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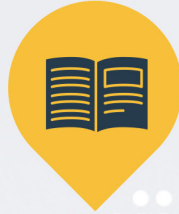
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**Why It's Okay
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**Stirring Speeches
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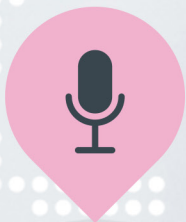
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Toastmasters International Mission:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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I Bid You Adieu, with Gratitude

When I was installed as International President in August 2019, I promised the audience that my term would be a year of limited change, of stability, and of resurgence. Little did I know that only a few months later, our organization would experience more turmoil and change than at any other time in our near-96-year history.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the entire world to a standstill. In-person club meetings were abruptly put on hold due to the physical distancing and lockdowns prescribed by almost every country.

The Board of Directors and World Headquarters moved quickly to allow online club meetings. With a sense of relief, first tentatively and then wholeheartedly, members flocked to virtual meetings. Club leaders and members mastered new skills and honed existing ones to adapt the traditional meeting format into an innovative new experience.

The unexpected benefit is that we are no longer limited by physical boundaries; we can access club meetings and District events anywhere in the world.

For example, in May, I served as General Evaluator for District 66's "One Country-One World" meeting. Members representing 70 countries attended—it was almost a mini-International Convention.

Examples abound of the enthusiasm with which members are embracing online engagement. [District 120 has created a video](#) of greetings from members representing 120 nationalities to welcome the new District to the Toastmasters fold.

Today, we have a more profound understanding of the culture, habits, and traits of our global Toastmasters community. We are learning best practices from our peers and practicing innovation. We have truly become one in pursuit of our mission to "empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders."

The words in "One But Many," a poem by American writer Suzy Kassem, ring true more than ever today:

*One God, many faces.
One family, many races.
One truth, many paths.
One heart, many complexions.
One light, many reflections.
One world, many imperfections.
ONE.
We are all one,
But many.*

As I bid you adieu, I want to express my gratitude to you for coming together and staying together to weather the storm that we are facing. We are stronger today than ever before.

Deepak Menon, DTM
International President



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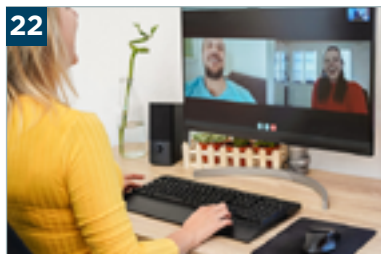
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“Remember that engagement is key to having successful club meetings online.”

—CASSANDRA R. LEE, DTM

An open platform for your tips, tactics, comments, and encouragement.

Engagement Is Key

I have appreciated receiving the messages from International President Deepak Menon, DTM, encouraging club officers to conduct their club meetings online. Considering there are still clubs that have not found it easy to conduct online meetings, I think Deepak's messages are informational enough to help these clubs, and all others, to have successful online meetings.

I encourage club officers to use the Toastmasters [online meeting resources](#) Deepak has mentioned and to remember that engagement is the key to having successful club meetings online.

In order to have engagement, focus on longevity, making sure clubs can exist now and after COVID-19—have variety at club meetings, with prepared speeches, Table Topics, speech evaluations, special educational workshops, and Pathways teachings; and offer interactivity by allowing club members and guests to ask questions, give feedback, and use the chat feature during online club meetings.

Officers are instrumental in helping their clubs to function during this time. I encourage them to see their club as a vital resource for the growth and development of their members in order to keep their club functioning online despite COVID-19.

Cassandra R. Lee, DTM

Chicago, Illinois, U.S.
Wrightwood-Ashburn Overcomers
(WAO) Toastmasters

Gaining Confidence

Since joining Toastmasters, one of my favorite things has been the inspiration and education I find every month in the *Toastmaster* magazine. My first club officer role was Sergeant at Arms. I made it my goal to always share something I found in that month's magazine in my greeting to welcome the club to our meeting. Thank you for providing such a well-written, encouraging magazine.

My husband, Chris, and I joined Toastmasters on a whim two years ago. We were new to the area and I was recovering from high-dose chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant. Looking back on our two years as members, I see how valuable the experience has been. Losing my hair and career really affected my confidence. Now, having stepped up to the stage to speak so many times, I see how my focus has shifted to my delivery, my words, and my connection to the audience.

I encourage people I meet to join our club, as it has been such a great experience. I love that our club has a warm, encouraging spirit that fosters growth and has helped me to feel more confident in myself.

Nicole Forman

Leamington, Ontario, Canada
Erie Shores Toastmasters

Virtual Camaraderie

I would like to recognize members around the world who are adapting to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though fear of the unknown and stress caused by myriad factors are commonplace, I continue to witness members champion the Toastmasters spirit internationally.

My club, Barrie's Small Business (BSB) Club in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, started

hosting online meetings in March. I was proud of the initiative our members took to adapt, troubleshoot, and assist, but I wondered how other clubs were faring. I reached out to clubs around the world and I was touched by the warm welcome I received. I attended four virtual meetings in one week and since then, I've been welcomed as a guest by seven clubs in five countries!

Each club has its own unique history and membership, but this experience illuminated the common thread of camaraderie that is sewn through the fabric that unifies all Toastmasters clubs, regardless of country of origin or time zone.

As each nation continues to face its own challenges caused by the pandemic, I'm grateful that Toastmasters International offers some sense of familiarity as we continue to connect and learn together while staying apart.

A heartfelt thanks to Downtown Achievers, Brisbane Sunrise Speakers, Northern Nomads Advanced Toastmasters, Leicester Leaders Speakers' Club, Wall Street Toastmasters Club, The Order of Smedley, and Nakano Toastmasters Club for your hospitality. I enjoyed being your guest and I look forward to visiting again, perhaps in person one day.






Amber Green

Innisfil, Ontario, Canada
Barrie's Small Business (BSB) Club

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write it in 200 words or fewer. State your name, member number, and home club, and send it to letters@toastmasters.org. Please note: Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity and may be published in the online edition.

www.toastmasters.org/Magazine

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WHAT'S ONLINE THIS MONTH:



Comedy Is Contagious

Comedy expert Judy Carter believes laughter might be just what you need during uncertain times. Listen to an interview with Judy and the *Toastmasters Podcast* hosts to learn techniques on spreading humor to help relieve stress, soothe tension, and improve your mood.

So, Can I Say So?

So is a versatile word. Listen to Toastmasters Toolbox author Bill Brown, DTM, as he helps distinguish the difference between correct and incorrect usages of this commonly used filler word.

RECOMMENDED READING

I Have Something to Say

Intrigued by the connection between public speaking and success in life, veteran journalist John Bowe explores the notion that spoken words can serve as medicine, especially in our disconnected world. Learn how he discovers the origins of speech training and joins Toastmasters in his book *I Have Something to Say*.



Powerful Speeches in History

Martin Luther King Jr., Indira Gandhi, and Elie Wiesel knew how to deliver potent, passionate words in the service of a noble purpose. Read about these historic orators and watch videos of their most memorable speeches.



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► MEMBER RECOGNITION

Showcasing members, mentors, and clubs

Shiela M. Cancino, DTM, of Hong Kong, credits her mother's work ethic and dedication to her family for inspiring Cancino's own hard work. Cancino studied diligently and became a certified public accountant. In 2010, she officially launched 4S Share a Secret Spread a Success Inc., to provide scholarships to underprivileged students in the Philippines. While she was able to provide financial resources, Cancino also saw that these students sometimes need additional motivation. Inspired by her time as a Toastmasters Division leader in 2014, she launched a new program called I-Taas Kaalaman, which translates to "Knowledge Advancement." After watching successful Toastmasters share their stories and improve their talents, she realized inspirational speeches could change lives. I-Taas Kaalaman invites successful individuals who grew up with few opportunities for success to speak to 4S students—and it helps! To date, more than 50 4S scholars have finished their studies and can support their families through their careers.



When **Sonali Subasinghe** (pictured left) joined Kegalle Toastmasters in Kegalle, Sri Lanka, she lacked confidence and was seeking the opportunity to improve her self-esteem and learn to share her knowledge in front of an audience. **Prarthana Liyanaarachchi** became her mentor and helped her through the beginning steps of improving her speeches and going beyond that. Subasinghe's skills improved, but recently she gave a speech that lowered her confidence. Luckily, Liyanaarachchi was there to give valuable advice: "Believe in yourself in every situation and do not let emotions control you. Breathe and allow things to pass." These words stayed with Subasinghe, who uses them as a reminder to stay confident. "My mentor is very supportive and caring. I will be thankful to her forever," she says. "She is my pillar of strength."

"The first thing every Toastmaster needs to do is enlist the help of a mentor. Your mentor is your number one well-wisher," says **Kamala Nellen** of Ojai Evening Toastmasters. She experienced this firsthand with her mentor **Pat Peake**, who passed away in April 2020. The two met at Ojai Valley Toastmasters in Ojai, California, U.S. She says Peake always engaged the room, shared stories of vulnerability, and regularly won speech contests over the years. He challenged Nellen and taught her to give speeches showing vulnerability even when she felt uncomfortable. "I am so much more open in my speeches now and less concerned about how I will look or sound," she says. "My goal is to speak my truth. Pat's words ring in my ears: 'Speak from your heart. Grab their hearts.' What a blessing he gave me!"



TALK TO US! Do you have a short story (aim for 130 words), fun photo, inspiring anecdote, or Toastmasters "Ah-Ha" moment you'd like to share? Mark your submission "Member Recognition" and email it to submissions@toastmasters.org.

► NEWS FROM TI

2020 Convention—With a Virtual Twist

Six-day online program in August features live events and speakers from every region.

The show will go on. Despite the tumult of a year like no other in Toastmasters' history, the 2020 International Convention will take place this month, continuing the annual celebration of achievement and fellowship the organization has presented for nearly 90 years.

Fears and fallout from the coronavirus pandemic prompted Toastmasters International to move the 2020 convention, scheduled for Paris, France, to August 2021. Instead, this year's convention will occur online, spread over six days, August 24–29. It is free for both members and non-members. Though the viewing will be virtual, members will still have the chance to enjoy such convention staples as the World Championship of Public Speaking®, the Golden Gavel award presentation, the Annual Business Meeting, and even the beloved Toastmasters sing-a-long, again led by Past International President Ted Corcoran, DTM, of Dublin, Ireland.

The program's online nature, free of the logistical constraints of in-person gatherings, will expand the breadth of the event. Instead of the usual eight to 12 education sessions, the convention will have 14 such sessions, each one led by a presenter from one of Toastmasters International's 14 regions around the world. Speakers include Distinguished Toastmasters Ellie Kay of Region 2 ("The Five Partnerships Every Toastmaster Needs"), Dineshrie Pillay of Region 11 ("Humanity Will Rise as a Force, Stronger Than a Disease"), and Suhail Nasir of Region 14 ("Win Hearts

With Humor"). (The selection of the 2020 Golden Gavel winner had not been announced as of publishing time.)

Attendees can join the convention from a computer or mobile device, and if you can't view an event live, you will have the chance to watch it the next day On Demand. Convention events will all take place in Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

The opening ceremonies will be a shortened session and will include a digital flag ceremony and a keynote speaker. Semifinals of the International Speech Contest will be shown over two days, and the eight winners will compete Saturday, August 29, in the World Championship of Public Speaking.

After the Annual Business Meeting on August 28, proxyholders will be given 24 hours to vote for International Officers and Directors and the Toastmasters proposals A and B. The election results will be announced August 29 and that segment will lead straight into the inauguration of the new International President—a first, since those two events are typically held on different days. Though a dinner and dance can't be held online—unless members get creative!—that soiree will be rescheduled for the 2021 convention in the City of Light.

For more details on the 2020 convention, including the schedule of events and how to register, visit the [2020 Virtual Convention webpage](#).

► CLUB EXPERIENCE

The Best for Your Guest

5 tips for following up with potential members.

1 Update your information. When was the last time you went into Club Central and made sure your "Club Contact and Meeting Information" is up to date? This information should be updated at least once a year to ensure it is accurate.

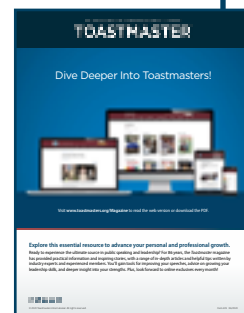
2 Check your email. Get into the habit of checking your email at least every other day to see if anyone has tried to contact your club.

3 Reply to all emails. If someone reaches out to your club, make sure you reply within 48 hours. People who go through the process to reach out to you are very interested in joining your club, so make sure you are in contact with them. Information about parking and how to get to the meeting room are helpful to add to your reply. And if you're doing online meetings, be sure to add instructions for how to log in.

4 Encourage guests. When someone contacts your club, always include information about your next meeting and ask

Share the Online Magazine With Guests

With the *Toastmaster* magazine print delivery temporarily suspended, a new digital flier was created to add to your guest packets or share with prospective members. The flier highlights the *Toastmaster* magazine online edition, which provides practical information, inspiring stories, and online exclusives every month. Download the flier from the [Resource Library](#).



them to attend as a guest. What better way to understand how a meeting works than to attend?

5 Follow up with guests. Getting someone to attend a meeting isn't enough. Following a meeting, you should contact all guests, ask if they have questions, and do everything you can to sign them up as a member of your club. For help, check out the "[Guest Email Follow Up](#)" template. If they do not have interest in joining your club, thank them for their time and wish them well.

▶ **SNAPSHOT** 



Speak Up Centennial Club in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, is working to keep members' spirits high. Club members check in with one another regularly to ensure everyone is healthy and happy. Members created this branded photo with signs spelling out the Toastmasters club mission, which they say reminds them they will make it through these uncertain times together.

▶ **COMMUNICATION**

What's the Word?

For Word of the Day inspiration at your next club meeting, check out these suggestions.

Embolden

verb
im-'bōl-dən
 to instill with boldness or courage

Copacetic

adjective
kō-pə-'se-tik
 very satisfactory

Metanoia

noun
me-tə-'nōi-ə
 a transformative change of heart

Predilection

noun
pre-də-'lek-shən
 an established preference for something

Ubiquitous

adjective
yü-'obi-kwə-təs
 existing or being everywhere at the same time

Widdershins

adverb
wi-dər-shənz
 in a left-handed, wrong, or contrary direction

TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



GET CREATIVE! Traveling *Toastmaster* wants to highlight creativity in quarantine! Take a picture in your home or socially distancing with your magazine or other Toastmasters memorabilia. Send your fun photos to photos@toastmasters.org.



1 | ROGER HOWARD of Glenfield, New South Wales, Australia, snaps a selfie with his Toastmaster during a trip to Havana, Cuba.

2 | KATHRYN CARRINGTON of Brackendale, British Columbia, Canada, poses in front of the castle in Disneyland in Anaheim, California, U.S.

3 | JOHN LYNCH of Memphis, Tennessee, U.S., "travels" to his front yard during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

4 | ROVINA SURI of Sunnyvale, California, U.S., stands near the twin Abu Simbel temples in Abu Simbel, Nubia, Egypt. The temples were built by the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II in the 13th century B.C.



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

Dual Member, Dual Benefits

What I've learned as a member of Toastmasters International and Rotary International.

BY MARK BURCHILL, DTM

Leadership challenges are invigorating. I have launched or led four businesses, a Toastmasters club, a Rotary club, a Rotary International Fellowship, and more.

As a Toastmaster and a Rotarian, I'm now watching the alliance between the two organizations spark new learning and leadership opportunities for members of both groups. For example, Rotarians are enthusiastically enrolling in the custom public speaking/leadership development courses Toastmasters created for Rotary members. A mutual benefit for members of each organization would be for Rotarians to practice new speaking skills before a Toastmasters club, and for Toastmasters to hone their skills outside the club setting by speaking at a Rotary meeting. Both organizations [work to transform lives](#), although in different ways. Both have had an impact on my life, starting many years ago.

When I was tapped to serve as president of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa, California, I knew I needed to step up my game. I wanted a higher level of skill and self-confidence in order to lead my club and represent Rotary in the community. Coincidentally, my wife had been a Toastmaster for a year, and I had visited her club a few times to watch her speak. She had really begun to blossom. This program could help me!

I was right. A few months after joining the Noon Toastmasters Club in Santa Rosa, I put my new skills to work. Hours before a Rotary meeting, our speaker canceled. (A guest speaker is typically included at Rotary meetings.) We quickly huddled to strategize a solution. One person suggested I talk about a recent journey to the Rotary International Convention. Another said, "No, he'll need a lot more time to prepare." I thought, *If I can do Table Topics with zero preparation,*



Mark Burchill

I can certainly give a half-hour speech with two hours preparation. My talk was well received.

I initially thought of Toastmasters as merely a "public speaking" class. My original plan was to stay for six months or so, and then depart and focus on Rotary. My, how things can change. In a very short while, I was a dedicated Toastmaster.

These were also momentous times in my Rotary life. Shortly after I joined Toastmasters, a Rotary group I led was approved as the Rotary Means Business (RMB) International Fellowship, which provides a business networking platform within Rotary. Soon, I was responsible for an international organization with members all over the globe. The fellowship brought Rotary full circle, as the organization was originally a business networking group before evolving into a global service organization.

Since then, I've given presentations on the fellowship to three Rotary International conventions, and to Rotarians all over the world. In every one of those situations, my Toastmasters experience helped me feel

confident in my ability to share my message in front of hundreds of people.

Toastmasters helped me discover that I was best able to step forward when forced outside my comfort zone. Another "big learn"? I love telling stories.

I've also gained insight from club evaluations, especially the quick ones that provided me an array of opinions from many members. I have gleaned many gems from these mini-evals that have helped my growth as a speaker.

For 30 years I owned a business with two dozen employees. As the boss, you tell an employee to do something, and they do it. Leading a volunteer organization, you have to motivate people to want to do something, or it won't get done. Holding multiple officer positions in both Toastmasters and Rotary helped me be more effective in motivating members in volunteer organizations.

The founding and nurturing of the Rotary Means Business International Fellowship is one of my most fulfilling personal achievements. My Toastmasters training has been by my side as I've watched the fellowship grow and thrive.

I've learned that both organizations can support and benefit one another. The alliance is a way for Toastmasters to expand opportunities, especially within their communities, and for Rotarians to enhance leadership and speaking skills. **T**

Editor's Note: *Toastmasters, reach out to local Rotary clubs with these [custom materials](#).*

MARK BURCHILL, DTM, is Past President of Noon Toastmasters of Santa Rosa, California, past president of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa, and founder and chair of the Rotary Means Business International Fellowship.



So, What's So Bad About So?

This word doesn't always deserve its reputation.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

When I first joined Toastmasters the only words the Ah-Counters looked for were *ums* and *ahs*. As the years went on, the list of words, phrases, and pregnant pauses got longer and longer and longer. But, in my experience, there is one word that has taken on a reputation worse than *um*, and that word is *so*.

Many speakers use that word as a filler on a regular basis. But there is one big difference between *so* and *um*—*so* also has real meaning. It is a real word.

The Ah-Counter position can be a daunting job. You are listening intently to presentations, marking down every instance of a long list of forbidden words. The tendency is to put a mark every time you hear one. But what if the speaker uses the word correctly? It frequently is still marked as bad.

At a recent club meeting, a newer member was dinged for using *so*. It really bothered her because she thought she had used it correctly. In fact, she had.

I suggest that if we are going to ding members for this word, then we need to analyze whether or not they used it correctly and only count the wrong ones. That is only fair to the speaker. But that requires we understand the legitimate uses of the word—and be able to recognize them.

If you look up *so* in a dictionary, you will find many uses. It can be used adverbially: “That piece of cake was *so* big.” It can be used to indicate purpose: “I wanted to win the speech contest, *so* I practiced

one hour each day.” It can be used to indicate reason: “The power went out, *so* we checked the circuit breaker.” Result is another usage: “I didn’t study for the test, *so* I failed it.” It can mean “likewise”: “You like ice cream? *So* do I.”

The dictionary also indicates that it can be used to introduce a question. “*So* why would you do that?” It can also be used to introduce a conclusion. “*So* that is how you write a good speech.”

There is one big difference between *so* and *um*—*so* also has real meaning. It is a real word.

I would add another usage that is not in the dictionary. Cadence or rhythm is very important in speaking. Sometimes you need an extra word in a sentence or it just doesn’t feel right. I believe it is okay to use *so* in this instance. Just don’t overdo it.

Let me illustrate my point. Imagine I am leading a webinar on storytelling. I might say, “Today we are going to look at some of the best resources on effective storytelling. Here is a list of the books that I recommend.” To say this effectively, I need to pause before “here,” which sounds a bit formal. I could also say, “Today we are going to look at some of the best resources on effective storytelling, *so* here is a list of

the books that I recommend.” The pause is much shorter, and the emphasis is softer, giving this a more casual feel.

There are, however, two usages that are not listed in any dictionary. The first is as a substitute for *um*. Ding! The second is to introduce your first sentence. Ding! Far too many speakers start their speech with *so*. I see that as the weakest way to open your message. Also, if you start virtually every sentence with *so*, that is bad as well. Ding!

The real issue here is not “Did the speakers use *so*?” The issue is “Did they use it correctly?” Perhaps that is more a job for the grammarian than the Ah-Counter.

There is one more aspect of *so* that comes into play. It is possible to use that word correctly, but *so* frequently that it becomes annoying. In that case, I recommend that you find different ways to say the same thought. Again, perhaps the grammarian should look for that.

So is a versatile word. Although short, it performs many different roles. Used properly, it greatly enhances your speech. Used as a crutch word, it reduces your impact. If we are going to count the *so*'s, let us also distinguish between correct and incorrect usages. It is easy to do once you develop an ear for it. **■**

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



Present With Executive Presence Online

Learn how to convey confidence in a virtual setting with these five key elements.

BY CHRISTINE CLAPP, DTM

Displaying executive presence is a key element of presenting at work, whether you're in a meeting, at a conference, or even speaking on the phone. As virtual meetings and online conferences become more common, the nuances of executive presence—a manner that reflects poise and professionalism, confidence and capability—are worth exploring. They can help you thrive as you focus on the five key elements of executive presence: stance, sound, smile, silence, and sight.

1 Stance: Whenever you're presenting virtually, position your computer so you can stand up to deliver your remarks—keeping the camera at eye level—just as you would for an in-person speech. Standing conveys confidence, increases your energy level, and serves as a constant reminder that you are in public-speaking mode, even if you can't see your audience.

For meetings and conversations conducted by video conference, sit tall in a structured office or dining chair (rather than a cushy couch or chair, which can compromise posture).

Use gestures to reinforce what you are saying and remember to avoid nervous, distracting movements (clicking pens, swaying, twisting in a chair). When you do use purposeful movements, make sure they are in the frame of your camera (viewers should see more than your head—chest up and a little wider than your shoulders is ideal).

2 Sound: If you want to sound confident, your voice must be easily audible. This starts with excellent posture (hence, standing or sitting in a firm chair) and requires full breaths between sentences.

Aim to speak in the low end of your natural range, at a slow rate, and crisply.

If you spend lots of time participating in video conferences or if you facilitate meetings or webinars, consider investing in a high-quality microphone.

3 Smile: Even serious professionals talking about serious topics look more assured when they have a “bright” face—a slight lift of the eyes, cheeks, and corners of the mouth. A soft smile not only makes your voice more pleasant to listen to, it disguises any nervousness you may be experiencing and makes you appear friendly, approachable, and enthusiastic.

Obviously, you want to use other facial expressions when delivering bad news, but for good news, neutral information, or technical topics, throw on a smile. And remember, in virtual meetings everyone can see your face in the attendee gallery even when you aren't speaking! So maintain that soft smile when you are listening too.

4 Silence: When speakers avoid pauses, it often results in sentences littered with filler words, such as “um,” “ah,” and “you know.” Using well-placed pauses—offering the sound of silence—will elevate your speech or presentation. Just be careful not to make your deliberate pauses too long; otherwise, audience members might get confused by the silence.

Long pauses can also cause listeners to miss nonverbal cues that indicate you intend to continue speaking, and they could cut you off. To prevent interruptions, prepare key points and enumerate them (“there are three reasons why I support this recommendation”). If someone does interrupt, you can more easily regain

the floor (“I promised three reasons, let me share the third before we move on”).

5 Sight: Lasting eye contact is crucial for building rapport with listeners and conveying confidence as a speaker. It's also particularly difficult in virtual presentations because you need to position your equipment properly and stare at a tiny dot on your computer or external camera.

Position your camera at eye level. You may need to set it on a few thick books or on a sturdy box to get it to your eye level. If your camera is too high, you may need to lower it or raise your chair.

To make it easier to hold your gaze at a piece of camera equipment, you can arrange the gallery of participants right below your camera lens so you can look at images of audience members closer to your camera. You can also tape a small picture of a loved one or a toy figurine right above or next to your camera lens to remind you to look at the camera.

By understanding the five elements of executive presence—stance, sound, smile, silence, sight—as well as their nuances, you will be able to convey confidence and stand out for the right reasons in any online workplace speaking situation. **T**

Editor's Note: *This article first appeared in the June digital edition.*

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I Have Something to Say

Author John Bowe explores the history of rhetoric and finds public speaking more relevant than ever.

BY SUZANNE FREY

As a veteran journalist and author, [John Bowe](#) is used to talking to people. He has traveled the globe on assignment for publications like *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* and prides himself on being able to talk to anyone. “I talk to princes and billionaires and prostitutes and criminals and farm workers and factory workers and everyone in between.”

But he always struggled with public speaking. “If you put me in front of a crowd, I could not make my brain and my mouth work together.”

This led Bowe to spend eight years immersing himself in the subject of public speaking, resulting in the book [I Have Something to Say: Mastering the Art of Public Speaking in an Age of Disconnection](#), published by Penguin Random House this month and available for purchase through the Toastmasters online store by August 24.

Bowe was introduced to Toastmasters in August 2011, while working on [an article](#) for *The New York Times Magazine* on the World Championship of Public Speaking®. He attended the Toastmasters International Convention in Las Vegas that year. The assignment spurred an interest in the relationship between communication and human connection. He will share his thoughts on this topic during the virtual Toastmasters International Convention this month, in his role as a featured session speaker.

What specifically intrigued you about the topic of public speaking?

I was interested in exploring my

hypothesis that speech training helps us shed a sense of loneliness and alienation. I was fascinated by its power to do what psychiatry and psychotropic drugs try to do. And I was deeply curious about what it might do to help solve societal and political problems. I get more specific in the book, but on the simplest level, if we cannot talk to one another, we are in trouble.

I was not so much interested in the self-help or self-improvement point of view as much as the problems the world is facing right now. The fact that people feel incredibly distant from one another, incredibly disconnected, and nobody seems to get along very well ... it seemed that underlying all these things is that we no longer get taught how to speak.

What about attending the Toastmasters International Convention resonated with you?

The first thing I noticed was how welcoming Toastmasters are. The second was how diverse they are. But after marveling at all the different styles of dress from countries around the world, what I noticed was that no one seemed so awed by the diversity; they were there to focus on their shared obsession with the art of speaking. What resonated with me, I think, was the essential humanism of it—and them. It was not a fad or a new technology they were interested in; they were studying how to be better humans.

You don't typically join organizations you write about. What prompted

you to move from New York to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and join a Toastmasters club there?

I realized that if I was going to write about the importance of speech training, I had to show how it works and what it means for people to find their own voice. It's such an internal, nuanced, personal experience.

I had dutifully gathered all of these great stories from Toastmasters from all walks of life—rich, poor, famous. But I still could not write my book. From the beginning, the Toastmasters I met kept asking me when I was going to join their club. I told them, “The story isn't about me, it's about you. I'm an objective reporter, not a memoirist.” Well, in 2012, with enormous trepidation, I ended up joining Speakeasy Toastmasters, in St. Louis Park, Minnesota!

“Suddenly it hit me that maybe the world's biggest problem is our lack of speech training.”

—JOHN BOWE

It was very much of a “physician, heal thyself” situation, because underneath all my intellectual curiosity was the simple fact that I had always been a terrible speaker myself. And in the end, my evolution from being a guy who can't competently say what he is thinking and feeling to being a guy who can, was what gave oomph to tell everyone else's stories and made the book take flight.



John Bowe, author, journalist and speaker at the Toastmasters International 2020 virtual convention.

simple inability for people to talk to one another and hash stuff out.

Tell us about your interest in rhetoric and its place in society.

For the Greeks, speaking well was considered the indispensable skill. If you worked in any kind of profession that required managing people or interacting with others, you needed to be skilled at listening and speaking. Has anything changed since then? If you are smart but socially inept and/or bad with words, you are not going to get promoted. Your personal relationships are likely to suffer as well. You could even say that in many ways, communications skills trump IQ, work ethic, even character.

“It sounds crazy, but in the middle of our biggest dysfunctional trends right now lies a simple inability for people to talk to one another and hash stuff out.”

—JOHN BOWE

For individuals and for society, speech training really constitutes the ultimate survival skill. It’s what keeps good people engaged with all of life’s fights—in family life, politics, at work, and so on—and keeps us alive for another day, hashing out problems, instead of sulking off to the sidelines, filled with resentment. I can’t imagine anything more relevant to our modern-day problems!

There is nothing more inauthentic than not being able to say what you want to say. **T**

Suzanne Frey is senior content strategist for Toastmasters International.

In researching the history of public speaking, what stood out to you?

I found it fascinating that for the ancient Greeks—and for the next 2,000 years for virtually all Western Europeans—the foremost component of education was rhetoric, which meant learning to speak, evaluate, and think critically about others’ speech and language. And now it is this vanished subject, for the most part.

I was thinking about the fact that 74% of Americans suffer from speech anxiety (it is the same or higher in most other cultures). All over the world, we are staring at screens all day and so few of us seem to know how to communicate well. So I thought, *Hey, this is huge. What happened to this critical idea? What’s this doing to us?*

What is it about the age of disconnection that makes you “have something to say”?

If you read through the ancient Greeks and Romans, and even the musings of

Ralph C. Smedley, Toastmasters founder, on the subject of speech training, it’s clear they viewed it as a kind of individual and societal corrective. Smedley wrote about how when people cannot speak up and express themselves, this whole side of their personality and intellect just remains offline, so to speak. He felt that Toastmasters training could benefit the whole world by teaching us all how to listen better. When I read these views, I began to see speech training as the ultimate social justice app.

Look around the world today at the rising levels of social isolation, of mistrust in government and in each other. For a long time, I thought these problems were the result of technology or that they stemmed from globalization or maybe rising wealth inequality. Suddenly it hit me that maybe the world’s biggest problem is our lack of speech training. It sounds crazy, but in the middle of our biggest dysfunctional trends right now lies a



Bring in visitors to build a bigger, better club.

BY PAUL STERMAN

So you want to add more members to your club. It's a goal that members have strived toward ever since ... well, likely since Ralph Smedley formed the first Toastmasters International club in October 1924. No doubt members of that small Santa Ana, California, group said to themselves, *Let's get more people in here so we have more help with the meeting roles!*

The more members, the better the club experience.

Of course, not everyone loves to be in a big club. But for the most part, that's an enviable problem to have. A quality club should have at least 20 members.

So how do you gain more people? Especially now, in a year where COVID-19 has cast its shadow, prompting Toastmasters clubs around the world to move online for their meetings. Here are some tried-and-true techniques to aid your mission, whether your recruiting efforts are aimed at online meetings or the traditional in-person club setting. The sections below explore key aspects of membership-building, including **social media, open houses, recruitment strategies, and community outreach programs.**

Social Media

Digital marketing is particularly valuable in today's world. Promote your club and its events on social media networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Toastmasters International also has a YouTube channel and a Twitter account. [Meetup.com](#) is a popular site for promoting Toastmasters meetings.

Lauren Parsons, a New Zealand Toastmaster, says Facebook is a fertile ground for generating interest in your club. She suggests having a club member be assigned at each meeting to take photos—someone giving a speech, for example, or participating in Table Topics. Post the pictures on your club's Facebook page. Then tag those members, which means their friends and connections will see the photos too.

"This means we will be able to organically reach more people and create conversations about what is going on at our Toastmasters club meetings," says Parsons, 2019-2020 Club President of the Talk of the Town Toastmasters in Palmerston North, New Zealand. She created [three videos](#) on PR tips for Facebook, including how to create a club Facebook page.

Yesica Vazquez, DTM, a Toastmaster in California, is also a big advocate of social media as a marketing tool. She has posted about her club's Toastmasters meetings on Instagram, describing snippets of action to spark interest from non-members.

"I think social media is one of the most pivotal things that members and clubs can use to help promote their clubs, especially smaller ones," she says.

Meetings Matter the Most

Membership-building starts with quality club meetings. Like trying to sell a car with a shiny outside but a lame engine, you can't sell your Toastmasters club if the product isn't sturdy and successful. High-quality meetings show visitors this is a place where they can learn and grow, where they can achieve personal and professional goals. That's what turns guests into members.

Balraj Arunasalam, DTM, Toastmasters' 2017-2018 International President, knows membership-building well. When he became president of the Colombo Toastmasters Club in Sri Lanka nearly 20 years ago, there were only three clubs in the small island nation. Now, because of the work done by him and other Toastmasters leaders, Sri Lanka has more than 150 clubs.

Compelling club meetings draw people, stresses Arunasalam. As he stated in a 2018 column for the *Toastmaster* magazine: "Guests and members are eager to attend club meetings that are exciting, offer diverse topics, provide valuable opportunities, and have great speakers and dynamic leaders."

That applies equally to online meetings. The virtual format offers a high-quality experience of its own. It presents an opportunity for members to stretch their skills, building their confidence and comfort level with communicating online. That's a particularly valuable skill in today's global workplace.

One advantage of recruiting guests to online meetings is that it's easier for them to attend—they can see what Toastmasters is all about from the comfort of their own home. And if visitors are inexperienced with virtual communication, share [resources for online club meetings](#) that will help them feel more comfortable in that setting.

"In some ways, you've won or lost a new member in their first 30 seconds in the room."

— IAN BROOKS

Hold an Open House

An open house is basically what it sounds like: an open invitation to visit your Toastmasters home and see what you do. It's one of the most reliable tools for recruiting new members.

Set up the event like a standard club meeting, with the same kind of structure and activities (and applause!) Show your guests the feeling of achievement they will gain. Explain each aspect of the meeting. And provide plenty of time for members and visitors to mingle.

Vazquez, the California Toastmaster, says her club—the San Diego Toastmasters 7—typically tries to hold three or four open houses a year. One such event drew close to 80 people last year, she says.

What's the key to a successful open house? Planning and promotion. Have a club committee plan the event. Invite members of the community and publicize the free program in local media outlets. (Access contact information for such outlets at [Mondo Times](#).)

Promote your program with a [customizable Toastmasters flier](#). Email the flier or print it out and post it around your community. Be sure to include online meeting information, if applicable.

Also invite "alumni"—past members who for one reason or another let their membership lapse. In addition, consider inviting members of local Rotary clubs; Toastmasters International and Rotary International recently formed an alliance to mutually benefit each organization. There's an email template you can personalize and use to invite Rotarians to Toastmasters club meetings, as well as a [PowerPoint template](#) for talking to Rotary clubs about teaming up in a local alliance.

At the event, have a guest packet ready for visitors, even a virtual one you can email later. You can fill it with marketing materials such as the Toastmasters brochures [Find Your Voice](#) and [Your Path to Leadership](#), and provide a link to the online [Toastmaster magazine](#).

It's important that open house speakers represent a mix of experience levels, says Vazquez, a 2019–2020 Division Director in District 5. If only the club's most distinguished speakers give speeches, she notes, novices in the audience might feel intimidated, thinking there are no beginners in Toastmasters.



“I think social media is one of the most pivotal things that members and clubs can use to help promote their clubs.”

– YESICA VAZQUEZ, DTM

Reach Out

There is an art to reaching out and recruiting new members. One immediate step is something Toastmasters know well: talking. Talk up Toastmasters. Tell people about the organization’s value. Give an “elevator speech” about your own experience and how you’ve benefited. Share your message with friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, community members, and others.

Pitching to potential members isn’t just about touting the value of Toastmasters—it’s about what the program can do for that person specifically. Find out what they’re looking for and tailor your message to how Toastmasters can help them with their own specific goals and needs.

Like so many things, word of mouth carries weight; in fact, it’s still the most effective recruiting tool. That’s what helped Ian Proud’s club boost membership. “People do things because someone they trust asks them to do it,” says Proud, a member of the Greater Susquehanna Valley club in Pennsylvania. “Members [in our club] asked friends and colleagues to accompany them to a meeting. They tended to stay and became members.”

If your club is meeting online, invite guests with a digital document created for that very purpose: the [Online Prospect Flier](#).

The Kossowan Touch

Peter Kossowan, DTM, is legendary in Toastmasters circles for his persuasive powers. The Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, resident has chartered more than 170 new Toastmasters clubs. That’s not a misprint. A member for 50 years, he is passionate about bringing new people and clubs into the organization, and very successful at it. He finds a softer approach works better than a hard sell.

When Kossowan meets prospects, he doesn’t say, “You should join Toastmasters”—he says, “Why don’t you join me at a Toastmasters meeting and see for yourself the benefits?”

Many clubs and Districts have membership-building resources on their website. [District 97](#) in Southeast Asia has such materials, and one resource offers these tips, among others:

- ▶ Ask members to wear their Toastmasters pin or badge—it will generate questions from other people that members, in turn, can answer and use as an invitation.
- ▶ Print club business cards and give them to members to hand others.

District 69 in Australia features a [raft of resources](#) on its site, including customized videos, presentations, letter templates, and a checklist—compiled from varied Toastmasters materials—to monitor the effectiveness of a club’s guest-to-member journey.

“These tools have been very effective for our clubs,” says Mark Snow, DTM, the District’s 2019-2020 Club Growth Director (CGD).

He and his team developed the framework for the resources, basing it on best practices of customer experience and sales practices in the corporate sector, he says. The District posted the resources in the summer of 2019 and the number of new members increased by 10% before the coronavirus outbreak, Snow adds.

Follow Through

As important as getting the word out is following through on your actions. A first impression is made even before a guest walks in the door. If someone calls or writes your club to ask questions or express an interest in visiting, make sure to respond promptly. Consider this: In a Toastmasters International survey last year of prospective members who had contacted a club, 60% of the respondents said they did not ultimately attend a club meeting; when asked why, more than 70% said it was because the club failed to respond.

Ian Brooks is determined to not let those opportunities slip away. “We work to get an email answer out to every inquiry within hours, and certainly within 24 hours,” says the 2019-2020 Vice President Membership (VPM) for the Eagle Club in Wallingford, Connecticut. “I always offer my cellphone number and invite questions at any time by ‘talk, text, or type’ and remind inquirers of the next meeting details a few days prior.”

The club’s initial email response features a positive, encouraging tone, highlighting that there is no charge to visit and no pressure to speak. It includes an invitation to attend the next meeting. “We are promoting public-speaking training with friendly individual and group support,” says Brooks. “It’s how we connect with guests who clearly have some ‘need’ to simply make the effort to contact us.”

The 25-year-old club has attained President’s Distinguished status every year since 2003.

In the Meeting

Greet your guests and make them feel comfortable and welcome. That's the golden rule of visitor protocol. A club member should greet guests when they walk in the door—some clubs even have an “official greeter.” Invite the guest to sit next to a member, who is essentially a personal host, helping the visitor understand what's happening every step of the way.

How important is this initial welcome? “In some ways, you've won or lost a new member in their first 30 seconds in the room,” says Brooks, the Toastmaster from Connecticut.

You can add a more personal flavor by giving everyone name tags to wear or putting name tents in front of everyone's seat. In Zoom calls, have people set their names to appear on the screen. Have visitors sign a guestbook or a similar document, so the club has their names and contact information on file. Also, provide them with information about your club, a club contact, and Toastmasters materials about membership and benefits; this can be done virtually or through a physical packet.

One practical but essential matter: Be sure your club website information is up to date, particularly when and where your club meets. The last thing you want is a guest missing your meeting because the information they read was wrong. Confirm that your club's information is also accurately listed on the Toastmasters website's Find a Club section.



Offer Speechcraft

A Speechcraft program is a great pitch for Toastmasters. Speechcraft is one of the organization's community-outreach programs, and clubs use it to teach the fundamentals of public speaking to non-members. Aside from helping people boost their comfort level with public speaking, the hope is that participants will decide to continue their skill-building by joining Toastmasters.

Clubs typically present Speechcraft through a series of workshops, delivered in four, six, or eight sessions. The program introduces people to the core of club meetings, with speeches, Table Topics, and evaluations.

Speechcraft offers non-members a taste of Toastmasters, a brief exposure to the benefits you can gain over the long term. As such, it's an excellent recruiting tool—and about to get better.

The Education Team at Toastmasters World Headquarters is modernizing and improving the Speechcraft program, bringing its content more in line with the current education program, Pathways. The updated program will include digital content. The expanded program is expected to be ready later this year; in the meantime, the [original Speechcraft program](#) is still available and highly effective. **T**

Be sure to formally acknowledge your guests in the meeting, and at the end, ask them if they would like to offer any comments on their experience. Always invite guests to come back, and ask them to join your club. That last part—“the ask”—is essential. Kossowan, the champion club-starter from Canada, says he has been to too many meetings where that final step is skipped. “They don't invite visitors to join. You have to ask for the sale!”

Always invite guests to come back, and ask them to join your club. That last part—“the ask”—is essential.

MORE MEMBERSHIP-BUILDING RESOURCES

- ▶ [The Benefits of Membership](#) outlines the value of being a Toastmaster.
- ▶ [Moments of Truth](#) offers tips for making positive first impressions on club guests.
- ▶ A [PowerPoint presentation](#) is available to use at open houses.
- ▶ Toastmasters [membership-building contests](#) are held throughout the year.

Do you have particular membership-building strategies that have worked for your club? Share your tips at magazine@toastmasters.org.

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive & editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

Stirring Speeches in History

Why the words of Martin Luther King Jr.,
Indira Gandhi, and Elie Wiesel still resonate.

BY MITCH MIRKIN

In May 1944, a teenaged Elie Wiesel was taken to the Auschwitz death camp by the Nazis. It was one in a string of hellish Holocaust experiences the author and human rights activist would go on to chronicle in his book *Night*.

Nearly 55 years later, in April 1999, Wiesel stood in the majestic East Room of the White House, in Washington, D.C., and delivered a memorable speech titled “The Perils of Indifference.” The 21-minute talk, like other great speeches aimed at advancing the cause of human rights, was marked by passion, power, and purpose.

Wiesel decried the apathy shown by many people and governments during the Holocaust. He pointed to the infamous June 1939 episode when United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt turned away the German ocean liner *St. Louis* and its nearly 1,000 Jewish refugees, many of whom would perish in the Holocaust. And he credited, and expressed profound gratitude for, those with the courage and moral clarity to act, including the “Righteous Gentiles”—Christians who risked their own lives to shield Jews from peril.

He also cited a long list of dark and deeply troubling chapters in the annals of 20th century history aside from the Holocaust: two world wars, countless civil wars, and assassinations, “bloodbaths” in places like Cambodia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Pakistan, and Kosovo.

Wiesel condemned the attitude of indifference that allows people to stand idly by, or to turn away, when others around them are the victims of cruelty. He tried to understand this regrettable—but common—psychological response:

Of course, indifference can be tempting—more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. ... Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction.

He posited that such apathy, more than hatred or anger, is what “makes the human being inhuman.”

Indira Gandhi challenged an entrenched traditional value system that had long relegated Indian women to a far lesser role.

Wiesel, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 and died in 2016, spoke from a sense of personal pain and loss that was deeper than most could know. He spoke in a calm, measured cadence, with effective pauses throughout, but his words resonated with intensity and authority. And there was a call to action that no listener could ignore: Do not stand by in the face of human suffering. Never allow yourself to become indifferent.

India's Challenge

The same qualities of passion, power, and purpose characterized a stirring 1974

speech by Indira Gandhi. She served as India's first female prime minister, from 1966 to 1977, and again from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984.

The title of the speech was “What Educated Women Can Do.” Gandhi delivered it at the 50-year anniversary celebration of Indraprastha College for Women in Delhi. In sharing her vision of how college-educated women could enrich India's future, she boldly challenged an entrenched traditional value system that had long relegated Indian women to a far lesser role. She believed educated women would fill a critical niche in promoting the nation's progress:

For India to become what we want it to become, with a modern, rational society and firmly based on what is good in our ancient tradition and in our soil, for this we have to have a thinking public, thinking young women. ... I hope that all of you who have this great advantage of education ... will make your own contribution to creating peace and harmony, to bringing beauty in the lives of our people and our country. I think this is the special responsibility of the women of India.

In a March 2020 *Toastmaster* magazine article marking International Women's Day, Toastmaster Sudarshan Seshadri praised Gandhi's speechmaking:

“Her speeches were very eloquent, erudite, and effective,” says Seshadri, a resident of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. “She used to attack the nub of the issue directly without an iota of doubt on where she stood on the issue being discussed. She was unequivocal in her speeches, and her speeches were defined by her courage, conviction, and clarity.”



A Defining Moment

Inspirational speeches often imbue us with a dream, a vision. Perhaps no orator in modern history has done this better than American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

King delivered his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963. A quarter of a million people had gathered for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Many in the packed crowd wore their Sunday finest—suits, ties, hats—despite the sweltering heat. The speech was a defining moment in the American civil rights movement. It continues to inspire millions around the globe thanks to its simple eloquence.

King’s six-minute talk contained echoes of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, of American folk songs, even of Shakespeare.

In a part of the speech that was actually improvised, based on past sermons King had given, he declared in his ringing voice, “I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

King deftly employed repetition as a rhetorical device. He rhythmically repeated the sentence “I have a dream” several times to start a new paragraph, strengthening the statement’s impact.

The setting of King’s speech was richly symbolic: It was President Abraham Lincoln who had freed the slaves a century



Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963.

earlier. King invoked Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (which began “Fourscore and seven years ago”) in his opening:

Fivescore years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice.

King’s six-minute talk contained echoes, too, of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, of American folk songs, even of Shakespeare. Perhaps most moving were its many biblical allusions and references, drawing on language and themes from the Book of Exodus and the prophets.

Former *New York Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani penned a brilliant analysis of the speech in 2013, on its 50th anniversary. She wrote:

“He began slowly, with magisterial gravity, talking about what it was to be black in America in 1963 and the ‘shameful condition’ of race relations a hundred

years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Unlike many of the day’s previous speakers, he did not talk about particular bills before Congress or the marchers’ demands. Instead, he situated the civil rights movement within the broader landscape of history—time past, present, and future—and within the timeless vistas of Scripture.”

King’s speech helped bring about the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a U.S. law banning discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Wiesel, Gandhi, King—all three knew how to deliver powerful, passionate words in the service of a noble purpose: promoting basic human rights, both for their own communities and for people around the world. **T**

Mitch Mirkin is a member and past president of Randallstown Network Toastmasters in Baltimore, Maryland. He works as a communicator for the research program of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.



IS IT OKAY TO *Laugh* IN **SERIOUS TIMES?**

Comedy lives in the details of life.

BY JUDY CARTER

Have you ever noticed that joking about a problem can make it more manageable? That's because at its core, comedy is about telling the truth in an unexpected and counterintuitive way.

Right now, most of us are living with one of the most life-altering problems we may ever experience—the coronavirus pandemic. The crisis has driven the majority of the nearly 8 billion of us who share this planet into quarantine. There's nothing funny about that. Or is there?

As a comedy writer, teacher, and professional humorist, I've been asked if we should feel guilty laughing during such serious times. Is it okay to joke at a time when so many people are



In unnerving times, comedy writer Judy Carter advocates “flipping the fear” and finding the positive side of life’s challenges.

hurting? As my Jewish mother would say, “It couldn’t hurt!” And as the U.S. TV show host Stephen Colbert wisely notes, “You can’t laugh and be afraid at the same time.”

Laughter, like supermarkets in this time of COVID-19, should be considered an essential business. Our mental health depends on it. Studies show laughter alleviates stress, soothes tension, relieves pain, improves your mood, boosts your immune system, resolves conflict, and just feels good.

The virus may take away our sense of smell and taste—but it can’t take away our sense of humor, which can help us cope in uncertain, stressful times.

Try some comedy techniques to turn problems into punchlines.

And there is plenty to get stressed about: fear of losing our health and jobs, not to mention the quarantine weight gain. It’s no wonder that flattening our abdominal muscles seems more difficult than flattening the coronavirus infection curve.

The virus is not only making us sick, it’s making us sick of each other. So what can help?

Finding the Funny

During my online comedy workshop, participants discussed how long it takes to get COVID-19 test results, and this joke popped out of my mouth:

I’ll tell some coronavirus jokes, but you’ll have to wait two weeks to see if you got them.

The entire workshop exploded into laughter, easing everyone’s stress. Next thing you know, people started turning their problems into punchlines:

Prediction: There will be a minor baby boom in nine months after shelter-in-place, and then one day in 2033, there will be the rise of the Quaranteens.

As a prank, my house just got TP’d (wrapped in toilet paper). Suddenly it’s being appraised at twice the price.

Actually, laughter is like the virus—it’s contagious. A lot of scary news is coming at us right now, creating despair, desperation, and depression. So rather than spreading fear, why not learn some comedy techniques to spread humor? You don’t need a prescription for it, you’ll never over-

dose on it, and you can help make a difference.

As I write this in May 2020, there is no vaccine against COVID-19, so right now laughter just might be the best medicine. As a matter of fact, the *only* medicine.

Here are some comedy techniques I believe can help all of us spread positive messages and laughter in these uncertain and often unnerving times.

Virtually Hilarious

Due to the pandemic, thousands of Toastmasters clubs are now meeting online. Consider opening or closing your Toastmasters speeches with comedic content. Think your humor won’t wow the club as much online as in person? Think again.

1 I dare you not to laugh.

There is nothing lonelier than saying something funny and hearing silence. Our brain interprets that as bombing, or, to use a kindlier word, failing. Next thing you know, you speed up to fill the emptiness and set a speed record for finishing your eight-minute speech in less than four minutes.

Laughter depends on connection. So when giving a humorous speech it’s essential for the online host to have all attendees *turn on* their videos and *unmute* themselves (with the exception of that one Toastmaster with a crying baby). The more laughter you hear, the more smiling faces you see, the more confidence you will have. Remember, laughter is infectious.

2 I’m watching you.

Deliver your speech looking right into the camera and arrange your view (on Zoom) from “Speaker View” to “Grid View.” So rather than looking at yourself, you will see members’ faces. Then, when you do get a laugh, you can add spontaneity

by reacting to your club members: “Karen, love your laugh!” or “Well, Bob thought that was funny!”

Knowing that *they* are being seen and watched by *you* during your speech will encourage more laughter and discourage them from multitasking and shopping on Amazon.

3 Wait for it. How you react to your audience’s laughter can be the difference between extending the laugh and killing the laugh. After delivering a punchline, there’s a lag from the end of the joke to the time the audience laughs and that silence can feel like an eternity.

Find a topic 90% of your audience has experienced and you’ll not only get a laugh, you’ll throw some sunlight into the world.

You might be tempted to jump quickly to your next bit, but that is a huge mistake. It cuts short the laugh before it has fully developed and disconnects you from the audience. Hold for the laugh; add gestures or commentary to accentuate your words. Poke your hands toward the camera and lean forward while nodding your head. You can also ask the audience, “Right? Right?” This can be a great way to orchestrate a laugh, even if you didn’t get one at first.

Your Life Is a Joke

“But Judy, there is nothing funny about my life now.”

When writing comedy, start serious—and end funny. Day one in my comedy workshops we get real by answering this question: “What’s *wrong* about your life?”

A student’s starting point could be: “I’m getting a divorce!” “I can’t stand my kids!” “Cancer.”

That’s right. A woman in my workshop once got an audience to laugh at cancer. She said, “Anyone see my bumper sticker? ‘Lose weight now ... ask me how.’” Did her ability to find the funny in a serious topic boost her T-cell count and help her go into remission? According to her it did, so what else matters?

However, remember that humor can heal and it can hurt. Insensitive jokes guarantee you aren’t going to win any fans in your Toastmasters club. It’s one thing to joke about your lack of toilet paper; it’s another thing to joke about the lack of respirators.

But here’s someone you can always joke about: yourself. Go ahead, joke about yourself! Everyone else is. If you feel your life is a joke, it probably is. Go with it! After all, that’s not a receding hairline—that’s a punchline.

Flex Your Funny Bone

“But Judy, I’m not naturally funny.”

Even if you are humor impaired, the following exercises can help make you funny. I’ve taught comedy techniques to software

engineers, accountants, and even the most unfunny—dentists. They all ended up doing five minutes of stand-up comedy. Even better, they nailed it. Follow these cues, and while you may not launch a career as a stand-up comedian, you will get laughs.

Warped thinking works.

Where others see problems, comedians see punchlines. We have a warped, or as I like to say, a counterintuitive view of life. A dysfunctional family or a quarantine has an upside: potential material. We flip our fear to make it work for us by looking at the *positive* side of fear.

I asked my Comedy Bible Facebook group to see if they could find the funny side of some COVID-19 calamities. I gave them this joke setup: There are some advantages to being quarantined, such as...

The coronavirus is a good thing, because now I know how to spell quarantine.

I used to be afraid of hoarders. Now I admire them. I’m taking a “How to be a Hoarder” course online.

And this setup: Signs you’re broke...

...you ask to sleep on your friend’s couch just so you can look for loose change.

...getting paid triggers a call from your bank due to unusual activity.

...you’ve stopped paying compliments.

Flex your funny bone and come up with your own advantages to living in these uncertain times. It’s a great topic because 90% of your audience has experienced it, and you’ll not only get a laugh, you’ll throw some sunlight into the world.

Don’t get mad, get funny.

The pandemic has given us examples of breathtaking compassion and, at times, jaw-dropping insensitivity. We can’t stop people from saying hurtful things, but we can choose how to respond. Why not try making a humor choice? This is the same technique I have used onstage to squash a heckler and it works great in life as well.

Consider opening or closing your Toastmasters speech with comedic content, as the willingness to spread laughter is a good thing.

The technique is called *validate and paradox*. That means to repeat, in a calm voice, the stupid thing someone said to you: “So, you think I’ve gained weight? Right?” Resist the urge to defend



Toastmasters will eventually return to in-person meetings, where comedy thrives on personal connections. Until then, turn on your Zoom camera, unmute the audio, and keep laughing at your fellow members' funny speeches.

yourself; instead, think counterintuitively and *agree* with them in an *exaggerated* way: “Yes, thank you for noticing all my overnight eating has finally paid off!”

Having a laugh rather than a fight can turn conflict into camaraderie and lighten up your day, not to mention your quarantine.

■ Write it down.

We may be feeling stuck, bored, and scared during this quarantine. But there are extraordinary stories in an ordinary day if you look at the details of the day.

Comedy is found in the *details of life*. You think you’ll remember funny moments, but unless you write them down, they will vanish. If you think or see something funny, jot it down. You can also spend 10 minutes each morning journaling—it just might result in a story that wins you the World Championship of Public Speaking®. What about the time you tried to make dinner from scratch, using peanut butter, an artichoke, and a can of sardines? As we comics say, “Bad for life—good for comedy.”

Do Something Different

Making people laugh means thinking differently. Doing something in a different way can exercise your brain, expand

your skill set, and lighten up your life. During the quarantine I’ve learned how to make bread, Zumba dance, and teach online comedy classes. In fact, teaching opened my eyes to how much comedy talent people have—even dentists.

So think differently, learn differently, and you might find you have a hidden talent for telling stories that spread laughter and lighten lives.

And now, I’ve got to go. I have a bowl of pralines-and-cream ice cream waiting for me. **T**

Editor’s Note: *If Judy Carter sounds funny—and familiar—to you, it might be that you’ve seen her comedy concepts on display in the Engaging Humor path in Toastmasters’ Pathways learning experience. Carter shares her expertise in a Level 5 video in the path, as does Darren LaCroix, Toastmasters’ 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking.*

Judy Carter *doesn’t like to brag, but she did write the Bible. No joke, she’s the author of The New Comedy Bible and The Comedy Bible Workbook. These books contain exercises from her renowned Hollywood comedy workshop, which launched the careers of Seth Rogan, Maz Jobrani, Hannah Gadsby, and many others. During COVID-19, Judy is offering her online speaking and comedy classes for free. Sign up at www.thecomedybible.com.*

From Reel to Real

Some speechifying films that elevate the spoken word.

BY CAREN NEILE, PH.D.

When silent-film icon Greta Garbo starred in her first speaking role in 1930, the movie posters read *Garbo Talks!* How far movies have come from that auspicious beginning!

Today, actors deliver a “speech” in every film—the term can simply refer to a chunk of dialogue—but sometimes, they also play characters specifically challenged, or buoyed, by the act of public speaking. Great speeches can transform a movie by demonstrating how effective speaking can transform not only individuals but society, as well.

“There is often a thrilling moment in a movie when a heroic character finds his or her voice and speaks truth to personal or political power,” says Susan Reilly, a media studies professor emerita at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida. “This transformation from being afraid to speak to speaking effectively is often remembered, and even if fictional, encourages viewers to participate in the democratic process.”

Here’s a look at some of these speechifying flicks, including some of the places you can find them online.

Hands down the most famous recent example of a movie about public speaking is the 2011 Academy Award winner from Britain, *The King’s Speech*. Starring Colin Firth as King George VI, it is based on the true story of how one of the most famous men in the world learned to overcome a stutter and address his nation in the mid-1930s—all thanks to Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue.

The two men develop a close friendship, and Logue uses unconventional techniques to teach the British monarch

how to speak with confidence. The film brought attention and empathy to the issue of stuttering, demonstrating through the dramatic example of King George VI that a speech impediment doesn’t need to hold anyone back from achieving success. (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu)

On a lighter note, *Speech & Debate* (2017) follows speakers on the opposite side of the spectrum from the king: three misfit American teens who decide to revive a high school debate club. The movie’s inspiring promotional slogan: “Life is a stage. Find your voice. Change the world.” (Netflix)

Meanwhile, in 2015’s *A Sort of Homecoming*, a New York news producer returning to her hometown to reconnect with her high school debate coach finds

herself reliving her tumultuous senior year competing on a national level. (Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube)

The romantic comedy *Speechless* (1994) stars Michael Keaton and Geena Davis as rival political speechwriters who fall in love. While it’s not the best of the genre, it definitely has its moments—and anyone who has ever stepped on a podium will long remember the candidate who tries to bring meaning to the lyrics from “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” that mysteriously appear on the teleprompter. I’m still having nightmares about that one! (Amazon Prime)

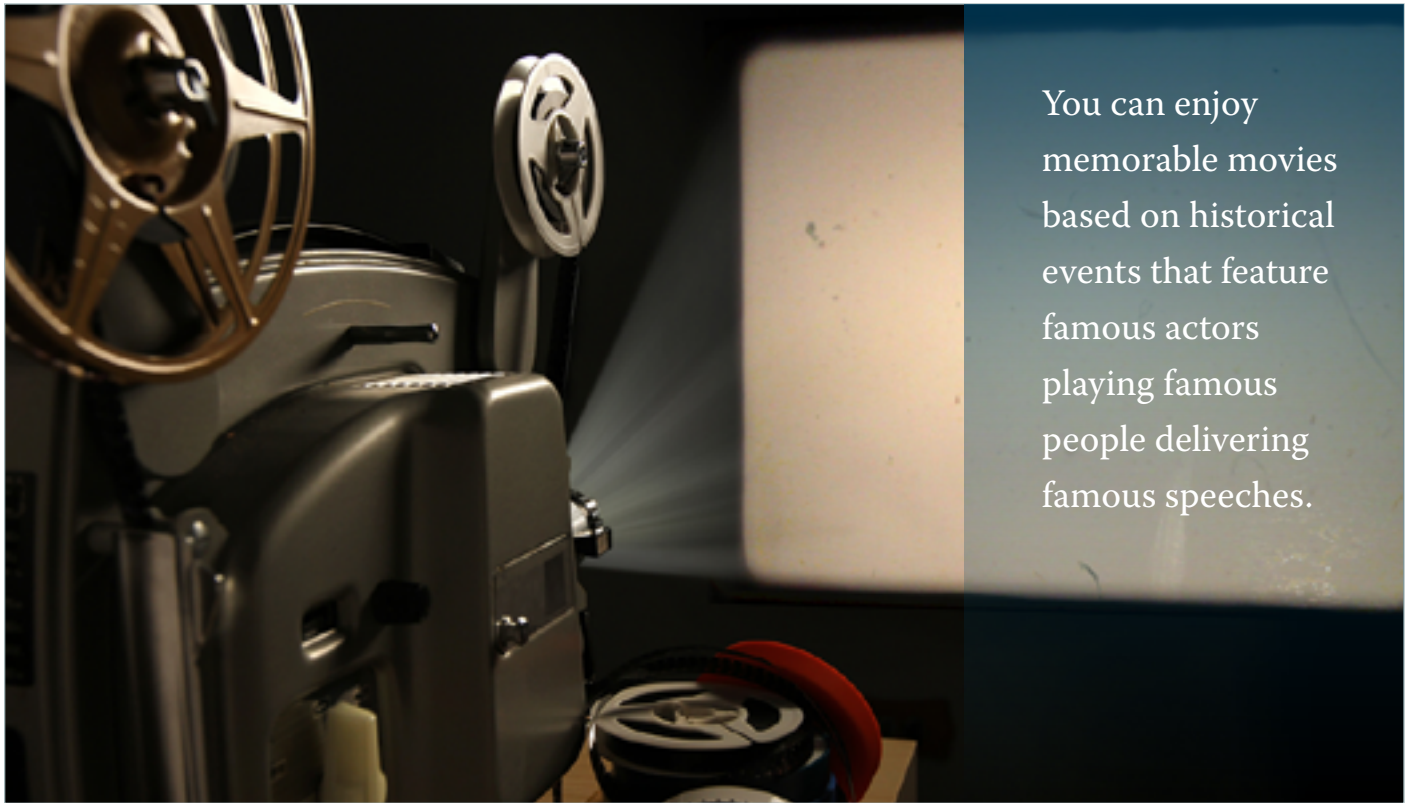
Historical Speeches in Film

In addition to *The King’s Speech*, you can enjoy other memorable movies based

MORE MOVIE SPEECHES

You can also enjoy terrific movies based, loosely or not, on true events that feature glorious, if sometimes fictionalized, speeches. These include the inspirational sports films *Rudy* (1993—Amazon Prime, Hulu, YouTube) and *Remember the Titans* (2000—Amazon Prime, YouTube, Disney+). The latter features coach Herman Boone (eloquent orator Denzel Washington), talking about the Battle of Gettysburg, drawing on the historical episode to motivate his football team.

Then there’s the Australian suspense film *A Cry in the Dark* (titled *Evil Angels* in Australia) featuring a dramatic Meryl Streep courtroom speech as well as the line “A dingo took my baby!” (1988—YouTube, Amazon Prime). And the courtroom is the setting for two classics: *Inherit the Wind* with Spencer Tracy, Frederic March, and Gene Kelly, about the 1925 Scopes “Monkey” Trial (1960—YouTube, Amazon Prime), and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961—Netflix), with an all-star cast including the likes of Tracy, Maximilian Schell, Judy Garland, and Montgomery Clift, ably speaking up against Nazi terror.



You can enjoy memorable movies based on historical events that feature famous actors playing famous people delivering famous speeches.

on historical events that feature famous actors playing famous people delivering famous speeches—even though the plot isn't purely about public speaking.

This situation presents both a challenge and a boon for filmmakers. On one hand, at least some viewers will already be familiar with the speech and perhaps will even have heard it delivered, so expectations will be high.

On the other, the writers know the speech is effective—and they are saved the trouble of creating it from scratch. Many of these movie protagonists fall into the category of folks whose speeches have been recorded verbatim by journalists, historians, and others: political leaders.

The Darkest Hour is a 2017 film about the early days of World War II. Its hero, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, delivered one of his most celebrated addresses to Parliament in June 1940, after the success of Operation Dynamo to evacuate Dunkirk, in the north of France. Churchill, played in the film by Oscar winner Gary Oldman, memorably says, “We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall

fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.” (Netflix)

In 2012, Daniel Day-Lewis played the title role in *Lincoln*, which takes place between two of the 16th U.S. president's best-known speeches: the 272-word Gettysburg Address (1865) and, a few months later, his Second Inaugural Address, delivered just before the end of the Civil War and his assassination. (Netflix)

In 2010, famed director Martin Scorsese made an award-winning HBO documentary called *Public Speaking* about the speeches of the social commentator Fran Lebowitz. The movie includes the memorable line “When I was a child, it was called ‘talking back.’ Now, it's called ‘public speaking.’” (HBO, Netflix)

The Great Debaters (2007), which features a star turn by Denzel Washington, is about the Wiley College debate team's encounters with racism on and off the stage in the 1930s (Netflix). Washington

had already made a name acting in films with a public-speaking touch, having nailed his performance as American civil-rights activist Malcolm X in the 1992 movie of the same name. (YouTube, iTunes, Amazon Prime)

World War II was also at the heart of the Oscar-winning film *Patton* (1970), in which then-megastar George C. Scott played the hard-boiled U.S. commander delivering a swaggering address right in the first scene, in front of a huge American flag. That powerful opening, incidentally, went on to become one of the most iconic scenes in all of moviemaking. (Amazon Prime, Hulu, YouTube)

Whatever your taste in movies, there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy and learn from public speaking in action. And who knows? Thanks to Toastmasters, maybe next year they'll be doing *your* speech up there on the silver screen! 📺

Caren Neile, Ph.D., is a performance storyteller, professor, and writer. She has contributed numerous articles to the *Toastmaster magazine* and has spoken at two *Toastmasters International* conventions.

Spread the Word

How to get press coverage in a disrupted, digital world.

BY CORINNE CARD

Getting publicity is a huge boost for any organization, including your own Toastmasters club. Seeing the club in the media is exciting for members. Publicity can also build awareness for what the club is doing, bringing in new members who could find Toastmasters a life-changing experience.

One way to bolster your skills and knowledge is through the “Public Relations Strategies” elective project in [Pathways](#), where you’ll get a chance to road-test your public relations (PR) skills and help your club get noticed in the process.

The biggest question for clubs seeking to showcase Toastmasters’ benefits for their communities is: “How can we best work with journalists?”

“If you want publicity for your Toastmasters club, or for anything else in the digital age, you need to get involved in content creation,” explains Jon Card, a business journalist and author of *How to Make Your Company Famous*. “Create your own bio—a short, powerful sentence about who you are; learn how to tell your story; have a longer, written profile about yourself; have lots of images—both still and moving; and become very quotable.”

When it comes to digital media—press coverage that gets published online—it’s often said that content is king. What this means is that you will need to prepare the stories, pictures, quotes, and data for the publications in which you want to appear.

In this respect, PR and media haven’t changed that much, says Chantal Cooke, managing director of PR agency Panpathic Communications in London, England. For Cooke, it’s all about creating good and

relevant content. “With any campaign, you have to start with the outcomes you’re hoping for. What do you want to achieve and who are you trying to reach?”

According to Cooke, the next step is to look at the platforms your target audience will be using and build content that will likely get published on those platforms—perhaps that means a compelling story, a video, a photo, or straightforward information. She adds, “At the end of the day, it’s always about the content being relevant and right for the publication.”

For example, if your club is looking for new members, consider which news outlets in your area would best reach potential members. Then pitch the kind of stories those news sources and websites are likely to publish. For Toastmasters, this could be your local newspaper, news or radio websites, magazines, and blogs.

I’ve spent my career as a digital PR professional helping businesses promote themselves and have provided five top tips to help you get noticed by journalists and the media in the digital age.

Tip 1: Learn to tell your story.

Every Toastmasters club or individual needs a good story if they want to get press. “Journalists need to know who you are, what you do, why you do it, and how you’re trying to make a difference to the world,” explains Card. “The fastest and most memorable way to do this is to tell them a short story that explains why you are doing this. Why did you join Toastmasters and what benefits can it offer someone else? Why should someone visit your club? Journalists want

to know the human story, the personal motivation—that’s absolutely key.” When it comes to finding the human story, think of your club members’ achievements, personal and professional goals that were met through Pathways, or a success story of someone who competed in a speech contest.



Tip 2: Conduct your own photoshoot.

The digital age has brought about changes, not only in the process journalists use, but also in the budgets they’re working with. Lower budgets mean it’s less likely a journalist will be able to send out a photographer, even if they like the story. And often, no photo can mean no coverage. The solution? Organize your own photoshoot, aiming for high quality, illustrative pictures that help to tell the story. James Hurley, enterprise editor at *The Times*, a British newspaper, says, “A good picture can bring the pages and a story to life.”

If you don’t have the budget to pay a professional photographer, you can still get good, high-resolution pictures using a



smartphone. For best results, go outside for natural light, choose a location with an interesting background, and find someone you know who has some photographic ability to help you out. And always try to illustrate the story you're telling in your pictures.

Tip 3: Get linking.

A clickable link can be valuable in digital PR. Often, it simply means readers can easily click through to the event, website, or competition you're trying to get publicity for, making it far more likely that you'll get more visits.

Always think about where you might want a journalist to link to and include that link in the article you send them. Just

“If you want publicity for your Toastmasters club, or for anything else in the digital age, you need to get involved in content creation.”

—JON CARD

journalists on any of the topics you might want to speak about. These can be quotes from other members of your club or people who have come to visit, but be sure to get their permission!

Meanwhile, calling up journalists is not generally recommended, as top journalists can no longer deal with the influx. “I have more or less stopped answering my landline at certain times of the day because of the constant bombardment,” says Hurley, *The Times* editor. “It’s a shame, because it does mean I miss some good ideas.”

One way around this is to get ahead of the pack with perfect timing. Look ahead for key newsworthy dates and pitch a story just when journalists will need it. This way, your story’s email subject line will stand out from the crowd.

For example, during the holidays, journalists tend to publish holiday-themed stories. Is your club



make sure the link is relevant and potentially useful to the reader, because the journalist will need to be able to justify it from their audience’s point of view.

Tip 4: Prepare a quote bank.

In the digital age, journalists are more desk-bound, and email interviews are the new normal. You can take advantage of this by building up a bank of quotes, stories, and photos that are available on demand and ready to send out to

Also, if you receive a list of questions from a journalist, it is important to remember that they are attempting to elicit quotes from you. Avoid answering questions with a “yes” or “no”—even if they are closed questions. Instead, aim to answer each question with a few meaningful sentences.

Tip 5: Time the perfect pitch.

Sending out a [press release](#) about your organization is increasingly hit and miss in today’s digital era. Even local journalists will often receive upward of 100 email pitches per day, meaning good, relevant stories will get missed if they don’t catch a journalist’s eye straight away.

planning a holiday-themed event or special occasion? Send details to the local news at the beginning of December, with a fabulous photo from last year’s event, to show readers what might be in store this year. And look ahead to other calendar dates to see what you could prepare.

Make journalists’ lives easier by giving them exactly what they want, exactly when they want it. Follow these tips, and you’ll quickly start seeing results. **T**

Corinne Card is co-founder of [Full Story Media](#), which helps mission-led entrepreneurs famous so they can change the world for the better. Get in touch: corinne@fullstorymedia.co.uk

Zoom Boom

Before everyone sees you at home, make sure you know what they're seeing.

BY JOHN CADLEY



Now that Zoom has become the video-conferencing platform du jour, there are a few things we should all remember. Yes, it's a wonderful way to stay connected during this time of social distancing, but, like all tools, we must be careful how we use it. A lawn mower is nice, too, as long as you don't run it over the garden hose.

First and foremost, do *not* be deceived by Zoom's seemingly informal nature. It may seem like you're just "getting together" with friends and family for a relaxed "social visit," but make no mistake: You are being judged. Everything that appears in your little square frame is being noticed and evaluated for better or worse: *Wallpaper? Really? Who uses wallpaper anymore? Tolstoy and Proust in the bookcase? Nice try. I know she reads Stephen King. A still-life painting of fruit? What is this—the 18th century?*

I know you believe this because you're doing the same to them.

The only way to avoid such harsh judgment is to sit in front of a plain white wall, and even that's risky. *Is he in an institution? Have their furnishings been repossessed?* My advice is to select the "audio only" option. It may seem anti-social to talk over a black screen but it's better than letting them see your collection of Elvis memorabilia.

And don't forget your own personal looks. Just because you're lounging around in the privacy of your home doesn't mean you should look that way. With 23 people watching, privacy is the last thing you have. First, wear a hat so they can't see your real hair color. Then throw a business jacket over your pajamas

so it looks like you really are working from home. And for goodness' sake, alert your spouse or partner that you will be on a Zoom meeting during such-and-such a time so they don't walk out behind you stark naked and ask where you put the clean towels. This will not simply embarrass you for the moment. It will wind up on the internet and embarrass you *for the rest of your life*.

All that virtual backgrounds do are remind your fellow Zoomers of all the wonderful places they can't go!

As for small children, I don't have to tell you how many ways things could go wrong, and any method of restraint I might suggest is against the law. You might as well resign yourself to the fact that your 3-year-old will do *something* to brand you as a bad parent. So be it.

And pets. Please—don't hold them up and wiggle their paws so they can "say hello" to everybody. I'm sure your cat or dog is cute but nobody cares. Really. Nobody.

Another way to discourage prying eyes is by using one of the virtual Zoom backgrounds, like a beach in Hawaii or the Grand Canyon. Don't. It's not uplifting; it's depressing. All it does is remind your fellow Zoomers of all the wonderful places *they can't go!* The same with the app that lets you turn your face into some other, supposedly humorous, object. There is a famous video going

around the internet (remember what I said about cyber immortality?) of a boss who thought it would be fun to start her weekly employee Zoom meeting using one of these images, only to discover she didn't know how to turn it off. The result was a serious 45-minute discussion about horizontal-axis wind turbines led by a potato.

Along these same lines, if somebody tells you to hit Alt+F4 for a better view, don't do it. It will close your window and you'll have to listen to 47 people laughing at how you fell for the joke. The only way out is to hope some hacker Zoom bombs the meeting with a video of Wayne Newton singing "Danke Schoen." *That* will get them off your back.

Zoom's popularity has, well, zoomed because it's so easy to use. We've all experienced an elderly family member appearing on the screen and shouting, "I did it! I did it!" But there's one thing you must practice beforehand: signing off. There's nothing worse than waving goodbye to everybody and then having them watch while you fumble around trying to find out how to leave the meeting. You'll stand up, they'll see your navel, you'll swear, they'll laugh, you'll look like a fool. It's not the worst thing, but after a sentimental get-together full of *I miss you's* and *Stay safe's* and *Love you's* ... it just looks bad. 📺

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 

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