

# TOASTMASTER®

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APRIL 2012

**8** MAKING TABOO  
TOPICS WORK

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AID INJURED PETS

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OF TABLE TOPICS

## PROFESSIONAL TRAVELERS

Having the confidence  
to explore the world.

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# THE CHARISMATIC CLUB



**Is your Toastmasters club so good** that members don't dare stay away? Is your club exciting and fun? Is your club charismatic?

I joined my first Toastmasters club in 1985 as a student at the University of California — it was a bubbling fountain of energy, excitement and enthusiasm. I could not stay away. You had to come early to get a seat or you'd have to join the "standing room only" section. The meeting was a highlight of the week, the event nobody on campus wanted to miss. I thought *every* Toastmasters club was like this!

Charismatic clubs draw members like flies to honey because their lively, positive meetings create a magnetic atmosphere. These clubs can surge to 30, 40, 50 or more members. Like a successful restaurant that always has a line, a charismatic club offers a special recipe for doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. Here are five hallmarks:

- ▶ **Energy:** John Wesley once said, "Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn." Passion is the lifeblood of great communication, and enthusiasm brings any meeting to life.
- ▶ **Friendly:** When a spirit of genuine interest and friendship permeates the club, members enjoy being together, and it shows.
- ▶ **Fun:** People prefer "edutainment" to dull, listless lectures. When members deliver manual speeches in a supportive, high-energy atmosphere, meetings become both educational and enjoyable.
- ▶ **Surprise:** Positive expectations revitalize the club. Members venture outside of their comfort zones when responding to creative Table Topics and new speaking assignments.
- ▶ **Value:** Meetings highlight learning and professional growth. Members feel the excitement of self-discovery and personal growth in a supportive atmosphere.

Toastmasters clubs are like the weather: they constantly change. Charismatic clubs make success look easy, but don't be fooled. Beneath the surface, these clubs have a leadership team committed to planning, preparation and mentoring. Leaders track Distinguished Club Program goals, attend training, follow up with guests and promote their clubs at every opportunity.

Club leaders have to compete for a person's time. Make your club even better than video games, shopping, movies, TV or sports. Make it a charismatic club. You learn it all at Toastmasters: Where leaders are made. **T**

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International President

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Since 1924, Toastmasters International has been recognized as the leading organization dedicated to communication and leadership skill development. Through its worldwide network of clubs, each week Toastmasters helps more than a quarter million men and women of every ethnicity, education level and profession build their *competence* in communication so they can gain the *confidence* to lead others.

By regularly giving speeches, gaining feedback, leading teams and guiding others to achieve their goals, leaders emerge. They learn to tell their stories. They listen and answer. They plan and lead. They give feedback — and accept it. They find their path to leadership.

**Toastmasters International. Where Leaders Are Made.**



“Reading the letter from Olivia Schofield, from First Berlin Toastmasters, I kept silent for 15 minutes to stop the tears in my eyes. Thank you, Olivia, for sharing such a great lesson.”

— Jennifer Wadhani  
Express Toastmasters  
Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

## Idiom **Overload**

Thank you, John Cadley, for criticizing improperly used words and expressions in “Battling Babble” (January 2012). Knowing that talented wordsmiths are on the job helps me sleep like a baby. Proper usage of words and phrases provides us with the edge to compete in this dog-eat-dog world of ours. Your writing style has *je ne sais quoi* and I find it useful for entertainment, instruction, etcetera. Of course, if everybody employed perfect communication skills, your column would shrivel and die, which would leave you feeling under the weather. I guess it’s true that you can’t have your cake and eat it too. That is wisdom you can take to the bank. I now bid you *adieu*.

Ernest R. Raynor III, DTM  
Leadership Masters club  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

## Gratitude **Out Loud**

Twelve years ago I expressed my deep-felt gratitude to Toastmasters International in a letter published on this page. Why? I had gained the oratory skills to present a beautiful tribute to my partner at his funeral. It showed me that I could rise to any speaking occasion.

That vivid memory surfaced last week as I bid farewell to someone else dear to me — my mother. Again I presented a eulogy to demonstrate my love and appreciation, just as two years ago, I was able to do the same for my father. Both times I silently

thanked Toastmasters for the skills it taught me and for the discipline I gained that enabled me to honor my loved ones.

But today I thought, why be silent? Why not shout out my gratitude to Toastmasters International for the world to hear? Yes, the skills we gain from working through the Toastmasters program can give us the confidence to face any difficult speaking task. Thank you, Toastmasters, again and again.

Sandra Lasky, DTM  
Sydney Speakers Toastmasters  
Sydney, Australia

## Success in a **Bottle**

I am a longtime Toastmaster who joined in 1951 and still regularly attends the Arlington Rotary Toast club, one of the oldest clubs in our district. The article “How Far Has Your Bottle Gone?” (January 2012) is one of the finest, perhaps *the* finest, I have read in the *Toastmaster* magazine. May we please have more like it?

William W. Lang, ATM  
Arlington Rotary Toast club  
Poughkeepsie, New York

## December **Praise**

In the December 2011 issue, I found the article “The Benefits of LinkedIn Groups” very helpful and the profile of Vincent Kituku inspiring. Reading the letter from Olivia Schofield, from First Berlin Toastmasters, I kept silent for 15 minutes to stop the tears

in my eyes. Thank you, Olivia, for sharing such a great lesson: “The reward isn’t the award.” You have touched the hearts of Toastmasters around the world.

Hats off to Jasmine Tan (“Q&A”), a Singapore student, for her motivation and efforts to contribute her time, knowledge, skill and talent to the people around her. And Shelley Stevenson, from Vancouver Toastmasters club, you, too, made me cry. What a brilliant “My Turn.” Henry, your son, is in my heart and prayers.

Jennifer Wadhani  
Express Toastmasters  
Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

## Correction has **Cachet**

I thoroughly enjoyed John Cadley’s piece, “Battling Babble,” in the January issue and often turn first to the back of the magazine to read his “Funny You Should Say That” column. However, Cadley was hoist on his own petard when he misspelled “cachet” as “caché” after correctly calling out those who incorrectly replace “ado” with *adieu*. Also, I would have loved a playful reference to the movie/stage play *The King and I/Anna and the King of Siam* as a more familiar use of “et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.”

I love the magazine and read it cover to cover every month!

Jeremy Darvis, DTM  
Watermeisters club  
Fountain Valley, California



▲ Roger Killen (in the green shirt, standing toward the middle) gathers with members of his 1969 high school class.

# LONG-DISTANCE LEADERSHIP

What I learned from reuniting high school classmates from around the world.

By Roger Killen, ACB, ALS

**D**o you want to make a difference in the world? Maybe create great experiences for others? Here is an idea to help you achieve these noble goals while also earning credit in the High Performance Leadership program: Organize a reunion.

For me, it all began on the morning of March 3, 2010. I called the home of my childhood friend, Philip, to chat, check in and catch up. Philip was 61 and had just retired. His wife, Carol, answered the phone. After I said hello and asked to speak to Philip, there was a long pause. Then Carol told me he had died two hours earlier.

My friend's death reminded me that life is short and fragile. It reminded me that if I want to do something important, I better do it while I can. It was the kick in the pants I needed to convert a long-procrastinated idea into reality: I began organizing a reunion for my 1969 high school class. But there were two complications:

1. We graduated 41 years ago — I had no idea how to find my classmates after so much time.
2. My high school was Regent House Grammar School, located in New-

townards, County Down, Northern Ireland. A distance the width of Canada and the Atlantic Ocean stood between it and Vancouver, British Columbia, where I had lived since 1975.

Yet I did spearhead the reunion, which took place last June. Sixty former classmates, from six countries on four continents, attended. By all accounts it was a resounding success. It also taught me a lot about leadership.

One lesson came from dealing with the distance — 5,000 miles (8,000 kilometers) — between Vancouver and County Down. Because I couldn't be the hands-on, operational type of leader I usually am, I was pushed out of my comfort zone and forced to be an inspirational leader.

I chose to use video to deliver messages to my classmates. My Toastmasters training taught me how to speak to the camera, and I learned how to script, shoot, edit and publish the videos on my own. I made short, inspirational videos to exhort my former classmates to participate in — and share the news about — the reunion. I created a YouTube channel and posted a video every six weeks or so. Then I emailed my former classmates

with a link to each video. (To view any of the videos, search YouTube for “regent house reunion 2011.”)

During the planning process, one former classmate was inspired to build and maintain a website. Another created and maintained a database. And a third formed a local organizing committee. This committee chose to expand the reunion from one evening to three days, and from one event to six. During those six events, dozens of dormant friendships were rekindled, scores of former classmates were reconnected and hundreds of faded memories were recolored.

Because I launched this reunion, I became a better leader. I learned the power of inspiration, the value of a shared vision and the benefits of encouragement. Now I encourage you to break the bonds of your comfort zone. Launch your own reunion or finish a project you have been delaying. When you dare to lead, things beyond your wildest dreams may happen. **T**

**Roger Killen, ACB, ALS**, is the founder of the Vancouver Entrepreneurs Toastmasters in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Contact him at [rkillen@shaw.ca](mailto:rkillen@shaw.ca).

# AROUND THE GLOBE

## ▶ INTERNATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

### BEST FOOT FORWARD



People from Arab countries and Asia, especially Thailand and India, consider feet the most unholy part of the body. If you visit these countries, know that it is considered rude or insensitive to show the soles of your feet or point them at someone — intentionally or not.

When walking, it is okay if someone catches a glimpse of your sole. But pay attention to the way you move and sit. Never use your foot to point and do not sit with your feet outstretched toward people or religious statues. When crossing your legs, be sure your foot isn't pointing at someone.

Pay attention to entryways as well. If people leave their shoes by the door, do the same. Respect the culture you visit and always lead with your best foot forward!

## ▶ WHAT DO YOU SAY WHEN...

### YOU RECEIVE A GIFT YOU DON'T LIKE?

**Members from the Lake City Breakfast club in Rotorua, New Zealand, respond:**

“This would look great on *your* wall.” — ANNETTE BATES, ACS, CL

“Thank you for your interesting gift. It will make a wonderful conversation piece!” — JAN MILLER, ACS, CL

“I would say, ‘Wow — what a thoughtful gift. That color will tone in perfectly with my bathroom suite.’ Then I would put a sticker with their name on it so I don't give it back to them next year by mistake.” — JENNIE ARVIDSON, CC

“Thank you. That's very kind of you. The range of presents that are available this year blows you away!” — LIZ SIMS, CC

*Congratulations to the Lake City Breakfast club on its 20-year anniversary!*

## ▶ SNAPSHOT



District 14 promotes Toastmasters on billboards around Georgia. “We found that we get more visibility if the ads are moved to different billboards every week. This gives us a larger footprint in the metro area and is a better use of our limited funds,” explains District 14 Governor Kene Iloenyosi, DTM. “We have already seen an uptick in new club requests.”

Email [marketing@toastmasters.org](mailto:marketing@toastmasters.org) for billboard art to promote your club or district, and contact digital billboard companies for nonprofit public service announcement rates.

## ▶ BOTTOM LINE

**Inside Scoop** Be sure to follow, join and “like” Toastmasters on social networking sites so you'll be up to date on news and announcements.

[www.toastmasters.org/socialnetworking](http://www.toastmasters.org/socialnetworking)

**Charter a New Club** Does your workplace have an in-house club? If not, bring Toastmasters to your company.

[www.toastmasters.org/bringti](http://www.toastmasters.org/bringti)

## Movie Night

On your next free evening, grab some popcorn and rent the public-speaking-themed movies *Larry Crowne* and *The King's Speech*.



## ► PROFESSIONAL TIP

### HOW TO WRITE A REFERENCE LETTER

Job applicants often need reference letters to support their resumes. If you are asked to write one of these important letters, do not brush it off. It's an honor to be asked, so put thought into offering a meaningful recommendation.

- **BE HONEST.** If you are unable to give someone a glowing referral, decline the request.
- **ASK FOR A CURRENT RESUME.** Be sure to know the person's professional details and describe her similarly to how she describes herself.
- **BE SPECIFIC.** State what the person has achieved. Use numbers, details and dates. Exclude generic and over-used phrases.
- **CREATE STRUCTURE.** Introduce yourself briefly, positively state the person's outstanding traits and skills, then offer to be a contact for additional information (if you are willing).

Good luck to all job seekers, higher education candidates and go-getters!

## MEMBER MOMENT

### ACHIEVING A DREAM

Chitra Raghavan, CC, CL, enjoys living in Mumbai, India, also known as the “City of Dreams.” She admires the people’s perseverance and openness to new ideas. A member of Mumbai Toastmasters, Raghavan studied electronic and communications engineering at Bangalore University. Initially her busy schedule kept her from taking on club meeting roles, but seeing her mentors as club officers inspired her to take on more leadership.

#### What do you do for a living?

I am currently the chief marketing officer of The Happiness Company, a consulting firm that empowers others to discover their passions and follow their dreams. As a freelance business consultant, I help set up new businesses, build new brands and plan marketing campaigns and events. I am also a technical writer. The best thing about my job is the freedom to choose subjects and assignments that are close to my heart.

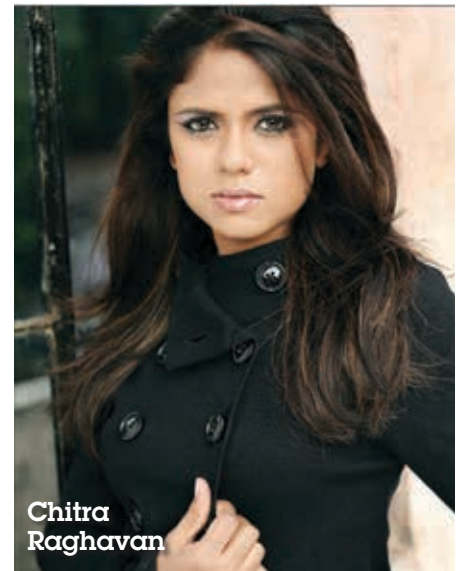
#### As immediate past president, what advice can you give to club leaders?

Planning for successors is important. At our club, we find and mentor successors so they are ready to handle club roles in the next term. This helps ensure consistency in club values.

#### What is the most useful thing you have gained from Toastmasters?

Learning to delegate and work as a team to achieve goals. When I became president, it was initially difficult for me not to say, “Let me do it,” but later I learned how to encourage others to understand the work and to guide them in achieving it.

Learn more about Chitra Raghavan at [chitrachaudhuri.com](http://chitrachaudhuri.com).



Chitra Raghavan

## Convention Countdown Begins!

The 2012 Toastmasters International Convention will be held August 15-18 — only four months away! The Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek resort ([hiltonbonnetcreek.com](http://hiltonbonnetcreek.com)) in Orlando, Florida, will host the event and is *the* place to stay during your visit.

Register between April 2 and July 20 to receive the full convention package at a discounted rate of \$590. Visit [www.toastmasters.org/convention](http://www.toastmasters.org/convention) after April 2 for the schedule and a list of speakers and education session topics.







# YOU'RE SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT?!

How to make controversial speech topics work for any audience.

By Ruth Nasrullah, CC

**P**olitics. Religion. Sex. Oh my! In some places these topics are strictly taboo. In others they are fodder for spirited discussion. In any setting even the most polished speaker must approach with caution before discussing topics related to politics, religion or sex. The price for carelessness can damage your reputation and your relationships with colleagues or friends.

*"To talk about any subject, we must do so in a respectful manner and look for common ground."*

You can learn to address these controversial topics with ease, and the Toastmasters program can help. You may have heard that certain topics are forbidden in Toastmasters — but that is not true. The Toastmasters International website states:

*Toastmasters International recognizes that club members may learn much about the world around them from listening to others' speeches on a variety of subjects. This variety can add interest to club meetings and stimulate thoughts and ideas. For these reasons, Toastmasters International does not place restrictions on topics, content or language in any speech.*

However, with the consensus of their members, individual clubs have the right to limit speech topics. Club

guidelines generally reflect local customs, the club's purpose or mission, and the members' sensitivities to particular subject matter. Some clubs clearly state, "We don't talk about that!" Corporate clubs may be bound by company policy to avoid certain subjects.

If you want the challenge of speaking about hot-button topics, read on for advice from members who happily talk about the most delicate subjects.

## Know Your Objective and Your Audience

Above all, it is essential to be crystal clear about your speech objective. Is it a subject you are passionate about? Do you want to change someone's viewpoint on a current local or world issue?

"As a public speaker you must know your audience and [predict] how they will perceive your talk," says Deepak Menon, DTM, an accountant from New Delhi, former District 82 Governor and current Region 13 Advisor. "Remember, you're not speaking for yourself, but for your audience."

It may seem like obvious advice, but it can't be over-emphasized: Be aware of your audience members' sensitivities and don't exceed their limits.

If you are an invited speaker, closely research the audience, sponsoring organization and event program. If, for example, you make general political commentary, you might want to tailor your speech a little differently when addressing a particular political party. You needn't change your focus, but be aware of any sensitive issues your speech may raise.

Menon recalls a district-level Humorous Speech Contest in which a contestant offered a speech about the popular game of cricket. However, the double entendre of the speech title, "Cricket Balls," caused some offended audience members to walk out. The judges, however, obviously weren't bothered by the title: They awarded the speaker first place. Taste varies, apparently.

"Knowing how to speak on controversial topics is a matter of perception, upbringing and background," says Menon. "What is acceptable in New York or New Delhi may not be acceptable in, say, Chennai."

## Delving into Religion

Religion can be among the touchiest of topics. David Carr, a member of Club Awesome in Coral Springs, Florida, found this out when he gave a club speech with the provocative title "Islamofascism and Islamophobia." The speech presented an overview of positive and negative opinions about Islam's role in today's world.

It was a tough talk, not only because he ventured into a controversial area, but because it was written in response to a remark about religion made by another member during Table Topics a few meetings prior. Carr felt uncomfortable with the remark and mulled it over before deciding to incorporate his discomfort into a prepared speech. He went ahead based on his view of the Toastmasters philosophy.

“The purpose of Toastmasters is not necessarily to be a debating society, where we give fair and equal weight to every possible opinion,” he says. “The purpose is to polish the techniques of making a point. So I guess you just have to keep that in mind as you go —

**“Knowing how to speak on controversial topics is a matter of perception, upbringing and background.”**

so that you’re not losing sight of why people get involved in Toastmasters in the first place.”

Carr’s talk was well-received in his club, whose members Carr describes as politically diverse yet respectful of each other’s views. He says a speaker shouldn’t be afraid to discuss sensitive topics, but must prepare well.

“Give it a lot of thought and spend a little extra time on that presentation,” says Carr. “If you’re going to challenge the beliefs of other people in the group, you need to figure out how to do that respectfully.”

While some clubs stay away from these lightning-rod subjects, some specialty clubs focus exclusively on controversial subjects. Leaders of these clubs uniformly claim their key to success is to always treat each other with respect, no matter how divergent their opinions may be or how wild the topics may get.

The Contrarians Toastmasters in Irvine, California, is one such club. Vice President Education Darryl Tahirali

explains that although members’ speeches have ranged from unsettling to outrageous, none of it would be possible if they didn’t deliberately focus on accepting each other’s viewpoints.

“To talk about any subject, we must do so in a respectful manner and look for common ground,” says Tahirali.

### **Don’t Be Vulgar**

Keeping it clean is another imperative for successful speeches on controversial topics. Nobody likes vulgarity, and you risk serious damage to your public speaking career by using sexual innuendo or profanity. Keep your comments tasteful and don’t use offensive language unless it is an

essential part of your speech content. Always do your research on cultural communication; a hand gesture in one country may mean something quite different in another. Don’t ruin a good talk by inadvertently being inappropriate or offensive.

Nadine Nofziger is vice president education of Toastmasters Taboos, a specialty club based in Anaheim, California. The club’s mission is to provide an open environment where members are encouraged to speak about topics related to religion, politics and sex.

Nofziger notes that it’s crucial to maintain decorum no matter what the subject matter is. “Everything goes in our club, but we are never vulgar or graphic. We never use profane language,” she says. “It’s the subject matter that is controversial, not the nature of the delivery.”

Menon shares this view. “Problems occur when people are trying to be humorous and use innuendo or try to poke fun at the other gender,” he notes. “But this is not stand-up comedy.”

Nofziger also advises that you know your subject well. “When you speak about a controversial subject, you really need to study it, especially if you’re debating. Be very comfortable with the subject and approach it with your emotions,” she says.

With religious or political topics in particular, be careful not to make general statements that you cannot support. If you are sharing an opinion, be ready to have your thoughts questioned. If you are discussing a faith practice — especially someone else’s — do your research before you give your speech. The level of knowledge you display will influence your integrity or reputation.

### **Speaking Politics**

Political debate is an instigator of conflict all over the world, from the international stage to small-town government. Allan de la Plante, DTM, belongs to a specialty club focusing on politics. How does the club — Politically Speaking in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada — avoid conflict among members?

“We don’t look at [our focus] as solely a political thing, as talking about a leader or a party,” says de la Plante. “We look at politics as running right through every form of life — in work, in your family, in just about every walk of life. So it gives everybody in the club a chance to share an opinion. It creates a tremendous energy.”

In New Delhi, Menon’s home club is learning the art of grappling with controversial topics. Club members have even spoken about the state of Kashmir, one of the most politically charged topics in the subcontinent. In India, a country with many different religions, languages and cultures, the risk of offending is great, but successful discussion of a provocative topic can be sweet.

Don’t let sensitive topics scare you off. The Toastmasters program can

help you master speaking about them. Take advantage of manual projects such as Project 4: “Addressing the Opposition” from *Persuasive Speaking* in the *Advanced Communication Series*, or attend club meetings where you can practice speaking about hot-button topics and seek honest feedback from your evaluator as well as fellow members.

In addition, Table Topics can serve as an opportunity to learn how to handle a touchy subject on the spot with a tactful and respectful response. As de la Plante notes, Table Topics can help you learn to deal with a heckler.

And don't ignore the leadership program: Serving as an officer in a club that confronts tricky subject matter offers a great chance to advance your leadership skills. Remember, not every potential member will be comfortable with no-holds-barred speeches about any topic. Therefore, member recruitment and management along with public relations may be more intense than in standard clubs.

Interestingly, a common feature of clubs specializing in controversial subjects is diversity of membership. Nofziger notes that the Toastmasters Taboos club has members from India, Israel, Australia, Mexico and her native country, Belgium. The Contrarians are about 50 percent minority and/or immigrant, according to Tahirali.

Perhaps there is a lesson in that. A homogenous membership may tend to stick to its own areas of interest, while diversity lends itself to reaching across cultural, political and religious boundaries. In today's world, that may be the noblest communication and leadership goal of all. **T**

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## QUALITY CONTROL

By Ruth Nasrullah, CC

Tarek Dawoud, CTM, a software engineer from Seattle, had to quickly master the art of tackling controversial topics. Immediately after September 11, 2001, he and fellow Muslims in his community faced a barrage of questions from the general public, sometimes motivated by suspicion and sometimes just curiosity. In response, a group of local Muslims created a speakers bureau. Dawoud says the bureau received plenty of requests for speeches, but the speakers weren't always effective.



“Everybody was just kind of winging it,” he says, “so a group of us decided to do some quality control.” Dawoud heard about Toastmasters, so he and a group of colleagues formed the Toasters club, based in Des Moines, Washington.

His speaking efforts have become so successful that he is now regularly invited to speak about his faith at schools, churches and other venues. Here are a few of his tips:

- ▶ **Have clarity of purpose.** Do you want to inform, persuade or inspire? What do you hope to achieve? “Coming face to face with your aspirations and fears helps you understand them and be in control,” says Dawoud. “This will help you focus when you start to feel flustered or agitated.”
- ▶ **Adapt your talk to your audience.** If you're speaking at a school, make the talk fun by asking questions or quizzing students. A church audience might like to see similarities between their faith and yours.
- ▶ **Stay on message.** Don't let a Q&A session be overtaken by unrelated topics.
- ▶ **Don't abuse the speaking opportunity** to go on at length conveying your opinion. “This is not about your ego; this is about informing,” says Dawoud.
- ▶ **Take advantage of Table Topics** to practice handling questions from out of left field.
- ▶ **Your ideas are not superior to others.** When talking about religion, be sure audience members don't think you are trying to convert them. And never give the message that you think your faith practice is superior to another.

## Mark Robinson, CC: HELPING THE UNDERDOG

Inventor's products aid injured and handicapped pets.

By Julie Bawden-Davis

**M**ark Robinson's mother likes to tell the story of how her 7-year-old child dismantled the family's television set to examine its inner workings, and when the repairman came to put the set back together, he was impressed by the boy's tidiness.

"The parts were so well-organized that the repairman reassembled the set without any trouble," says Robinson, a Toastmaster and self-proclaimed

also carries dozens of other products for handicapped pets.

Robinson's own dog, whose life was cut short because of a disability years ago, inspired him to invent Walkin' Wheels. "Pets used to be put down if they became lame or incontinent," he says. "The mission of **HandicappedPets.com** is to teach people about alternatives to euthanasia. An elderly or disabled pet can often live a high-quality life for many years

Robinson, who belongs to the Toastmasters of Milford in Milford, New Hampshire. He credits Toastmasters with giving him "the tools to spread the message about my endeavors."

"We all have great ideas and important contributions to make; the ability to speak clearly gives us a way to turn these thoughts into 'things' that make life better for all living beings," he says. "My customers told me they needed a wheelchair for their dogs that was adjustable, accessible, attractive and easy to own. For me supporting the loving bond between an animal and human is a privilege."

Robinson also uses his communication skills to market his other company, The Energy Grid, an innovative Web marketing firm for the alternative energy industry and other progressive companies. He started the business in 2002 after becoming impassioned about renewable energy while traveling the country to give presentations on alternative energy for NexTek Power Systems.

### Smitten with Electronics

Robinson feels fortunate to have attended a high school in the 1970s that fueled his passion for electronics. "Lewis-Wadhams, a boarding school in Westport, New York, nurtured a

"Robinson's own dog, whose life was cut short because of a disability years ago, inspired him to invent Walkin' Wheels."

"geek" who spent his childhood experimenting with everything from electronic equipment to pond water. His fascination with how things work and how one action sets off a chain reaction has motivated the entrepreneur and inventor to build a variety of successful businesses, including a company that carries products for disabled dogs.

Robinson is founder and president of **HandicappedPets.com**. The website features Robinson's patented invention Walkin' Wheels, an adjustable dog wheelchair that allows disabled, injured and elderly dogs to move around on their own. The company

if the animal gets assistance through products like diapers, a rear-support leash or a wheelchair."

Thousands of Walkin' Wheels have been sold worldwide since 2008, and the invention has been featured on the Animal Planet TV show *Underdog to Wonderdog*. In addition, Robinson has more than 44,000 Facebook fans. He credits Toastmasters with helping him build his various businesses and garner attention for them.

"When I attended my first Toastmasters meeting over 30 years ago, I took to heart the advice to accept every opportunity to speak in public," says



▶ **Mark Robinson says** “supporting the loving bond between an animal and a human is a privilege.” Here he displays his inventions with the help of Buster, an employee’s dog.



student’s innate curiosity by allowing you to learn whatever you wanted,” he says. He immersed himself in math classes and tinkered for hours with the school’s 8-bit experimental/hobby computer. “The attitude I’ve always had — to spend my days doing what I enjoy and get paid for it — originated at that school.”

After college, Robinson opened a burglar and fire alarm division for a fire safety sprinkler-system company. In 1978 he transitioned to a new, small-business alarm-system division for Honeywell Protection Services, where he quickly learned to be a salesman. “I made 100 cold calls a week, and for the first five weeks I didn’t sell anything,” Robinson recalls. “At one point I considered giving up, but I persevered and finally made sales, eventually becoming salesman of the quarter several times.”

At Honeywell, he also returned to school for a degree in business management from the University of Southern New Hampshire.

While at Honeywell management asked him to give a speech. “That was, I hope, the worst speech I will ever give,” says Robinson, who says he sweated profusely and became tongue-tied. “Fortunately, an audience member suggested afterward that I try

Toastmasters, and I went running to a meeting. I discovered I liked speaking and found I had the ability to explain complex issues clearly — in essence, serving as a translator for the super-intelligent uber-geeks to the real world.”

The ability to speak engagingly about complicated matters served Robinson well in the 1990s, when he ran a computer consulting firm that held “computer empowerment” seminars for executives.

“CEOs at the time were falling behind in the computer age, and my motivational seminars were designed to help them put aside their fears,” says Robinson, who supplemented the workshops with his book *Dancing with Computers — Do You Still Scream When You See a Mouse?*


### Hard Work and Innovation

Robinson’s colleagues say his communication and listening skills are vital to his success. “Mark is fantastic to work with because he motivates you and pulls out your best qualities, and he does this by being a good listener,” says Kathy Conley, vice president of operations for HandicappedPets.com. “He also listens to customers and what *they* want.”

For his part, Robinson says harnessing the power of community is

key to thriving in business. “Provide a valuable service or product and your community will support you,” he says, pointing to [HandicappedPets.com](http://HandicappedPets.com) as an example. When Robinson started a discussion board on the website about caring for disabled pets, he says, “I found groups of pet lovers who loved the idea of helping disabled animals, and they spread the word.”

Robinson delivered a keynote on that topic last year, at the BizCon New Hampshire conference. He spoke about attracting the emotional support of community through real-world and online social networking. He titled the speech “The Awwww Factor — Getting Value From Your Community.”

“The Awwww is the sound customers make when they see a dog in a wheelchair enjoying life again,” says Robinson. “It’s a heart-warming sight.” 

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# TAKE CONTROL OF TABLE TOPICS

Structure your responses to own the unknown.

By Russell Isaacson, CC

**T**able Topics is one of the more challenging aspects of Toastmasters. Speaking without preparation for one to two minutes in response to a random question is intimidating to most speakers. Without the opportunity to plan ahead, formulating an effective response is difficult. Practice generally reduces anxiety and improves performance, but even veteran Toastmasters experience this struggle.

Yet the extemporaneous nature of Table Topics need not characterize every aspect of the exercise. In particular, you can approach Table Topics with a preset structure in mind. Presumably you can't already know *what* you will say in a topic response, but you can know *how* you will say it. In other words, regardless of what the Topicsmaster asks, you can respond already knowing the framework of your response. As such, you will exert control over a key aspect of Table Topics and be able to *own the unknown*.

You can apply many structures to your Table Topics speeches. A reliable one is that used for most expository speeches: introduction, body and conclusion. Even though a Table Topics speech is only two minutes long, you still have plenty of time to apply this structure and produce an effective response.

## Introduction/Thesis

One tactic to try during the introduction is to start your response by simply repeating aloud the Table Topic question or statement. This buys you extra time to clarify your thoughts and confirm your understanding of the topic. Whether or not you try this tactic, be sure to clearly state your thesis or position during the introduction phase.

## Body

Subsequently, you will progress to the body of the speech. This will constitute the bulk of your content.

In this phase, justify or explain your thesis with clear points. Three points generally do the job, but if you are struggling, two points should suffice. Avoid giving only one point, because this rarely meets your objective to speak for at least one minute. Admittedly, the body is probably the most challenging part of the speech, despite using a predetermined structure.

## Conclusion

After justifying your thesis with the body of your speech, move on to the conclusion — you're almost there! At this point, concisely repeat your thesis and supporting arguments.

If you have time and feel comfortable with the topic you were given, consider offering a concession point to challenge your original argument. This may seem unusual, but if you challenge the material you have already delivered, you can then refute *that* point with further justification for your

original thesis, thereby cementing your argument. But this is just icing on the cake if you have the time and knowledge to attempt such a feat.


Using this introduction-body-conclusion approach enables you to deliver an efficient and effective speech even when you don't know the speech topic in advance. This structure is not the only one you can apply. You might want to respond with more of a storytelling response. Yet even with that narrative approach, you can't avoid the need for a clear beginning, middle and end.

For example, suppose the Topicsmaster asks you to speak on the subject of travel or, more specifically, about a dream destination you have never visited. When you arrive at the lectern armed with the above structure, you will know how to respond to this question.

First, you can restate the question to confirm you understood it and buy yourself some time. Next, state firmly where you want to visit. Let's say you choose Paris. Then explain why you want to visit that location, mentioning at least two points, such as the delicious food, inspiring art and/or the exciting nightlife.

Then (if you choose to employ the more advanced technique) you can say there are many other places on your list (you can name a few if you like, such as London or Hong Kong), but Paris is still your number one choice. Finally, even if you choose not to concede that you are interested in visiting other destinations besides Paris, you will conclude by restating that Paris is your dream destination because of the food, art and nightlife. Consequently, you will have delivered

a coherent Table Topics speech even though you had no idea what the topic was in advance.

Table Topics need not be intimidating just because it is an impromptu speech. The exercise may be extemporaneous in terms of content, but it does not have to be spontaneous in terms of structure. Approach Table Topics with a clear structure in mind so you can make it a more manageable exercise. You, too, can own the unknown! 

**Russell Isaacson, CC**, is a member of Talk of the Towers in New York City. When not attending Toastmasters meetings, he works as a director of business development at Condé Nast. Reach him at [risaacson@mba.stern.nyu.edu](mailto:risaacson@mba.stern.nyu.edu).

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◀ Author Beth Blair visits Yanert Glacier in Alaska, USA.



# PROFESSIONAL TRAVELERS

How they developed the confidence to explore the world.

By Beth Blair

**T**hirteen years ago, when I was a first-year flight attendant, my airline crew had a multi-day layover at an all-inclusive resort in the Dominican Republic. On our first evening, as we enjoyed the tropical setting, we met a group of resort employees. We discussed the recent hurricane that ripped across the island, and I asked one of the young men if he was a local.

“Joining or even visiting a Toastmasters meeting reveals what the city’s culture, people and region are about.”

He looked at me horrified and hurt, as did his cohorts. His friend defensively asked me, “Why did you ask my friend if he is crazy?”

After a moment, I realized that the word “local” had been confused with the Spanish word *loco*, meaning crazy or insane. What ended in a good laugh was also a lesson for me: Good, non-offending communication is priceless.

Accidentally choosing the wrong words is not the only potential landmine we face while traveling. Confidence and body language also come into play as we encounter new regions and customs. After joining Toastmasters, I gained the confidence to approach new situations. I also enhanced my travel-writing career by participating in conferences and giving hour-long presentations. Plus,

I have developed friendships with fascinating people in the travel and aviation world. But I am not the only travel professional who has benefited from Toastmasters.

Mary Jo Manzanares, from Federal Way, Washington, is another travel professional who has reaped professional benefits from her Toastmasters experience. A flight attendant and editor-in-chief of

**TheTravelersWay.com**, an online travel magazine, she also runs a personal website, **TravelingwithMJ.com**. Manzanares joined Toastmasters to improve her speaking skills as a media spokesperson for the flight-attendant union during a strike campaign. She found that speaking in sound bites became too comfortable, and putting together more thought-out and reasoned presentations had become difficult. “Since I had always done a fair amount of public speaking, I knew that I needed to get these skills back before I lost them for good,” she says.

Marianne Schwab, ATMB, a TV travel show producer from Los Angeles, California, and travel adviser at **BestTravelDealsTips.com**, also found solace in Toastmasters. While an extrovert in personality, she still dreaded public speaking and attending

parties or conventions where she didn’t know anyone. Schwab joined the Sherman Oaks club in 2001 and, after a year, discovered that she was no longer intimidated by these events. “Meeting people is now so easy and I’m completely comfortable in most environments where I don’t know anyone,” she says. “It’s a new-found freedom.”

## The Industry Specialist

Experts in every field are often invited to speak at conferences and other industry-themed events, and travel professionals are no different. Toastmasters allows members the opportunity to enhance their careers by developing good speaking habits, leadership skills and the confidence to say “yes” to exciting opportunities.

For example, travel writer Zach Everson, CC, participated in Toastmasters from 2006 to 2009 at the Global Links club in Washington, D.C. That experience led him to speak to journalism classes and the Society of Professional Journalists about travel writing and social media. In addition, he is now a regular guest on a Louisville, Kentucky, morning radio show.

Seattle-based travel writer Manzanares is a perfect example of someone who has taken her profession to the next level. Not only is she a full-time flight attendant, but she is also admired in the

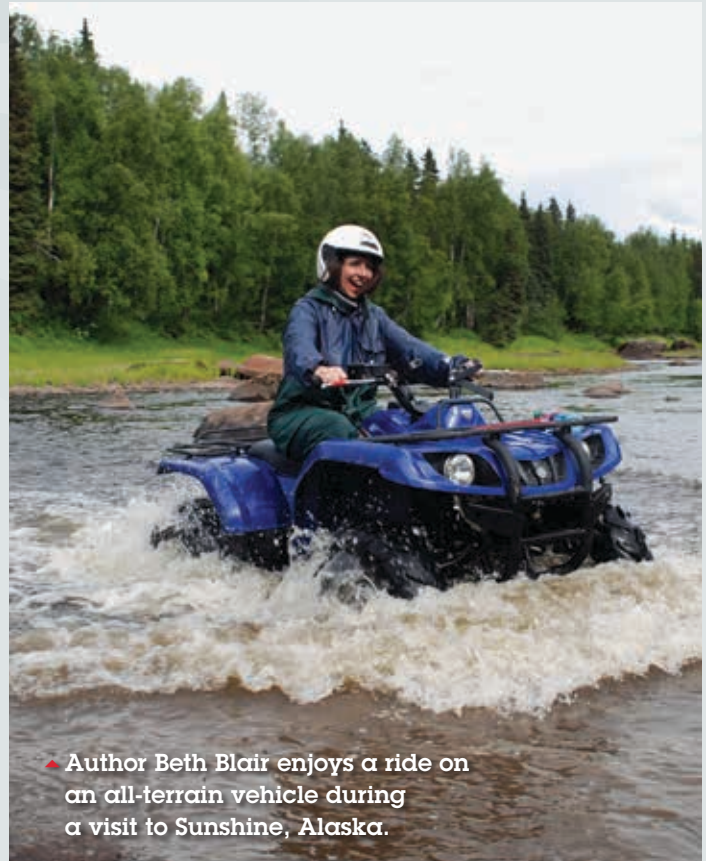
# COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR TRAVELING ABROAD

By Beth Blair

It is important for travelers to make an effort to learn some of the region's language. By doing so, you tell people that you care enough to try, even if you are not well versed in their language.

Here are some ways to communicate better while traveling:

- ▶ **Key phrases.** Learn a few phrases and words in the host country's language, such as "thank you" and "please." TV travel show producer Marianne Schwab, ATMB, says a little goes a long way. "When I was a producer at the 1980s–90s TV show *Runaway with the Rich and Famous* and contacting tourism offices and hotels to set up video shoots, I learned how to say, 'I don't speak your language, do you speak English?' in many different languages and preferably with the correct accents as well. Making the initial request in their tongue was a great icebreaker and I would get a friendly response."
- ▶ **Translator aids.** Invest in pocket guidebooks to help you translate or use Yahoo! Babel Fish, Google Translate or another translation app on your iPad or phone.
- ▶ **It is okay to not be perfect.** Travel writer Zach Everson, CC, says, "While a translator is convenient, I prefer to struggle and try to speak directly with the people I meet. In Istanbul, I negotiated with a shopkeeper in French: I was a terrible student in that subject, but it was our only common language."
- ▶ **Make connections.** Use social networks to connect with local residents. Many Toastmasters clubs use Facebook and are thrilled to welcome visitors.
- ▶ **Learn the protocols and customs of the land.** Hugs, handshakes and bows mean different things in different countries. Learn proper introductions and you will start your journey with confidence.



▶ Author Beth Blair enjoys a ride on an all-terrain vehicle during a visit to Sunshine, Alaska.

Photo courtesy of Rita Pilger.

blogosphere and the travel conference scene. "Getting my ATM [Able Toastmaster] award helped me regain and improve the tools necessary for good communication, whether from the speaking platform or one-to-one," she says. "I know that these skills are part of the reason I frequently speak at travel-blogging-related events like BlogHer and Blog World Expo."

## Speaking Triggers Travel

Presenting at events enhances credibility, and allows for travel and

networking opportunities. You do not have to be in the travel industry to benefit from such opportunities; many Toastmasters travel more as a result of their success as speakers.

Before joining Toastmasters, Julie Austin of [CreativeInnovationGroup.com](http://CreativeInnovationGroup.com) had never spoken to an audience in her life, but thanks to her involvement with Professional Women Toastmasters in Los Angeles from 2009 to 2011, she now speaks to groups of 500–1,000 around the country. "I get to travel and make money at the same time,

plus I get to meet new and interesting people," she says.

On top of the dream-job chart are those who specialize in speaking on cruises. Allyn Evans, ACB, a member of Pacesetters club in Stillwater, Oklahoma, from 2005 to 2011, gives the organization credit for her success. The training Evans received in Toastmasters opened the door for her to book a speaking assignment on Princess Cruises and, more recently, to facilitate a workshop involving swimming with

wild dolphins in Bimini, Bahamas. “Without Toastmasters,” Evans says, “I wouldn’t be traveling to fun destinations like New York City, Los Angeles and the Bahamas. Not only do I get all my expenses paid, I usually earn a nice profit!”

### Benefits of Exploring New Regions

Two years ago my family uprooted from the hot and arid desert in Tucson, Arizona, to settle in the other extreme, Twin Cities, Minnesota. While it was hard leaving my first club, I have since settled in at Speak N’ Eagan Toastmasters. What I realized from the move was that joining or even visiting a Toastmasters meeting reveals what the city’s culture, people and region are about.

Visiting an out-of-town meeting might even cause you to walk away with a great story. Julie Sturgeon talks about the time her family and some friends and their teenagers visited London. Her husband, Past International Director Ron Kirchgessner, DTM, received an invitation to a cocktail party at one member’s home. The visiting group thought they would

enjoy the chance to see how “real Londoners” live and it would give them an opportunity to celebrate one of the teens’ birthday.

“It turns out our host was god-mother to Princess Anne’s son, and in charge of England’s equestrian Olympic team,” recalls Sturgeon. “She bought a cake to help us celebrate the birthday, and while we were singing, a cat wandered over to her patio. It was rock star Chrissie Hynde’s [from the band the Pretenders] cat. So much for seeing how *real* Londoners live! We still talk about what a great time we had that evening — and the teens remember that evening in far more detail than they do any of the museums or famous attractions we visited.”

### Describing Our Travels

One thing writers and speakers have in common is a focus on efficient communication — to *show*, not tell, by using firsthand experience and visuals.

Travel writer and flight attendant Manzanares says, “I use everyday words to paint a picture of what I’m describing. I think people can tell when I’m passionate about a

destination or experience because of the emotion in my words, whether written or spoken.”

Travel writer Everson says he relies on anecdotes from his own experiences. “Rarely do I describe major attractions like the Eiffel Tower or Great Wall; there’s not much I can add to the canon of what’s already been said about those places. But I can provide readers or listeners with insight about a location and share an experience that was special to me.”

TV travel show producer Schwab concurs. “I also like to include several photos of where I’ve visited, because no matter how eloquent you are in your written description, a picture still paints a thousand words.” She also points out that video is an easy way to bring an audience to a location by revealing the ambiance of a place through its colors, sights and sounds.

### More than Words

As a frequent traveler, I know from firsthand experience that Toastmasters goes beyond words to support members in the development of active listening, organization and

*Continued on page 27*



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▲ George Hamilton Main (back, center) with members of the Intel Vietnam Toastmasters in March 2011.

# XIN CHÀO!

Say ‘hello’ to club members in Vietnam.

By George Hamilton Main, ACS, ALB

**V**isiting a Toastmasters club in Vietnam is an exotic experience. All over the world, people join Toastmasters to become better speakers and leaders — the same reason you joined your club; however, during my trip to Vietnam from my home in San Francisco,

prospective employers. At that time, Vietnam had only these two clubs.

Trinity Nguyen, then-president of Intel Vietnam Toastmasters, replied that she would be happy to host me at a club meeting. She not only did that, but before the meeting she also showed me around the Intel

nearly 50 smiling and engaged faces. The guest speaker was Joe Ruelle, a well-known Canadian blogger who lives in Hanoi. He spoke in perfect Vietnamese about the varying cultural perspectives of public speaking etiquette. In Vietnam the custom is to acknowledge everyone before beginning your speech. Ruelle told the club members that doing so to a Western audience will exhaust their patience and time, and he suggested they get to the point quickly when talking to Westerners.

Nguyen led the Table Topics session by projecting “East Meets West” illustrations by artist Yang Liu that portray opposing attitudes on work, leisure, relationships and social order. Each speaker defended or opposed Ms. Liu’s point of view. I was intrigued listening to these Toastmasters share their diverse opinions.

*“A stranger evaluating a young woman beginning her career is serious business in Vietnam.”*

California, I visited clubs that have a cultural and social feeling like nothing I have ever experienced.

I traveled to Vietnam in March 2011 for business and pleasure. Preparing for my trip, I contacted the Intel Vietnam Toastmasters and the Saigon Toastmasters clubs, both located in Ho Chi Minh City, where I would attend trade shows and meet

production plant in the Saigon Hi-tech Park District and introduced me to Intel employees throughout the plant. I even had the opportunity to talk with the head of the public relations department about Intel’s commitment to the local community.

The club meeting started on time and featured a fitting theme: culture. I looked around the room and saw

## Finding a Club in the Crowd

A week later, I visited Saigon Toastmasters at the International Development Company (IDC) school. Ho Chi Minh City is dotted with new stores and schools, so finding the meeting location along a street festooned with signs was a challenge.

Chartered in October 2010, Saigon Toastmasters was the first community club in Vietnam. Then-Club President Annie Nguyen emailed me the agenda for the meeting well before I visited, which immediately made me feel more comfortable. I was also asked to fill in as an evaluator for a member's Ice Breaker speech.

Before the meeting started, club mentor Douglas Foster took me aside to talk about the person whose speech I would evaluate. She was a new member: young, female, in transition to a new life in Ho Chi Minh City and very sensitive to criticism from her elders. A stranger evaluating a young woman beginning her career is serious business in Vietnam. The culture is influenced by Confucianism, a system of ethical and philosophical teachings, and places great importance on respecting relationships, station in life and social decorum. I knew the speaker would receive my evaluation framed by my age, gender, professional status, behavior and dress (a well-dressed male attorney in his late 50s). What I may regard as a simple observation, she might receive as severe criticism.


As it happened, the young woman blanked out during her speech that day. She had memorized the words of her speech and, in a moment of anxiety, forgot them. Standing erect in embarrassed but determined silence, she struggled to regain her composure and words. Then, the audience members amazed me: They spontaneously began applauding loudly. The clapping revived the downcast speaker, and she continued with a wonderful speech.

When the time came to evaluate her, I spoke about the three strengths

of her speech and left out comments for improvement. She learned on her own how to improve.

Intel Vietnam Toastmasters and Saigon Toastmasters honored me by letting me attend and participate in their meetings. I learned that, in Vietnam, communicating with my hosts before the meeting was important to acknowledge their position and express my intentions. Arriving early to the meeting gave me time to connect socially and gave the members time to learn about me. We created relationships and shared stories before the meeting began. Everyone relaxed as we took on our roles as speakers and evaluators. Despite me being the foreigner in the room, I saw the same meeting organization and Toastmasters materials that we use in my home club.

My strongest impression of Toastmasters in Vietnam was of the members' enthusiasm. Given the chance to speak publicly and be evaluated without the fear of failure, the members spoke with vigor and used the body language of advanced Toastmasters. They were natural storytellers.

Intel Vietnam Toastmasters and Saigon Toastmasters each had its own flavor. Yet both clubs shared the universal Toastmasters philosophy of self-improvement in public speaking and leadership through positive practice. I enjoyed my visits and benefited from networking with the members, and I will continue to make new connections for business and fun in our global Toastmasters community. Please do the same. Wherever you go, Toastmasters are there to welcome you. 

**George Hamilton Main, ACS, ALB**, is a member of the Renaissance Toastmasters club in San Francisco, California, and District 4 area governor. He works on business startups and programs for schools in Vietnam. Contact him at [ToastmasterMain@gmail.com](mailto:ToastmasterMain@gmail.com).

## WANT TO VISIT A CLUB WHILE TRAVELING?

By George Hamilton Main, ACS, ALB



▲ The author with Saigon Toastmasters' then-club president Annie Nguyen.

A Toastmasters club can provide local knowledge about the countries you visit. Use this advice to ensure that you and your hosts have a great experience.

- ▶ **Contact your host(s)** weeks before the meeting. Find club information at [www.toastmasters.org/findaclub](http://www.toastmasters.org/findaclub).
- ▶ **Share information** about yourself with your host(s) to warm the relationship and express your intentions. Ask how you can help with the meeting.
- ▶ **Keep in touch** while planning your trip. Your itinerary or the club's circumstances could change and you will be happy you kept an open line of communication.
- ▶ **Prepare to speak** about your own club, offer evaluations at the meeting or comment on your experiences while traveling.
- ▶ **Follow up** with a thank-you note or email to the club you visited, and renew your invitation for any members of the group to visit your home club.



Ricky Gervais

# SATIRE, IRONY AND SARCASM

Use these literary devices to deride and delight.

By Jenny Baranick

**P**ainters have brushstrokes and color, musicians have tempo and rhythm, and fashion designers have fabric and silhouette. Similarly, writers and speakers express themselves with words using literary devices. These include alliteration, symbolism, understatement, foreshadowing, hyperbole, and the tools I will focus on in this article: satire, irony and sarcasm.

Used in a speech, these three devices can unsettle or surprise audience members, or at least make them think deeper about a particular situation. Incorporating them into your presentation also requires a shared understanding with the audience: Listeners must recognize that a gap exists between the surface meaning of the words and the intended, deeper meaning. Consequently, audience members become more engaged and derive pleasure from their ability to bridge that gap. Which is why deftly incorporating satire, irony or sarcasm into your speeches can make them wittier and tailored to the audience.

## Use Satire to Sting

If the goal of your speech is to bring about change in some way, consider using satire to ridicule the subject of your opposition (i.e., what you want changed, whether it be corrupt politicians or teenagers who text too much). After famously using satire in his novel *Huckleberry Finn*, in which he skewered racism and hypocrisy in American society, Mark Twain also used the device in his prolific public speaking career. In his 1900 speech “Poets as Policemen,” Twain ridiculed the New York police force, saying at one point, “I would be very glad to serve as [police] commissioner, not because I think I am especially qualified, but because I am too tired to work and would like to take a rest.”

Dian Duchin Reed, a published poet, used satire in her speech “Killer Robots Take Over the Planet,” which she delivered in a meeting of her Evening Toastmasters club in Santa Cruz, California. In the speech about humanoid robots (robots that resemble people), Reed poked fun at today’s ever-advancing technology and fast-paced modern life. A sample:

*“I can foresee a future in which humanoid robots start to join Toastmasters clubs. They learn quickly from feedback, so it won’t take long for them to become competent communicators and leaders. I imagine they’d volunteer to be club officers, since it’s a great way to polish their skills. And they have plenty of time and energy to devote to the job: They don’t need to sleep or set aside family time or shop for groceries.”*

Reed, ACB, says the purpose of satire is to “expose human folly.” It can be powerfully effective. As the 19th-century British scholar Stanley Lane-Poole wrote, satire “has a power of fascination that no other written thing possesses.”

**“Using satire, irony or sarcasm adds creativity and flair to your speeches, but it also demands more of your audience.”**

### **Irony: Not Quite What It Seems**

When asked in a job interview to define irony, Winona Ryder’s character in the movie *Reality Bites* responds the way many of us might: “Well, I can’t really define *irony*, but I know it when I see it.”

It is debatable, however, that many of us do know irony when we see it. Something ironic is more than simply odd, unfortunate or coincidental. For something to truly be ironic, a scenario cannot play out as originally intended. A disparity must exist between:

- ▶ What is thought about a situation and the reality of it. (For example, Romeo thought Juliet had died when in reality she was temporarily sedated.)
- ▶ What is intended by an action and the actual outcome of it. (For example, serving an expensive French wine to impress your guest only to find out he scoffs at wine from France.)

- ▶ What is said and what is meant — as is the case with sarcasm. (For example, “I can’t wait to spend all weekend rehearsing my speech. So glad I’m not going to Las Vegas with my friends.”)

Bernadette Stockwell, CC, is a college English professor and president of Isaac Davis Toastmasters in Acton, Massachusetts. Stockwell remembers a student’s compelling use of irony in a classroom speech. “One of the quieter students in the room stood before the class and began to talk about ‘a steadfast force’ in our classroom,” she recalls. He described this force as “a support that never wavered, was always present and was the accommodating ‘shoulder’ for a student

speaker to lean on.” Stockwell thought the student referred to *her* — trying to get a good grade. But no; he was not honoring a person, but an old wooden desk at the front of the classroom. Because of the student’s creative use of irony, Stockwell awarded him an A grade.

### **Sarcasm: To Bite the Lips in Rage**

The saying “Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit ... but also the funniest” reflects society’s ambivalent response to this literary tactic. Although satire and irony are often used to reproach or scorn, sarcasm is considered more harsh and crude, particularly if it is directed at an individual. In fact, the Greek roots of the word translate as “to bite the lips in rage.” While many say that sarcasm is a potent tool for humor, others warn speakers to be wary, because audience members might take the joking comments at face value. “Personally, I’d be

leery of using sarcasm in a speech,” says Reed, the poet and Toastmaster from California. “It’s not my style to be harsh in that way.”

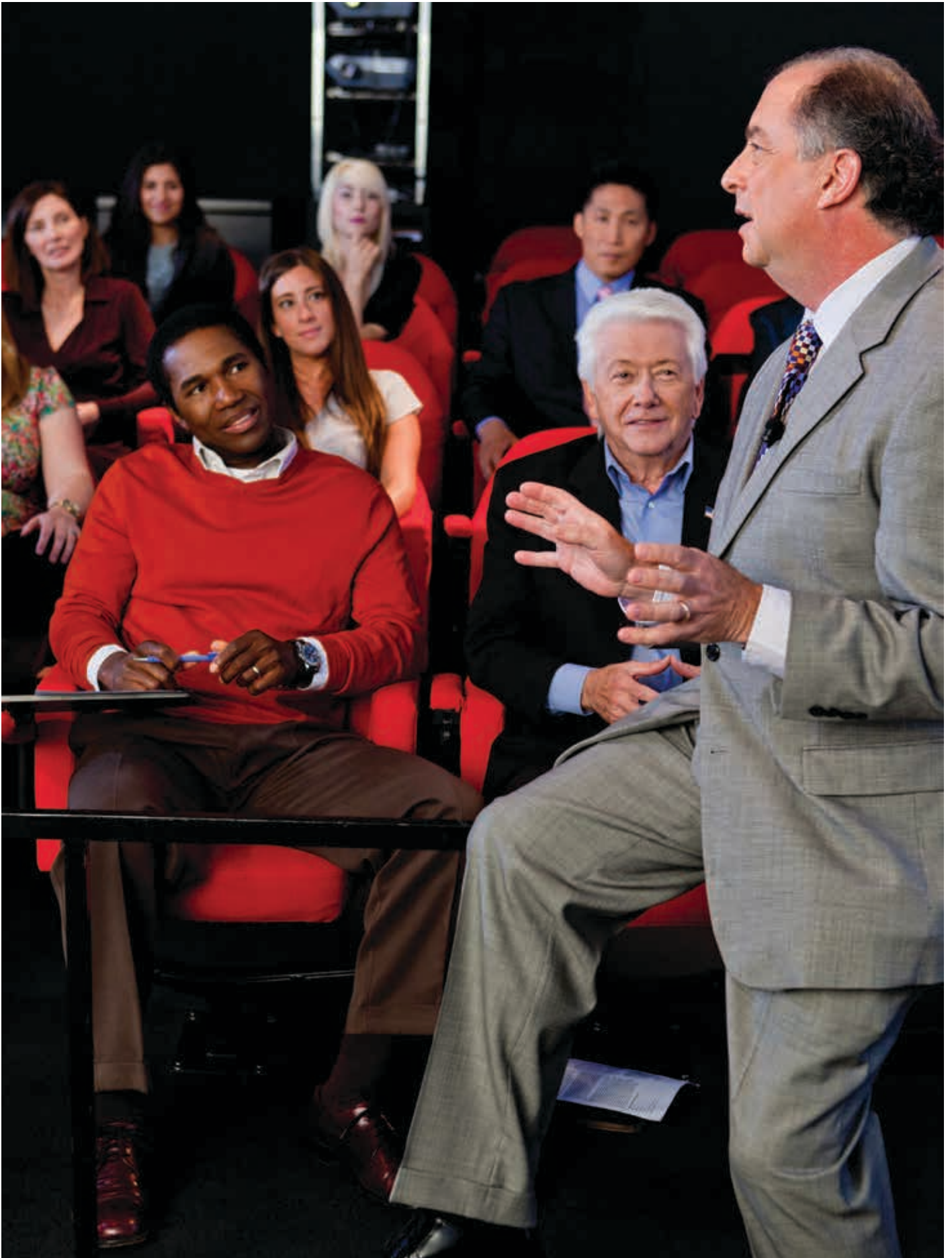
English comedian Ricky Gervais drew sharply mixed reactions to the stream of blistering jokes he unveiled while hosting the 2011 Golden Globes awards show. Among several other scathing remarks about actors’ appearances and abilities, he said this when introducing actor Sylvester Stallone: “The next presenter is a true Hollywood icon. In 10 of the biggest blockbusters of all time, he has shown his extraordinary acting versatility. He has played a boxer ... and Rambo. Please welcome Sylvester Stallone!”

Actor Robert Downey Jr. called the show “hugely mean-spirited with mildly sinister undertones,” yet actor Christian Bale said, “That’s what comedy’s supposed to be about. The guy’s a genius.”

At the very least, be extremely judicious when using sarcasm in a speech. Unlike Ricky Gervais — who was asked back to host the 2012 Golden Globes — most of us can’t boast a net worth of \$80 million.

Use of satire, irony and sarcasm adds creativity and flair to your speeches, but it also demands more of your audience: The listeners must grasp your intended, deeper meanings and (often) your sense of humor. Thus, it is doubly important to practice your speech in front of others until the meaning and humor are clear. The extra effort is worth it. Explore the use of literary devices in your presentations and your audience will thank you. **T**

**Jenny Baranick** is an English professor based in Southern California. Reach her at [jennybaranick@gmail.com](mailto:jennybaranick@gmail.com).





# SHOWING SCHOOL SPIRIT

Become a guest speaker to inspire students and sharpen your skills.

By Ralinda Harvey

**A**s a new adjunct marketing professor, the first thing I wanted to do was bring in exciting guest speakers to add context to my course. I was an inexperienced teacher with the best of intentions — and unaware of the potential problems involved in using guest speakers.

After observing one too many dozed-off, note-passing or homework-studying students sitting in front of a frazzled guest speaker, I realized I had only myself to blame for these

tunities to speak in schools are countless, ranging from speaking at a high-school career day to being a guest lecturer in a graduate-level program.

If done well, this type of activity is fulfilling for both speakers and students. “Guest speakers make the kids’ learning experiences more interesting,” says Richard Conant, a member of Funny Bones Toastmasters in Culver City, California, who is often a guest speaker in his wife’s

*fellow Toastmasters captivate and charm student audiences?*

Here are some tactics to help you shine on the classroom stage.

## 1. Preparation still counts.

One of the biggest mistakes guest speakers make is not preparing enough. Think about what you will say to help students in their lives, their careers or the class they are taking. Be sure to work the “what’s in it for them” material into your speech as early as possible. In addition, be proactive and ask the instructor to brief you on key course concepts and be sure to refer to them in your speech. Also ask the teacher to forward you some of the students’ questions in advance so you can be clear on their interests and expectations.

## 2. Involve the students.

Encouraging dialogue with the students adds energy to your presentation and advances the learning experience. Conant says guest speakers should never lecture the whole time; rather, they should involve students in the presentation — for example, request volunteers for an activity, or ask students questions such as, “What do you think?” “What are some examples?” “What are similar situations in *your* life?”

Also, discuss case studies in your business and ask students how they may have handled similar scenarios before you reveal how things actually

“When speaking to students, don’t take for granted that they are aware of the business trends you know so well.”

episodes of classrooms-gone-wild. I had not prepared my visitors to properly engage what can be an unexpectedly tough crowd. Also, the speakers and I assumed that because they were well-respected executives, the students would naturally care about what the speakers had to say. Wrong!

As is true with any audience, students need to be shown “what’s in it for them.” Speakers must demonstrate why their message is valuable to the class.

Toastmasters, in particular, are well-equipped to make a difference in the classroom. With their speaking background, they can discuss their professional experiences in a creative and compelling way. And the oppor-

grade-school class. “It’s inherently a bit boring [for students] to always have the same teacher. With a different person — a non-teacher — delivering specific information, that information may stand out in the students’ memories better and longer than if it had been delivered by the teacher.”

As for well-meaning, time-crunched professionals, they get the chance to affect the lives of students in close to the same amount of time it takes to have a decent lunch. Which brings me back to my original point: *As a new teacher, what advice could I have offered my guest speakers had I known then what I know now? Even better, what have I learned that can help my*

played out. Posing a few challenges could also be a great opportunity to get fresh ideas for your company.

### 3. Do tell ... the details.

When speaking to students, don't take for granted that they are aware of the business trends you know so well. Yes, the Twitter campaign you launched was a tremendous success, but what made you choose Twitter as opposed to Facebook? Take the time to explain what your thought process was and how decisions are made in your company. Do you consult with a few key people outside your business? Do you take consumer surveys? Give

**“Encouraging dialogue with the students adds energy to your presentation and advances the learning experience.”**

students a detailed, behind-the-scenes look at what you do.

### 4. Connect the dots.

Most students are interested to know how you got where you are. However, if lucky breaks and connections were a key, that will not register as useful advice; instead, describe how you turned a random chance into a real opportunity. Emphasize practical steps you have taken that students can emulate, such as choosing certain courses in school, joining Toastmasters to become a fearless communicator or using effective networking techniques.


### 5. Be resourceful.

Share some useful resources that relate to your topic and suggest ways students can get the most out of them. For example, you might recommend a great blog to follow and inform students that it is possible to establish important connections by guest blogging or making insightful comments on that blog.

### 6. Take something for yourself.

As a Toastmaster you are always on the prowl for ways to improve your speaking skills. Here is a perfect chance: Provide a survey about your classroom presentation for the instructor to distribute after you are gone. Questions should address what students thought about your speaking style and your approach to the topic, as well as what they took away from your speech. Speaking of evaluations, consider making your speech do double-duty by asking a fellow Toastmaster to attend the class and evaluate you.

As an instructor, once I armed my guest speakers with these tips, they started making my students more interested in hearing what they had to say and less interested in a mid-day nap.

So what's next for you, a guest speaker in waiting? Take the first step by putting the word out in your professional and personal networks that you are open to guest-speaking opportunities. Many instructors are hesitant about reaching out; they assume that asking you to speak in their class would be asking for a huge favor. But who knows? It just might be the other way around. 

**Ralinda Harvey** is a member of Funny Bones Toastmasters in Culver City, California. She is a professional writer and lifestyle marketing consultant. As a former marketing professor she continues to guest lecture at schools and universities. Contact her at [rh@glossmarketing.com](mailto:rh@glossmarketing.com).

## TALKING TO TEENS

By Patrick Mott

Teenagers are the original Tough Crowd. They are demanding, easily distracted and possess an alarmingly low boredom threshold. This is not an audience for the unprepared speaker.

Now the good news: Teenagers are not a bizarre and combative subspecies. Think of them as trainee adults who have the same needs and desires as their older counterparts: respect, understanding, trust and a little entertainment.

Bryan Jossart faces such an audience every day — five times a day — as a math teacher at Serrano Intermediate School in Orange County, California. A high school and junior high school teacher for more than 20 years, the former engineer has been highly successful at communicating with his charges. So much so that he was named the Orange County Teacher of the Year in 2006.

What is essential when talking to teens? An authentic message, says Jossart — and a sense of humor.

“I live on [a sense of humor],” he says. “And I think it's appreciated, because I never take myself seriously. I take my subject seriously, but there's a certain entertainment value there, and it's important when you try to communicate with a group to keep it light and not be heavy-handed.”

“A lot of times my students say, ‘You should have done stand-up.’ I tell them I am doing stand-up. I do five shows a day.”

## PROFESSIONAL TRAVELERS

Continued from page 19

leadership skills — skills that are important when traveling, whether attending an event, leading a group, asking for directions, standing on stage, or in my case, overseeing the safety of airline passengers.

**“When traveling, learning some of the region’s language tells people that we care enough to try.”**

Cathy Runyan-Svacina, ACB, also known as “The Marble Lady,” is a 15-year member of Tiffany Springs Toastmasters in Kansas City, Missouri. She relishes the game of marbles — she travels to national and international marble championships and speaks worldwide on topics related to marbles. She says Toastmasters helped her numerous times in her travels, “but the best part

is knowing how to listen and getting others to be comfortable speaking.”

Erica Mandell, a former member of Creekside Toastmasters in Beaverton, Oregon, is currently in Tel Aviv, Israel, for graduate school.

“Thanks to Toastmasters and the organizational skills I learned, I had the confidence to invite a top nuclear security expert to speak to my graduate class about nuclear policy. I will be the one to introduce the speaker, hopefully with poise and proper protocol.”

Communication is more than just the spoken word. “Good communicators use every tool at

their disposal to understand and be understood — regardless of whether people speak the same language,” says Manzanaras. “From the rate and pace of the spoken word, to tone and voice inflections, body language, facial expressions and gestures — it is all part of the composite that makes for an effective communicator.”

To ensure positive and memorable travel experiences, don’t leave your Toastmasters skills at home. They can come in handy when you end up appearing a little *loco*. **T**

**Beth Blair** is vice president public relations for Speak N’ Eagan Toastmasters in Mendota, Minnesota. Her book *Break into Travel Writing* debuts this year. Learn more about her at [bethblair.com](http://bethblair.com).

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## NO LIMITATIONS

Administrative judge and World Champion speaker defies expectations.

**A**t last year's Toastmasters International Convention, Dana LaMon, DTM, presented an education session about how people can achieve excellence as speakers or leaders. Excellence — it is a subject LaMon knows well. Blind since the age of 4, he refused to accept limitations on his life. He graduated from Yale University and

what you want; Imagine yourself there; Start the journey; and Stick to it until the goal is reached.

LaMon is the author of four books, including *Master the Ceremonies: The Emcee's Handbook for Excellence* and his latest, *Making the Moment Meaningful: Creating a Path to Purpose and Fulfillment*. The 24-year Toastmaster belongs to three

**What single characteristic most contributed to your success?**

I am afflicted with stubborn determination. I used to think that “stubborn” was a bad word. When I was a young child, my mother often said, “You’re so stubborn.” I have come to know that stubbornness, when applied to determination, is a good thing. It’s not good when it renders a person inflexible.

I do not easily give up on a task. I reason that if it can be done by one person, then it can be done by me. Of course, I acknowledge that I must have the skill to perform a task when a special skill is required. For example, I cannot perform brain surgery, because I don’t have the training. But I can obtain the training and then perform the surgery. So if I set a goal to complete medical school, stubborn determination will get me to the goal.

**What is your next goal?**

Goals change based on the circumstances, but desire is constant. My desire is to spread my message about meaningful living, the subject of the book I published in January 2012, *Making the Moment Meaningful*. My goal is to increase my speaking to about 100 speeches a year. I hope to reach that goal in three years.

**“I do not easily give up on a task. I reason that if it can be done by one person, then it can be done by me.”**

then served nearly 30 years as an administrative law judge. As a Toastmaster, he achieved the Accredited Speaker designation and won the 1992 World Championship of Public Speaking. He is the only Toastmaster who holds both distinctions.

LaMon delivers speeches and training programs around the world and speaks for organizations as varied as Kiwanis, Vanguard Investments and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. He earned the Accredited Speaker designation with a keynote speech titled “KISS to Success,” offering four steps to success that have worked for him: Know

clubs near Lancaster, California: Talents Unlimited, Speakers in the Wind and Desert Candles. He lives with his wife, two sons and two daughters.

**Q. Were you always success-oriented?**

**A.** My drive to achieve was probably my response to other’s low expectations of me. After I became blind at age 4, the statement I heard very often was, “He’s blind; he can’t.” Whenever I heard someone say I couldn’t do something because of my blindness, it became my goal to prove the person wrong.



"I have learned that stubbornness, when applied to determination, is a good thing."



Dana LaMon

**You are an avid reader and writer. As a blind person, what tools or technology do you use to help you read?**

Most of my reading is through the use of "talking books" from the National Library Service (NLS) of the Library of Congress. I began using talking books in the 1960s when books were recorded on vinyl records. Today, the NLS uses Digital Talking Books. There is a special machine that plays cartridges similar to a flash drive, and books are downloaded from a special website. I just started using this method of reading in May 2011. In the last eight months I have read 83 books.

Occasionally I will order a book from the NLS in Braille. I also receive commercial audio books from friends.

**How has your Toastmasters training benefited your law career?**

I served as a judge for seven years before joining Toastmasters. I did not join for the purpose of improving my work; that benefit was unintended. I became a better listener. I improved my ability to decipher what was relevant to a decision in a case. Additionally, I improved my writing of clear and concise decisions.

After the presiding judge was notified that I attained my Competent Toastmaster designation, she added me to the team that trained new judges.

**Do your children appreciate your interest in communication and leadership topics?**

My sons, Dana and Anton, and daughters, Winter and Linnea, seem to have respect for my skills as a speaker. Whenever they have an oral presentation to give, they come to me. I found that even though I think they aren't listening, they are. From time to time they tell me nuggets of wisdom or inspiration they have gleaned from my speeches.

**How have your travels shaped your world view?**

My traveling to South Africa, Botswana, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan has served to strengthen my faith in the greatness of humanity. I have learned about differences in culture and am persuaded that "different" does not translate to "superior" or "inferior." No matter where I have been, I have found that people around the world want what I want — a meaningful life.

**You are a World Champion of Public Speaking and an Accredited Speaker. Which of the two paths have benefited you the most?**

Each designation has its specific impact. The Accredited Speaker title impresses and influences the person deciding to hire me as a professional speaker. It serves to verify my speaking skills. The World Champion title impresses the audience to whom I am speaking. When they hear the designation in the speaker introduction, they respond as if to say, "Okay, this is a person I won't mind listening to."

**As a 24-year Toastmaster, what keeps you coming back to the organization?**

I have stayed in Toastmasters to give. I want to give away what I know: what I have gained from being in Toastmasters for 24 years, from competing in contests and from speaking to Toastmasters around the world. Every time a new member joins the club, I have another reason to stay. Another person to whom I can give. T

To learn more about **Dana LaMon**, visit his website at [danalamon.com](http://danalamon.com).

# MEDIEVAL THINKING

Finding the middle without a beginning or an end.

By John Cadley

**I've never liked the word** *medieval*. When I first heard it in grade school I thought it meant a time in history when evil stuff didn't happen quite as much, or when it did happen it wasn't quite as bad. Like someone saying: "It wasn't really evil, just sort of mid-evil."

Then I found out it refers to the *Middle Ages*, from the Latin *medium aevum*. How *aevum* became *eval* I will never know. My guess is that there were no dentures in those days and a lot of words got garbled from people speaking without any teeth. But that leaves the question: Middle of what? You can't locate the middle unless you know the beginning and the end. Science may have some ideas about when the world began but nobody knows when it will end — except the people who predict it so they can be interviewed by Geraldo Rivera.

Technically, medieval denotes the period between the fifth century and the 15th century (when, by the way, a lot of evil stuff *did* happen. Hundred Years' War, anyone?). The actual start date is 476, when the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, seeing his armies decimated, his cities crumbling, his treasury empty, and hordes of Goths, Visigoths, Huns, Bulgars, Avars and Magyars closing in on every side, handed his crown to the court jester and said, "Here, you take over, I'm out of here." The end date is 1453 with the siege of Constantinople, when Constantine XI, seeing he had 10,000 men to defend the city against 150,000 Ottoman Turks armed with 69 pieces of artillery, handed *his* crown to the court

jester and said, "Here, you take over. I've got some vacation time I need to take before the end of the year." It was at this point that the Sultan Mehmed II, commander of the Ottomans, rode into Constantinople, called a press conference and said: "OK, this is the end of the Middle Ages. It's been fun but it's time to move on to the Early Modern Era so Gutenberg can invent the printing press and we can all learn how to read."

Of course, historians are a precise bunch and the phrase "medieval times" covers a lot of ground. So they've given us the Early, High and Late Middle Ages, which break down roughly as follows:

**EARLY MIDDLE AGES:** The glory of Rome is gone. Infrastructure is crumbling. Complaints about potholes have increased dramatically. Nobody can afford lions and tigers for the Colosseum, so the gladiators have to fight small domestic animals. The public baths are gone and underarm deodorant is still 20 centuries away from being discovered. Air quality becomes an issue. And because the trade routes are no longer safe to travel, Roman merchants invent the Dollar Store in hopes of drumming up a little business at home.

**HIGH MIDDLE AGES:** European population explodes — a kind of baby boom effect from the Early Middle Ages when, as we've seen, there wasn't much else to do. Plus, barbarian invasions cease, so more people actually get to live long enough to reproduce. Classical knowledge, long hidden in

mosques and monasteries, is brought into the light and more people get to be insufferable know-it-alls. The decimal system replaces Roman numerals for everything except the Super Bowl, and algebra is invented, dooming future generations of high school students to suffer untold agonies trying to find out what "x" equals.

**LATE MIDDLE AGES:** Characterized by some of the world's greatest all-time downers. Climate change causes 95 famines, the Black Death kills one-third of the population, and the Hundred Years' War takes care of the rest, leaving Europe with 14 people in reasonably good health. Unfortunately, half of them are English and the other half French, so the mayhem keeps right on going. The church tries to intervene but can't do much since there are three popes at the time, all with different parenting styles. On the positive side, people find out the world isn't flat after all and the cruise industry is born.

So there you have it — centuries of human struggle, triumph and disaster denoted by a single word, which refers to a middle where there is no middle, isn't pronounced the way it's spelled, and is really easy to *misspell* with those two stupid vowels side by side. Call it medieval thinking, but I just don't like the word. **T**

**John Cadley**, a retired advertising copywriter, is a freelance writer and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Reach him at [jcadley@twcny.rr.com](mailto:jcadley@twcny.rr.com).

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**Bill Moylan, DTM**, from Farmington Hills, Michigan, visits Hwaseong Fortress, just south of Seoul, South Korea.



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**Renée Ouellet, CC**, from Québec, Canada, visits Saint Jean de Buèges Village in the Buèges Valley, Montpellier, France.



**Laurie J. Kurilla, ACB, ALB**, from Ventura, California, visits Machu Picchu, Peru.



**Cheryl A. Woloski, DTM**, from Plains, Pennsylvania, visits Warsaw, Poland.



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