

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | DECEMBER 2021

# TOASTMASTER®



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Pets bring new perspective  
on communication.

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## Toastmasters International Mission:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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## Jumping Toward Our Common Goal

Years ago, I attended a weeklong personal development course on a gorgeous tropical island. It was such a privilege to be there, and I was anxious yet enthusiastic about the seven days ahead. I was assigned a partner to complete tasks with throughout the week. Our first assignment was to rebound—otherwise known as jumping on a trampoline—every morning to get us moving and oxygenate our minds and bodies and prepare us for the day ahead.

The first day went off without a hitch. On day two, the organizers moved our rebounders (trampolines) close together so we were a bit more crowded as we bounced away. My partner didn't like this change one bit, pursing her lips and furrowing her brow in anger while the rest of us laughed and tried to manage our new challenge.

On day three, the organizers threw us a curveball—beach balls, actually—that we were instructed to throw in the air while we rebounded. My partner was livid! She pulled her rebounder off to the side and bounced away by herself while complaining about how unsafe the exercise had become.

## Sometimes those balls in the air can seem like too much to manage.

I was uncomfortable about her behavior toward the instructors. Yet she continued. And there I was, enjoying the company of my other fellow attendees as we figured out how to manage the tasks the organizers gave us. Why couldn't my partner do the same?

By day six, I was ready to hide every time I saw my partner scowl. Was I letting her down or was she letting me down? How could we possibly get through the end of the week, much less offer support to each other?

Finally, on day seven, my partner arrived and began happily rebounding with the rest of us. I was amazed! How had this woman who had spent so much time complaining finally be smiling?

"I get it," she admitted. "In life, we have a lot of balls to juggle and people invading our space and demanding our time. But it's how we cope that defines our success. I've always pulled away and coped on my own, but I see now that this exercise is a metaphor for life. How we handle games is how we handle life."

I think about that story often when I hear from members who feel as if they have been tasked with too much. Sometimes those balls in the air can seem like too much to manage when we're already dealing with everyday life.

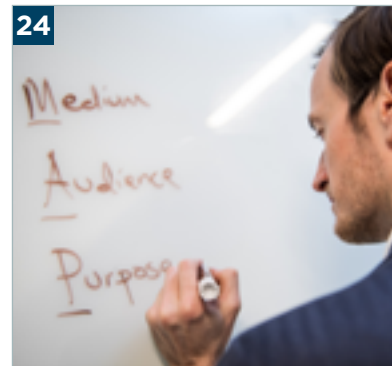
We don't have to do it alone, however. We set and accomplish our goals together, and celebrate our successes, large and small. Eventually, we'll look back at what we've done and realize our achievements have set us up beautifully for success. And how we actually managed it all. Together.

**Margaret Page, DTM**  
International President



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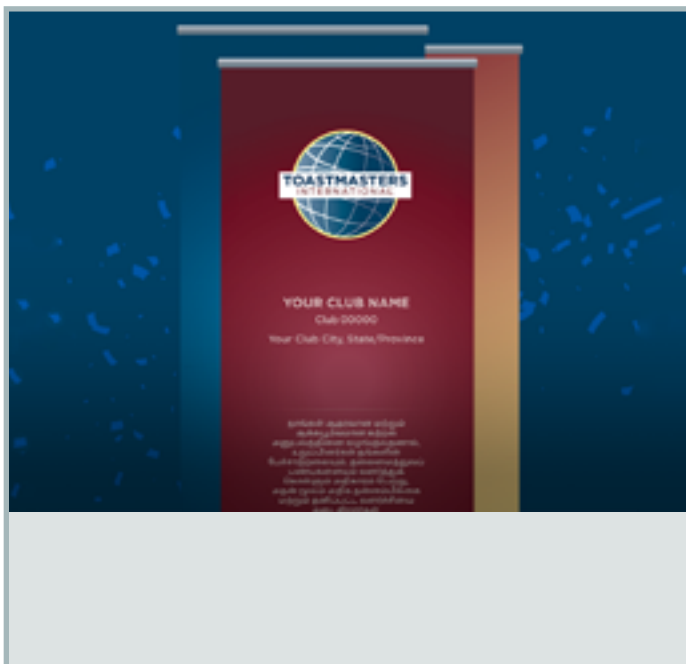


### The Celebration Continues

Catch up on the [latest webinar](#), with International President Margaret Page, DTM, and a panel of leaders celebrating Toastmasters' 97th anniversary. Hear stories of success and resiliency and honor the leaders who have helped you!

### Zoom Discount Code

Is your club using Zoom to conduct online meetings? Then you may want to request a discount code for 50% off your plan. If your Club President hasn't already received a code, send an email to [clubquality@toastmasters.org](mailto:clubquality@toastmasters.org) with your request and you will receive your code within two weeks. If you already have your code or have questions about this program, please visit our [Zoom Discount FAQ](#).



### Translated Banners Are Here!

Custom club banners are now available in Arabic, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish, Tamil, and Traditional Chinese. [Clubs can order](#) translated custom club banners in yellow, navy, or burgundy.

### Access Articles on Base Camp

Next time you log in to Base Camp for your [Pathways learning experience](#), you may notice some additional resources. Applicable articles from the *Toastmaster* magazine have been added to each level—from tips on evaluations to speechwriting to body language.

## Resources

### Toastmaster Online Magazine

In the [December online edition](#), read additional stories about Toastmasters and their pets and view an online photo gallery of members' furry friends. While you're visiting the digital magazine, discover a list of top stories and podcasts from 2021. Don't forget, you can access all of the online and PDF issues from this past year in the [magazine archive](#).



### Invocations and Pledges

Invocations and pledges are popular ways to open club meetings with an inspirational message. They are usually one or two minutes in length, delivered by a designated club member, and are entirely optional. If your club chooses to open a meeting with an invocation or pledge, always take care to respect the diversity of club members and visitors. More information on this topic can be found on the [Invocations, Pledges, and Controversial Topics page](#).

### Keep Your District on Track to Distinguished

Check the status of your District's progress in the District Recognition Program by reviewing the dashboard, located on the [Distinguished Performance Reports](#) webpage. Want to learn even more about how the DCP benefits you as a member? Read this October [Toastmaster article](#).

## Reminders

### How to Submit An Article or Idea

The *Toastmaster* magazine accepts unsolicited article queries and story ideas. Before you submit, please review the [Writer Guidelines](#). For general article submissions, please complete the [article submission form](#) and send via email to [submissions@toastmasters.org](mailto:submissions@toastmasters.org).

If you have an idea or topic that would make a good story, but you're not interested in writing it, please fill out and [submit this form](#).



▶ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Joel Schwartzberg’s inerrant article “How to Quit Talking Quickly” was gripping. My initial year as a Toastmaster was spent struggling with my speaking pace; most of my feedback addressed it. I blamed it on the fact that I spent most of my life as an English teacher who had so much material to cover in so little time. I also blamed it on the fact that I lived so close to “The Big Apple.”

One day after a meeting, a fellow Toastmaster and mentor took me aside and told me he felt I should concentrate more on articulation and also pause more often. It worked!

Thank you, Mr. Schwartzberg, for your empowering article.

**Linda Childress**

*Palm City Orators • Palm City, Florida*

In the September 2021 *Toastmaster* magazine, you asked “Are you a member of a corporate club? Tell us how you have benefited.”

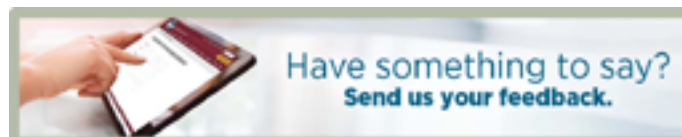
I am a member of corporate club Toastmasters of BankUnited in Miami Lakes, Florida. I joined this club at the beginning of this year, which began my journey with Toastmasters. Prior to COVID, Toastmasters meetings were held on-site at the corporate headquarters in Florida. For the last year and a half, our company and our corporate club have been functioning remotely. This allowed for employees located in states other than Florida to join the club. This was great for me as I work for a subsidiary in Maryland. Our company also has a large presence in New York and the club was able to add members from there as well.



In a time when I felt like I was in solitary confinement working alone in my home, I was able to connect and network with people throughout the company that I may not have otherwise had the opportunity to meet. I learned about different job functions and have even been able to give leads to other departments. Toastmasters has benefitted me tremendously in the form of increased confidence and speaking skills, but it has especially benefitted me with gaining connections and a stronger bond to my coworkers and company.

**Jennifer Duffy**

*Toastmasters of BankUnited • Cockeysville, Maryland*



▶ TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



**STEPHAN DYER, DTM**, of North York, Ontario, Canada, holds a printout of the February 2021 *Toastmaster* magazine cover he appeared on.



**ROWENA GARCIA** of Elmhurst, New York, enjoys the *Toastmaster* online magazine while overlooking the Caribbean Sea on vacation in St. Thomas.



## ▶ SNAPSHOT



A few charter members of Iceberg Alley Online Toastmasters Club gather on Signal Hill, which overlooks St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. This is the location where the first transatlantic wireless transmission was received in 1901, and the photo is an ode to the progress made in communication technology over the decades.

## ▶ HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

The Official Toastmasters International Members Group on [Facebook](#) is always filled with conversations started by and for members. **Tim Patmore** of Didcot Speakers Toastmasters Club in Oxford, England, asked this question:

*“Anyone have tips for drumming up lots of guests for face-to-face meetings?”*

One idea that's worked well in my clubs: a new agenda role, the “guest master.” Their meeting duty is to bring one guest to the meeting and introduce them around.

**Mike Raffety** • Chicago, Illinois

Website, website, website. Even before the pandemic, the quality of the club website played a major role in bringing visitors to the club. Now, it's even more important.

**George Marshall, DTM** • Fremont, California

Currently we are putting up posters around town, marketing on Facebook groups, listings in local papers, and writing an article in one of the papers.

**Colin Bunston** • Sorrento, British Columbia, Canada

Bring in a guest speaker, make meetings fun, word of mouth can be a great advertisement.

**Lisa Dodis, DTM** • Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Relevant theme meeting.

**Fern Rashkover, DTM** • Douglaston, New York

Food.

**Chandrashekar Angadi** • Doha, Qatar







# Embrace the Uncomfortable

How Toastmasters taught me to shine, even via video.

BY NHI ARONHEIM

**W**ith English being my second language, the last thing I could ever imagine is becoming a published author with my book distributed in a dozen English-speaking countries. I also never imagined doing book promotion presentations to large audiences, especially via video.

And yet, my unimaginable dream became a reality. My book *Soles of a Survivor* was published in May 2021. And I'm grateful that Toastmasters has come along with me throughout this special journey.

Since joining Toast of Inverness in Centennial, Colorado, in 2014, I've learned that how well we can tell a story makes a huge impact on how much a message resonates with the audience. I also learned that a strong speech is carefully structured, with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Only then should we begin to write, edit, and rewrite—just like a shorter version of writing a book. I used this skill when writing my memoir.

*Soles of a Survivor* is about the soles of my feet still bearing the scars of my horrific escape from Vietnam in 1987—where I trudged through the jungles of Cambodia as a child with a group of strangers seeking what we saw as the land of opportunity: America. My only possessions were two pieces of clothing and a heart filled with hope.

However, my book is more than a survival story—it's also about the lessons I learned about humanity, diversity, and unconditional love since arriving in the United States. I met and married my Jewish beau and gained a deep appreciation for the parallels between the Jewish and Vietnamese cultures, and others as well. The book shares all these experiences



Nhi Aronheim

and is an invitation from my heart to yours, a reminder that there is light at the end of every tunnel.

**I'm grateful that Toastmasters has come along with me throughout this special journey.**

After delivering many Toastmasters speeches, I'd grown comfortable speaking before an in-person audience. However, I was afraid of speaking in unfamiliar settings, such as in front of a video camera. For one thing, I was concerned that new audiences might not be able to understand me clearly because of my Vietnamese accent.

Then COVID-19 hit the world, forcing our club to hold virtual meetings. It not only changed our meetings, it also

drastically transformed the traditional way books are marketed. Tours, big gatherings, and bookstore events all went virtual. I had no choice but to adapt.

At first, I was quite uncomfortable and anxious. Thankfully, the members of my club encouraged me to practice with them. Initially, I could only notice my white hair sticking up, or imperfections in my makeup, or the lighting when my desktop camera was pointed at me. I was fearful about the whole world seeing my insecurities. Yet my fellow Toastmasters reminded me that virtual meetings were here to stay, and I'd better learn to embrace them.

So I did. Change is uncomfortable, but it can be a good thing to feel uncomfortable in order to grow. I pushed myself to accept the change. I've repeated this mantra to myself prior to many virtual meetings and interviews: *Stop worrying about what viewers think of you! Just be yourself and communicate as if you were talking to them in-person.*

I changed my viewing screen so that I could only see the attendees and not myself. I then consciously focused on looking at the camera and then briefly at the audience on the screen, so I could read their facial expressions. By using this technique, I became much more comfortable in my uncomfortable zone. I feel my personality now shines, even via video.

Based on my experience, I understand that having fears is normal. I hope that, just like me, you will embrace being uncomfortable and conquer your fears. **T**

**Nhi Aronheim** is a member of Toast of Inverness in Centennial, Colorado. She is a mediator and author of the book *Soles of a Survivor*. To learn more, visit [www.NhiAronheim.com](http://www.NhiAronheim.com).



# The “Where” of Vocal Variety

Don't put emphasis where it doesn't belong.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

The evaluation form in the Pathways learning experience asks you to rate and comment on the speaker's vocal variety—how well they used the tools of tone, speed, and volume. But in what way did they use those tools? How many ways are there?

We are primarily evaluated on the *level* of vocal variety (do we use little variety, or a lot) and often on *how* to use vocal variety (volume, speed, etc.). The aspect that is less frequently discussed is *where* to use vocal variety.

To paraphrase George Orwell, all words are equal, but some are more equal than others. In every sentence you speak, some words are more important than others, and they need to be emphasized. That is a key purpose of vocal variety.

What makes one word more important than another? It boils down to its significance to the message that you are conveying.

Sometimes it is in a contrasting sense. It is, perhaps, a *wet* towel as opposed to a *dry* towel.

Sometimes it indicates a change of some sort. The Toastmaster is now a speech contest *winner* as opposed to a speech contest *participant*.

Sometimes it defines a salient point. He wore a *red* tie. Or perhaps, a *very red* tie.

Sometimes it indicates a critical point. But *why* did he do it?

However, all too often, particularly in news broadcasts when the reporters are reading a teleprompter, the speaker emphasizes words seemingly at random, just so they can sound interesting or non-monotonous. And they end up emphasizing the wrong words.

This, unfortunately, also occurs in Toastmasters speeches, primarily when the members are either reading their speech or are trying desperately to remember it. Both situations are usually because of a lack of familiarity with the speech.

## Focus on communicating your message.

I have noticed that in casual conversation we tend to naturally emphasize the important words and phrases. But when we are delivering a speech or when we are in a more formal situation, perhaps one that is unusual for us, we get artificial. We overthink it. We focus on the words rather than the message. We focus on getting through it, rather than communicating. We focus on ourselves rather than our audience.

The key is to tap into your natural expressiveness. Change your focus from yourself to your audience. Focus on communicating your message.

Don't give the speech, live the speech. Living it comes from practice. And practice. And practice.

Know it so well that you don't need a copy of the text in front of you. Or, if you do, you don't rely on it for the script, but for the key thoughts.

If you must read a speech, go through it and underline the key words and phrases—every sentence has them. This is where the emphasis should go.

I see a few situations that are abused more than others. First, there is a tendency to lower our volume at the end of sentences.

I hear this a lot. This deemphasizes the final word or phrase. Sometimes this is appropriate, but frequently the most important word in a sentence is the last one. It needs to be emphasized, and, in order for that to happen, it needs to be loud enough to hear.

Second, if we are promoting a company or a product, we are, no doubt, mentioning the name of that company or product. Yet, because we are familiar with it, we have a tendency to rush through it. Sometimes it is so fast and slurred that it is difficult to understand.

Your audience members need to hear it and to sense the pride that you (hopefully) have in it. In other words, you need to emphasize it. But how?

I suggest that when you say the word or title, say it a little bit slower and a little bit louder than your other words. Not a lot. In fact, it may be imperceptible to the listener, but you will know that it is there. And you will, thus, say it with a little more pride. That is what will be perceived by your listener.

The bottom line here is that *when* you use vocal variety is just as important as *how* you use it. You inherently know which words and phrases need to be emphasized. You do it all the time in normal conversation. Take the time to know your message so well that you convey that natural emphasis. Don't just give the speech. Live the speech. ■

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



# Cheers to New Beginnings!

How to make your toasts meaningful, memorable, and short.

BY LAURA AMANN

It's the end of the year, which means you may have the opportunity to raise your glass and toast something or someone. And being a Toastmaster makes it even more likely you'll be asked to give one, and perhaps that opportunity makes you cringe.

You might remember listening to someone deliver a toast that dragged on for 10 minutes, detailing a laundry list of past accomplishments ("Monique joined the company in 1988; by 1990, she was a team lead; in 1994, she ..."), or someone who referred to inside jokes and inappropriate stories ("and how about that time the finance team 'missed the bus to Pittsburgh?!"). And then there are the cringe-worthy toasts given by someone who has spent too much time at the bar.

Don't be that person. Whether given in person or virtually, toasts are a brief acknowledgement of goodwill and celebration.

Toasts are longer than a Table Topics® speech, but shorter than a club speech. Ideally they are memorable, meaningful, and personal. A tall order for a short speech. Here are some tips to break down the process.

## Find the Purpose and Structure

First, look at the occasion and the reason for giving the toast. Is it an end-of-the-year work party? Someone's retirement? A holiday celebration? What or who is the center of attention? Focus on that.

"You need to understand who or what it is that you're elevating and bringing to the center of attention," says Meera Manek, a professional speechwriter, coach, and

humorist, and a member of Warner Bros. Toastmasters in Burbank, California.

Consider your audience as well—your voice and content might be different depending on whether you're speaking to the office about the past year, wishing someone well at their retirement, or simply raising a glass at the dinner table.

**Toasts aren't club speeches; rather, they're meant to be short, inspiring celebrations.**

Even a short toast should contain the hallmarks of a good speech: a purpose, some organization, and an introduction, body, and conclusion. You want to give a brief introduction of who you are and why you have been asked to give a toast. Then move into the celebratory part, with a brief anecdote or story summarizing the person or time. The conclusion can simply be, "and now let's raise our glasses to [person or event]!"

## Keep It Short

If you have a lot of time to prepare a toast, it's tempting to gather as much information and as many stories as you can. And to a certain extent that's a good idea, but only focus on a few anecdotes.

"Sometimes you could talk for an hour, but don't," advises Past International President Ted Corcoran, DTM, of Dublin, Ireland. "Dumping facts is sleep-inducing. You can't tell a couple of hundred stories; you need to really narrow it down to a few important things."

Somewhere between two and three minutes seems to be the sweet spot for holding people's attention. Toasts aren't meant to be long summaries, just thoughtful acknowledgements of a time, person, or occasion.

## Toast, Don't Roast

A toast isn't the time to embarrass someone or dwell on a slump in business in the fourth quarter. You don't want anyone—guests or the honoree—to feel uncomfortable or left out. Avoid inside jokes and profanity; a toast should be relevant, entertaining, and inclusive to everyone.

Think of a toast as the praise part of an evaluation. This isn't the moment to focus on the areas of improvement or challenges to overcome. Instead, point out what went well. "You want to have a warm tone, and keep it light," says Michael Varma, DTM, of Lake Forest, California, and the author of *Tasteful Toasts*. "People want to hear that things are looking better, getting brighter, or that a person is moving on to something better."

That's not to say you should overly embellish or make things up, just be mindful of what you choose to highlight.

"A good toast is a combination of sincere, thoughtful, meaningful," says Manek. "It should leave you with a feeling that you experienced a tribute or a closure of some type. You understood how valued this person was, or how meaningful the event was."

## Add a Light Touch

Toasts aren't club speeches; rather, they're meant to be brief, inspiring celebrations.



Think about your natural style. If you love telling stories, do that. Or use quotes, humor, or anything that personalizes and lightens the mood.

Corcoran is a lover of poetry, quotes, and witty quips. Varma enjoys using puns and funny sayings at the beginning or end of his toasts as a way of breaking the ice.

Manek finds that using positive humor at the beginning of a toast can be a good way to get your audience comfortable with you as a speaker. “A toast is about elevating a person or event and providing perspective. They trust that your perspective is the right one for the event.”

If you want to use humor, make sure you’re comfortable delivering it. Also make sure that the person you’re toasting is okay with some levity, and that it’s appropriate for the situation.

### Write It Down

Some people are fooled by the length of time they have and think the words will appear as they start to talk. Especially for formal to semi-formal occasions, write out what you want to highlight so that you remember every point.

“I’m a big fan of writing it out ahead of time and memorizing it,” says Varma.

Because there are generally a lot of emotions surrounding a toast, Manek also recommends jotting down some notes to bring with you. And you may still be composing it until the last second, she notes. “You’re hearing new things throughout the event that you’ll want to include.”

If you do use notes, use notecards, not a big sheet of paper, and don’t read notes off your phone. “It makes you look like you’re Googling ‘how to toast,’” says Manek.

Don’t overthink the toast, but don’t underthink it either. Be kind, be specific, be brief.

And if you want to get some practice toasting, consider leading a toast at your next club meeting. **T**

*Laura Amann is the magazine supervisor and editor of the Toastmaster magazine.*

## TIPS FOR TOASTING

**Do it early.** There is no hard-and-fast rule for when to toast. If you’re at an in-person event, you’ll want to do it after most people have arrived and before people start to leave. If there is alcohol being served, it’s best to raise your glass before people have imbibed too many alcoholic beverages. A heckler at a toast isn’t much fun.

**Get their attention.** You can either clink the side of your glass with a fork or stand up and ask for attention. Wait for people to notice you and quiet down (you may have to clink or speak more than once).

**Give a brief introduction.** Once you have people’s attention, offer a brief introduction of who you are, the fact that you want to toast, and a few words about why you’re offering the toast. For

instance, “I’m Susan, and I’ve been Jerry’s supervisor for the past eight years. I’d like to take a few moments to acknowledge how much Jerry means to us.”

**Raise your glass.** If your speech is less than a minute, you can lift your glass at the start of a toast and encourage others to do the same. But three minutes can be an awkward amount of time for people to be holding up their glasses. If you’ve tapped your glass for attention, simply hold it at waist level while you deliver the toast, and then raise it at the end and visually encourage others to do the same.

**The ending.** End your toast with a brief summation or a celebratory call to action. It may be something as simple as “to the coming year!” or “to Jerry’s new adventure!”





# 5 Ways to Calm the Pre-Speech Jitters

Transform anxiety into helpful energy to fuel your speeches.

BY DIANNE GLOVER

**M**y first love was always performing. I acted in plays throughout high school, majored in theater in college, and eventually moved to New York City to pursue my dream of becoming an actress. Being onstage and moving an audience to laughter or tears felt like I was living my purpose. I loved learning about a character and slowly transforming myself into another human. I felt at home onstage.

When my daughter was born, I experienced a love that was even more powerful. My life purpose shifted. Being a mom was the role of a lifetime. I quit acting and took a job in the business world to minimize my time away from her.

When I made the career shift, I discovered I had a paralyzing fear of stepping onstage as myself without the cloak of a character and pre-scripted dialogue. My voice became shaky, and I suffered from panic attacks when I presented. After performing for thousands, my fear of public speaking was deeply embarrassing on a personal level, and I knew it would stifle me professionally. I had to overcome this fear.

My first step was to join Toastmasters. My dad had been a Toastmaster, so I was familiar with the organization. As an actress, I always relied on rehearsals to develop my character. Being in Toastmasters gave me a safe space to practice standing up as myself. I became comfortable using the skills already in my toolbox as a performer to speak with power, polish, and poise. I learned how to transform my anxiety into helpful energy that fueled my speeches.

Now I use the following five steps to calm my body and center my mind before speaking:

**1 Breathe.** Shallow breathing is one of the body's responses when the nerves kick in. Counteract this by taking big, slow diaphragmatic breaths (think of sending breath all the way to your toes). Make sure the exhale is longer than the inhale to activate the parasympathetic nervous system and calm the body. Inhale to the count of eight, exhale to the count of 12. Repeat. Feel the body calm.


**2 Keep a success journal.** Through my coach training, I learned the importance of documenting success. I started keeping a notebook detailing what I liked about every speech and one or two things that I would like to improve on (keeping the emphasis on what went right). I added inspirational quotes and pictures of people who inspire and/or support me. I review the notebook prior to every speech. Focusing on the positive sets you up for success.

**3 Move your body.** Backstage before a play, I always did a physical warm-up. When the nerves kick in, the body overproduces adrenaline, which can cause increased blood flow to your organs and speed up your heart rate. By jumping up and down and shaking out my arms and legs, I could channel this adrenaline into focused energy. Move your body in whatever way works for you—take a brisk walk around the block or put on some music and dance! Even

squeezing your toes or shaking your hands can be helpful. Let go of the excess energy to center your body and calm your mind.

**4 Positive self-talk.** If, like me, you have had a “less than perfect” experience with public speaking, you may have a saboteur lurking in your subconscious. Be kind to yourself. I use a mantra or give myself a pep talk to combat that voice of negativity. I repeat the word “calm” or “I am enough” before I speak.

**5 Focus on the audience.** Through Toastmasters, I learned to always arrive early where I am speaking and talk with other people in the room. Even a moment of connection is enough to channel the sometimes-dormant extrovert in me. As the meeting starts and I await my time to speak, I focus on the “why” of the speech. I remind myself it's not about me; it's about them. What do I want the audience to do, feel, think, or learn? Once you tune in to the goal of the speech and focus on the audience, the purpose becomes greater than the fear, and the mind and body relax.

Next time you start to feel those nerves, review your success journal, remind yourself that you are fabulous, take a few deep soulful breaths, squeeze your toes, get up to speak, and make magic happen! 

**Dianne Glover** is an executive speech coach and member of Stone Oak Toastmasters in San Antonio, Texas. Visit [www.dianneglover.com](http://www.dianneglover.com) or email [dianne@dianneglover.com](mailto:dianne@dianneglover.com) to connect.

# Meet the **Winners** of the 2021 Toastmasters International **Video** **Speech Contest**

BY STEPHANIE DARLING

This [annual contest](#) recognizes outstanding speeches by Toastmasters in undistricted clubs. Below, the 2021 winners talk about the stories and preparation behind their winning speeches.

## First Place:

**Roderick K. Grech**

*Mosta, Malta*

Toastmasters Malta

**Speech title:** “[Want It!](#)”

My speech was born of bitter disappointment at not winning at the club level in 2020. I had high expectations that day. My 12-year-old son was with me. He asked about the colored lights, and why, in particular, I didn’t stop speaking when the red one came on.

The experience taught me two important lessons. First, feedback can come from the most unexpected places. My young son was the first to point out the time factor I dismissed. Secondly, as my ego and super ego warred the night I failed to win the contest, my mind drifted back to an experience I had at 15. It resulted in a pivotal lesson from my dad about how wanting and working for something can make it possible. That memory became the basis of my 2021 speech.

## Second Place:

**Annie Yun Bai, DTM**

*Mississauga, Ontario, Canada*

One Country One World

**Speech Title:** “[A Piece of Relationship Advice](#)”

In my speech, I tried to give a possible solution to people struggling with family connections that were

suddenly *too* close during the pandemic. Small conflicts were magnified. Anxiety became contagious, sometimes leading to serious domestic situations. I wanted to show that as families, we may have different characteristics, but we can choose to listen, learn, love, and lean on each other to find harmony and peace. Togetherness makes us stronger.

I included gestures, dialogue, and props because my first thought is always about the audience. Today we’re trained to be distracted by the concept of multitasking, so as speakers, we must find all sorts of ways to keep our speech interesting—and make it work with our own purpose and style. My other advice: Practice, practice, practice.

## Third Place:

**Alhaji Abubakar**

*Austin, Texas*

Virtual Professional Speakers

**Speech Title:** “[The Catalyst](#)”

My speech explores self-leadership in the service of others. The quote I shared from author Neale Donald Walsch says it



**Roderick K. Grech**



**Annie Yun Bai, DTM**



**Alhaji Abubakar**

all: “Your life is not about you. Your life is about the lives of everyone you touch.”

I prepared for my speech as I usually do—making notes, outlining structure, focusing on the core message. Most importantly, I visualized and transported myself back to the moments that I described. (This is actually a skill I’m still working on so I can paint a more vivid picture for my audience.) Each time I practiced and told the story, I found myself going deeper and deeper into the moment, to the point where I felt I was actually there.

I still get slightly nervous when I speak. I remind myself that I have a message to share and I’m the only one who can share it in the unique way that I do. That’s true for all of us. **T**

**Stephanie Darling** is senior editor of the *Toastmaster magazine*.



# A Toastmaster's Best Friend

Pets provide loyalty, laughs, and “pawsitive” reinforcement to members around the world.

BY SHANNON DEWEY



Pets play a vital role in our daily lives and can even bring a new perspective on how we communicate. We asked members to share how their animal companions impact their Toastmasters experience—here is what they had to say.

## Anand Sebastian Koottummel & Archie & Marshmallow

*Muscat, Oman*

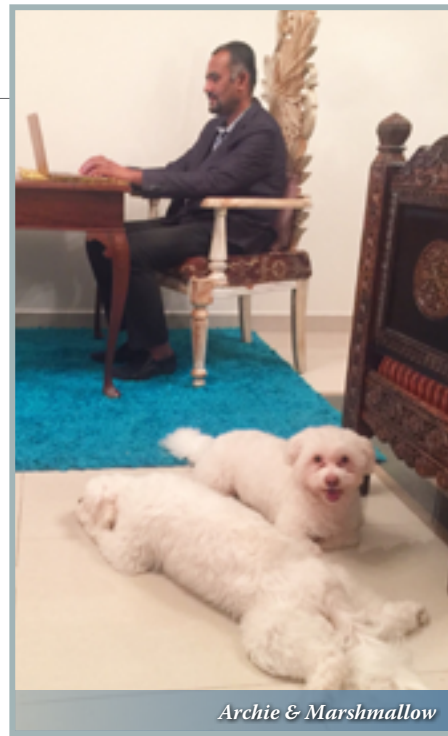
My dogs Archie and Marshmallow became part of our family during the trying times of the pandemic. Mere words cannot explain the joy and happiness that they brought. Their love, antics, and play made this uncertain and difficult phase easier to pass.

When Toastmasters sessions commenced on online platforms, the feeling was just not the same for me. The many



expressive faces reflecting criticism, agreements, disagreements, and appreciation were missed. The scenario changed a few days into these sessions. I got an exclusive audience. Who else but Archie and Marshmallow.

They realized Friday mornings were no time for fun and play, but instead, to be keen and serious listeners to the Toastmasters. They are quite good critics too. They make sure to share their displeasure when the pitch and tone of the speeches get a bit too overwhelming or louder than what is expected and anticipated. They convey their annoyance toward over-exaggerated hand gestures and movements. I love to practice my speeches before these completely unbiased and honest critics. Another joy is to see them give all ears during my speech and look the other way round when the others speak, so as to say, "You are the best and our vote is always for you."



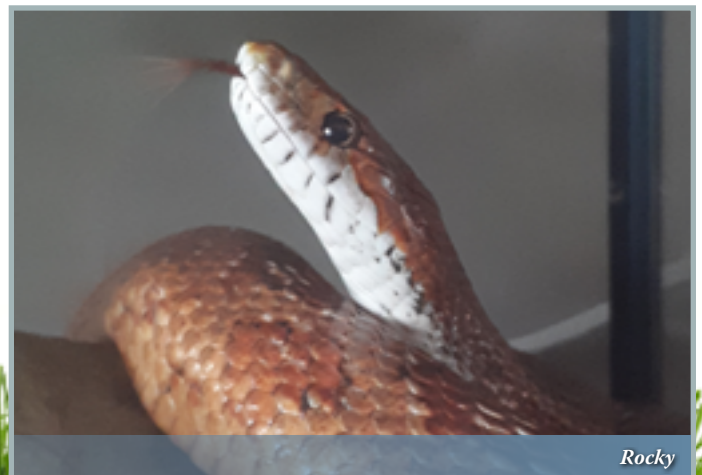
*Archie & Marshmallow*



## **Felicia Ketcheson, DTM, & Rocky**

*St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada*

Over the years, I've given several speeches about my corn snake, Rocky. When we moved to online meetings, it was an unprecedented opportunity for Rocky to accompany me. In one such speech, I demonstrated how comfortable I am with her by placing part of her on top of my head. Everything was fine until I removed her from my head. She hooked around my glasses



*Rocky*



and off they came with her! There I was mid-speech, extracting my glasses from my snake. Glasses back on my face, I continued my speech while wrapping Rocky around my arm. I've wrapped Rocky around my arm many times in our 17 years together and seldom have issues. This wasn't one of those times. I had to give the remainder of my speech holding Rocky in one hand with much of her body dangling from it. Not wanting to move too much since her head was dangling in mid-air meant I had little ability to gesture.

Through this experience, Rocky reinforced to me that unexpected things can happen during a speech—not just with your audience, but with your props! Preparation is important, but as she taught me, it's also important to expect and gracefully handle the unexpected.

## Ankurita Pathak & Hashtag & Ms. Lollypop

*New Delhi, India*

Hashtag, our adorable golden retriever, is a whole lot of cuteness and clumsiness. He is a total simpleton. On the other hand, Ms. Lollypop, our prapso shih tzu, is quite smart and empowered. Despite her tiny size, she knows how to run the show.

Life around them is a subconscious lesson in leadership. Hashtag is the epitome of loyalty, and he doesn't hold grudges. Lollypop comes with her independence and strategic ideas. They don't hesitate to get their paws dirty. They believe in work/life balance, with the right mix of play and rest.

Communicating with them with the right intent, energy, and impact is a huge lesson. A fulfilled and stress-free life around



*Hashtag & Ms. Lollypop*

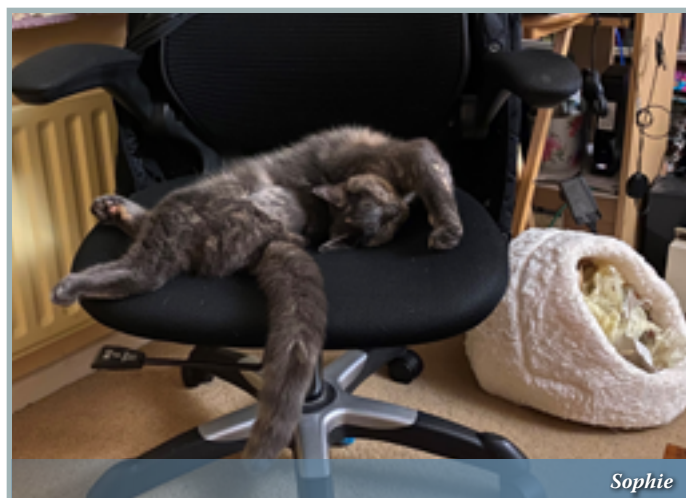
pets allows more zeal and zest in whatever you do in life. This includes my Toastmasters experience too.

Most importantly, Hashtag and Lollypop are more popular than me in my Toastmasters club because they are keen observers in the proceedings of my Sunday morning online meetings, especially when I deliver a speech!

## Sam Warner, DTM, & Sophie

*Telford, England, United Kingdom*

Sophie-dophie is a rescue cat, and we had to learn each other's language. I'm autistic, and reading body language and facial expressions used to be incredibly hard. I observe and interpret her the same way I observe and interpret my audience. I search my audience for their facial expressions—are they shifting in their seats or leaning in? Are they nodding and smiling, or do they look puzzled and confused?



*Sophie*

I find cats to be very honest about what they want, and that removal of ambiguity is comforting. We have two cats (Sophie has a sister called Inka) and they are like chalk and cheese. They hang out behind me on Toastmasters Zoom calls and like to feel included (don't we all?).

Sophie is quite the contortionist and uses her body language very clearly (to me). It's fascinating that my chronically shy hubby, who cannot be persuaded to join Toastmasters, struggles to read her physical language. I think Toastmasters has helped

me over the past 11 years to interpret and respond on more than one level of communication. We may use our voices occasionally, but our body language is louder, clearer, and more honest.

## Carolyn Krachkowski, DTM, & Ladybug, Barkley & Tobie Lynn

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I discovered Toastmasters in my 40s after spending the earlier part of my life avoiding anything that might involve being put in the spotlight. When I visited my first Toastmasters club meeting in the office building of a job I recently started, my goal was to attend just one meeting. Everyone was so welcoming and supportive; I actually did a Table Topic! After a few more meetings, I became a member.

The only way for me to have the courage to give a speech was to talk about my dogs. The first six or seven speeches in my *Competent Communication* manual were tied to stories about my dogs, past and present. It helped relax me amid a terrifying situation. It made me smile and come off as more personable with my audience. My dogs also helped me with speech topics because they were always doing something fun and adorable. I was encouraged to share stories of my fur kids, which helped me become a better speaker, which helped me get over my fear of being in front of an audience ... a fear that I tried my best to get over for more than 30 years. I credit my dogs with helping me toward achieving my DTM, because without them, I would have never made it past the first five speeches.



Ladybug, Barkley & Tobie Lynn



Priscilla Dias, DTM, & Yoyo

## Priscilla Dias, DTM, & Yoyo

Safat, Kuwait

Me: Yoyo, where are you?

Yoyo: Meow ... Meow...

Me: Yoyo, jump.

And the next thing you know he is on my desk. This is our time together. Launching Pathways projects, writing speeches, approving Base Camp requests, working on Area Director's reports, editing a podcast video, petting and pampering Yoyo, and it goes on.

Yoyo has been my fairest mentor while I practice my speeches because all that he is doing is purring. He is not evaluating or judging my speeches, but allowing me to practice, practice, practice. He loves my vocal variety and lets me know that with a tic of his ears. I can practice every paragraph of my speech, or the entire speech a thousand times, and he will still be purring.

Ask any Toastmaster: Yoyo has been the finest online guest during meetings. He lies down, tummy up, between the screen and the keyboard, listening to every speech, Table Topic, evaluation, and the role player reports and is content (purring) with the Toastmasters meeting. Yoyo has been a wonderful guest for more than 100 meetings now. It is high time we grant him membership and address him as Toastmaster Yoyo.



## CLUB FOR ANIMAL LOVERS BRINGS LEVITY AND LIMITLESS SPEECH TOPICS

BY SHANNON DEWEY

**H**ave you ever visited a club meeting where you're greeted by cats, dogs, bunnies, and roosters? For guests and members of the PAW-TY Pet Toastmasters Club, animal sightings—and sounds—are a regular occurrence.

Not only do the 21 members of this online club share the screen with their animal companions, they also deliver speeches about them, and sometimes put their pets in the spotlight to speak (and sit, and stay, and lie down).

The idea for the club, chartered in June 2021, came about thanks to the newest family member of Club President Rose Kirland, DTM—a 3-month-old puppy named Winston, who loves hopping onto her lap during her Zoom meetings. “One evening, as I was preparing for a meeting, my 11-year-old grandson said, ‘G-ma, you should have a doggie Toastmasters club! That would be so cool to make friends from all over the world, maybe even meet a pet from Ireland.’ And so, it began,” says Kirland, of Wailuku, Hawaii.

While most members do have pets, it isn't required to join. Animal lovers alike are welcomed to the club. Kirland noted that during the early stages of chartering, a potential member said he can't have a pet where he lives, and that just being part of the group filled that void in his life. “What a rewarding feeling that we can help our fellow humans this way. The bonuses of being a Toastmaster!” she says.

One challenge many speakers struggle with is finding speech topics; however, members of this club rarely have an issue with that. Why? Kirland says it's because they have funny, inspiring, teachable, and loving life stories with their pets, and are passionate about animals. Allen Brieschke, DTM, a club member from Tomah, Wisconsin, who has two service dogs, agrees.

“Inspiration can come from their everyday involvement in our lives. Their looks, their behavior, their timing. Their simple way of being around us,” says Brieschke. “I talk with my two service dogs, Benjamin and Tutmoses, all the time. The stabilizing company they provide helps in everyday living.”

The club also makes room for special meeting themes, like celebrating pets' birthdays, anniversaries, and adoption dates. The agenda even includes a “Puurfect

Points to Ponder” segment, likened to an Inspiration or Jokemaster role. Another perk of this online club? Having your best friend by your side while meeting members and guests from locations like Australia, Canada, Singapore, United States, Mexico, and more.

Toastmasters and pets ... who would have thought?



*Martin Galaviz of Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, attends a club meeting with his roosters.*

**Shannon Dewey** is the digital content editor for *Toastmaster magazine*.

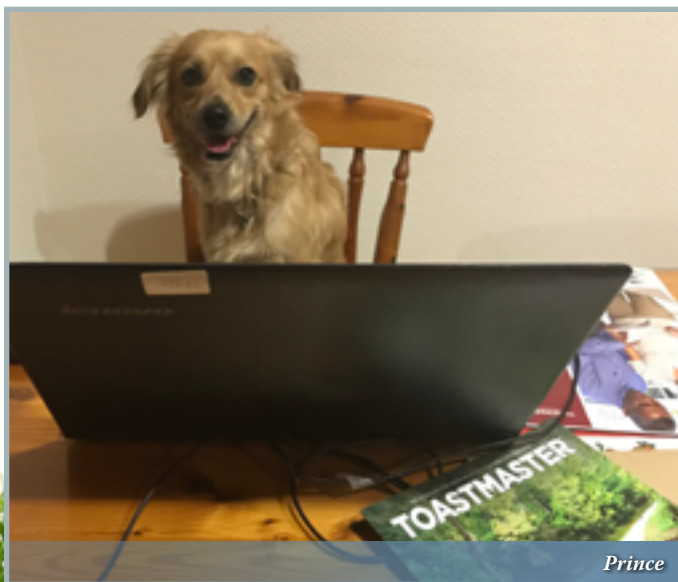


## Lilian Shaftacola, DTM, & Prince

*Nicosia, Cyprus*

When I first adopted Prince from a local shelter, little did I know that I was getting a dog who would embrace the Toastmasters ideals with as much enthusiasm as I do. He began his Toastmasters career in 2017 by helping me work with my mentees; he would sit and listen to them practice. If he found a speech engaging, he would stay. Otherwise, he would walk away, a sure signal to my mentees that they had more work to do! During that period, I also loved hosting fellow Toastmasters from all over the world. Prince, in his role as the “Official Greeter,” would lie in wait so that he would be the first to run down the drive, tail wagging, to enthusiastically welcome our guests.

However, Prince really came into his own with the Zoom environment. The first time I attended a club meeting online, I got up and returned only to find that he had taken over my seat. He followed the meeting with fascination while my fellow members were thrilled to have him onboard. Prince has attended countless online meetings, Toastmasters Leadership Institute trainings, and conferences. My leadership roles have allowed him to follow officer trainings, strategy meetings, and listen to the views of Past International Presidents and current Board Members. Whether I’m giving a speech or delivering a presentation, he will always be my greatest supporter, cheering me on.



Prince



Freddy the Bassett

## David Hablewitz, DTM, & Freddy the Bassett

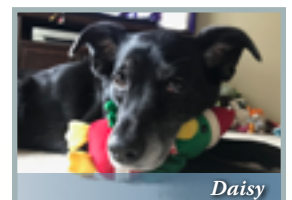
*Bothell, Washington*

Meet Freddy the Bassett. Freddy joined Toastmasters in November 2018, and regularly gives speeches with my aid. I am his mentor and interpreter, but he simply refers to me as his “human.”

Freddy came to live with me after my mom passed away about two years ago. In his Ice Breaker speech, he told of her passing and his adventures driving with me 3,000 miles across the country from Tampa, Florida, to Seattle, Washington. So many new experiences—he even saw snow for the first time! Since then, he has given many speeches of his adventures with me serving as his interpreter. His goal is to remind us all to not forget those loved ones we have lost and he spreads joy, love, and compassion through his stories. He has also expanded his voice through social media and has a following of several thousand strong on Facebook and Instagram, with a forthcoming YouTube channel to give himself a platform to share his speeches and adventures with the entire world. He even has a [website](#).

In the process of serving as Freddy’s Toastmasters mentor and interpreter, I have been able to develop the skills to give Freddy the Bassett a voice, share his message, and touch people around the world. 📺

**Shannon Dewey**, *digital content editor for Toastmaster magazine, compiled and edited these stories. She is an avid animal lover and dog mom to Daisy, a 9-year-old black lab mix.*



Daisy





# The Invaluable Evaluator

This meeting role comes with powerful responsibilities.

BY GREG LEWIS, DTM

**W**ell, you have finally done it! You delivered the speech you worked so diligently on. Now comes the moment of truth: your evaluation.

For many Toastmasters, the evaluation can be almost as nerve-racking as delivering the speech. However, it doesn't need to be. In fact, a well-prepared and shared evaluation can do more to help members reach their communication goals than any part of the Toastmasters program. Yet with this influence comes a powerful responsibility.

## A Cautionary Tale

Ryan McKeen, from Lowbanks, Ontario, Canada, recalls receiving a devastating evaluation of his Ice Breaker speech.

"I had only been a member for a few months and my worst fears came true with the very negative evaluation I received. The first thing [the evaluator] said was I shouldn't have used cue cards,

which my mentor assured me was perfectly fine for my first speech.

"I told my mentor after the meeting that I was quitting Toastmasters. What little confidence I had was shattered. Luckily, my mentor and another member whom I greatly respected took me aside and pointed out all the positive aspects of my speech, such as my eye contact and use of humor, which really helped me feel better about my speech."

Their support, says McKeen, convinced him to stay in Toastmasters. He went on to become a confident, capable speaker. Now a successful construction company owner with nine employees, he credits Toastmasters feedback for giving him the confidence to run his business.

However, his experience clearly demonstrates why we must be careful in how we prepare and present evaluations, *especially* to new members.

Here are my thoughts on how to do that. First, consider one of the commitments in the Toastmaster's Promise: "To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations." There is a lot packed into those eight words. Especially "helpful" and "constructive."

Build on this guidance in your evaluations to offer actionable feedback that the speaker understands and can use.

As Toastmasters founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley once said, "Faultfinding without suggestions for improvement is a waste of time." So instead of saying, "Tony, I wish you had used more body language," you could say, "Tony, when you yelled 'Stop!' it would have been even stronger to me if you had forcefully raised your hands in front of you." Constructive comments like these will help the speaker learn, as well as feel encouraged and empowered.

## Plan Carefully

Preparing a thorough, effective evaluation is much like preparing a successful speech. Start planning as soon as you're notified that you will be an evaluator. Contact the speaker and discuss their Pathways speech assignment. Understand the speaker's personal objective—what they want the audience to think, feel, or do because of the speech.

As a sidenote on connecting with your speaker: Don't underplay this step. The isolation we've felt due to COVID-related restrictions and adaptations over the past many months has made regular communication between evaluators and speakers more important than ever.

When the speaker is finished, share your verbal evaluation, using an upbeat, supportive tone. Address what the speaker did well, offer some suggestions, and end on a positive note. Your goal is to help the speaker (and the audience) with useful feedback and leave everyone feeling empowered to deliver their next speech.

## Be Authentic

I'm not suggesting that you "white-wash" areas the speaker needs to work on. We can't improve without receiving feedback on areas for improvement. Just ensure your advice is constructive and, most importantly, appropriate for the speaker's experience level.

One thing that is helpful to you as an evaluator is the Pathways evaluation form. It provides tangible, detailed criteria for you to assess the speaker, making it easier to deliver specific and actionable feedback. An evaluation form for every Pathways project can be found on Base Camp.

Complete and send your written evaluation to the speaker as soon as possible, ideally within 48 hours. Here you can dig deeper and provide more comprehensive feedback. Finally, follow up with the speaker after

they've read your written review and address any questions they may have. Again, communication is key.

## The Value of New Evaluators

For a new Toastmaster, the process of [evaluating another member](#) may seem daunting. However, you will find seasoned Toastmasters are only too glad to help less experienced members develop evaluation skills. If you are new, ask your mentor or another member you respect to coach you.

Also, something to keep in mind: The [observations](#) of a new, less experienced evaluator are just as valid as anyone else's, because you are offering observations on what *you* personally see and observe. There's no level of experience required to do that. Any authentic observation can be helpful to a speaker, no matter the skill or "qualifications" of the evaluator.

## Ensure your advice is constructive—and appropriate for the speaker's experience level.

In an online meeting format, a separate breakout room is a good place for the new evaluator and speaker to meet. If you choose this route, be sure to make room arrangements in advance with the Sergeant at Arms and update your mentor/coach on your plans.

## Evaluators Grow Too

Applying yourself to the evaluation preparation can offer diverse and often unexpected growth opportunities, regardless of your Toastmasters experience. For example, Junko Yamaji is a member of Tokyo Bilingual in Japan; the club holds meetings in Japanese and English. Yamaji was very comfortable evaluating in her native Japanese. However, she discovered she had to really think about how to choose the right words in English to express her thoughts.

Practicing evaluations in English helped Yamaji learn to choose words

diplomatically, which increased her own vocabulary. Through a process of trial and error, she learned to recognize the right words in English to express her thoughts. She often talked to the speaker after the evaluation to ensure her meaning was properly received in English.

These insights apply equally to all Toastmasters, even when we are communicating in our first language. An effective evaluator understands that words are powerful and can have unintended consequences when used carelessly.

## Outside the Club

The evaluation skills we learn as Toastmasters apply equally outside the club. This is especially true in the workplace when conducting employee performance reviews.

"What a performance appraisal requires is for one person to stand in judgment of another. Deep down, it's uncomfortable," says Dick Grote, author of *How to Be Good at Performance Appraisals*. When handled properly, however—such as with feedback that is specific, sensitive, and constructive—performance reviews are more enjoyable and beneficial for both the reviewer and the employee.

Whether in an office or community setting, Toastmasters can demonstrate evaluation, leadership, and critical thinking skills. By contributing useful and constructive comments, we add value to the discussion and set an example for others to follow.

Overall, evaluations offer an ongoing growth opportunity for all of us. When we help fellow members achieve goals, we contribute to the club's strength and viability. We also get to grow ourselves as speakers, listeners, and learners. **T**

**Editor's Note:** For more on evaluations and other meeting positions, visit [Club Meeting Roles](#).

**Greg Lewis, DTM**, is a retired business executive and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster magazine*.



# Comedy Catharsis

London member mines the link between humor and mental health.

BY PAUL STERMAN

**H**ave you ever worked in customer service? Ola Aralepo has. And he lived to tell about it—in a Toastmasters Humorous Speech Contest.

Aralepo, DTM, shared his grievances over dealing with rude, self-entitled patrons of the London Underground—also known as the Tube—where he worked many years as a customer service adviser. Recalling one particularly belligerent man who hurled questions at him, Aralepo got down on his knees in the 2017 speech, in mock worship of “his majesty, the customer”: “Whatever you are about to say next, you are right. I’m here for you to use and abuse as you choose.”

As recreated by Aralepo, the Tube tyrant blathers on and Aralepo’s boss, sensing his employee’s building frustration, pulls him aside and urges him to simply let it go: “Otherwise, you’ll spend the rest of your life trying to state the stupidly obvious to the obviously stupid.”

Zing! Aralepo says the [speech](#)—with which he won the District contest—felt like a vicarious verbal clapback to the disrespectful customers of the world, made all the more satisfying by the roaring laughter of the audience.

“That was my therapy,” he says in an interview over Zoom. “By the time I gave that speech, I had left the job at the London Underground. The speech was like a catharsis.”

## Healthy Humor

Aralepo has spent a great deal of time examining how humor serves as an emotional release valve. He sees a strong link

between comedy and mental health, and he’s mined that connection in his studies and his work as a counselor and coach, including the value of incorporating humor into the educational field.

Since 2006, he has been a member of Tube Talk Toastmasters, a community club that started as a corporate club for London Underground employees. He first heard about Toastmasters when he took a course offering strategies to succeed in the music business. (He was an aspiring songwriter at the time.) The instructor was Dec Cluskey, lead singer for the ’60s pop group The Bachelors. Cluskey is a Toastmaster (he now has a DTM) and recommended the organization as a great place to overcome the fear of networking.

“He’s such a breath of fresh air and so giving of his time.”

—HELENA BODEN-BREWER, DTM

Aralepo says he had never thought of himself as funny, but when he delivered his Ice Breaker, his evaluator told him he had a great sense of humor. That changed everything for the new Toastmaster. The feedback gave him the confidence to experiment with humorous speeches. (He still has the education manual with the evaluator’s comments.) By the time he earned his Competent Communicator (CC) award, the dream of becoming a songwriter was on life support: He saw

humorous speaking as a more authentic addition to his vocation.

Aralepo continued to progress, and in 2011 he won the District-level Humorous Speech Contest. District Director Helena Boden-Brewer, DTM, praises his improvement and style of observational humor—the way he has fun with relatable topics such as Facebook issues, public transportation, and personal identity.

“I think he’s a much more confident performer than before and has a delivery style which he didn’t have originally—his expressive facial expressions, the raise of an eyebrow, just something about the way he comes across, which is why I really love watching Ola perform,” she says.

## A Stand-Up Guy

Eventually Aralepo ventured into the arena of stand-up comedy, performing at open mic nights in London and South England comedy clubs. He also brought groups of fellow Toastmasters to comedy venues, urging them to try stand-up themselves. He notes that watching and doing stand-up comedy is a great way to improve your humorous speaking. “You get a sense of the timing, and what works and what doesn’t work,” says Aralepo, who has continued to do stand-up off and on through the years. (He also performed a solo show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2017.)

Among the topics he tackles in his comedy is the tricky act of cultural navigation. Aralepo was born in London to Nigerian parents, but the family moved to Lagos, Nigeria, and he grew up there. As a young adult, he returned to London at



Ola Aralepo, DTM

“The therapy room and the comedy club are the only two places in society where it’s permitted to talk about taboo subjects.”

—OLA ARALEPO, DTM

“He’s such a breath of fresh air and so giving of his time,” says Boden-Brewer, the District Director.

One of those he’s helped is Tazud Miah. In 2015, he agreed to mentor Miah when the latter entered the Humorous Speech Contest. Like Aralepo himself when he first started in Toastmasters, Miah says he didn’t think of himself as a funny person. But Aralepo saw potential in him and invested himself in Miah’s growth.

“Ola really helped me as a mentor,” says Miah, a member of the Early Bird Speakers in London. “He made me work harder than anybody else I’ve had as a Toastmasters mentor.” The work paid off when Miah won the District contest that year. His mentor’s reaction? “He was immensely proud.”

Aralepo is also encouraging at his club meetings. As the Table Topicsmaster at one meeting this past summer, he empathized with those daunted by the activity, especially newer members. “When I first joined Toastmasters, Table Topics produced *titanic* terror in my soul,” he said (deftly working in the word of the day). “It still does.” He urged members to take a chance and not worry about the result.

As for what Toastmasters has given him, Aralepo expresses deep gratitude for many insights and assists. If he hadn’t received the encouragement to try humorous speaking, first by his club members and later by mentors within the District, he wouldn’t have tried stand-up comedy and never would have drawn on the healing aspect of humor as a professional cornerstone.

“I would say Toastmasters gave me the career I have right now.” **T**

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

the urging of his parents, who felt he had much better economic opportunities in England. (“You know you have a problem when your own mother tells you to go back where you came from,” he quips.)

Being both Nigerian and British, with the inherent pressure to assimilate, can result in cultural confusion, says Aralepo. He points out how parents in Nigeria, as in other developing countries, desperately want their children to pursue practical, well-paying occupations. Which plays into one of his comedic bits:

“When I told my dad I wanted to be an actor, he said, ‘It’s pronounced *doctor*.’”

### Onstage Therapy

Aralepo, a qualified counselor (in England the term refers to the general equivalent of a psychotherapist), taps into the common ground between stand-up comedy and psychotherapy. As he points out, “The therapy room and the comedy club are the only two places in society where it’s permitted to talk about taboo subjects, such as sex, aggression, and other issues.”

In 2016 he enrolled in a master’s program called Performance Practice as Research, at London’s Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. There he developed what he calls Stand-Up Therapy™ (he’s trademarked the term),

which explores how humor can help foster emotional and psychological well-being.

The concept embraces more than stand-up comedy; it encompasses humorous expression in all forms, whether it be funny speeches or interpersonal communication. As a counselor/school project manager for Place2Be, a nonprofit organization that helps children with mental health struggles, Aralepo tries to incorporate humor, when appropriate, into his campus presentations or one-on-one sessions. In one such “play therapy” session with a student, he jokingly took on the persona of a gruff football coach, helping to amuse and calm the boy.

Now he’s trying to help teachers as well. He’s currently in a doctorate (EdD) program at the UCL Institute of Education in London, with a focus on helping those who are training to be teachers use humor to boost their confidence and competence in dealing with classroom-related mental health issues.

### Positive District Presence

Aralepo is well-known in District 91 (the southern United Kingdom) for his friendly manner and positive contributions. He has consistently participated in speech contests, delivered workshops, and mentored other speakers.



# Want to Add Humor to Your Speech? Follow this MAP

Consider your medium, audience, and purpose to determine how to effectively use humor.

BY ANDREW TARVIN

**W**hen I first told a good friend I started doing stand-up comedy, his response was, “But you’re not funny.”

In many ways, he was right. Humor was not something that came naturally to me. I was and still am an introverted computer geek with a degree in computer science and engineering who got pushed into improv and stand-up comedy while attending university. I was as surprised as anyone when I made people laugh.

I had to learn how to humor, and I did it by doing what engineers do with most things they want to better understand: take it apart, see how it works, and put it back together again.

What I’ve discovered—after over 1,000 shows as a stand-up comedian and improviser, and more than 600 keynotes delivered in more than 30 countries—is that humor is a skill. And just like public speaking, it’s something that can and should be learned.

Whether you’re speaking in front of an audience of five people or a thousand, at a conference or a wedding, as a brand-new speaker or a Distinguished Toastmaster, humor is a valuable way of capturing attention, boosting engagement, and increasing the impact of your message.

The question isn’t “should you use humor?” The question is “how do you use it well?” How do you effectively use humor in a corporate keynote, Pathways speech, or when you have to say a few words at the holiday party after everyone’s been sipping eggnog and singing *Jingle Bells*?

The key is what I call the Humor MAP.

## The Humor MAP

The Humor MAP is the easiest way to determine what type of humor to use, regardless of venue, organization, or speech topic. It also helps you choose the right humor for different cultures, work contexts, and times of day (my math jokes don’t go over as well at 8 a.m. when people’s coffee has yet to kick in). It’s the framework I’ve used with organizations like Microsoft, the FBI, and the International Association of Canine Professionals (woof!).

**Humor is a valuable way of capturing attention, boosting engagement, and increasing the impact of your message.**

The MAP isn’t a formula for funny but rather a framework for how to think about what humor will work based on three key factors: your **medium** or the format in which you’ll be sharing your message, your **audience** or who will be hearing your message, and your **purpose** or why you want to use humor in the first place.

When you define these three things, you’ll have a good idea of what type of humor to use to get the results you want.

## Medium

The medium is all about the *how*: How will the message be delivered? Will you be speaking live in a conference room, onstage in a banquet hall, or virtually over

Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or one of the other 20,000 online meeting platforms that seem to exist?

The medium impacts your delivery. Exaggerated performance and big movements can be a fun part of speaking when on a large keynote stage, but might feel out of place when pitching a concept in your boss’s office.

Timing is also a factor in how your message flows. For example, one of the biggest mistakes people make when they first start using humor is they “step on their laughter.” That means they say something funny, but they don’t pause long enough for people to laugh before they start talking again.

Gauging how long to wait is part of what we mean by “timing.” This is even harder in a virtual environment where often people are muted, and you can’t hear any laughter. When delivering virtually assume that you are crushing it; assume every joke is landing. Because assuming anything else won’t help your performance.

## Audience

The next component of the Humor MAP is the audience, which is all about the *who*. Who will hear your humor? What do they know? What do they need? And what do they expect? You want to deliver the message they need in a way they may not expect.

The audience determines the content of your humor because they dictate whether or not what you say is funny—if they laugh, it is; if they don’t, it isn’t.



### Improve Understanding (Association)

When you want to explain a complex topic, create a compelling metaphor or analogy that will keep your audience engaged and help them understand the idea. I've helped speakers compare project management to weddings, population census to Girl Scout Cookies, and geo-engineering to Mary Poppins—it turns out a spoonful of sugar helps incredibly complex solutions go down.

### Increase Likability (Reference)

There's no denying that we like people who make us laugh. Reference humor takes advantage of that by referencing media, experiences, or concepts that the audience already knows, such as a popular movie or visiting family during the holidays. A very powerful version of this is the callback. When you reference something that was previously said in a Toastmasters meeting or refer to a joke you made in your own speech, you're crafting an experience that includes the entire audience.

### MAP Your Way

I'll admit some people still agree with my friend that I'm "not funny." Just check out the comments on my [TEDx Talk](#) on the skill of humor. While the majority of the comments are positive and the video has more than 10 million views, there are still plenty of people who have posted things like, "This dude isn't funny"; "He's trying too hard"; and "Go back to engineer, PLEASE!"

So, when I say, "this is what works for me," it's up to you to decide if that's a pro or a con. I've found that humor for the sake of humor is perfectly fine, as long as you are intentional about that being your purpose. With a clear objective for using humor, you increase the chance that you'll not only delight your audience but also achieve your goals. **T**

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As a result, speaking their language is vital; otherwise you run the risk of boring, confusing, or upsetting them ... like the time I told a grandmother in London that I liked her pants. I was unaware that in the United Kingdom, "pants" means underwear. I was wondering why she winked at me.

It's very hard to deliver an effective speech if you offend the people listening. So, if you're unsure about the audience or will be speaking in front of a diverse group, it's better to err on the side of caution. Keep your humor positive and inclusive and leave any sarcasm or "digs" for your friends.

### Purpose

The final component of the Humor MAP is also the most important because it's all about the *why*. Why are you using humor? Is it to capture people's attention, help them understand a concept, or make them laugh so hard they get milk up their nose, thus never forgetting your performance?

The purpose primarily defines the type of humor you use. If your goal is to capture attention, a long story that has a slow build and no payoff for seven minutes is not going to do the trick. By the time you get to

the punchline, your audience will already be daydreaming. Instead, it would be better to go with a quick joke or incongruous statement, so the audience laughs within the first 20 seconds of you speaking.

### The Humor MAP is the easiest way to determine what type of humor to use, regardless of venue, organization, or speech topic.

There are no rules dictating what type of humor you must use for a specific purpose, but I have found that some styles tend to work better than others. Here are three of what I believe to be the most important reasons to use humor as a speaker:

### Capture Attention (Incongruity)

Once you get people laughing, they are listening. Incongruity humor, such as a humorous synonym, also known as a "humonym," is a great way to quickly capture attention. Which would get you to lean in more: a speaker starting with "ladies and gentlemen" or "hello fellow humans"?



# A Deep Dive into Corporate Jargon

Whether at work or at Toastmasters, it doesn't have to be a red flag.

BY MEGAN PRESTON MEYER

It's the first meeting of the day, and you're barely awake. You sit quietly, coffee mug in hand, peering bleary-eyed at the PowerPoint slides.

Then your boss starts in.

*Thanks for being here, everyone—I know 7 a.m. is early, but it's absolutely mission-critical that we implement Project TIGeR before the end of Q3. Right now, I'm not confident in our ability to shepherd it across the finish line, and we're running out of time to pivot. Let's double-click into some of the milestones we've missed and drill down into why this initiative hasn't been as effective as we'd like it to be. Is it as simple as tweaking the hypertargeting algorithm, or do we need to start greenfielding a new solution?*

Your tired mind tries to interpret, but there's just so much jargon. You take another sip of coffee, trying to look attentive, and hope the buzz of the buzzwords doesn't lull you to sleep.

Sound like your workplace? You're not alone. Corporate jargon is everywhere, from Dubai's 60th-floor boardrooms to Silicon Valley's in-office espresso bars, and it can be annoying. It can be easy to assume buzzwords are a smokescreen of sorts, a way for managers to say a lot while knowing very little. Effective business communication should be clear,

concise, and simple, we're told ... and jargon is just the opposite.

## Benefits of Buzzwords

But jargon gets a bad rap. Corporate-speak can serve a purpose, and when used judiciously, may actually make your message work.

Before we talk about the *how*, let's talk about the *what*. We'll start by doing something that jargon-slingers rarely do: defining the term that we're talking about. The *American Heritage Dictionary* says that jargon is "the specialized language of a trade, profession, or similar group,

especially when viewed as difficult to understand by outsiders." It's language specific to the group's shared activities, and other people within the group know exactly what it means.

This specialized language contains not only technical terms, but also words and phrases that are used differently than they would be in other contexts. A start-up founder and a baseball announcer understand the word "pitch" very differently; a carpenter and a photographer don't "frame up" the same things. When most people talk about a "red flag," it's a warning that things aren't as great as they

## GLOSSARY

- ▶ **Mission-critical (adj):** important, necessary to the end result
- ▶ **Shepherd (v):** to lead; to supervise closely
- ▶ **Pivot (v):** to change direction; to pursue a different goal
- ▶ **Double-click (v):** to delve further into; to go into more detail
  - See also: **drill down, deep dive**
- ▶ **Hypertarget (v):** to target
- ▶ **Greenfield (v):** to start from scratch; to not consider or be limited by existing constraints, processes, or progress
- ▶ **Open the floodgates (v):** to remove a constraint, allowing for a large, often negative consequential effect
- ▶ **Have a seat at the table (v):** to participate; to have one's voice heard
- ▶ **Overindex (v):** to overemphasize; to focus too heavily upon



Terms like “milestone” and “finish line,” which denote geographic distance, make measuring progress toward a goal more real. Verbifying words like “shepherd” and “greenfield” grabs our attention because we expect them to be nouns; they also evoke vivid images that help make messages more memorable.

### Use Jargon Judiciously

Of course, corporate jargon can go too far. If you drop buzzwords into every sentence, they can become distracting, and people may suspect you’re using them to mask the fact that you don’t know your stuff. If you overuse certain phrases, they can turn cliché and lose their power as useful metaphors. And most dangerous of all, if your audience doesn’t share the same knowledge, using too much jargon can alienate them.

Jargon doesn’t have to be confusing, and it doesn’t have to be annoying. There’s a reason that it’s so common—it’s efficient and colorful. When used appropriately, it can move the needle on your professional communication’s effectiveness.

The secret is to know your audience and to make sure they share your context. If they do, feel free to sprinkle in specialized terms with group-specific meanings ... just don’t **open the floodgates**. The takeaway is this: Jargon deserves **a seat at the table**—as long as you don’t **overindex** on it. **T**

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seem—but in Toastmasters, it’s the signal that your speech needs to end. When used correctly, these “hidden” meanings are like a secret handshake: They create connection by signaling that you’re all part of the same group.

This connection, and the shared knowledge it implies, has another advantage. When you’re confident that your colleagues have the same context that

you do, you can pack a lot of meaning into very few words. An ER doctor can say “Stat!” instead of “As soon as possible, please—it’s extremely urgent,” thereby saving time ... and, possibly, lives. Jargon can be very efficient.

It can also be concrete and colorful. Many concepts in corporate settings are abstract and intangible; jargon helps to clarify with metaphors and imagery.



# Rehearse, Compete, Rinse, and Repeat

Three speech contestants share their lessons learned.

BY SONJA BONIN

**T**oastmasters offers the opportunity to learn and grow in speech contests every year. Options range from the International Speech Contest to Table Topics® to Evaluations to Tall Tales to Humor.

In 2021, I won my District German Speech Contest; and my fellow International Lunchtime Toastmasters-ILTM member Maria Issartel came in first and second, respectively, in the International Speech Contest at the club level in 2019 and 2020. Santhiago Vieira of Zurichberg Toastmasters Club in Zurich, Switzerland, who competed for the first time this year, signed up for three contests: Table Topics, Tall Tales, and the International Speech Contest, where he reached the Division level. The three of us discussed the benefits and lessons learned when participating in a contest, no matter the level of experience.

**Bonin: What was it like participating in and preparing for a Toastmasters speech contest?**

**Issartel:** The first time [in 2019], I was so overexcited, I changed my speech on the way to the contest! The second time, I lost to a competitor who was clearly better prepared than I was. That really drove home the lesson that preparation is all that matters. Last time I had to give an important speech, I rehearsed four to five times every night and recorded myself on video dozens of times. The more I practice, the less nervous I am.

**Vieira:** I started to record myself rehearsing right after my Ice Breaker, and I have never looked back. It's an extremely effective way to improve your delivery skills (body language, vocal variety, movement, etc.), as well as your content. It's unbelievable how my speeches changed for the better with every iteration, from level to level. I wrote up to seven versions of each contest speech, and each was an improvement on the last one. At some point, for example, I cut back on the number of props I had intended to use. I realized they weren't necessary to get my message across. The final touches came thanks to a special feedback session that a member of my club offered a few days before the contest.

“More stage time means more practice, more practice means more confidence, more confidence means less anxiety.”

—SANTHIAGO VIEIRA

**Bonin:** I like to start with my preparation as early as possible. I've learned how valuable it can be to line up many different test audiences and to improve your content and performance incrementally. Also, beware of last-minute changes! Chances

are you are better off delivering the version of your speech that you've rehearsed, even if it is not perfect.

**Bonin: I thought it was exciting to speak to a different, larger audience. How did that make you feel, were you nervous?**

**Issartel:** If there is just one person in the room with whom what I say resonates, that is good enough for me. And the chance of that happening increases with a larger audience!

**Vieira:** I think that speaking in front of a larger, unfamiliar audience offers a fantastic learning opportunity. The more I speak, the more I am able to keep my adrenaline under control. More stage time means more practice; more practice means more confidence; more confidence means less anxiety.

**Bonin:** It's so important to check your tech [especially when your audience is larger]. We've all seen our share of dim video and poor audio. Online or offline, you have to put a lot of effort into the staging of your speech, practicing your gestures, how to incorporate your props, improving your lighting, your technical setup, etc.

**Bonin: I felt that the contest really celebrated how international and diverse our organization is. Our District, 109, incorporates 10**



Sonja Bonin

**European countries and vastly different cultural backgrounds. Many participants weren't competing in their first language.**

**Issartel:** When you realize that parts of your audience may have trouble understanding all that you are saying, it can force you to double down on your body language, facial expressions, and overall expressiveness. It's an extra incentive to make your speech interesting in spite of potential language or cultural barriers.

**Bonin: What other benefits did you take away from participating in a contest?**

**Vieira:** When you really work on a speech over a long period of time, you put everything under a magnifying glass: from big bloopers, such as gestures that don't make sense, to distracting props to more fine-grained details, such as word choice. With every iteration, I got more

selective with my vocabulary. I paid more attention to how the language flows, how different parts of the speech connect, and I started using rhetorical devices such as alliteration. This polishing process is a very valuable skill that I will transfer to the future. Also, the confidence I gained as a speaker is something that will stay with me forever.

**Bonin: Were you disappointed when you didn't make it to the next level?**

**Issartel:** Yes! It made me even more eager to compete again next season!

**Vieira:** Not at all. It was never about winning for me, but about improving. And I did learn so much! Next time, I will find a mentor specifically for the contest preparation. (Somebody who isn't involved in the contest as a judge or chair, of course.)

**Bonin: Do you have any other tips for your fellow Toastmasters?**

**Issartel:** Don't force [participating in a contest] if you don't feel ready, but don't put it off because you fear you are too much of a beginner.

**Vieira:** First, have a clear vision for your speech. It helps you to be effective and to filter out any feedback that might not align with your vision.

Secondly, analyze your feedback. I organized mine into categories: feedback on me as a speaker versus feedback on my speech, contradicting advice, etc. I thought it through and then incorporated some while rejecting others.

**“Don't force it if you don't feel ready, but don't put it off because you fear you are too much of a beginner.”**

—MARIA ISSARTEL

Thirdly, have a strong *why* for competing—besides winning. When it's all about winning, the odds are against you, so you are setting yourself up for disappointment. But if you have other good reasons to compete, such as learning or stage time with new audiences, that's something achievable.

**Bonin:** I was impressed at how much a club can do to support their members—had my President not nominated me [to compete], I would never have signed up, much less won! Then, some fellow Toastmasters offered a feedback session to the participants which was incredibly helpful. And Maria got inspired to conduct a Table Topics session in our club where everyone was encouraged to speak their native language.

Last but not least, don't forget to celebrate. Anyone doing well in a contest can serve as inspiration for members of your own club to try the same next time! **T**

**Sonja Bonin** works as a writer, editor, and translator in Zurich, Switzerland. She is a member of International Lunchtime Toastmasters-ILTM in Zurich, and won the 2021 District German Speech Contest.



## Here's the Thing

The word that's worth a thousand pictures.

BY JOHN CADLEY

I've always been intrigued by the word "thing." It's a word that can have both no meaning and many meanings. It can make you sound profound (*Ah, 'tis a thing devoutly to be wished!*) or spectacularly ignorant (*What's that thing you mow the lawn with?*). It gives you a word to say when you don't know the word to say, or when you simply would rather not say it (*You have a thing in your nose*). When your teenager backs over your neighbor's mailbox, destroys her prized petunia bed, and takes down the clothesline, you can simply say to your spouse, "What about this car thing?" and save yourself the pain of itemizing the breathtaking automotive ineptitude of your offspring.

I am also fond of Thing's siblings—Something, Anything, Everything, and Nothing—which multiply your options exponentially, especially when they're combined. You've heard your physician say, "Well, it could be Something or it could be Nothing." The only thing we know for certain here is that you have an "it." Something means it's not Nothing, and Nothing means it's not Something. If it's Something, your doctor will do Everything he or she can to treat it; if it's Nothing, then it really could have been Anything. So you end up with a Something that was a Nothing, meaning your provider doesn't have to do Anything because Everything's all right. That will be \$40, please.

What I am *not* fond of are Thing's cousins: Thingamabob, Thingamajig,

Thingummy, and the odoriferous Thing. True, a Thingamabob is in the Thing family—i.e., a Something about which you obviously know Nothing, including its name. And yes, referring to an object as a Thing can show your ignorance. Referring to it as a Thingamabob or a Thingy, however, not only reveals your ignorance; it celebrates it. Use these words and it won't be long before you'll be employing *their* cousins—Doohickey, Doodad, Whatchamacallit—and then all is lost. Sell your house, move up into the hills, take what food you can, and wait for civilization to return.

**You can bring your Things, or you can bring your Stuff, but you can't bring the Stuff that has your Things.**

This dystopian scenario reminds me of a horror movie from 1982 called (not uncoincidentally, as you shall see) *The Thing*, a story about an American research team in Antarctica which encounters a parasitic extraterrestrial life form that assimilates and then imitates other organisms, including humans. Paranoia ensues as the scientists all wonder which one of them has become The Thing. Eventually they turn on each other and nobody survives, which probably would have

happened anyway just from being stuck in a hut in Antarctica.

*The Thing* was reviewed as "instant junk" and called the most hated film of all time by *Cinefantastique* magazine. Quite a distinction. I haven't seen it but it can't be as bad as some of my home movies. The pertinent point is that this extraterrestrial parasite, in its ability to become whatever it inhabits, is the perfect avatar for our word Thing, for it, too, can become whatever it combines with—a sweet Thing, a bitter Thing, a foolish Thing, a last Thing, a crucial Thing, a crazy Thing, a great Thing, an awful Thing, a strange Thing, a funny Thing, an only Thing ... *ad infinitum*.

You can see, then, why I have a thing for Thing. It's the writer's best friend, ready to jump in at a moment's notice when you have neither the time, nor the patience, nor the knowledge to be specific. I'm sorry I don't have time to write about Thing's identical twin—Stuff—which, like all identical twins, hates being confused with the other. You can bring your Things, or you can bring your Stuff, but you can't bring the Stuff that has your Things. The words would collide on the page, causing a minor explosion. And that would be (a) a terrible Thing, or (b) Stuff you don't want to deal with. ■

**John Cadley** is a former advertising copywriter, freelance writer, and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at [www.cadleys.com](http://www.cadleys.com).





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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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

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

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

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

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





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