

TOASTMASTER®

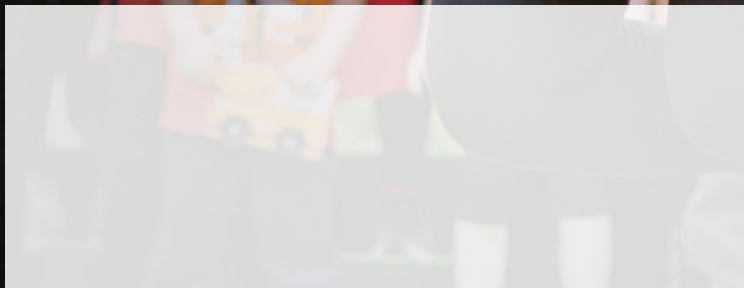
Running with a Dream

Bosnian athlete rises from adversity to achievement

How to Find and Tell Your Story

An Impressive Operation

Medical team embodies Toastmasters skills



It's More Than an MBA

The club president role vs. graduate school.



I learned more in one year serving as club president than I did in the two years of completing my MBA,” says Deepak Gupta, former president of the Toastmasters Club of New Delhi. Some may laugh at that statement. How can you compare Toastmasters with a structured Master of Business Administration (MBA) program? But Gupta has a point. Toastmasters provides opportunities for growth that are not offered by many other educational institutions; Toastmasters prepares you for life.

Natalee McKenley, presently a District 84 area director (Central and Northern Florida, U.S.), is a former president of the Toasting 601 club in Jacksonville, Florida. She agrees the role of club president aligns well with an MBA curriculum.

“Some of the similarities include learning to prioritize and manage an ever-changing schedule,” she says. “The president’s role has been like serving as the group leader in various projects during my MBA studies. Learning skills like how to delegate, gather people, and execute as a team are crucial.”

“Most of all,” she adds, “is the need to constantly present! Like MBA studies, where project presentations are constant, I research and give speeches regularly in Toastmasters. I am in front of my peers every week, presenting some new information, gathering feedback, and executing on plans. I wish I knew about Toastmasters before I completed my degree. It would have made my classes a lot easier!”

“The president’s role has been like serving as a group leader in various projects during my MBA studies.”

—NATALEE MCKENLEY

The art of managing people and resources is the biggest challenge leaders face; Toastmasters is the laboratory that produces leaders who practice and perfect these skills.

These specific leadership and management skills cannot be learned elsewhere—skills such as motivating a member volunteer team; helping fulfill the club’s mission; enthusiastically implementing the Club Success Plan; and encouraging a club culture that inspires, motivates, and supports members and other volunteer leaders.

As the philosopher and writer George Santayana said, “The great difficulty in education is to get experience out of ideas.” Toastmasters combines education with experience in a learn-by-doing format that effectively prepares us for life.

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International President

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Clubs gather to celebrate connections and camaraderie.



The 505 Speakers Corner club of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, celebrates its 505th meeting with balloons and cake.



The Great America Speakers club of Santa Clara, California, hosts a picnic focused on sharing personal stories to allow the corporate club members to get better acquainted.



For a special meeting, the Toastmasters Club of Pune, in Pune, Maharashtra, India, had the 18 pictured Distinguished Toastmasters hold club meeting roles to give the more than 100 attendees an enlightening Toastmasters experience.



Send your fun club photos to photos@toastmasters.org. Include a description and your club name, number and location. Photos must be in jpeg format with a resolution of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) and size of at least 1 MB (megabyte). Out-of-focus images cannot be accepted. It is not necessary to include the Toastmaster magazine or other branded materials in your photos, but if Toastmasters materials are displayed, they must reflect the current brand.

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By Craig Harrison, DTM



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About Toastmasters International

Toastmasters International is a nonprofit educational organization teaching public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. Membership exceeds 358,000 in more than 16,800 clubs in 143 countries.

Find out more at www.toastmasters.org.



Improve public speaking skills



Build leadership skills



Maximize your potential

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USING STORIES TO BREATHE LIFE INTO EVERY SPEECH

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-  **Watch** informative videos.
-  **Listen** to enlightening audio features.
-  **View** collections of fun and interesting photos.
-  **Access** valuable resources through hyperlinks.
-  **Share** articles with prospective members, friends and colleagues.



FIND MORE ONLINE THIS MONTH:



Going The Distance

Meet Nudžejma Softić, a trailblazing Bosnian runner who has completed multiple marathons, half-marathons, and triathlons—all while wearing a hijab. She also gives motivational speeches to running groups and businesses. View additional photos of her unique journey in an online gallery.

Curious About Contests?



It's not always about winning the big trophy. Hear from Toastmasters Toolbox author Bill Brown, DTM, about one member who made great strides in his speaking ability by entering his club's speech contest.

WEB RESOURCE



Branding Basics

Want your marketing materials to stand out among the rest? Get creative but stay consistent with help from the Toastmasters Brand Portal. There you will find an instructional Brand Manual and videos, as well as free templates for business cards, stationery and websites, marketing resources, design elements, and professional images.

www.toastmasters.org/Branding

Surgeon-scientists Shine in Canada

Did you know Toastmasters members are part of an elite team of surgeons and scientists at a Canadian university? Listen to a podcast with China native Dr. Wenjing He to discover how she merges her medical talents with her communication skills.



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▶ MEET MY MENTOR



Stephen Morrow: A Straight-Talking Legend

No matter what club you visit in Northern Ireland or just over the border in the Republic of Ireland, everyone seems to know Stephen Morrow. So says Alison Matthews, who is Morrow's mentee in the Lagan Valley Toastmasters in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. Morrow chartered the Lagan Valley club, and has mentored and cajoled hundreds of "unsuspecting" people into becoming better communicators and leaders, says Matthews. Morrow has been president of the Lagan Valley and Belfast Toastmasters clubs, and as area director, organized the annual district conference in Belfast in 2014—a time when many people were reluctant to attend due to political tensions in the area. Matthews says it was the best attended conference in years.

Alison, what is the best advice Stephen gave you?

"Get over yourself, get out of your chair, get onto the floor, and say anything!" During my first three visits to Lagan Valley Toastmasters, I was planted to my seat and terrified he would even say my name. After I signed up, Stephen told me gruffly there was no point in paying my membership if I were to remain silent for the rest of the year, so I was to get up and say anything. Now he can't get me to shut up!

What characteristic does Stephen possess that you hope to emulate?

Stephen is always thinking of how he can bring his Toastmasters communication and leadership skills to others. He took Toastmasters into his former secondary school in a socially deprived area of Belfast and has now successfully run a Youth Leadership Program for the last four years. At our last meeting, four of those students (two of whom are refugees and just learning English) came and gave their speeches to us. For the past three years, Stephen organized a sort of cross-border "walk and talk" meeting where members of a few nearby clubs walk up a mountain and have a full-blown Toastmasters meeting, much to the surprise of the other walkers we meet! Aply, our Word of the Day for our recent walk was "ambulate"!

How did Stephen become your mentor?

It kind of happened organically, as Stephen was self-employed and understood the difficulties I faced being newly self-employed with no clue as to how to pitch myself and my business and network. He pushed me to do my best and forced me outside of my comfort zone. In 2016, I entered a Women in Business pitching event. Stephen and the rest of my club gave me great feedback before the event, and I won prize money for my business! Stephen has always been



Stephen Morrow and Alison Matthews

self-employed, so he understands all the challenges and the importance of getting a clear message across on social media and in person.

How would you describe Stephen?

Stephen is a straight-talking legend. He doesn't believe in gray—everything is black and white. But at the same time, he is very kind and supportive, and even with his brutal honesty he can cushion evaluations to motivate you and help you learn. I joined Toastmasters as a new business owner who was terrified even to stand up for one minute to talk about my business at networking meetings. Thanks to Stephen and his "gentle" pushing over the years—and the support of the other former presidents—I became the first female president of Lagan Valley Toastmasters. I am now doing roadshows with three other people in my industry. If Stephen hadn't pushed me that night, I might still be at home sitting on the sofa dreaming of the things I could achieve. Instead I'm achieving them!

Laura Mishkind is editorial coordinator for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

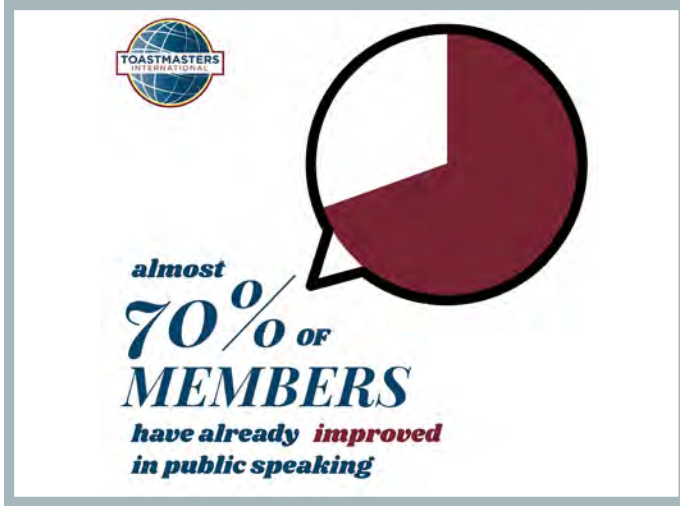
Nominate your mentor by emailing your story and a photo (1MB or larger) to MentorMoment@toastmasters.org.

LOOKING FOR A MENTOR IN YOUR CLUB?

Ask your vice president education who is available to mentor you. To start a mentoring program in your club, order the Club Mentor Program Kit (Item 1163) at www.toastmasters.org/Shop.

► NEWS FROM TI RESEARCH LAB

Did you know...



► LANGUAGES

Happy Holidays!

Toastmasters unveiled two new languages for translation in 2019, bringing the total number of supported languages to 10. In honor of that and the many holidays celebrated around the world this time of year, we'd like to wish everyone happy holidays!

Want to hear how the different languages sound? Visit www.toastmasters.org/Magazine to hear the audio of each language.

즐거운 휴일 보내세요

楽しい休日を

Joyeuses Fêtes

نتمنى لكم أعياداً سعيدة

Feliz Navidad y Felices Fiestas

Boas Festas

佳節快樂

节日快乐

Frohe Festtage

இனிய விடுமுறைக் கால வாழ்த்துக்கள்



▶ SNAPSHOT

Members of Kota Kinabalu Club in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, climbed the country's highest peak, Mount Kinabalu, which stands 13,435 feet/4,095 meters above sea level. The club trained for seven months prior to conquering this feat, and both the training and final climb built strong camaraderie among members.



▶ NEWS FROM TI

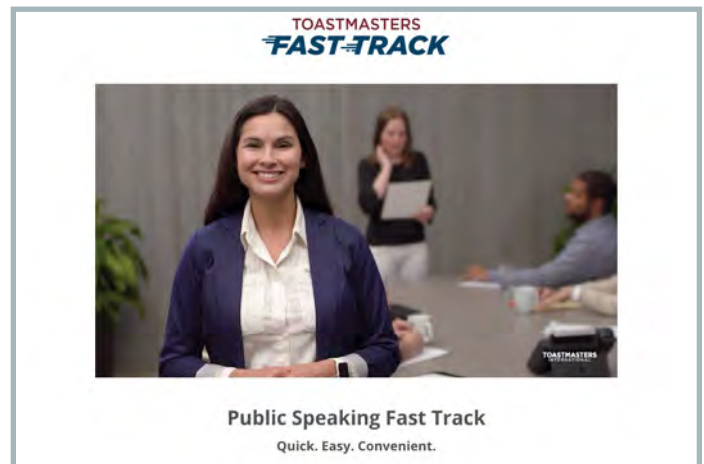
Do You Know Someone Ready for Fast Track?

Perhaps you've heard of Fast Track, Toastmasters' newest program, or maybe you even know someone who has tried it. This new online-only introductory course rolled out in October to help prospective members directly experience the benefits of Toastmasters.

For the price of a latte, participants work through a public speaking course that allows them to polish a speech and gain immediate insight by viewing and reevaluating their original speech. Participants work through the following steps:

- ▶ Complete a self-assessment of their speech-giving ability
- ▶ Record themselves giving their speech to analyze strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ Watch three instructional videos on speech preparation, vocal variety, and body language
- ▶ Watch their original recording
- ▶ Re-assess themselves based on the skills they've learned

Upon completion of the course, participants are encouraged to continue their public speaking journey at a Toastmasters



club and are provided a direct link to the Find a Club section on the website.

Fast Track is a quick, easy, and convenient way for prospective members to see the immediate benefits of Toastmasters membership.

If you know someone who might benefit from Toastmasters but is reluctant to join, steer them to Fast Track, which allows them to learn public speaking skills from the comfort of their own home.

To find out more about Fast Track, visit the Toastmasters On Demand webpage, bit.ly/TI_FastTrack.




1 | A group of Toastmasters from all over the world explores Rocky Mountain National Park near Denver, Colorado, before attending the International Convention.


2 | Distinguished Toastmasters **DESI** and **MIRIAM MORA** of Austin, Texas, visit Grote Markt, a town square in the heart of the old city quarter in Antwerp, Belgium.

3 | **BILL SCHMALZEL** of Sacramento, California, assists with safety support from his kayak for participants in an “open water swim” in the San Francisco Bay near Alcatraz Island in California.

4 | **ALINA WADOWSKA** of Krakow, Poland, takes in the views of Portimão, Portugal. The city is known for its busy marina.



 **View additional photos** in this month's *Traveling Toastmaster* photo gallery at www.toastmasters.org/Magazine.

 **PICTURE YOURSELF HERE!** Pose with the *Toastmaster* magazine during your travels and submit your photos for a chance to be featured in print or online. Send images 1MB or larger to photos@toastmasters.org. Bon voyage!

Reclaiming My Voice

I am a person who stutters. Accepting that led to a career as a comedian and speaker.

BY NINA G

As a stand-up comedian, I have found myself in some more-than-interesting situations. The most memorable was the night a fight broke out just as I was getting onstage. I kept performing. Then the police came. I kept performing. Then the person of interest ran out of the room. I kept performing. Finally, they dragged him out in front of the stage in handcuffs as he yelled at the bartender.

How was I able to keep going? Simple: I have a stutter, and because of that, I have been interrupted my entire life. In fact, I've been interrupted so many times in conversations that I have learned not to pay attention to interruptions. I mean, when you live your life having others guess what words the repetitive sounds you're making might lead to, you learn to deal with disruptions from others. In most new speaking situations, I address the situation upfront by saying, "I stutter. You are just going to have to wait for all my brilliant ideas!"

Growing up in Northern California, I dreamed of becoming a stand-up comedian. For years I wrote jokes, researched events where newcomers could try out their material, and planned for my debut. I was 17 when I realized I had never seen a comedian stutter, and I decided I had to walk away from my dream.

Nearly 20 years later, I attended a stuttering conference that challenged many of my misconceptions. I realized that internalizing interruptions from others was holding me back each time I talked. But it just wasn't conversations. It extended to relationships, wishes, hopes, and dreams. They all had been interrupted by not wanting my voice to be a burden to others. I realized that the way I spoke was valid in all situations, and my goal became to reclaim space I had given up. Six months after the conference, I



Author Nina G

ventured onstage in San Francisco, California, and told my first joke. I have been hooked ever since.

The club treated me exactly how I had hoped—like everyone else.

Once I felt comfortable doing stand-up, I wanted to move into the world of professional speaking. I prefer speaking over writing, which may seem ironic except that in addition to stuttering, I also have dyslexia, and writing is often difficult for me. Knowing that public speaking involves writing speeches, I decided to approach it like I did stand-up and find a way to practice and hone my speeches in a venue where I could mess up and feel safe doing so. Luckily, many people I know

who stutter have joined Toastmasters and recommended it as a safe and friendly place to practice speaking. I found a club and decided to try it.

Of course, as a person who stutters, I am often leery of meeting people. How will they respond to me? Will they give me a patronizing standing ovation just for saying my name? Will I be met with a barrage of advice for how to cure my speech disfluency? Happily, at the Watergate Toastmasters Club in Emeryville, California, I was met with attentive listening and good feedback. The club treated me exactly how I had hoped—like everyone else.

As a professional speaker, I appreciate what Toastmasters meetings offer me. I can not only practice but also experiment with my speeches. Toastmasters is the gym where I work out my speaking muscle for game day when I am paid to speak.

Today, in addition to comedy, I do trainings and keynotes on disability justice and accessibility. I integrate my own experience with stuttering and dyslexia and use humor to help people understand disabilities and build a more accessible society. I've given a TEDx Talk and written a book, which led to TV and radio appearances. It's been incredibly empowering. People with disabilities often second-guess their capabilities and internalize what they can and can't do based on other people's assumptions. Don't be afraid to challenge assumptions in yourself and in society. It was only when I spoke up that I found my authentic voice and brought it onstage. **T**

NINA G lives in Northern California and is a comedian, professional speaker, storyteller, writer, disability activist, and educator. She is the author of *Stutterer Interrupted: The Comedian Who Almost Didn't Happen*. Find out more at www.ninagcomedian.com.



The Value of Mastermind Groups

Extra brainpower generates fresh ideas and creative solutions.

BY LYNNE STRANG, DTM

As the saying goes, everything old is new again. Take the concept of mastermind groups. Coined from the 1920s book *The Law of Success* by Napoleon Hill, mastermind groups bring people together to help each other work toward individual goals. Members discuss their goals or problems with the group, which then brainstorms fresh ideas and creative solutions. Everyone gets the benefit of different perspectives.

Toastmasters can take advantage of mastermind groups to reach any key goal. In my case, I formed a group for professional reasons, as part of my Toastmasters High Performance Leadership (HPL) project in the traditional education program.

My vision was to form a mastermind group of women business owners, consultants, and freelancers who would help each other become more successful and share ideas on topics of interest to sole operators, particularly prioritizing tasks, scheduling time, handling workflow, and finding

trustworthy advisors. My first step was to research mastermind groups and define my goals: What would be my group's main purpose? Who should participate?

You are much more likely to achieve a goal when you belong to a supportive, encouraging group of peers.

I learned that in a typical mastermind meeting, each member gets equal time in the "hot seat" to talk about a specific challenge or problem. (Some groups use "focus seat" or another term to refer to this opportunity.) The other members ask clarifying questions and, if necessary, probe deeper to unearth the root of the problem. Once it's exposed, the group brainstorms ideas, shares insights, and recommends solutions or actions based upon their own

experiences and knowledge. A leader or facilitator keeps the conversation on track, encourages the group to work together, and watches the clock to ensure each hot-seat discussion stays within its allotted time.

As anyone who has ever had a big idea knows, procrastination derails many good intentions. You are much more likely to achieve a goal when you belong to a supportive, encouraging group of peers who meet regularly, provide progress updates, hold each other accountable, and celebrate each other's victories.

Variety of Formats

Like Toastmasters clubs, mastermind groups vary in terms of when, where, how often, and how long they meet. A group of marketers, for example, may meet for 90 minutes once a week over a three-month period to study and implement a new social media strategy. A group of business executives may hold 10 two-hour meetings throughout the year to help each

other improve their companies. Some groups meet in person; others are virtual. Some are free; others charge a membership fee, which can be substantial. Most groups tend to be small, with four to eight members being common.

Starting Your Own Group

Since I live in a metropolitan area with a lot of traffic, I opted for a virtual meeting format. That meant learning to use video conferencing and practicing with my HPL advisory committee, so I could smooth out the kinks before holding my first meeting.

The most challenging part of the process was recruiting members. It takes time to find candidates and have conversations with them to determine if they are a good match. I used my network and social media resources (including my Toastmasters district's Facebook page) to find four "solopreneurs" from different backgrounds, who knew the realities of self-employment and possessed certain qualities—such as friendliness, authenticity, and selflessness—that foster meaningful, candid conversations. My group was free to members.

Dianne Mouchon Rhodes, a member of Franconia Orators in Alexandria, Virginia, and a veteran of three mastermind groups, agreed to join. "I've seen improvements in the way I do business," she says of the process. "For me, one of the biggest pluses is the exchange of information. It has been so helpful to present a business challenge to members and receive feedback. It is also gratifying to be able to give advice and suggestions to others."

Finding a Group

Starting a mastermind group from scratch may not be for everyone. If you prefer to explore groups that are up and running, here are some suggestions for finding one:

- ▶ **Use your network.** Ask people you know if they belong to a mastermind group or know someone who does.
- ▶ **Visit social media sites.** Meetup lists more than 400 mastermind groups worldwide. LinkedIn, Alignable, and

other business-oriented social media networks have forums that sometimes offer leads on both newly forming and existing mastermind groups for professionals.

- ▶ **Vary online search terms.** Mastermind groups sometimes go by other names. Include search terms such as "peer advisory groups" or "peer-to-peer mentoring" for more results.

Whether you join an existing alliance or form your own, a mastermind group

can be a powerful addition to your success plan. It's fun. It's thought-provoking. And it just might provide that push you need to finally achieve an elusive goal. **T**

Lynne Strang, DTM, is a member of *Galloping Governors Advanced Toastmasters and Sparkling Speakers Toastmasters*, both in Fairfax, Virginia. She is a freelance writer and the author of *Late-Blooming Entrepreneurs: Eight Principles for Starting a Business After Age 40*.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through my HPL project and other avenues, I learned these mastermind fundamentals:

- ▶ **Group chemistry is everything.** It isn't enough to have members who share a goal. Look for friendly, motivated members who have a sincere desire to help others succeed.
- ▶ **The leader needs to be well-organized.** Other skills needed for this role are diplomacy, time management, excellent follow-up, and an ability to listen closely.
- ▶ **Ground rules provide clarity.** Members should know upfront what's expected of them in terms of attendance, participation, and maintaining confidentiality.
- ▶ **An agenda keeps things on track.** The conversational nature of mastermind groups may foster a temptation to wing it. Make sure you have structure for every meeting.
- ▶ **Members need a way to communicate between meetings.** My group, for example, uses an email list and a shared online document to share resources and other information.

Mastermind Snapshot

Michael Bayer, who received the Accredited Speaker designation at the Toastmasters International Convention last August, has belonged to several mastermind groups through the years. His current group was key in helping him earn Accredited Speaker status.

"I joined because I needed an accountability group to keep me on track with my goals, as well as give me advice and guidance," Bayer says. One way the group ensures accountability is "Fess Up Friday." That day, members are expected to share how well they did—or did not do—in reaching weekly goals and setting new ones.

Bayer says that each member must be committed to the process for it to work.

"I've been in groups that were all talk but no action," Bayer notes. "In my current group, we are serious and supportive, and we are all making progress." All the groups he's belonged to have been free, he adds.



Officer Involvement Equals Member Success

When leaders participate in the learning experience, so do members in their clubs and districts.

BY PAUL STERMAN

Ever since Pathways launched worldwide in 2018, members have looked to their leaders for inspiration and assistance with the education program and with Base Camp, the online learning management system.

Which is why it's vital that district—and club—officers be enrolled and working in Pathways.

Role Models Matter

“Our members view club and district leaders as role models and emulate what they observe,” says Deepak Menon, DTM, Toastmasters’ 2019-2020 International President. “Also, these leaders are expected to have knowledge and experience about the education program they are required to promote to enhance the growth and development of our members.”

The numbers back that up. According to the Toastmasters International Pathways Annual Report, which assesses the first year Pathways was available to members, statistics show a direct correlation between district officers adopting Pathways and members adopting Pathways. (A member is considered to have adopted Pathways once they’ve logged into Base Camp and created an account.

Most members choose a path as soon as they get into Base Camp.)

“Districts with the lowest officer adoption rates have the lowest overall and lowest new-member adoption rates,” the report concludes.

New members who join Toastmasters work in Pathways as their education

program. For all others, there has been a transition period that enables them to work in either Pathways or Toastmasters’ traditional education program, or both. The transition period ends June 30, 2020, after which Pathways will be the organization’s sole education program.

The Pathways Annual Report shows that in districts where more than 90% of district officers adopt Pathways, more than 80% of existing members, and more than 70% of new members, adopt Pathways as well. And at the other end of the spectrum, in districts where less than 60% of district officers adopt Pathways, less than 55% of existing members, and less than 50% of new members, adopt the program.

Menon says this equation means only one thing: “It is imperative that all of the club and district leaders actively adopt and engage with Pathways.”

A One-Year Analysis

The Pathways Annual Report was compiled by the Business Research and Analysis team at Toastmasters World Headquarters. It covers the first full program year that Pathways was available to members (from July 2018 to June 2019). Some of the findings include:

TRACKING TOOLS

Two resources are available to help club officers track members’ progress in Pathways. With the Pathways Achievement Chart, clubs can not only track members’ progress but also display the chart at club meetings to keep members informed. The Pathways Achievement Tracker is a valuable record-keeping tool that includes pages for recording members’ paths, completed speeches, meeting roles, and more. Both tools can be purchased through the Toastmasters online store:

www.toastmasters.org/PathwaysStrong



PATHWAYS ADOPTION

Total adoption

36.13%

64.97%

New member adoption

44.29%

60.84%

June 2018

June 2019



OFFICERS LEAD THE WAY IN PATHWAYS ADOPTION.

Districts where officer adoption is lowest have the lowest overall and new member Pathways adoption rates.

- Toastmasters International Research

It's up to district officers to set the tone for success, she adds.


"Leaders need to lead by example. How can we motivate members to migrate to Pathways when we ourselves have not done so?" says Starr, a member of the Dining to Speak Toastmasters club in Fairfield, New Jersey. "We cannot 'sell' the program to others if we lack understanding of it and enthusiasm for Pathways."

"Our members view club and district leaders as role models and emulate what they observe."

—TOASTMASTERS
INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT
DEEPAK MENON, DTM

Starr herself started in Pathways when it became available to District 83 in May 2018. She is now on Level 2 in both the Effective Coaching and Motivational Strategies paths. "I picked these paths to help build my leadership skills in my role as program quality director and now district director."

Officers and members should all be working in Pathways at this point, not waiting until the June 30, 2020 deadline, says Menon. He adds that Pathways is here to stay, and it's a great asset to current and future Toastmasters. The innovative program will help members better meet their professional and personal goals.

"The Pathways education program provides contemporary skills and competencies much needed in our lives, presently, and in the future," says Menon. "Embracing Pathways as quickly as possible provides our members a head start in gaining these competencies that will help them achieve the objectives for which they have joined Toastmasters." 

Paul Serman is senior editor for *Toastmaster magazine*.

To learn more about the Pathways program, visit www.toastmasters.org/Pathways.

- ▶ The overall rate of members adopting Pathways (as of June 2019) was about 65%, up from 36% a year earlier.
- ▶ The rate of new members adopting Pathways is also growing. The adoption rate as of June 2019 was about 61%, almost 17% higher than it was a year before.
- ▶ On average, users take approximately 222 days to complete a path.
- ▶ The path completed by the most members is Presentation Mastery (about 200 members had completed it at the time of the report).

Perhaps nothing is as attention-grabbing as the statistics that reflect the connection between officers adopting Pathways and members adopting the program. Lynda Starr, DTM, District 83's program quality director in 2018-2019,

says her fellow district officers not only enrolled in Pathways but took many steps to help members become comfortable with navigating the program. One has been holding "Pathways Live" events—drop-in sessions where members work with Pathways leaders and get any of their questions answered.

"District 83 has done a combination of the drop-ins, workshops, virtual conferences, and club visits by our Pathways team led by a past district director," says Starr, the 2019-2020 district director. "The hands-on approach—offering members a chance to come with their laptops, tablet, or other devices and sit with a Pathways trainer or Base Camp Manager—seems to be the most effective regardless of the setting. The district is continuing to do all three types of trainings."

Everyone Has a Story

How to dig in and discover your own.

BY CRAIG HARRISON, DTM

We're surrounded by stories. I took a trip recently and all I heard were stories: on the shuttle to the airport, while going through the security lines, at the gate, on the airplane, and while waiting for my baggage. Everyone was sharing stories. The flight attendants were no doubt telling stories to each other about us!

Many speakers lower their head and murmur that they don't have great stories since they haven't beaten cancer, founded a Fortune 500 company, or won a Nobel Prize. But everyone has stories; you just need to uncover them.

The Best Stories: Unique Yet Universal

What makes a speaker's story compelling? For starters, it's *their* story. Not a story gleaned from an article or book you read or lifted from another speaker's repertoire. Audiences can sense when a story is fictitious or appropriated from other sources. Authenticity reigns.

For the audience to embrace your personal story, it needs a universal theme that people can relate to. Otherwise, your story is not serving your audience.

For example, we can all relate to stories with these familiar themes:

- ▶ Coming of age
- ▶ Acquiring wisdom
- ▶ The hero's journey
- ▶ Finding Prince Charming

In fact, the list of universal truths is a lengthy one. For any story you're considering using, identify the broad appeal it offers listeners.

History, Her Story, Our Story

Your family has stories—about your birth or how your ancestors arrived in this country. Your religion has stories. Your organization has them: about the founders, the incorporating of the business, and its development. Your nation has them: about its founders, wars, famines, transformations, and growth. Cultures have them; often they take the form of myths and legends. You have stories—of growing up, of life's milestones, of your travels. It's time to uncover them.

What makes a story meaningful and memorable is how you tie it in to something larger that people recognize and understand. A successful story needs to do more than give an account of something that happened to you; rather, there needs to be a moral, learning point, or universal truth embedded within it that others can relate to. Keep that in mind as you begin to mine your past.

Uncovering Your Story Gems

People constantly ask me: "How do I find my own stories?" It's hard to do in isolation yet easy to do with the help of others. Engage a friend, colleague, or family member and spend some



For the audience to embrace your personal story, it needs a universal theme that people can relate to.

the first time you did something. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it is guaranteed to generate stories.

- ▶ First day at school
- ▶ First pet
- ▶ Childhood best friend
- ▶ Your first girlfriend/boyfriend
- ▶ First breakup
- ▶ Favorite vacation
- ▶ First time you saw your partner
- ▶ First job
- ▶ First place you lived on your own

Other topics that spark stories:

- ▶ What was your family like?
- ▶ Where did you grow up and what made it distinctive?
- ▶ What were some of your favorites when you were a child? Foods? Friends? Music? Hangouts? Relatives?
- ▶ What has been the most exciting or unusual thing you've done?
- ▶ Have you ever witnessed an extraordinary event?
- ▶ Have you ever encountered a famous person? If so, what did you do or say?

time together. Have them ask you about the following situations and capture what emerges (through notes or a recording). Many of the questions pertain to

Using this process, I generated stories about the large dog on the corner that inhibited my newspaper route, the time I made a famous comedian laugh, and a mishap at a Chinese banquet hall in Hong Kong. Once you've found a story to develop, expand on it with details and then weave in a takeaway or a common life theme so the audience goes away with something deeper than your personal story. Listeners will either inhabit your story with

FAVORITE VACATION



CHILDHOOD BEST FRIEND



FIRST PET





FIRST JOB

FIRST TIME YOU MET YOUR SPOUSE

FIRST APARTMENT

you, or it will remind them of their own story. Either way, you've connected!

Types of Stories for Everyone

Your use of story can be educational, entertaining, inspirational, motivational, or some combination thereof.

Professional speakers, trainers, consultants, and coaches use stories strategically to tie into the main theme or learning point they are discussing. Parents often use stories to teach children lessons and instill a sense of family, religious, national, and cultural heritage. Many professionals have a “signature” story, a story of their own as distinctive as their signature. They tell it flawlessly, again and again, as if for the first time.

Others, such as educators, storytellers, or aspiring World Champions of Public Speaking, use stories to transition from one part of a presentation to another. This technique creates a change of pace and redirects the audience's attention to a third party.

“The human mind is wired to be receptive to stories,” says Dilip Abayasekara, DTM, a past International President and an Accredited Speaker. “A well-designed story helps the audience ‘feel’ the scene that the storyteller is painting ... stories help people see, hear, and feel [your message]. If you want to connect with an audience, stories are an essential and invaluable tool.”

Stories validate and reinforce your message and offer an outlet for thoughtful reflection. Yours can too.

Story On!

Once you have some stories to develop, start honing them. Don't be afraid to experiment to find the right balance of story and message. How?

- ▶ Write them out—pay attention to the story arc: the beginning, the escalation, and the climax. Consider ending with a lesson you learned or a conclusion you reached.
- ▶ Tell them informally to your friends to see what interests them, what they want to hear more about, and what the stories mean to them.

- ▶ Share them at your Toastmasters club and in your other presentations.
- ▶ Check libraries or community centers or other gathering places for storytelling opportunities, anyplace where stories are freely exchanged. Ask for feedback before sharing your story and note reactions. (In the U.S., you can look for Story Swaps, which are often fostered by local story guilds or associations.)
- ▶ Record your stories. Then relax and listen to them critically and subjectively. How can you improve?
- ▶ Ask for feedback from your audiences—through written evaluations—to learn which stories stuck, which missed the mark, and which were their favorites. Try to find out specifically the why behind what worked and what didn't.
- ▶ Practice, practice, practice.
- ▶ Listen to storytelling programs online or in podcast form, particularly “This American Life” (www.thisamericanlife.org), or “UnFictional” (www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/unfictional), or “Serial” (www.serialpodcast.org).
- ▶ Listen to the stories told on The Moth (www.themoth.org) and the rich oral histories recorded in StoryCorps (www.storycorps.org).

Everyone has stories. And we all should work on sharing those stories, not only to become better speakers, but to share ourselves with others. “Storytelling is something I have been trying to develop over the years, because I realize how powerful it is,” says Toastmasters' 2019 World Champion of Public Speaking, Aaron Beverly. “Humans are built to tell stories; they are what keep people's attention the most.”

So, dig in, discover your own story, and then you, too, will live happily ever after! **T**

Craig Harrison, DTM, is a past District 57 governor, professional speaker, and storyteller. He got his start melding stories with silliness going door-to-door in his hometown of Berkeley, California, as an 11-year-old telling and selling Recycled Jokes. Enjoy story resources at expressionsofexcellence.com/storytelling.



Inspiring Quotes on Storytelling

Want to get inspired to add more illustrative stories to your speeches and conversations? We've rounded up quotes by influential storytellers from a variety of backgrounds to encourage you on your storytelling journey.

“You’re never going to kill storytelling, because it’s built in the human plan. We come with it.”

—MARGARET ATWOOD, AUTHOR



“Stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.”

—CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE, AUTHOR

“The most amazing thing for me is that every person who sees a movie brings a whole set of unique experiences, but through careful manipulation and good storytelling, you can get everybody to clap at the same time, laugh at the same time, and be afraid at the same time.”

—STEVEN SPIELBERG, FILMMAKER



“The storyteller sets the vision, values, and agenda of an entire generation that is to come.”

—STEVE JOBS, ENTREPRENEUR

“Humans are not ideally set up to understand logic; they are ideally set up to understand stories.”

—ROGER SCHANK, ENTREPRENEUR



“Tell me the facts and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”

—NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERB

“Great stories happen to those who can tell them.”

—IRA GLASS, RADIO HOST AND PRODUCER



“I’m writing my story so that others might see fragments of themselves.”

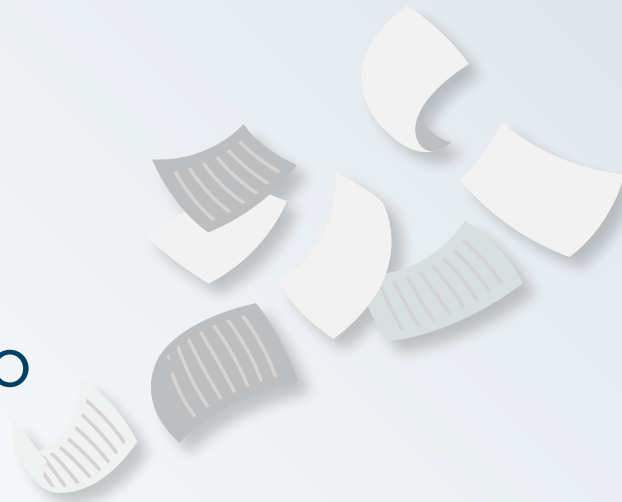
—LENA WAITHE, SCREENWRITER



“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.”

—RUDYARD KIPLING, AUTHOR

Using **Stories** to **Breathe Life** into **Every Speech**



15 storytelling tips for weaving the personal with the universal.

BY CRAIG VALENTINE

Over the past 20 years, I've had some amazing opportunities to speak to audiences about the importance of leadership and presentation skills, and I've been fortunate to touch lives around the globe. The main tool I've used to accomplish this is storytelling. Storytelling helps both leaders and presenters motivate, inspire, and influence their listeners. It also helps them be remembered.

Here are 15 storytelling techniques I use that can help you breathe life into your speeches and keep your audiences on the edge of their seats.

1 Use a "foundational phrase."

For each story, develop a foundational phrase your audience can easily remember and repeat. It should be simple to say, audience focused, and preferably fewer than 10 words. For example, one of my foundational phrases is, "Don't get ready, stay ready." It sticks with my audience.

2 Don't start each story from the beginning.

You can start from the middle or even the end. For example, I could start like this: "There I was, standing on stage with the 1st place trophy at the World Championship of Public Speaking. It was surreal! However, it didn't start out that way. In fact, four years earlier..." You can start at the end and work back to how you got there. Mix it up with each story.

3 Get to your stories quicker. There's way too much set-up (what I call "pre-ramble") for many stories. Get to the story and then go rapidly into the conflict and hook your audience.

4 Don't be the guru of your own story. The guru is the person who gives you the advice that helps you overcome your conflict and changes your life for the better.

The longer you work on a story, the shorter it should get.

I share a story of how I wanted to leave the company I worked for in order to live my dream of being a professional speaker. The vice president kept offering to raise my salary so I would stay. When I asked my wife what I should do, she said, "I don't care how much they try to compensate you. Your dream is not for sale." I left and spoke more than 160 times in one year. My wife is the guru of that story. Having a guru helps you remain similar, rather than special, to your audience.

5 Pause and look. Realize it's the look you give before, during, and after the line that really tells the story. The story lives in the spaces between the lines. Don't rush into your next line. Many of my

laughs come from the looks rather than the lines. Therefore, the structure of your speech must allow enough space for you to take your time. Remember, you can't rush and resonate.

6 Don't just establish a conflict, escalate it. Think of it like the Titanic. Hitting the iceberg established the conflict but then what happened? The water started rising on the Titanic. That escalation of the conflict led to a desperate need for a solution. You should show how your conflict escalates too. For example, I share a story about wanting to write a book on the art of public speaking. My friends said it would never work because it would be too hard to find a publisher. The more negativity they gave me, the more the conflict escalated. Finally, my friend Steve called and said, "Craig, if you write that book, I'll be the first one in line to purchase it." After a deep sigh of relief, I said, "Steve, that'll be \$15.95."

7 Invite your audience into your scene. For example, I say, "Imagine being in my passenger's seat as I went through the drive-through." My audience members are now in my passenger's seat where they can relive the story with me.

8 Condense to connect. When you deliver a scene with characters having dialogue, don't tell us everything, just tell us the main thing. Try not to



Author Craig Valentine speaks at the 2019 Toastmasters International Convention.



Remember, you're not doing a stage play. You're having a conversation with your audience.

go back and forth between characters more than a few times, because your audience will grow tired. Instead, put the important statements in those few lines of dialogue.

9 Come out of your story and talk to your audience. Remember, you're not doing a stage play. You're having a conversation with your audience. When you get into a story, you don't have to lose that conversation. For example, I may say:

You should have been with my wife and me 15 years ago when we took our six-month-old daughter, Tori, to the doctor. Raise your hand if you have kids. Great, then you know the doctor is going to measure her length and...? They yell out, Her weight!

On a side note, I often hear someone answer, "Her height!" At that point I say, "You do know that the length, when you turn her upright, becomes the height, right?"

Even though I already started my story, I still looked out into the audience and asked them about their kids. I call this a "you-focused check-in." It keeps the audience on their toes because, instead of being passive spectators, they become active participants.

10 Make your audience curious from the beginning. What questions can you plant in their minds that they'll

want answered during the story? I start one story with, "The best leadership principle I ever learned was from the president of the United States in the early 1990s when I shared a golf cart with him." My audience likely has one of the following questions:

- ▶ Which president?
- ▶ How did you get to be in a golf cart with him?
- ▶ What is the lesson he taught?

Because of the curiosity, my audience anticipates coming on the journey with me. Tease them before you tell them.

11 Don't keep repeating your message. When your story is over and you've given your foundational phrase (that short phrase that is easy to remember and repeat), don't ramble on about the point. The story actually makes the point, and the foundational phrase makes the point memorable. If you keep talking and trying to drive the point home, your audience will want the ride to end.

12 Create characters. When delivering the lines of your characters, use their posture, positioning, and maybe a slight change in your voice to make that person come alive and be different from the other characters. You might have a character that is stern, has a very stiff posture, and crosses his arms and frowns when he talks. Become that character.

13 Show the emotional change in your character. After you overcome or transcend your conflict, make sure your audience recognizes the transformation. If there's no change there's no story.

14 Be subtle with most of what you do delivery-wise. For example, you don't need to speak with a child's voice when delivering the lines of a child. Instead, speak with your voice (with maybe a slightly higher pitch) but deliver it with the child's expression. You can also have him or her look up to show that the child is talking to an adult.

15 With a few exceptions, keep your stories short. The longer you work on a story, the shorter it should get. It's addition by subtraction. The story gets better not by what you put in but by what you remove. I try to keep mine under four minutes so I can leave my audience wanting more.

Using these 15 storytelling tips will help you touch lives around the globe and become the speaker others sign up and line up to see. **■**

Craig Valentine is the 1999 World Champion of Public Speaking. He is an internationally known professional speaker, author, and speech coach and is the founder of the Speak and Prosper Academy. Learn more at www.52speakingtips.com.



“I want all of society to see that our biggest differences are our greatest treasure.”

—NUDŽEJMA SOFTIĆ



Running with a Dream

Trailblazing
Bosnian runner
and speaker learns
that training is
everything.

BY LAURA AMANN

In 2015, Nudžejma Softić of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, decided to take up running. Within six months, she ran her first half-marathon (about 13 miles) and within two years, at the age of 28, she learned to swim and was training for a triathlon, an event combining running, swimming, and bicycling, each at long distances.

She has now completed seven full marathons, 45 half marathons, three 70-mile triathlons (also known as Ironman 70.3), and more standard triathlons than she can count. She is currently training for a full Ironman in 2020. (See sidebar for distances of these races.) A member of the Sarajevo Toastmasters club, she also gives motivational speeches to running groups and businesses, and two years ago, she formed a running group, “Trčanje i to,” which has now grown to over 200 members.

Much of the attention Softić garners is for what she wears: She is the first woman in Europe to finish a full marathon and an Ironman 70.3 while wearing a hijab, a Muslim scarf that covers a woman’s hair and neck. But she has also overcome tremendous obstacles in her life and credits running with changing her perspective and outlook. In the past two years, she has been featured in numerous print articles and is now the subject of a feature-length documentary, *Little Star Rising*, which focuses on her life and accomplishments as well as her positive and inspirational attitude. The film debuted in August at the Sarajevo Film Festival.

From a Difficult Early Life to a Running Life

Softić was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina just before the start of the Bosnian War. Her father was killed when the fighting began. Her mother, pregnant and with Softić and her sister in tow, was forced into a concentration camp. They were later sent to a

Defining the Distances:

Triathlon: A multisport race with three continuous and sequential events: swimming, cycling, and running. Distances can vary, but the most common length follows the Olympic guidelines of swimming .93 miles (1.5 km), biking 24.8 miles (40 km), and running 6.25 miles (10 km).

Marathon: A long-distance running race of approximately 26 miles (42.195 km).

Half-marathon: A running race that is half the distance of a full marathon (13 miles/21 km).

Ironman: An extreme long-distance triathlon race consisting of a 2.4-mile (3.86 km) swim, a 112-mile (180.25 km) bicycle ride, and a 26.2-mile (42.20 km) marathon, raced in that order and without a break.

Ironman 70.3 or Half Ironman: Each leg of this triathlon is half the distance of that segment in a full Ironman. The 70.3 refers to the total distance in miles (113.0 km) covered in the race, which consists of a 1.2-mile (1.9 km) swim, a 56-mile (90 km) bike ride, and a 13.1-mile (21.1 km) run.



Nudžejma and her husband, Jasmin Harbinja, finish together at the Ironman 70.3 in Zell am See, Austria, during their honeymoon.

refugee camp in Croatia. “In Croatia, my mum met my stepfather, a recent Syrian immigrant, who had arrived at the camp as a humanitarian worker,” she says. “My mother and stepfather taught my siblings and me values—and that I have to fight for myself.”

In 2001, Softić and her family of eight were able to relocate to Sarajevo. There, she completed a master’s degree in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian language and literature, and she now works as a proofreader and copy editor for Al Jazeera Balkans TV. She is also a personal running trainer and keeps busy with her running club, which, in addition to encouraging running, also tries to motivate people to take small steps that add up to a big difference in their health and everyday lives.

Running has helped her focus on the positive aspects of her life and brought her new friends and opportunities. “I realized I could spend the rest of my life in despair thinking that it’s someone else’s fault for my bad life [referring to her refugee childhood, as well as a short, failed marriage], or I could choose how to live.”

She now considers Sarajevo home, although she tries not to tie herself to one place and still travels and moves frequently. “I believe that moving brings us all opportunities that we get in life.”

The Making of ‘Iron Nudži’

Softić confronted a few challenges when she first started competing. Like other competitors, she had to gain financial support, but she also had to find clothes appropriate for a Muslim woman, particularly a modest bathing suit, to wear for her biggest personal obstacle: One-third of a triathlon involves swimming in

open water. And Softić not only had to learn to swim, but she also had to overcome her great fear of water, especially deep water.

After failing to qualify for the swimming portion of her first Ironman 70.3 attempt, Softić trained intensely and competed again the following year, finishing with ease. She says her stubbornness and persistence to finish the race, despite all the fears and difficulties, is what earned her the nickname “Iron Nudži,” a play on the nickname for Nudžejma, Nudži.

“Some people’s reactions were that I am crazy to run in the heat with a headscarf,” she laughs. Others felt that if she wanted to be a true role model, she should be winning more races. Although she initially struggled with these types of comments, she now shrugs them off. “I realized how much more important my role is as a person who makes a path for others, a person who breaks stereotypes and shows that she can do anything.” She particularly wants to inspire women who wear headscarves and who are only recently beginning to compete in sports at a high level. (Until 2012, hijabs were not allowed in the majority of Olympic and other international sporting events.) She recognized that one of the best ways she could inspire others was by sharing her story and letting people know about the obstacles she has overcome, including her childhood.

In March 2019, Softić joined the Sarajevo Toastmasters, the only Toastmasters club in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Media outlets were beginning to ask her to be a guest speaker, and she was starting to get hired as a speaker by businesses that wanted to hear her message of inspiration and motivation. She knew she already had the experience and leadership skills she needed, but to make the impact she hoped to, she needed to improve her public speaking skills. For her Ice Breaker, Softić told the club about her childhood during the Bosnian War.

“We can achieve every goal if we have a good plan, if we work regularly on it, if we train and face our fears.”

—NUDŽEJMA SOFTIĆ

She credits Toastmasters with giving her the confidence to talk to diverse groups of stakeholders and financial backers during the course of filming, and as she continues to promote the documentary at various film festivals across Europe.

Alma Palo, founder of the Sarajevo Toastmasters club, says that Softić, now the club’s vice president public relations (VPPR), has tirelessly promoted the club and worked to support many elements of the club’s development. She has also seen Softić’s impact on the club. “Her fantastic stories, told in her speeches, inspired many people to work on their dreams and try to make this world a better place.” She adds, “Nudžejma has taught us that



the only limits are the ones in our minds and that it takes courage and persistence to achieve one's goals."

"I realized how much more important my role is as a person who makes a path for others, a person who breaks stereotypes and shows that she can do anything, especially to women who wear headscarves."

—NUDŽEJMA SOFTIĆ

Softić weaves the larger lessons she has learned from running into her speeches and daily talks, saying she can't imagine her life without running now. She particularly emphasizes that training is everything. "Running has taught me that we can achieve every goal if we have a good plan, if we work regularly on it, if we train and face our fears. There are no shortcuts: How much we invest is exactly how much we get back."

Keep Moving

Although she initially received the most attention for being one of the first women to finish a marathon and triathlon wearing a hijab, she is quick to downplay her role as a trail-blazer and is proud that so many women are taking up the sport in her country. "Although at first it was very exotic to see a woman with a headscarf in a race, very soon it became completely normal."

The concept for the documentary *Little Star Rising* came from one of Softić's colleagues, Slađana Lučić, a documentary filmmaker who wanted to examine how changes in one person's life can affect many other lives. "I felt the need to tell and show this story to others because I witnessed such a powerful, true change in Nudžejma," says Lučić. "I could see how she motivates people to change, how she shows them that the fear of leaving one's comfort zone doesn't have to be stronger than desires and dreams. Her story shows the complexity of the moment we live in and the post-war traumas that haven't yet healed in this region."

Filming took two and a half years and depicts the emotional challenges, the events, the ups and downs, and the big decisions. During that time Softić's running group, which was just beginning at the start of filming, took off, and her marriage to Jasmin Harbinja, a fellow triathlon athlete and Toastmaster, was recorded as well. The film shows the growth of hijab-wearing women who had just started running and are now doing marathons and triathlons. Softić's infectious enthusiasm has also inspired people with weight problems, people with permanent disabilities, and people who never thought they would do sports.



Nudžejma at the Sarajevo Toastmasters club.

This past summer she and her racing friends helped organize an international triathlon in Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Green Lake BH Triathlon Cup drew 163 competitors from nine countries and was organized entirely by women. The women wanted to not only spotlight the growing sport in the region but also to promote their country.

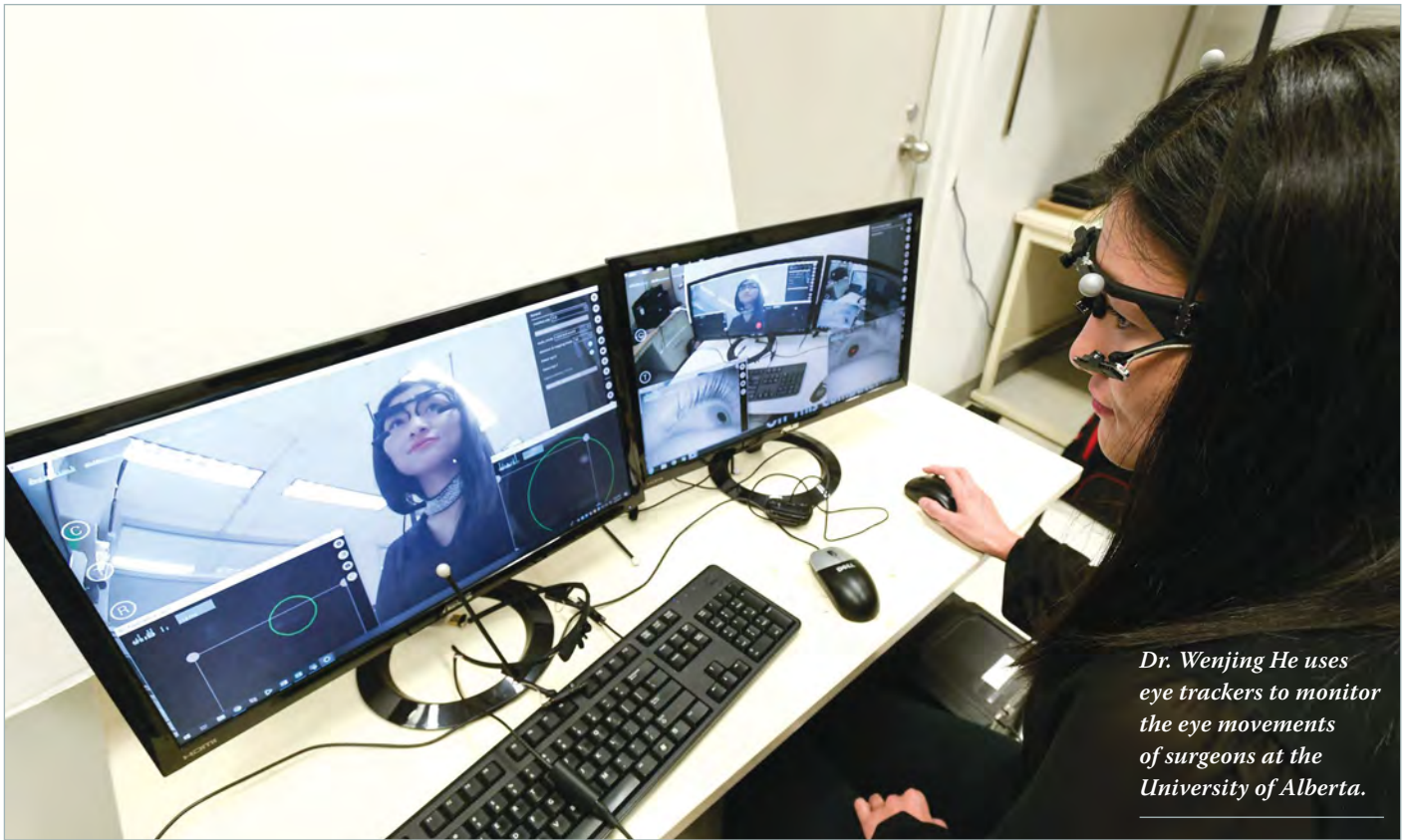
Having become well-known and recognizable to many in Bosnia, Softić hopes to use her newfound fame as an opportunity to inspire people. "My wish is to encourage all people to realize how much our fear prevents us from making great moves and experiencing wonderful things," she says. "I want to encourage people to stay focused and train, no matter how many times they fail."

Film director Lučić says she has certainly felt the impact of Softić's inspiring life and story. "Through her, I've learned to love and appreciate life even more than before. She encouraged me to step out of my own comfort zone many times (through running and filmmaking), despite my fear of failure."

Sarajevo Toastmasters club founder Palo notes that Softić has exceptional leadership skills, which she uses on a regular basis to inspire both Bosnians and Toastmasters.

For her part, Softić hopes to motivate people to take life in their hands, set their goals high, and stay focused. "I want all of society to see that our biggest differences are our greatest treasure. By helping each other succeed, we can do so much. No one can live alone in this world." 📌

Laura Amann is associate editor at *Toastmaster magazine*.



Dr. Wenjing He uses eye trackers to monitor the eye movements of surgeons at the University of Alberta.

Photo by Matt Martin

An Impressive Operation

Surgeons and researchers at a Canadian university merge medical talents with communication skills.

BY NICHOLAS WILSON

An elite, global team of surgeons and scientists is conducting cutting-edge research at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Many of these medical experts belong to a Toastmasters club near the university and bring their communication skills to the lab.

The university's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry has various departments, including the Department of Surgery. Within that department is a research team focusing on surgical-simulation training, and it is regarded as a world leader in this type of training. The team includes a number of Toastmasters, and they credit their communication skills with helping achieve that success.

The team uses robotic and other innovative tools to give medical students a uniquely realistic experience in surgical training. For example, the team is

developing virtual reality and augmented reality technology for surgeon training. It aims to build a surgical robot that can remove tumors in the prostate, brain, and liver. And talk about a hands-on approach: The same group is developing a robotic teaching system to transfer surgeons' minuscule hand motions from an expert to a novice.

The team's ultimate goal is saving lives. "Improving surgeon training will cut surgical procedure time and reduce infection risk. We are doing something fantastic—combining IT with healthcare," says Dr. Bin Zheng, Ph.D., a surgeon who leads University of Alberta's surgical-simulation research team. "We are training the next generation of surgeons using smart technology."

In this hothouse of training and research, strong communication skills

are critical. Both the university's surgery department and the nearby College Plaza Toastmasters club benefit from each other's presence, say members of both groups.

"The synergy between the two, and their innovation, is incredible," says Oksana Babenko, Ph.D, a charter member of the College Plaza Toastmasters club and a medical education researcher in the university's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. "Researchers bring science to the Toastmasters club, making it accessible to lay people, and the club enables [the researchers] to be effective communicators back in their labs."

The ability to effectively communicate constructive feedback is also a valuable asset, says Dr. Zheng, an associate professor of surgery who collaborates with surgeons, engineers, clinical educators, and psychologists to develop



simulators and assess the effectiveness of simulation-based programs. “Critical comments given by Toastmasters during our research meetings help improve the brainstorming quality among lab members and help yield better research.”

High-Tech Science

When the Toastmasters-researchers aren’t presenting in lecture theaters, they can be found in their futuristic laboratory, deep in the labyrinth of the university’s Heritage Medical Research Centre, behind a nondescript gray door labeled 162 HMRC. Here, at a bench in the open-space lab, robotic “hands,” which one day will teach surgeons how to suture, are hard at work transmitting a veteran surgeon’s nanoscopic motions to a novice’s fingertips.

In another part of the lab, physician-scientist Dr. Paola Sánchez—a member of the Fun Speakers Toastmasters, another club located near the university—dons goggles that have a tiny tracker built into the eyepiece to record her eye motion and which plunge her into a virtual brain.

“Researchers bring science to the Toastmasters club ... and the club enables [the researchers] to be effective communicators back in their labs.”

—OKSANA BABENKO, Ph.D.

In the corner is Dr. Wenjing He, M.D., Ph.D., a key leader of the College Plaza club. Her computer hums with custom-made platforms and analysis tools as she number-crunches her own eye-tracking data to boost surgical team performance. She attaches eye trackers to team members to monitor their eye movements. The team is also monitoring



Dr. Wenjing He and Dr. Yuandong Li (right) perform a simulated surgery for training purposes. Dr. He is a leader in the nearby College Plaza Toastmasters, while Dr. Li is a former club member who now works in China.

Photo provided by the University of Alberta

surgeons’ brainwaves under stress to develop eye-tracking technology.

Eye synchronization is an important part of surgical teamwork. Surgeons, nurses, and anesthetists working together need to effectively coordinate their eye movements—in simple terms, they need to be looking at the same place at the same time. The more their eye gazes are in sync, the more time can be saved, which can be critical. Dr. He’s research helps with this kind of training.

She says she applies her Toastmasters skills in her work, including when teaching medical and pharmacy students. “For example, I ask the students to introduce themselves one by one and answer a question at the beginning of each class,” explains Dr. He. “This [process] is what I learned from Toastmasters, and I apply it to a real situation. It helps the students to get to know each other better, share their vulnerabilities with each other, and in the end, they get closer.”

Dr. Babenko, the medical education researcher, says she draws on her Toastmasters training when she works

one-on-one with researchers who need to present their ideas for research studies or grant applications to more seasoned researchers. She coaches them on how to best prepare for their presentations.

Club Background

College Plaza Toastmasters was founded in 2013. The flourishing community club has about 25 members, most from the university (including a number of students) but also some from the private sector, such as an engineer, architect, and business analyst. And when collaborating researchers visit the University of Alberta from hospitals and universities around the world—for between a few weeks to a year—they often come to College Plaza club meetings.

One such visitor, Jani Koskinen, a graduate student in computer science, is looking at setting up a club in his town when he goes home to Finland.

“Being able to clearly communicate your ideas to other researchers is a very important skill in academia,” he notes. “Even in the research world, simply presenting the information is often not enough: You



Members of the College Plaza Toastmasters speak many different languages. The diverse community club includes doctors and researchers from the nearby University of Alberta. Honing their communication skills helps their work in the field of medicine. Photo by Kaiyang Fan and Suki Liu

must also deliver your presentation in a captivating way to stand out from others. Toastmasters lets me gain confidence and practice the public speaking skills I need to make my presentations interesting.”

As successful as the College Plaza club is, only last year it was struggling mightily—facing closure, in fact—after losing most of its private-sector members in a fierce recession that affected the prairie province of Alberta. But thanks largely to the efforts of Dr. He, the club has enjoyed a resurgence. When she was elected club president, she reached out to her university colleagues, recruiting students and staff from many disciplines. The university infusion had a dramatic impact: College Plaza Toastmasters made a speedy recovery and became a top-performing club a little over a year later. It added about a dozen members and earned President’s Distinguished status in the Toastmasters Distinguished Club Program—the first time the club has achieved that distinction.

The club has great diversity—with 22 different first languages spoken by members—as does the university surgical-simulation group. “Our research team is multicultural, passionate, and open-minded; we regard each other as family members,” says Dr. Sánchez, who specializes in augmented and virtual reality surgical simulation research. This multicultural family comes from Bulgaria, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, China, Iran, Iraq, Uzbekistan, and Finland.

Dr. Babenko learned English as her third language, after Ukrainian and Russian. Dr. Sánchez and Dr. He, natives of Colombia and China, respectively, co-founded the group’s Mandarin-English-Spanish language learning program.

Positive Impact

When referring to the influence that Toastmasters has had on the team’s research, Dr. Sánchez says, “Teamwork is a key word in Toastmasters; meetings cannot work without the collaboration of every member. Similarly, in my lab, I work on a multidisciplinary team where each of us contributes to reaching common goals.”

“Being able to clearly communicate your ideas to other researchers is a very important skill in academia.”

—JANI KOSKINEN, GRADUATE STUDENT FROM FINLAND

The team attracts researchers from many fields: medical education, neuroscience, computer science, physics, artificial intelligence, nursing, engineering, and dentistry. The group even has an artist and fashion designer, Suki Liu, a College Plaza member who makes surgical-simulation manikins—human-shaped models used to simulate the human body in

medical and other scenarios. “Toastmasters boosts my confidence, which helps me relax in a team setting and so spurs my creativity,” says Liu. In the 14 months she’s been a member of College Plaza, she went from not speaking English to competing against Anglo-Canadians in their own language in Toastmasters speech contests.

Mutual Benefits

The reciprocal benefits for the Toastmasters club and the university can be seen in various ways. For example, all applicants to Canadian medical schools have to answer multiple mini-interview questions—basically, Table Topics—often with a focus on ethically challenging scenarios. They can practice first at a Toastmasters meeting, where a club panel answers hardball questions from a panel moderator—and faces audience challenges to their answers. (This exercise is also part of a Pathways project in the Presentation Mastery path.)

The club also provides panels of scientists for university graduate students who want to practice defending their theses. Healthcare researcher Yilina Liubaoerjijin, who learned English as her third language after Mongolian and Mandarin, recently presented her master’s thesis to the club and fielded questions from its scientists, the week before her thesis defense.

Surgeon-scientist Dr. Yuandong Li, a former College Plaza Toastmaster, who is now working back in China, also points to the value of the club experience. Communicating effectively is vital for a doctor, he stresses, whether it’s talking with a patient or presenting research to colleagues.

“Club participation has improved my communication skills significantly,” he says. “Giving speeches helps me to summarize my ideas more concisely, so I can share my opinions with research colleagues more clearly and save time.”

Nicholas Wilson is a member of the College Plaza Toastmasters in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He is the communications coordinator for the University of Alberta’s Department of Surgery.



Succeeding in a Speech Contest

How to prepare and improve as you work toward your goals.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

When you hear the words “speech contest,” what are your thoughts? “I want to be the World Champion of Public Speaking.” “If I could just win the area contest, that would be great.” “No way am I going to compete in one of those.” Do any of those reactions sound familiar?

Each year, thousands of Toastmasters compete in the Humorous, Evaluation, Tall Tales, Table Topics, and International speech contests. They start at the club level and progress through to the district level. (The International Speech Contest progresses all the way to the World Championship of Public Speaking.)

My personal contest experience could best be summed up by the tagline from a sports program that I watched when I was young: “The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” These different degrees of success have given me a clearer perspective on the contest experience. That perspective has helped me win some trophies—and to be content when I didn’t. The important factor was that I grew with every contest. And so can you.

First of all, to be successful in a contest, you have to understand what success is. Yes, it might be to win a trophy. But keep in mind, only one Toastmaster becomes the World Champion of Public Speaking every year. Did all the other participants fail? Or do they become better speakers in the process? Isn’t that success, too?

One of my club members decided to enter the Tall Tales Speech Contest last March. At first, his story was rough, but he worked on it and it got better each time. When he competed at the area level,

our club members were stunned at how well he performed. Although he didn’t win, he is still, to this day, excited about that speech. It transformed how he views his speaking ability.

He might not have won a trophy, but he really did win. He is a much better speaker today because of his participation. And, as he speaks for his business, he has the potential for greater success there. That is true contest success.

Keep in mind, only one Toastmaster becomes the World Champion of Public Speaking every year. Did all the other participants fail?

Second, being successful in a contest takes effort and dedication. You have to want to grow and be willing to put in the time to make that happen. I have heard many times that the Speech Evaluation Contest—where contestants observe a test speech and then present an evaluation of the speech—is great because you don’t have to prepare. I strongly disagree. When I won that contest at the district level, I had a plan. I knew exactly what I was going to look for. In addition, I knew how much time I would dedicate to each segment of my evaluation (positives, suggestions for improvement, and summary).

And finally, I practiced evaluations at the club level many times. It’s not easy to put together a complete evaluation speech with just five minutes of prepara-

tion (the amount given in the evaluation contest). I won because I put in the effort before the contest.

If you are entering the International Speech Contest, select a topic you are passionate about. Your interest and expertise on the topic will energize the audience and come through in how you speak. Finally, to perform well in a contest, you can’t be worried about the judging. Far too often I have seen contestants, myself included, trying to score points on the ballot. The judging process is not that mechanical.

If you focus on winning a trophy, you will focus on technique instead of communication. Your passion for your message might not come through as strongly. Focus, instead, on providing something of value to the audience. You will connect better with them—and the judges. Regardless of how the contest turns out, you will have succeeded.

I still have people coming up to me, repeating the key point of a couple of my International Speech Contest presentations from years ago. The speeches may not have been winners in the judges’ eyes, but they benefited those who needed to hear them.

In short, yes, you have to work hard to win a contest. The question is, what is winning? If you grow through the process, and you help others grow through your message, that is true success. **T**

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach from Las Vegas and a member of Pro Toastmasters and Ahead of the Curve Toastmasters. Learn more at www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.

Wait! Don't Tell Me

If impressing people with your wit, charm, and intelligence is too much trouble, just remember their names.

BY JOHN CADLEY



You've just given the best speech of your life. Flush with the glow of victory, you leave the stage and say to your host, "Thanks for inviting me, Bob, I really enjoyed it." And Bob says, "My name is Frank." Forget the meticulous preparation. Forget the enthusiastic applause. Forget the visions of professional speaker status. You are toast, my friend. The chance of "Bob" inviting you back just went from "Can you make it next year?" to "How about never?"

Dale Carnegie said there is no sweeter sound to a person than their own name. And there's no worse sound than "Bob" when your name is Frank. This is why conventions always issue name tags to the attendees—so fights don't break out between people who get each other's names wrong. I personally think this is the way to world peace. If you look at our planet as one big convention with 7.7 billion participants all wearing name tags ... well, it's really hard to invade somebody's country when they see you coming and say, "Hey, Larry, how've you been?!"

Unfortunately, this isn't so easy. According to an article in *Psychology Today*, 85% of people middle-aged or older have trouble remembering names. I find that hard to believe, but then I've already forgotten the writer's name, so it must be true. The reason isn't so much lack of memory as the fact that we just don't care. When we're introduced to somebody, we're usually thinking of everything except the person's name: *Where's the food? How does my new suit look? What can I say that's witty?* No wonder you run into the

person you just met five minutes ago and say, "You look familiar. Do I know you?"

Thankfully, there are ways to avoid this grievous social wrong. One memorization technique is to ask the person how to spell their name: "Hello, Danyon. Is that with an 'o' or an 'e'?" This works particularly well with unusual names. Just don't use it if the person's name is Al.

It's an immutable law of nature: People whose names you forget *always* know yours.

You can also use association. Another article suggested that if you happen to meet a Laurel from Brazil, you can "imagine her with a laurel wreath on her head while swimming in the Amazon River." I'm sure this is effective, but it's a little too involved for me. I'm afraid I'd see Laurel and say, "How was your swim?"

Connecting the name to a physical attribute is another strategy, although the example given in yet a third article seems a little excessive. She says for someone who has big ears and whose name is Brian, you might "imagine brains coming out of his ears." I might also scream every time I see Brian.

Repeating the person's name helps as well. The right way would be: "Nice to meet you, Annika. Annika is such a pretty name." The wrong way would be: "Nice to meet you, Annika. I love the name Annika. You're so lucky to be named Annika,

Annika." This is a good way for Annika to remember *your* name as someone she never wants to see again.

You can also use visual imagery. Someone named Hamilton can be thought of as a ton of ham. Not a particularly appealing image but, boy, you sure won't forget it. Or you can try rhyming: *Dave needs a shave*. I don't recommend this because it requires a good memory, the very thing that is lacking. All you'll do is run into Dave and think, *This guy needed something. What was it?*

Now, you might be forgiven for not remembering a person's name after one introduction. But how about several? How about those people whose names you really should know? You've talked to them at parties, said hello at the grocery store, sat next to them at school plays. How could you *not* know their name—especially when they know yours! It's an immutable law of nature: People whose names you forget *always* know yours. I think they do it just to show you up: *I know your name and you can't remember mine! I win!* You can try to fake a feeble "Hey, buddy," or "Hi, gorgeous," but they know ... and you just got disinvited to their pool party.

So find a way to remember names. People will like you so much, they'll probably overlook most of your many obvious personal shortcomings. **T**

John Cadley is a former advertising copywriter, freelance writer, and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at 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.
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Pathways Strong!

Your club is midway-through—get ready to finish your program year equipped with Pathways tools: the achievement chart, tracker, and recognition pins at www.toastmasters.org/PathwaysStrong.



PATHWAYS ACHIEVEMENT CHART

Club Number _____ District Number _____ Club Name _____



Member Name	Mentor Name	Path Name	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Date Path Completed	Pathways Mentor Program Completed
1.									<input type="checkbox"/>
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24.									<input type="checkbox"/>

Place date that member completes level in appropriate space.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER RECORD

Member Name _____
Path Name _____

Level	Project name	Speech title	Date	Officer(s) present
1	Ice Breaker			
	Evaluation and Feedback (3 parts)	Serve as a Speech Evaluator		
	Researching and Persuading			
2	Required Project:			
	Introduction to Toastmasters Mentoring			
	Required Project:			
	Elective:			
3	Elective:			
	When the first 9 projects, it is recommended that you complete the following ones:	Serve as Toastmaster		
4	Required Project:	Serve as Table Topicmaster		
	Elective:			
	Required Project:			
5	Elective:			
	Reflect on Your Path			

Summary

Level 2 2 required projects Introduction to Toastmasters Mentoring	Level 3 1 required project 2 electives Serve as Toastmaster and Table Topicmaster within the first 9 projects	Level 4 1 required project 1 elective	Level 5 1 required project 1 elective Reflect on Your Path
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