competing in a speech contest and someone in the audience blew her nose so loud that it sounded like a Canada goose. Those things happen.

The question is: How well do we handle it? Do we get frustrated, lose our place, get mad? Or do we continue with our speech as if nothing was wrong? Don't be that boy with the stick. Perform calmly and professionally, even if there is total chaos around you.

One final thought: Some of those kids were only 11 or 12. Yet there they were handling large, sometimes cantankerous animals, and they were performing their task without fear or frustration. If they can do that, then we have no excuse to avoid giving a speech. Stand up there willingly and calmly, and perform like a champion.

Of course, if you do have some nervousness, perhaps you could get the Toastmaster to rub your belly with a long pole. I hear that it works wonders in some circumstances.

**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette, and Evening Stars Club in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at [www.billbrownsspeechcoach.com](http://www.billbrownsspeechcoach.com).

# 6 Tips for Successful Club Meetings

Find out what it takes to be great.

By Greg Lewis, DTM

I am one happy Toastmaster when I attend a well-organized, engaging, and educational club meeting. I've been lucky enough to experience that many times over the years.

Yet I've also experienced some club meetings that are chaotic, inefficient, and flat. These always leave me a little frustrated and dissatisfied. Perhaps you have had similar experiences.

While it's unfortunate that some meetings don't live up to their potential, the good news is they all *can*. As Toastmasters, we can learn from each other and make every meeting a great one. The more we like being there, the more we'll benefit. As Toastmasters International founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley once said, "We learn best in moments of enjoyment."

## Building a Strong Foundation

Toastmasters doesn't have a mandatory meeting format; however, meetings are built around three elements: prepared speeches, Table Topics®, and speech evaluations. In addition, it's recommended that clubs hold a business session at the beginning or end of meetings at least once a month.

Otherwise, clubs have a lot of leeway with what they can do. Many have [unique meeting roles](#) (Jokemaster, Mystery Greeter, Meeting Poet). Some conduct educational sessions or host outside speakers. This flexibility allows each club to create its own unique personality.

Yet great clubs also have a few things in common. Let's define "great" as a club where members want to stay and guests want to join. Members' goals are met, and there is a strong sense of community and support.

Whatever your club's personality or your members' goals, these six elements can help your meetings be great.

### 1 Be well prepared for meeting roles.

Advance planning helps members be prepared and better able to succeed. Some clubs distribute their agenda about three weeks in advance, which gives each participant time to properly prepare for their role. If three weeks

is not realistic for your club, try to at least get the agenda out early and not scramble at the last minute. That way if a member is unsure of what their role requires, they have time to get help from the Vice President Education (VPE) or their mentor if they have one.

### 2 Begin and end meetings on time, and follow an agenda.

Developing the skills to prepare and adhere to an agenda is an important part of every Toastmaster's development. While the Toastmaster of the Day takes the lead in managing the meeting flow, everyone with a role helps. Brenda Toth, of Garden City Toastmasters of St. Catharines, in Ontario, Canada, says when she served as Sergeant at Arms, she always worked closely with the Toastmaster to help keep the meetings running on time. "It's not all up to the Toastmaster," says Toth.

To that end, some members with roles will need to make adjustments during the meeting. For example, if the meeting is running late, the Table Topicsmaster might need to shorten the number of questions. If you're assigned a meeting role, review the agenda to know exactly how much time you have been allocated.

### 3 Welcome guests and make them feel part of the group.

Look at a meeting from the perspective of both guests and members. For [guests](#), a supportive, positive environment is key. Immediately greet visitors when they arrive and introduce them to other members. The more they feel comfortable and included, the more likely they are to return.

At Viva Las Voices Club in Las Vegas, Nevada, every officer assumes responsibility for guests, ensuring they are not alone during a meeting. "Guests are extremely important to our club," explains Club President Christine Wittwer. "We ensure they have a great experience and leave with a visitor information packet. And we contact each guest following their visit to invite them back."



The same principles apply to an online meeting. Invite guests to log on early before things start and get to know other members. The Club President or Toastmaster should also formally acknowledge and welcome each guest at the start of the meeting, and ask for any comments or feedback at the end.

#### 4 Give speakers proper introductions and positive, helpful evaluations.

A [proper introduction](#) sets a speaker up for success by providing background on them and explaining their speech's goals or objectives.

This gives audience members more context for what they're about to hear. An introduction is also a chance to help the speaker by relaying basic information about their topic that would otherwise take up valuable speaking time.

Effective speaker evaluations are a hallmark of every great meeting. As speakers, we improve when we receive positive and practical feedback. Just as a speaker needs to prepare, so do evaluators. Make sure you are familiar with the speaker's speech assignment as well as the speaker's objective. When giving feedback, offer constructive suggestions for improvement and deliver them with encouragement.

#### 5 Recognize member achievements.

Celebrating the progress of members is crucial. When I was a member of Rose City Toastmas-

ters, in Welland, Ontario, Canada, we would always acknowledge member achievements during meetings. The Club President or VPE would make a point of recognizing major speech milestones (Ice Breaker speech, Pathways path completion, speech contest participation, etc.). We also recognized (with their permission) members who experienced major life changes (new job or promotion, having a baby, etc.). A little recognition goes a long way.

#### 6 Regularly update members on club business and progress.

Is the club business meeting the least popular aspect of Toastmasters? Some members think so. Yet when done right, they can actually be fun—yes, fun! Members who take pride in their club want to know how well it is doing. It's a time to celebrate your success. The club officers can each provide updates on their respective areas of responsibility. The VPE or Club President can review the club's status in the Distinguished Club Program. That's a perfect opportunity to highlight member progress.

If there are areas of concern, the Club Executive Committee should review these issues and develop a plan to address them. In addition, it's never too late to review your current meeting format and look for ways to improve the member and guest experience. In fact, try to do this on a regular basis.

### Applying Your Skills

You can also apply the benefits you gain from successful meetings to your life outside the club. When you run a successful meeting, you gain skills that will help you stand out among your peers. You'll develop more confidence, a deeper appreciation for efficient and punctual meetings, and better organizational skills. When you evaluate speakers, you hone your ability to offer helpful feedback to people in all kinds of settings.

A final word on Toastmasters meetings. The most important factor is attitude. You must want to create and run a successful club meeting. One that meets everyone's needs. High-quality clubs are filled with energetic and enthusiastic members, and officers who put best practices to work. Members are prepared for meetings, happily welcome guests, and provide valuable and positive feedback to speakers.

As Kathy Orth, President of Garden City Toastmasters of St. Catharines, in Ontario, Canada, says, "These elements constitute the 'scaffolding' upon which we hold our meetings. They are habits now, and new members seem to take to them easily."

Now, how will you create your own great meetings?

**Greg Lewis, DTM**, is a retired business professional who strives to inspire and encourage his fellow Toastmasters. He and his family live in Fonthill, Ontario, Canada.

# The Benefits of Being Real at Work



Author Susan Cain

A new book by *Quiet* author advocates for emotional authenticity.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

When Susan Cain was a corporate lawyer in New York City, she'd put on her power suit at home—and then don her emotional armor before entering the office. That's because she needed to prepare not only for her job, but also for the “emotional labor” of being a strong, super-positive professional in a challenging work environment.

“I would reach the office door every morning,” she recalls, “and I'd say to myself, *Okay, Susan, time to put on your Superwoman costume!* Immediately I would change my whole way of being, starting with my facial expression. I knew from long experience that any signs of sadness or weakness were not considered appropriate for the workplace.”

As Cain chronicles in her most recent book, *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*, everyone has periods of sadness and weakness, and they're not always so easy to hide. Yet too often, like Cain, we are made to

International's prestigious Golden Gavel Award in 2013 for her communication and leadership achievements.

## Why Show Vulnerability at Work?

The association in many people's minds of happy winners and abject losers can make us think that instead of being happy *because* we win, we have to be happy *in order* to win. Yet Cain enumerates several reasons why encouraging the display of authentic emotions such as loneliness and longing is actually vital for an organization's success. First, it leaves employees the time and energy for more important things than hiding feelings—like doing your job to the best of your ability. Sometimes, as in Cain's own case, putting on a happy face all day can feel like a job in itself.

What's more, letting others know how you feel can prevent conflict. For example, do you experience chronic pain? If colleagues know you're not feeling up to par, they

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We form deep connections from being open about the challenges we face, and these connections can make collaborating on a work project much easier.

feel that our true feelings are not welcome in the office, that we are expected to exude nothing but strength and positivity.

Eventually, the expense of energy to appear invulnerable at work caused Cain to burn out, and she quit. She went on to forge a highly successful career writing and speaking about the power of expressing who we really are—warts and all.

Author of the 2012 bestseller *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Cain is a past member of Toastmasters and was awarded Toastmasters

won't take it personally when you don't smile and make small talk at the office. Plus, says Cain, shared sorrow tends to bring us together. We form deep connections from being open about the challenges we face, and these connections can make collaborating on a work project much easier.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for bosses to promote the display of authentic emotion in the office is simply practical. If everyone were totally satisfied, there would be no overwhelming urge for growth or change. Creativity would be stifled. In fact, Cain contends,

“A good speaker is fully there with you, in touch with the full range of emotional life, however it’s going to express itself.”

—SUSAN CAIN

business outcomes actually *depend* on normalizing vulnerability and “challenging the tyranny of positivity.”

This idea of transforming pain and longing into creativity, transcendence, and love is at the heart of Cain’s thesis.

## How To Share Vulnerability at Work

There are several ways to spread the message that challenging emotions are welcome in the workplace.

**1 Leaders can communicate their own fears and worries—up to a point.** They may not want to overshare concerns and anxieties; employees want to feel they can count on their bosses. But if leaders don’t pretend to be super-human, they give those who work for them permission to accept that they’re not, either, and to not beat themselves up for their own all-too-human flaws and foibles.

**2 Try this simple exercise: Ask employees to write on a slip of paper a challenge they face.** Tell them not to include any identifying information. Then collect the papers and have someone read out the responses. (This works best in a large group to preserve anonymity.) In this way, says Cain, people come to appreciate the shared humanity of everyone on the team, and learn to behave toward one another with compassion—even if they don’t know which problem belongs to whom.

**3 Practice kindness.** Feeling free to express your own negative emotions means that you also have the freedom to show empathy to others. Even small gestures of kindness can have a powerful impact.

“I recently got a letter from a woman going through a really difficult time,” Cain explains.



“She was a bank teller. She told me that someone gave her an extra smile at work and that made all the difference to her.”

**4 Explore the Toastmasters Pathways project “Understanding Emotional Intelligence.”** The project helps cultivate an understanding of how emotions impact our relationships, including those at work. It also helps identify how the emotions of others impact our own, and introduces concepts such as reframing, active listening, self-regulation, and emotional honesty.

## How Toastmasters Helped Susan Cain

At the start of her literary career, joining Toastmasters provided Cain with a major confidence boost. She says being a member was particularly meaningful because the experience enabled her—a self-described introvert who had just written about the subject in *Quiet*—to speak comfortably on stages around the world.

“I came to Toastmasters with a lifelong, crippling fear of public speaking,” she says, “and for years I avoided confronting that fear. But when my first book came out, I knew I had to do speaking engagements. So I started showing up for [Toastmasters] meetings. In time, the change in my skills and attitude felt transcendent. Absolutely unbelievable.”

Cain sees a strong connection between public speaking and her current work.

“What makes a good talk?” she asks. “It’s not revealing your deepest personal secrets. It’s

being totally present. A good speaker is fully there with you, in touch with the full range of emotional life, however it’s going to express itself.

“This is about more than emotional intelligence,” she adds. “I’m talking about emotional willingness, the will to express your own feelings and those of others.” Maybe the atmosphere that surrounds such disclosures is not always so pleasant, she concedes. “But it can be exquisitely sweet to recognize that we are all human beings, that we can be acutely aware of the distress of others, as well as our own.”

Have you found yourself wearing a superhero costume at the office? Are you ready to challenge the tyranny of positivity at work? Depending on your role in the company and the nature of your industry, you might want to make incremental changes. But the rewards, Cain says, can be huge.

“A friend of mine is a CEO,” she says. “When I was researching this book, he told me he only wanted to hire happy people, that unhappy people can make organizational life difficult. I recently connected with him again, after he put into practice the principles in *Bittersweet*. And he said, ‘The truth is, now we all know each other so well. We love it.’”

**Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D.,** has written for this magazine for 20 years and has presented at three Toastmasters International conventions, including presenting a session on storytelling at the August 2022 convention. Learn more at [carenneile.com](http://carenneile.com).



# Know a Narcissist?

Learning how to self-advocate and set boundaries is critical for your well-being.

By **Kristen Hamling, Ph.D.**

**T**rying to communicate with someone who blames, manipulates, gaslights, dominates, or belittles you for their own gain can leave you feeling confused, unheard, and invalidated. Unfortunately, people with complex personalities are everywhere—at home, work, and even Toastmasters clubs. Maybe you have a coworker who constantly demeans you or your ideas, or a partner who insists that you are just imagining things when there are problems. According to the British Journal of Psychiatry, the rate of people currently living with a personality disorder is estimated at 7.8% worldwide.

# SYMPTOMS

## of Narcissistic Personality Disorder



Considers themselves intelligent, confident, and self-assured



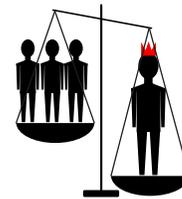
Believes they are unique and special



Is unable to empathize



Has a grandiose sense of self



Always thinks they're right



Manipulates, blames, and gaslights



Has an excessive need for praise and admiration



Displays a sense of entitlement



Uses criticism and bullying to achieve their goals

I've been a psychologist for over 20 years, and I have a Ph.D. in the field of psychology, and yet it took me two years of therapy to understand that I was in an unhealthy relationship. Constantly trying to rescue a relationship by apologizing and surrendering your needs to take care of the other person can leave you exhausted—especially if the person has a complex personality such as narcissism. The trauma bond, or the narcissistic abuse cycle that accompanies narcissism, often results in post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, and depression.

Sometimes you will have to walk away from the narcissistic relationship because the short-term pain of ending the relationship will result in long-term gain for your health and well-being.

Narcissism is a significant social problem, and combatting it begins with education. Learning why people develop narcissism and how to communicate with the narcissist is the first step. Given that positive social relationships are foundational to well-being, learning how to communicate with complex personalities will not only protect your well-being, but theirs as well.

### What Is Narcissism?

When someone displays extreme narcissistic characteristics, such as the case with a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), then problems can start to arise. People diagnosed with NPD consider themselves as self-assured, intelligent, confident individuals, with a strong sense of right and wrong. However, in reality, someone living with NPD is often a deeply insecure person who has a profound lack of confidence and self-esteem. This is often a result of childhood trauma, genetics, and an insecure attachment style.

For example, someone born with an anxious temperament who has self-absorbed and emotionally unavailable parents grows up fiercely independent, believing that they have to take care of themselves and prove to the world that they are worthwhile and special. NPD is a serious mental health condition with complex symptoms such as an inability to empathize, diminished self-reflection and insight, and an excessive need for praise and admiration. Although there are different types of narcissism (e.g., covert/vulnerable or grandiose) the root cause of the problem is often the same.

Narcissism does not allow people to fully understand or regulate their emotions. You might know some people who must control their environment or avoid feelings such as shame or rejection.

Here are some examples of workplace scenarios you might encounter when dealing with a narcissist.

#### The vulnerable/covert narcissist might cope by becoming a victim:

Sally: "You haven't been getting your reports in on time as we discussed; please get the report in on time this week."

Bruce: "I can't seem to do anything right. I try so hard, and I still get criticized. I'm such a bad employee."

#### The grandiose narcissist might cope by blaming the other person:

Celia: "Well if you didn't give me so much work and you stopped micromanaging me, I might get the reports in on time."

#### Worst of all is the narcissist who gaslights you:

Helen: "Remember you said that the report wasn't due until Monday. You're so stressed out lately, you've probably got me confused with George's team."



Boundaries are your best friend if you want to stay connected to your truth when in a relationship with a narcissist.

Narcissists are less interested in team harmony and success, and more interested in using others to pursue their own agenda. Many narcissists will take responsibility for others' accomplishments. They set perfectionistic standards and are often workaholics. They may even use bullying tactics to achieve their goals. For example, withholding information to sabotage coworkers' performance, persistently criticizing, and spreading gossip. The covert and vulnerable narcissist is more likely to act vindictively—make sure you keep records of conversations and limit information provided to them.

Narcissism can lead to serious mental health issues such as burnout, compassion fatigue, depression, and anxiety. A narcissistic boss can erode your self-esteem, make you feel incompetent, and cause you to lose trust in yourself and others. If you are not careful, narcissism can also damage your career.

Narcissists aren't just confined to the workplace—often, the people we love the most display tendencies. In the following example, Barry, who is a very attentive husband, is faced with his wife's narcissistic rage when he tries to change plans.

Barry: *"I know we planned dinner tonight, but I have an old friend in town, and I'd love to go out to dinner with her—can we reschedule for tomorrow night?"*

Fiona: *"You always do this; you never make me a priority in your life. You are so selfish and inconsiderate. You knew I've been looking forward to tonight. Why are you choosing to go out with another woman on our date night?"*

Barry: *"But I hardly ever cancel plans. Of course I love you ..."*

In this instance, even though Barry would love to see his friend from out of town he decides to go out with his wife to placate her. However, over time, this will cause him to lose sight of himself. The narcissistic loop of manipulation, blame, gaslighting, etc., can derail constructive conversations and be mentally exhausting.

## There Is Nothing Wrong With You

Truthfully, having a relationship with a narcissist can make you feel like there is something seriously wrong with you. But you're not the monster they make you out to be. Elinor Greenberg, therapist and author of the book *Borderline, Narcissistic, and Schizoid Adaptations: The Pursuit of Love, Admiration and Safety*, explains that when narcissists feel good about you (or more accurately that you are making them feel good about themselves), they see you as special. Then you do something "wrong" (e.g., say "no" to one of their requests), and suddenly you're bad and worthless.

Therefore, people with NPD only see people (including themselves) in one of two ways: Either they are special, unique, perfect, and entitled (High Status); or they are defective, worthless, garbage (Low Status). Boundaries are your best friend if you want to stay connected to your truth when in a relationship with a narcissist.

## Boundaries, Boundaries, Boundaries

Maintaining boundaries can be particularly challenging when communicating with a narcissist. Narcissists are masterful at blurring boundaries. Paul Mason and Randi Kreger, authors of the top-selling book *Stop Walking on Eggshells*, developed what they call the broken record technique to help people maintain boundaries when communicating with difficult personalities.

The broken record technique helps you avoid the white noise (gaslighting) produced by the narcissist by staying focused on the issue at hand. Going back to Barry and Fiona, you can see how Barry could have used the broken record technique to enforce his boundaries.

Fiona: *"You always do this; you never make me a priority in your life. You're so selfish. You knew I've been looking forward to tonight. Why are you choosing to go out with another woman on our date night?"*

Barry: *"I know you're disappointed and I'm hearing that you want to spend time together. We will have our date night tomorrow night, but right now it's important to me that I see my friend."*

Fiona: "But you're choosing to go out with another woman on our date night. Are you having an affair with her?"

Barry: "It's concerning that you think that, and we can absolutely discuss these issues later if you want. But as I said, right now it's important that I see my friend."

Fiona: "You're not listening, I don't want you to go out with her."

Barry: "I know you're disappointed, but as I said, it's really important to me that I see my friend and we'll have our date night tomorrow night."

No matter what Fiona throws at Barry, he's going to repeat the same thing, just like a broken record. Barry doesn't get caught up in the white noise and he remembers "just because they say it doesn't mean it's true." Fiona is triggered and stressed, and she is struggling to manage her own emotions. By staying calm, respectful, and assertive, Barry has a greater chance of getting his needs met.

## Safety and Self-Care

When your boundaries stop the narcissist from getting their needs met, it can result in a high level of stress and hurt for them. Self-care is critical when dealing with the narcissist because as the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. If the narcissist is someone in your family or close circle, be sure to spend time with other people, go to yoga, go to therapy, eat well,

The broken record technique helps you avoid the white noise (gaslighting) produced by the narcissist by staying focused on the issue at hand.

and remember, you are not responsible for their emotions. Sometimes you will have to walk away from the narcissistic relationship because the short-term pain of ending the relationship will result in long-term gain for your health and well-being.

Julie Hall, author of *The Narcissist in Your Life*, argues that the narcissistic mentality of superiority and entitlement results in scapegoating people who are different. Scapegoating increases conflict and tribal

## How to Cope with a Covert Narcissist

1 Don't Take It Personally



2 Set Boundaries

3 Advocate for Yourself



4 Create a Healthy Distance

thinking and reduces diversity, collaboration, and cooperation. Narcissism underpins significant social problems, such as sexism, racism, and queerphobia, and, unsurprisingly, wreaks havoc with workplace morale and team performance.

It pays to be strategic when communicating with a narcissistic colleague or manager at your workplace. Remain objective, don't approach the narcissist with high emotions, and choose your battles. For example, know when to play the game and know when to stand up to the narcissist. You may benefit from aligning yourself with people you trust and who will support you if the narcissist tries to undermine you or steal your ideas.

Recognizing narcissism in the workplace will not only protect your mental health, but it can help to protect your career as well.

No matter how much hurt we cause each other, we should default back to compassion, but with boundaries. Narcissism is actually a front for deeply vulnerable and insecure people. Boundaries and self-care are paramount when dealing with narcissism, but anger and retaliatory behaviors serve no one well in the long run. It is possible to have a healthy relationship with people who have complex personalities and maintain compassion for their pain, but awareness and boundaries are advised.

**Kristen Hamling, Ph.D.**, is a trauma and positive psychologist and a Toastmaster in Whanganui, New Zealand. She is the founder of Wellbeing Aotearoa, which focuses on trauma-informed well-being practices. A facilitator, coach, and researcher, she has also served in the Australian Army Reserve. Learn more at [www.wellbeingaotearoa.com](http://www.wellbeingaotearoa.com).



# Next-Step Networking

How to develop meaningful and useful connections with new contacts.

By Victor David

Whether you love or hate networking, you can turn it into an opportunity that benefits you and others, even when it initially feels uncomfortable. If you want to take the next step in networking with new contacts, how do you start the conversation? How can you demonstrate sincerity without sounding salesy or as if you're only asking for a favor? Here are some ideas.

## Do your research.

LinkedIn and Google provide a wealth of information about people you have just met. These two resources usually show the career endeavors of your contacts, their interests, volunteer work, affiliations with professional organizations, and who you know in common.

If your contact is sharing a lot of these details online, they are serious about networking. These details provide a springboard for broader talking points, help you discover mutual interests, and determine if someone is a good fit for networking.

## Find your flow in the follow-up.

After meeting a new contact, get to know them better through an informal catch-up, such as coffee or lunch. If you've met online, continue the chat or jump on a short phone call. Be respectful, even if your interests and career paths differ. You don't need to have the same goals or similar careers to be in each other's network, but you do need a basis for trust. This trust will help them feel confident to refer you to their network when the opportunity arises.

If someone you follow up with doesn't welcome your invitation (or simply doesn't have the time), don't be disappointed. Even if it's a "no" for now, nothing is stopping you from rekindling the relationship in the future.

## Lead with a passion, not a pitch.

People are happy to help if they can, and they will do so if compelled by your story. You don't necessarily need to be

on a Nobel Prize-winning quest to get people on board, but a keen passion goes a long way.

People are eager to refer you if they believe your passion is genuine and can help everyone flourish. Most people like to meet other professionals with diverse backgrounds and learn about innovative ideas and insights, so think more about the story you tell them rather than the title on your business card.

## What if you're approached?

People will reach out to add you to their network as well, and the more senior roles you grow into, the more often this will likely happen. Generally, it's a good idea to accept the invite and see where this opportunity may take you. If you're not sure whether you should invest time in getting to know someone better, or it starts to look like a sales pitch you're not interested in, simply ask if there is anything you can help them with. It's not a rude question. It's also acceptable to say you can't help them now, which leaves the door open to rekindle the relationship later.

## Consider the favor on the table.

Once you build rapport, trust, and respect, you may want to come forward with a favor, a request for an introduction, or even a potential business deal. Frame your request with your relationship in mind and avoid sounding too transactional. It feels much more approachable if you say:

*"I would like to find people who might be interested in X. Is that something you could help me with?"*

Instead of:

*"I need to find people interested in buying X. Could you introduce me?"*

In the first request, the contact would be keener to act because they feel they could help you, instead of helping you tick a box. If they genuinely can't help you, the first phrasing means they have more room to explain the reason. In this way, the new relationship between the two of you is not on the line. You always want to keep the relationship positive; you never know what the future will bring.

## Get to your goal.

If someone is keen to refer you or even buy from you, they will likely start the process behind the scenes, and this new contact will be working on closing the sale already. Success!

However, if you haven't heard back, it is okay to follow up in a few days. Be enthusiastic but not pushy. If you don't hear back within a week, it's still okay to check back in and ask if they're still interested in connecting with you.

If the silence continues, or the other person doesn't want to proceed, just accept it. Don't let it stand in the way of your positive relationship. Check in with them in a few months, as things may have changed.

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**Victor David** is Immediate Past President of City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, where he works for the government as a senior communication advisor. He is the founder of [The Networking Experience](http://TheNetworkingExperience.com), a networking skills training platform. Contact him at [victor@thenetworkingexperience.com](mailto:victor@thenetworkingexperience.com).

## Try These Networking Tips

Members of City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, share some steps that work for them.

### Mike Kano-McCallum, DTM:

Make it known you are a (potentially) great addition to their network. Do this by posting on LinkedIn or other social media regularly. Many people don't comment, but they view what you post about. It's much easier to open a conversation with someone who has heard about or from you before.

### Rachel Beaney:

Build on long-term professional relationships; they bear more fruit over time. When you get to know people and build trust, they are more keen to learn about other things you offer, aside from what they already know about you. People are always interested to hear about a better way to do things or ways to expand their businesses if it comes from someone they know and trust. It's a win-win approach that helps grow their business and yours.

### Stephanie Giannis, DTM:

At Toastmasters, you learn to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and opinions. Use that skill to network and get along with people who are quite different from you. They can introduce you to people whom you otherwise might not meet, and you may learn a thing or two about diversity as well.





# The Age of Opportunity

How different generations of Toastmasters can learn from one another.

By Greg Lewis, DTM

In any given Toastmasters club around the world today there can be as many as five distinct generations of members. This means there is a tremendous opportunity for growth and understanding. We learn from our fellow members; we teach, inspire, and encourage each other. Having a wide range of ages in a club brings fresh opportunities to work and learn from each other in a safe environment.

“In our club we have a lot of generational diversity, which is amazing. I am inspired by the passion my fellow club members, both older and younger than myself, have for Toastmasters,” says Eugene Law, 25, a member of Brock Toastmasters in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

When clubs intentionally seek out members with a wide range of ages—and work to maintain that variety—they gain a depth of experience, along with a solid base of members. Members of different generations offer



# Generation Breakdown



diverse perspectives and skills, largely based on their life experiences, the times in which they've lived, and the culture that has surrounded them.

The chart above shows the generally accepted names and age ranges of five generations, the youngest being born in 2010.

## Avoid the Stereotypes

If you're a 55-year-old and walk into a Toastmasters club that has members in their 20s, it's understandable that you might feel out of place. However, it's important not to fall prey to stereotypes and assume you won't have anything in common with people in different generations. In fact, you'll likely learn more about some things than you would if you stuck with your own age group.

Certainly, the rise of the internet and mobile phones have had a dramatic impact on the way we communicate. While the rate of adaptation varies around the world, one thing that holds true everywhere is a difference in comfort levels with technology among the generations. Many millennials and Gen Zers have grown up with the internet as an essential part of their lives, and this has shaped and influenced their expectations

Each new generation brings different experiences and perspectives.

in a variety of ways. They may have less experience with face-to-face communication and many may have shorter attention spans.

Different generations might have different expectations and ways of communicating, but no method is inherently better than another. Just because another club member does something differently than you might, doesn't mean they are doing it wrong. For instance, the social media of Gen Z offers new opportunities, but a traditional newsletter has a place as well.

Younger generations also tend to be less formal and more direct. As millennial Andrew Tsuro, DTM, a District 74 leader and CEO of The eHub, an organization that provides professional coaching and training to South African entrepreneurs, observes, "I also recognize that we question a lot of the formalities, like the need to use a gavel at a meeting. Why is that still necessary?" Observations like this present a great opportunity for clubs to ensure the club's practices are meeting and reflecting the needs of their members.

But again, it's important not to make assumptions. Just



because a new member is in their early 20s doesn't necessarily mean they "live" on social media. Or that a 55-year-old has no idea how to use TikTok.

## Find the Common Ground

Regardless of age, people join Toastmasters with a common goal: to improve their communication and leadership skills in order to gain more opportunities. And no matter what a person's ability or confidence level, Toastmasters provides the opportunity for every member to realize their full potential. Technology may have made a drastic change to the way we communicate, but it hasn't changed the mission of a club. This common ground provides a bridge between the generations in a Toastmasters club.

"I am in Toastmasters to prepare myself for every personal and professional assignment I will have to take on in the outside world," says





Tsuro, echoing a common goal of members for the past 98 years.

Think of each Toastmasters club as its own team. Everyone on that team brings different skills, experiences, and expectations. There are veterans, rookies, and everyone in between. This spectrum of skills and experience adds greatly to the fabric of the “team.”

Like any team, the aim is to achieve your goals (and have some fun along the way). In Toastmasters, the team wins when members reach their objectives. As each member grows and succeeds, the entire team (club)

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**We are all individuals and must strive to first understand our fellow club members and not pre-judge them.**

also succeeds.

The question is, how can you get all generations to work together, so everyone on the team wins?

It helps to understand the strengths, background, and expectations of each member, and each generation.

Phil Gwoke is a writer, market researcher, and managing director of Bridgeworks, a company that helps people realize the value each generation brings to the workforce. In his 2021 Toastmasters International Convention presentation “When Generations Connect,” Gwoke points out that it is experiences that shape each generation, not simply age. This

goes a long way to explaining the “why” of a member’s actions.

“Different experiences result in different styles of communication,” says Gwoke. “The more we understand about where people are coming from and what shaped them, the more effective we can be in delivering our message to them.”

This understanding and appreciating of experiences opens tremendous opportunities for growth and development.

### Create a Supportive Environment

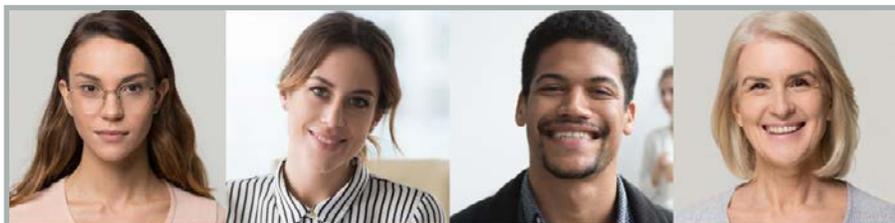
When looking to attract younger generations to your club, stress the mutually supportive atmosphere. Members are free to make mistakes, thereby learning and growing, without fear of how that may look to their boss or superiors. Clubs also offer a unique opportunity for members of all generations to work together and learn from each other.

Millennial Amanda Mae Gray, the host of the *Yes You Mae* podcast and a member of Toast of Cobb Toastmasters and Speakers Roundtable Advanced Club, both in Georgia, says, “At Toastmasters you have a whole bunch of support from people of all ages and walks of life.”

She was also pleasantly surprised to find the opportunities with Toastmasters to improve her leadership skills. “It’s like an on-the-job training that you are very supported in.”

Generational diversity also expands the opportunities for mentoring, a vital part of every Toastmaster’s journey. Traditionally, mentorships are seen as an older person guiding a younger person, imparting their knowledge and experience.

However, Toastmasters offers an opportunity for what is known as



reverse mentoring. In this situation, a member from a younger generation acts as a mentor to an older member. While the ages may be reversed, the goal is still the same—to help the mentee become more comfortable and confident in a new situation.

Having an open mind in reverse mentoring is vital for both the mentor and the mentee. The benefits, however, are undeniable.

Patrice Gordon, an executive coach and personal development advocate, talks about this in her video for TED’s “The Way We Work” series. “You [the mentee] have to be genuinely curious about learning from that individual [the mentor] and have to be intentional about the relationship in order to make it work.”

Of course, reverse mentoring works outside the club setting as well, in the workplace and in everyday life. A baby boomer learns how to set up a podcast, or a Gen Xer masters Instagram.

Law shares an example of reverse mentorship he saw in his club.

“We had an older guest attend a meeting. A younger member was eager to mentor and provide guidance to this guest on all things Toastmasters. The older member later delivered a memorable Ice Breaker, and expressed his appreciation toward the younger member for taking time outside the

regular meeting time to work with him on preparing his speech.

“I believe that the mentorship from the younger member helped the older member become more confident in delivering his speech and feeling supported and encouraged in the new Toastmasters club environment.”

Each generation brings different experiences and perspectives. By remaining flexible and open to people of all ages, clubs thrive.

As your club grows, so will its members. As Gray, the podcast host, says “I help people get what they need and in return get the help I need. We each bring skills and knowledge to the club, which provide amazing benefits.”

So rather than fear generational diversity, embrace it. Whether you are in your 20s, 40s, or 80s, there are learning opportunities for everyone. When we view our fellow members with openness and a keen desire to learn and teach, we all win!

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**Greg Lewis, DTM**, is a retired business professional who strives to inspire and encourage his fellow Toastmasters. He and his family live in Fonthill, Ontario, Canada.

## How to Make Your Club More Inviting

**1 Be flexible.** Toastmasters provides a simple framework for professional development, with defined roles, published agendas, and the Pathways learning experience. While traditions offer stability, it’s important to avoid a rigid adherence to ceremony, which can make newcomers feel excluded. Toastmasters is a place for growth, not a secret society. Be willing to invent new traditions and try new technologies.

**2 Focus on commonality.** Toastmasters is an affinity group, where people come together out of a shared interest in public speaking and leadership. Avoid labels like “Gen Z” or “millennials.” Also avoid jokes about generational differences. No one wants to be stereotyped.

**3 Be judicious in your feedback.** Young members benefit from hearing mature perspectives. But experienced members shouldn’t point out every last defect in a newcomer’s speech. When it comes time to evaluate, give two or three concrete areas for improvement. Avoid sweeping statements and instead use conditional phrases like “I typically…” or “In similar situations…” or “It may be useful to…” Such phrases allow for the fact that there’s more than one way of doing things.

**4 Highlight Toastmasters’ mutually supportive environment.** Psychological safety is the foundation on which all learning takes place. Let prospective members know about your club’s positive environment in your marketing materials. Welcome and reassure them when they walk in the door. Remember what it was like to attend your first meeting. In Toastmasters we share each other’s triumphs and challenges.

**5 Meet them where they are.** If your club has older members, consider doing promotion at local universities. (You may need approval from the student activities office prior to posting fliers.) Also explore social media, event-planning sites (such as Meetup), podcasts, and short videos as tools for reaching young people.

Finally, remember that in Toastmasters the benefits we receive are comparable to those we bestow. Millennial Andrew Tsuru, DTM, says, “The biggest thing that Toastmasters gave me has been to understand how service is fulfilling—just serving and seeing transformation in other people.”

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**Jesse Scinto, DTM**, is a Fulbright scholar and deputy director of the strategic communication program at Columbia University in New York City.

# Speaking Up to Change Lives

A member's journey from poverty to finding her voice.

By Ruth Nasrullah

Gaining the courage to speak in public can be life-changing for Toastmasters. For Jillian Haslam, DTM, it was not just life-changing; in many ways it was life-saving. Speaking up helped her leave a life of wretched poverty in a land where she barely belonged and barely survived. Eventually it became her path to help the lives of those in India who suffer now as she did as a child.

Haslam was born and primarily raised in Calcutta, the daughter of British parents who were born in India when it was part of the British Empire and chose to stay after the country gained its independence in August 1947. The family lived in poverty against the backdrop of unrest and violence after the partition of India and Pakistan.

Her family was loving but lacked stability, and much of her childhood was spent homeless, with family members often separated from one another when they couldn't find or afford sufficient space for parents and children to

another sister was on the verge of dying, Haslam pushed through and found her voice.

"I ran to a tea shop with a little bowl and begged them to please just give me some milk to save my sister's life," recounts Haslam, a Toastmaster since 2010. "That was the very first time I understood that if I use my voice, if I could try to find the will to speak up, I would get some help .... [The tea shop owner] gave me the milk and every day I would go back with my bowl and beg him for that milk."

## Overcoming the Terror

Eventually, she was able to move out of that life of incessant poverty. After finishing high school, Haslam moved to Delhi, to live with her sister and enroll in a secretarial course. She saw a help wanted ad for assistant to the CEO of Bank of America and applied for it. She never imagined she would get the job, but out of over 200 applicants, she

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The more presentations she did, the more she realized that to have the most impact, she would have to transition to the big stage.

all live together. Even when they were together, tragedy was never far. The family lost four out of the 10 children born to her parents to illness or malnutrition. It began to seem almost commonplace to Haslam.

"It seemed that death took one of us and left one of us, then took another one of us and left one of us," she says.

The stress of chronic poverty was compounded by abuse she endured at the hands of a woman who took Haslam and her sister in for a time; to discipline Haslam, she locked her in a small outhouse swarming with large cockroaches. Terror became part of ordinary life. In her autobiography, *A Voice Out of Poverty*, Haslam describes how her family fled in the middle of the night after being warned that gang members were planning to kidnap her older sister.

Her childhood took its toll. After years of suffering and deprivation, as a teenager she developed episodes where she was unable to speak and would at times suffer bouts of dizziness and fall to the ground. She was never evaluated for the spells, but they kept her from leading a functional life, and from caring for her siblings. But as yet

was chosen. However, the more Haslam succeeded, the more her mind returned to thoughts of poverty-stricken children and families in India. As she writes in her book:

*The more poverty and devastation I saw in the streets, the more my personal world recalibrated each day, and how I saw myself changed as well. Day by day, what was becoming most important to me, what began to define me and my moral code, was steadily transforming.*

"Every single weekend I used to go out to the homes of the dying and the destitute, to the lepers, to the poor, to anyone I could find," she says. "I would just want to be with the poor."

Initially, she did the work of providing food, clothing, toys, and other supplies, along with general comfort and companionship, on her own. After seeing her dedication, her boss at Bank of America promoted her and made her president of the bank's Charity and Diversity Network. In this position, she was able to assemble a team to accompany her on visits to those in need.



Jillian Haslam, DTM

When her boss transferred to an office in the United States, she chose to move to the United Kingdom, essentially reversing the decision her father had made years before to remain in India. While working as a personal assistant at a Dutch bank in England, she began taking steps toward her long-term goal of starting a business that would enable people to lead more successful lives. She took online classes offered through her employer and enrolled in professional training courses, earning a certification in coaching and mentoring, and becoming a professional corporate trainer. The more presentations she did, the more she realized that to have the most impact, she would have to transition to the big stage—which meant vanquishing her fear of public speaking for good.

A woman she worked with told her about Toastmasters, and she was intrigued, particularly by the organization's tagline, "Where Leaders Are Made." Leadership being her bailiwick, she attended her first meeting soon after.

"I could not have got rid of this fear [of speaking]," she says. "That wouldn't be possible without Toastmasters."

## Taking Action

Haslam founded a charitable organization, [Remedia Trust](#). Under its auspices, she now runs multiple charities: Ageing Smiles (for the elderly poor), Happy Hearts (for children), Empowering Girls (for teaching work skills), India's Disabled (for building a mobile medical unit), E3 Growth (focused on education, empowerment, and employability), and the Mother Teresa Project (for women and single mothers). She is especially proud of the services provided to girls and young women from impoverished backgrounds.

"[Remedia] takes the little ones and educates them, and then we have skill-training schools," Haslam explains. "We have all of these different centers where we train them and give them a skill and get them out to work."

Talking about this charitable work, she recalls a larger-than-life role model she met as a child in Calcutta. Every Friday, the Sisters of Charity came to the slums where her family lived to give out bags with clothes, powdered milk, and cookies.

"One day I met Mother Teresa there," she says. "She used to come and check up on all her [charity] branches. I felt so great and so inspired with what she was doing for the poor that I just wanted to do that."

Haslam is a member of The Write Toastmasters Club in Moate, Ireland, and Hertfordshire Speakers Club, based in Hatfield, England. Hertfordshire's Vice President Membership, Elizabeth Jordan, DTM, has known Haslam for 10 years and has always been an admirer of hers.

"Jillian is humble and modest," Jordan says. "Despite a poverty-driven life, she didn't grow up with anger or hatred. Jillian can not only recite the Toastmasters values—integrity, respect, service, and excellence—she *lives* the values."

She brings those values to bear on both her professional life and her philanthropy. She has never forgotten the days when she begged for milk to save her sister. She has never forgotten her parents' faces each time they lost a child. Most of all, she will never forget the lesson she learned when she finally stopped falling to the ground, stood up straight, and made her voice heard. She makes sure the girls in her Remedia Trust programs learn it too.

"Everything starts with public speaking. That's what I teach them—to find their voices," Haslam says. "They come in with their heads down; they won't even look up at you. Now they're going and opening other branches [of Remedia Trust] and delivering speeches. For me that is just a dream come true."

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**Ruth Nasrullah** is a freelance journalist and Vice President Public Relations of the Pearland Toastmasters Club in Pearland, Texas. She is president of the Houston chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and recently was honored with the Howard S. Dubin Outstanding Pro Member award from the society's national organization. She is also a co-founder of the [COVID-19 Wall of Memories](#). Read more about her at [www.ruthnasrullah.com](http://www.ruthnasrullah.com).

# 7 Tips to Brush Up Your Small Talk

How to have casual conversations during your work parties and holiday gatherings.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

With holiday work parties, family gatherings, and social events on the calendar, it might be time to brush up on your small-talk skills. Small talk, although often about unimportant things, serves the important purpose of being a social lubricant, helping you and others interact. Small talk allows you to assess mood, interests, and potential for business or personal relationships. Small talk can lead to more substantial conversations, and these seven tips can help you get there.

## 1 Ask open-ended, specific questions.

Encourage others to talk by asking open-ended questions that can't be answered with just a "yes" or "no." You can use the phrase "Tell me about ..." to elicit longer responses or to avoid asking questions that might be uncomfortable to answer. Try "Tell me about your family," instead of "Are you married?" Specific questions (e.g., "What were your favorite holiday traditions as a child?") are better than general questions (e.g., "How are you?") because they provide context for the other person to frame an answer around. Good small-talk topics include:

- Questions about the location or event: "What brought you to this event/location?"
- Leisure activities (hobbies, sports, travel, movies, or weekend plans): "What are you looking forward to this weekend?"
- Professional interests: "What do you enjoy the most about your profession?"

## 2 Try the CAAA approach to break the ice.

CAAA is an acronym for a four-step process to help you initiate conversation and not simply ask question after question like you are conducting an interrogation.

- **Comment** positively on something you observe or have in common (like the event) or observe and compliment

a person's unique attire. Consider wearing a "conversation piece" item yourself (such as a Toastmasters pin) to have a handy topic to discuss.

- **Ask** an easy-to-answer, open-ended question related to your comment.
- **Affirm** their answer after listening to their response, ideally paraphrasing what they said.
- **Add** to the conversation by extending the topic with your own experience or by pivoting to another related topic. (You can also ask a follow-up question.)

Here is a CAAA example:

**Situation:** Two people who don't know each other are standing in line for desserts at a holiday work party.

**Person 1** (Comment and ask): "Wow! All the desserts look delicious! What looks especially good to you?"

**Person 2:** "I've got my eye on the crème brûlée."

**Person 1** (Affirm and add): "Ahh ... Crème brûlée. That's my favorite. My mom made it for special occasions and it brings back many memories. I bet you have some foods that bring back memories."

As you converse, you will want to focus on finding common ground topics you can take to a deeper level.

## 3 Pay attention to body language and actively listen.

People communicate using much more than just the words they speak. You can encourage people to talk with your body language. Try using NOSE-y body language.

- **Nod**—Nod to engage with what they are saying.
- **Open Body Language**—Keep your arms uncrossed and your hands visible.
- **Smile**—Smile when you first initiate conversation and keep a pleasant expression.

Encourage others to talk by asking open-ended questions that can't be answered with just a "yes" or "no."

- **Eye Contact**—Make eye contact as culturally appropriate.

You can also encourage the other person to continue speaking by using small verbal comments like, "uh huh." At the same time, you want to actively listen and notice the other person's body language and tone of voice. You can't do that if you are distracted by non-related thoughts or your phone. Focus on the other person. And then respond by occasionally reflecting back ("So, what you're saying is ...") and asking clarifying questions.

**4 Consider cultural differences.** "Small talk differs across cultures, not only in how it's done but also in terms of its role and importance in business communication," says Andy Molinsky, the author of *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures without Losing Yourself in the Process*. "In many cultures—especially those with more formal rules for communication and with a strong emphasis on social hierarchy—it's considered inappropriate to engage in casual conversation with superiors. In addition, it can also feel impolite and even dangerous to openly express your opinion during small talk, especially if it could potentially conflict with the other person's opinion."

**5 Avoid awkward topics.** While acceptable small-talk topics vary depending on culture, you generally want to avoid discussing the following topics with someone you don't know well:

- Your health issues
- Personal/confidential information
- Controversial topics
- Inappropriate jokes

"Holidays can mean the ideal family get-together or a day of awkward moments, uncomfortable silences, and eruptions of family feuds," says Debra Fine, author of *The Fine Art of Small*



*Talk.* "Personal questions you do not know the answer to are never a good idea. For example, you will want to avoid conversational landmines such as, 'How is it that your son looks just like you and your daughter looks like she could be from a different family?' or 'When are you two going to make me a grandmother?'"

If you make an awkward comment, you can admit it, apologize, and maybe even laugh about it. "To laugh is sometimes a release. And it acknowledges, 'Oh, that came out a little oddly!'" says Lucinda Harman, DTM, of Shilling Speakers in Havant, England. "Generally, you can then move on. If you get rattled or try to hide it, it gets worse."

**6 Construct a conversation resume.** "The conversation resume allows you to remind yourself that you're not such a boring person after all," says Patrick King, author of *Better Small Talk: Talk to Anyone, Avoid Awkwardness, Generate Deep Conversations, and Make Real Friends*. "It's the difference between having a good answer or story when someone asks, 'What did you do last weekend?' versus simply saying, 'Oh, not too much. Some TV. What about you?'" King suggests regularly updating your conversation resume with talking points about your daily life, personal background, notable experiences, and current events. Review this resume before you head into socially intense situations. "If you've ever felt like your mind was going blank, this is the cure!"

## 7 Practice in Toastmasters.

Improve your small-talk skills in Toastmasters by participating in the impromptu speaking practice of Table Topics® and looking for ways to incorporate conversation in your club meetings, like a game session.

Pre-pandemic, when most members were meeting in person, they often had casual conversations before, after, and sometimes during a meeting. It's much more challenging to engage in small talk in online meetings, where it seems the etiquette is to talk to everyone or don't talk. You can build a little extra time at the beginning and end of meetings for unstructured conversation, or open meetings with individual check-ins or an icebreaker question. Some clubs use breakout rooms in online meetings for small group networking or small group topic discussions as part of Table Topics. You can reach out in the chat feature to individuals for written small talk, too.

Small talk might start small. It might be quick. It might seem irrelevant at first. But ultimately, small talk is about human connection. It's worth making an effort.

**Diane Windingland, DTM**, is a presentation coach from St. Paul, Minnesota, and a member of two clubs: PowerTalk Toastmasters and Readership Toastmasters. Learn more at [www.virtualspeechcoach.com](http://www.virtualspeechcoach.com).

# Slanguage

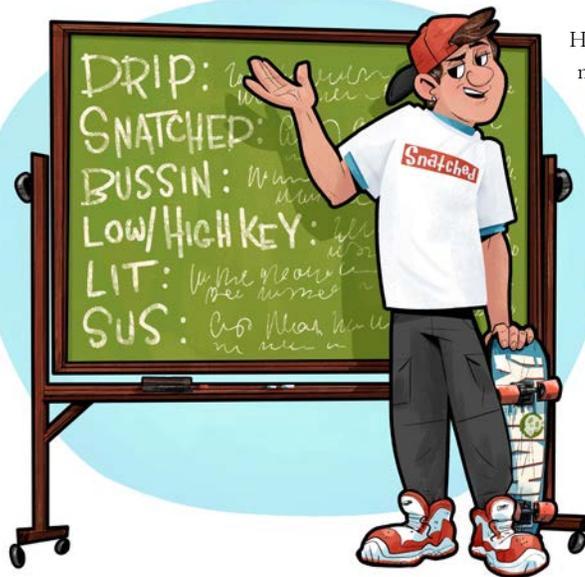
Do not use any new word you learn in this column or you will be cheugy. And that's not good.

By John Cadley

Independence is particularly important to the American character. Having, on July 4, 1776, declared our collective independence from Great Britain, we continue to declare our independence—from each other. No American wants to be a face in the crowd; rather, it seems, every American wants to be *the* face in the crowd. We strive to distinguish ourselves, to stand apart, to be the “rugged individual” who goes his own way (until he has to ask a 7-year-old how to use an iPhone).

Slang is one of the ways we do this. Slang is not like jargon or argot, which help a particular group—physicians, soldiers, plumbers—to communicate more efficiently with one another. Slang is about culture and class distinction. It starts in adolescence with the desperate attempt to NOT be like your parents. When I was a teenager that meant being “hip” or “cool.” Parents can never be cool. It’s actually written in the little-known Article 8 of the U.S. Constitution: *Any American citizen who begets a child or children, upon birth of said offspring, (a) shall forfeit all rights to claim any relevance whatsoever to the time in which he or she lives, (b) shall have no right to appeal in a court of law, and (c) shall, if caught attempting to be “with it” through language or dress, be forced to sit in the public square for 15 days, to be laughed at by any natural-born citizen under the age of 20.*

So if I used “hip” and “cool” today I would be laughed off the planet. Because slang changes. As soon as it becomes accepted and, God forbid, makes it into the dictionary, it loses its purpose. Far from distinguishing you as “in the know,” it marks you in today’s Gen Z slang as “cheugy”—someone who is trying too hard to be trendy, and in so doing effects the opposite perception. If your child’s friends come to your house and you tell them you’re “just chillaxin’ in your crib,” you’re being cheugy. And your children have been traumatized.



According to linguistic scholars, to be considered slang a word or phrase must (1) undermine the standards of accepted speech; (2) mark you as a member of the “in” crowd; (3) be taboo to the upper classes; and (4) replace a conventional word with a newly minted synonym (think of “friending” for “befriend,” a crafty neologism which, thanks to our friends at Facebook, affords one the opportunity to have

Whatever slang you may be familiar with, it is passé. There is new slang now which, since I’m over the age of 20, I am forbidden to use.

thousands of friends without the bothersome inconveniences of actually being one).

Whatever slang you may be familiar with, it is passé. There is new slang now which, since I’m over the age of 20, I am forbidden to use.

However, dedicated as I am to the erudition of my readers, I am, at the risk of ridicule, contempt, and spending 15 days in the public square, going to share with you some of the words today’s youth are using. Read it, then burn this column. Being caught with it will forever brand you as a tourist trying to speak the language of the locals from a guidebook.

**Drip.** Whatever clothes you’re wearing at the moment, they’re your drip. If they’re really fashionable, you’re dripping.

**Snatched.** Very similar to drip, as in “Dude, that suit is snatched!” (In my prehistoric mind I wonder: If someone snatches your drip, do you go home in a barrel?)

**Lit.** This used to mean being overserved at a cocktail party. Now it means really good or exciting. Hence, you might hear “This party’s lit!” without actually being lit.

**Bussin’.** Once again, a word for great or wonderful: “Girl, that song you wrote is bussin’.” Perhaps this comes from the conventional meaning of buss—to kiss: “Girl, this song you wrote is like a kiss.” One can only hope.

**Low-/High-Key.** Mild interest or strong desire, respectively: “I low-key want to go to gym class,” or “I high-key want to skateboard on ice.” As for the latter, I would advise the skateboarder to low-key those plans to his parents.

**Sus.** Something that doesn’t feel quite right, arousing suspicion. For instance, if you try to hide this column when a young person walks into the room for fear they might ask what you’re reading, they’ll say you’re acting sus. Your only response is, “What’s that?” If you can’t resist one-upping them by saying you’re “hip to their lingo,” I hope your town has a nice public square.

**John Cadley** is a former advertising copywriter and currently a musician working in upstate New York. Learn more at [www.cadleys.com](http://www.cadleys.com).

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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

*Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring* by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

We are happy to speak with you about your publishing needs.  
Call us at 978-440-8364 or visit us at <http://www.eBookIt.com>.



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