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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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## Smedley Fund - Helping Members Help Members

Every December I donate to the [Smedley Fund](#) in honor of my father and the month he died. He was a great believer that everyone should have the opportunity for some type of education. All he ever asked of me was that I do the best I can and be satisfied. And it's something I think about all the time. Am I doing the best I can? Am I satisfied with what I've done, with what I've contributed, with how I've helped?

The Smedley Fund is named for Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, the founder of Toastmasters, a man who knew the importance of having communication and leadership skills; and understood that developing them shouldn't cost a great deal of money. He felt strongly that being an effective communicator was essential for a successful career and life, and that people learned best in positive and supportive environments.

The Board established the Smedley Fund in 1965—only three days after Smedley's death—to ensure that people continue to have access to the benefits of Toastmasters, and that the education program is valuable and relevant.

This year I've decided to donate now, in October, rather than December. Both my father and I have birthdays in October, and so does Toastmasters. The organization turns 99 years old on October 24 this year, and as we approach our milestone centennial, it's a good time to consider how we can each keep the tradition going and open the doors for others.

If Toastmasters has helped you become a better communicator, given you more confidence, or opened your mind, then I encourage you to consider donating.

Smedley was adamant that Toastmasters should remain a nonprofit, and that no one should ever profit from it. When Toastmasters was incorporated, back in 1932, he even included a provision that if it ever engaged in profit making, the profits would revert to him or to his estate.

In fact, when asked what type of memorial he would like, Smedley said, simply: "The perpetuation of Toastmasters should be my memorial. I want nothing more than that and nothing less."

Toastmasters has changed my life in more ways than I ever could have imagined, and for almost 100 years members across the globe have been changing their lives and their communities. If Toastmasters has helped you become a better communicator, given you more confidence, or opened your mind, then I encourage you to consider donating. It's a way that members can help members.

You can read more about some of the ways that the Smedley Fund has helped, and how members, clubs, and businesses can continue the legacy, by visiting [toastmasters.org/Smedley](http://toastmasters.org/Smedley).

**Morag Mathieson, DTM**  
2023-2024 International President

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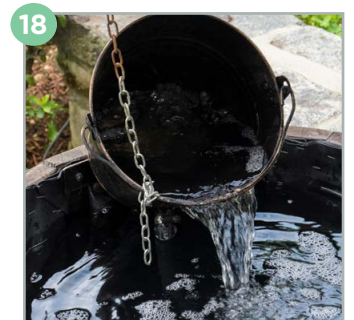
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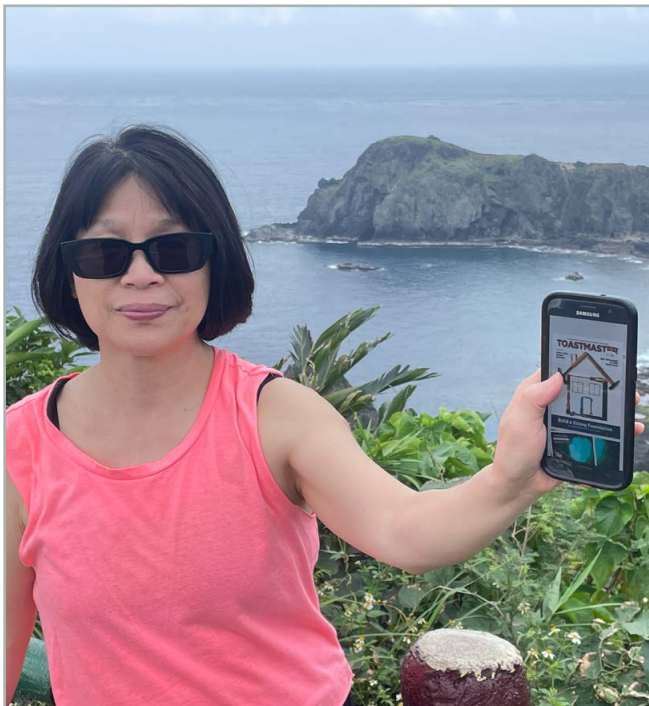
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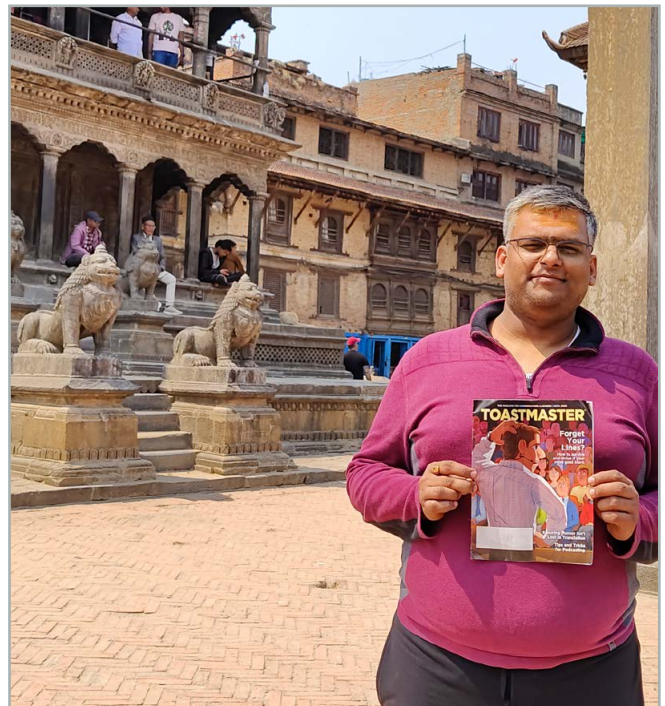
**OASIS TOASTMASTERS** club hosts an outdoor meeting after hiking to Kanda Ela Reservoir in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka. The theme of the meeting was “Eyeing for the Hill.”



## Traveling Toastmaster



**LIN HITT** of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, holds the digital edition of the *Toastmaster* while visiting family in Green Island, Taiwan.



**HARSH SINGHAL, DTM**, of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, poses with the *Toastmaster* magazine in Patan Durbar Square in the Kathmandu Valley of Lalitpur, Nepal.

# Celebrating the History of Women in Toastmasters

From those who paved the way to the leaders of today.

By Laura Mishkind

While it wasn't until 1973 that women were officially admitted as members by Toastmasters International, they had actually been involved for many years before. Yes, they were “wives and sweethearts” of Toastmasters, but they also began their own organization in the 1930s—the Toastmistresses.

Although Toastmasters and Toastmistresses were separate organizations, they both held their conventions in San Jose, California, in 1939. Toastmistresses joined Toastmasters for many of the convention activities. In the 1930s, it was common for the two organizations to have joint meetings, and reports of these events were published in issues of *The Toastmaster*.

Some Toastmasters clubs periodically staged special “ladies’ night” events to allow spouses a chance to see for themselves what Toastmasters was all about. Another option for women was to form a Gavel Club—clubs affiliated with Toastmasters but for people who don't qualify for membership in Toastmasters clubs.

Collaboration continued over the next few decades, and, in 1965, Toastmasters’ Founders District proposed to allow auxiliary clubs for women. The Board of Directors considered this proposal and gave clubs the right to support such groups if they chose to do so, but none of these groups were officially sanctioned by the international organization.

Then, in 1971, an exemption became available for corporate clubs. Women were able to join Toastmasters clubs sponsored by corporations to meet equal opportunity requirements. This exemption ultimately led to 10% of established clubs and 25% of recently chartered clubs having women as part of their membership.

Meanwhile, women like Helen Blanchard, who would later become Toastmasters’ first female International President in 1985, were using gender-neutral names to join clubs. It's believed that these

women boosted membership a great deal in the early 1970s. Blanchard originally applied for membership under the name “H. Blanchard” before World Headquarters requested a full name—she chose Homer.

At the August 1973 International Convention, delegates decided that Toastmasters International would

be open to women, and Blanchard, who had already been elected Club President, could accurately share her name with World Headquarters.

## Effects of Women

Women quickly began making their mark as official members of Toastmasters. In 1976, just three years after the membership milestone, Canada's Stephanie Noonan became the first woman to reach the finals of the World Championship of Public Speaking®.

The year after Noonan's success, Evelyn Jane Burgay, of Springfield, Virginia, stepped onto the World Championship stage and won, making her both the first woman and first blind member to take the title. Women continued to compete in speech contests for years to come and, in 2018, [three women](#) took first, second, and third place. At the 2023 World Championship of Public Speaking, women led the way again, earning the top three spots.

“Women will continue to play a significant role in our organization as members and as leaders,” Jo Anna McWilliams, 2000–2001 International President, said in the [October 1999 issue](#) of *The Toastmaster*. And she has been proven to be correct.

After International President Blanchard made her place in history, another woman stepped into the role in 1994—Pauline Shirley, DTM.

In total, seven women have taken the reins to lead Toastmasters International, paving the way for a new milestone to be met in the coming years.

For the first time in Toastmasters history, three women are set to serve as [International President](#) in consecutive terms. Morag Mathieson, DTM, of Moehrendorf, Germany, was inaugurated in August at the International Convention in Nassau, Bahamas; followed by Radhi Spear, DTM, of Piscataway, New Jersey, in 2024; and Aletta Rochat, DTM, of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2025.

It took the passion, dedication, and determination of Blanchard, Shirley, Burgay, and the many others who may not have shared their real names for women to be part of this organization. Toastmasters is proud to celebrate the 50th anniversary of female membership, the many years of participation that came before, and the many years ahead.

**Laura Mishkind** is associate editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.



International President John S. Latin, DTM, 1984-1985, inducted Helen M. Blanchard, DTM, as Toastmasters’ first female International President.

# The First Moment of Truth

Sparking the interest of prospects quickly is critical in the digital age.

By Stephanie Darling

The first time you hear that Cologne Toastmasters welcomed 54 new members during the 2022–2023 program year, you might think your ears were playing a trick on you. The same might happen when you hear that during that same period, the club hosted 240 guests, with the highest number of visitors for one meeting topping out at 19.

And while these numbers are extremely impressive they're not a priority for the club, says Past Club President Peter Ratko. "These are people—new colleagues—behind the numbers. What's key for our club is to motivate and help them achieve along their journey. We're all learning together."

How did this bilingual, hybrid club in Cologne, Germany, reach—and engage—so many new members? They used the same touchpoints as other clubs do—websites, open houses, personal discussions—but with the keen awareness that each technique offers only about five seconds to spark the attention of a prospect, making quick, compelling impressions extremely important.

"That first touchpoint with the club is the first moment of truth," says Ratko. "Especially in the digital setting; if you don't interest them quickly, they're gone."

The club is dedicated to fostering a warm, inviting, newcomer-friendly culture. Visitors need only bring

"openness and a good mood," the website notes. At the same time, the club has worked hard to back that sentiment with a thoroughly thought-out, strategic approach to member recruitment and retention.

"In 2021, we [club leaders] asked ourselves, 'How can someone find

us without knowing Toastmasters, or our club, exists?'" explains Olaf Langenbeck, DTM, Club Secretary. Leaders then created a "communication concept" aimed at finding and reaching the club's target group—everyone from age 18 to 60.

Ratko, a professional website designer and Google analytics expert, studied what people were searching for online that matched what Toastmasters and the Cologne club offered. Three top key phrases emerged: improve speaking skills, give presentations, and overcome stage fright. Ratko and a team of journalists and writers in the

club revamped the website. Those phrases—and similar variations—are now at the top of the club's homepage and are repeated throughout the site. "The ranking of the website is getting better and better the more matches/matched searches performed," Ratko explained.

To properly orient and educate new members, the club created a customer journey that covers five phases: awareness, interest, desire, action, and post-action.

Here are some of the specifics aiding in the journey.

**Easy contact:** Visitors can sign up to attend meetings straight from the website. These, and all inquiries, are answered personally by the Vice President Membership the same day, or even instantly, Ratko says.

**Guest manager:** This new role is rotated among club members. The guest manager welcomes all online and in-person visitors and is available before and after the meeting to answer questions.

"We have a very open atmosphere at our meetings," Ratko says. "Every member is open to communicate with new people in the room, whether they are guests or new members."

**Onboarding:** The club holds an onboarding session every two to four weeks, depending on need. New members and guests learn about the club and how it functions, including Pathways, easy-Speak, and the structure of Toastmasters. Questions are welcomed, and attendees receive a flier about Toastmasters and the club.

**Mentoring program:** The club is sharply attuned to this effort, after learning that many mentees weren't comfortable finding a mentor on their own. The club Mentorship Manager finds members to serve as mentors. The club website includes a mentoring section, including a mini profile of several existing mentors and their areas of expertise. Anyone searching the pages can easily see how the program works and the broad range of skills-building advice that's offered.

**Programs:** Planning for the program year begins by listening to member interests and needs, Ratko says. Based on feedback, new club meeting formats have included a month on the topic of quality mentorship, meeting outside the club's regular space, and workshops on Table Topics® or humor.

To learn more about the club, visit [cologne-toastmasters.de](https://cologne-toastmasters.de).

**Stephanie Darling** is the former senior editor of and frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



Cologne Toastmasters

# Reaching My Full Potential

Toastmasters helped me find my confidence and enhance my career.

By Jane Osemwegie, DTM

As a young teenager I was bullied in high school and also lost my precious mother. Both experiences greatly affected my confidence and ability to relate to people. During high school I could barely speak in the presence of my peers because they'd laugh at me whenever I did. I often allowed the opinions of others to matter, which ate up my confidence. But after completing my education, I went on to start my career with Access Bank PLC in 2012—one of the leading financial service companies in Africa. I realized that my lack of confidence wouldn't take me anywhere, and I needed to get over my childhood trauma.

In 2016, Access Bank, under its “W” initiative for empowering women, was interested in creating a Toastmasters club. I attended a meeting with other colleagues where management gave us a briefing about this new initiative. That was the first time I heard the word “Toastmasters,” and I quickly Googled it for more information. When I saw the organization promoted confidence and public speaking, I told myself this would be the turning point for me.

I decided to take the leap and became the charter president of AWN Toastmasters—a corporate club for Access Bank employees—in Lagos, Nigeria. This changed the way I viewed the trajectory of my life. I summoned the courage to give my first Ice Breaker speech, even though I still didn't believe that I could speak in front of an audience, and spoke about my childhood journey. Since then, I have become better and better in my public speaking, confidence, and how I view myself. I began to see myself as a light and not based on how people view me.

Toastmasters helped me sharpen my leadership and listening skills, as well as my ability to give constructive feedback. I became part of the key talent at my job and was entrusted to handle some crucial tasks because of the skills I learned from being a



Jane Osemwegie, DTM

Toastmaster. I even started mentoring my junior colleagues on how to improve their confidence and public speaking skills. All this progress earned me the Brand Ambassador award in 2019 at Access Bank.

Then, I decided to take a big step outside my comfort zone.

In late 2019, I left my booming career in Nigeria to start afresh in Nova Scotia, Canada. That move was scary! But I wanted to expand my knowledge and skills, learn different cultures, and be able to apply them in my everyday life. Migrating to Canada and leaving my comfort zone turned out to be a huge plus for me.

When I arrived in Canada, I quickly joined a Toastmasters club, which helped me gain a

deeper understanding of the country's way of life. That club pulled me through the anxiety of migrating to a new country. However, I faced several job application rejections and failed interviews, so I decided to overcome these problems by participating actively in club meetings.

My club, Bedford Basin Toastmasters, has a fun environment with nice, friendly, smart, and professional people. In this environment, I give speeches and perform leadership roles, which help develop many competencies. By completing projects and practicing my skills, I am continuing to build up resilience to prepare me for what's ahead, and am overcoming my challenges. I now work for a technology group in one of the leading firms in North America.

As a seasoned and Distinguished Toastmaster, I am reaching my full potential. I see a blessed, confident, Black, and gifted woman in me. Today, I feel fearless, and I do not feel anxiety when I deliver a speech. One of my greatest achievements is that I have overcome my fear of public speaking and my childhood trauma, all thanks to Toastmasters.

Do you struggle with public speaking? I recommend you join a Toastmasters club near you. And if you are already a member, I encourage you to participate more by taking on roles to build your resilience and prepare yourself for the future. Remember, life is not all smooth sailing, and success is not linear. We all experience obstacles, rejection, and disappointment; it's part of the human experience. It's how we choose to respond that determines the key to our success. If I can do it, so can you.

**Jane Osemwegie, DTM**, is a Nigerian-born Canadian who loves to spread kindness to everyone she comes across. She is the Immediate Past Area Director in District 45 and a member of Bedford Basin Toastmasters, a hybrid club based in Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada.



# Can Speaking Skills Boost Your Career?

Content matters, but how you communicate that content is key.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Can speaking skills boost your career? We all know that the answer we are supposed to give is “yes.” But do we always act that way?

All too often I have heard speakers whose presentation style suggests they think that only their content matters. Their speaking style sounds more like blah-blah-blah. And their speech organization has more twists and turns than a steep mountain road. Are they right? Does only content matter?

If you are someone who is happy staying in your current job for the long term, that style of presentation could be fine. But if you have higher career aspirations, if you want to grow and advance in some sense, then presentation skills are very important, and can be critical.

If you have those aspirations, what are your communication objectives? First, you want your listeners to actually listen to you, to pay attention to you, to hear and understand what you have to say. Second, you want them to have confidence in you and trust in your content. And third, you want them to earmark you for future consideration of some sort, perhaps a promotion or a bigger project.

That being said, let me give you three thoughts to ponder as you prepare your next presentation.

First, communication is an important part of business. The better you are at clearly and persuasively communicating your message, the better you will do. And the higher up you go in the organization, the more important that skill is.

Will management commit funds to your project if you can't explain and sell it effectively? Probably not.

Will they give you greater responsibility within the company? Not likely.

Second, as you walk to the front of the room to present to your boss or, perhaps, the executive team, what do you want them to be thinking? “Oh, good! This should be a great presentation!” Or “Oh, no. Not him again.”

Remember, they can't hear what you have to say if they aren't paying attention. If you are

known as a boring presenter, you may have lost before you even begin. I can't tell you how many presentations I have heard that, although they contained information I wanted, were so poorly organized or presented that I just couldn't stand to listen. And over time, I didn't even try. Fortunately, I had my cell phone with an email app, so the time wasn't wasted for me. But was it for the presenter?



The better you are at clearly and persuasively communicating your message, the better you will do in business.

Third, your listeners are gauging your competence.

Who might be assessing your skills? Executives, customers, investors, or even managers in other departments. What questions might they be asking? “Does it sound like you know what you are talking about? Does it sound like you have the ability to do what you committed to? Will working with you help or hurt my career?”

Recognize you have competitors in every situation. Usually your coworkers. Some of them are going for the next big promotion, the one you really, really want, and only one of you is going to get it. Or they could be going for more influence with management. There is, after all, a pecking order in every organization.

That competition for influence could possibly extend across department lines. Do sales and operations have different priorities from time to time? They frequently are on different sides of an issue, aren't they? Who gets the resources? Marketing versus sales is another classic rivalry. Then let's throw quality control into the mix just for fun.

How well you communicate your message may well determine how you (and your boss) fare in those situations.

Then again, that political battle may be taking place several levels above you between executives. They have the same objectives that you do, albeit at a different level. Yet how well you communicate your message may have an impact on how that battle turns out. And that could very well influence your professional future. Those executives are, after all, potential gatekeepers in your career.

In other words, every time you speak or present, you are involved in a competition. You may be competing for a green light. You may be competing for future consideration. And you are definitely competing for your listeners' attention.

While your content is important, how well you communicate that content is also a key factor in your success.

So, can speaking skills boost your career? You bet they can. By all means, make the most of them.

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



Corey Barksdale works on a painting while listening to music in his earbuds. He says music helps him relax and focus on his art.

## Illustration of Excellence

Georgia artist creates varied works that reflect his roots and experiences.

By Marian Barilone,  
DTM

For more than 20 years, Corey Barksdale has worked as a professional artist, exploring and excelling at different artistic mediums. He has painted murals, illustrated books, and designed artwork for movies like *Get Out* and *Superfly*, and television shows such as *Atlanta*, the hit series set in his hometown. Many of his dazzling creations have centered on aspects of African American history.

Barksdale's passion for art was sparked early. His grandmother created images and took scraps of clothes to make new clothing and quilts that many people adored. "She instilled in me a love for storytelling, culture, and heritage," he says in a recent interview. "Her stories, wisdom, and support encouraged me to incorporate elements of my family's history into my artistic expression."

Barksdale, a member of the Gwinnett Harbingers Toastmasters Club, in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and the Gwinnett-Tucker Toastmasters Club, in Tucker, Georgia, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Atlanta College of Art in 1994. His works have been exhibited in an art museum in Marietta, Georgia, and are currently on display at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Inspired by African American artists like Romare

Bearden, John Biggers, Aaron Douglas, and William Tolliver, he is strongly committed to his heritage, and his art often represents his experiences and how he identifies himself.

"Throughout my life, I've been an unorthodox, creative, and free thinker regarding religion, race, fashion, and art," he says. "They say unconventional thinking is the lifeblood of innovation."

With International Artist Day being celebrated this month—October 25—it's a fitting time to learn more about this standout artist.

### What type of art do you specialize in and where is your artwork shown?

I work in the fine arts, including as a muralist, illustrator, and live painter. As an illustrator, I recently completed 40 illustrations for the book *The Night Before Freedom*, published by Random House. As a muralist, I created a large mural and sculpture in Dublin, Georgia, to recognize a historical event many years ago: when Martin Luther King Jr. won an essay competition at one of the local churches in downtown Dublin and then presented it as a speech at a young age [15] on April 17, 1944.



Barksdale fine-tunes his image of jazz great Thelonious Monk.



The "I Am A Man" slogan holds particular significance in African American history.



Barksdale and his painting of legendary saxophonist Charlie Parker.

### Your art often feels like it's moving and alive. Can you share more about your work process?

I create with themes of music, rhythm, and diversity to enliven Atlanta streets and highlight life's richness, beauty, and expression. My art, which is centered on my experiences and community, embraces life and culture and reflects love, inclusion, and diversity. My

### Why did you join Toastmasters?

To increase my communication and public speaking skills and overcome my fear of public speaking. I understood that by giving speeches and working through the Pathways program, I would increase my confidence in the public speaking and presentation arena.

Following the release of *The Night Before Freedom*, I had more opportunities for public speaking

Festival [one of the largest free jazz festivals in the United States]. I had the opportunity to create the official poster art and other elements for this spectacular event. It was a moment of great pride and recognition when, during the jazz festival kick-off event celebration, I had the privilege of being presented alongside the mayor of Atlanta and other influential public figures.

"I'm an introvert, so Toastmasters is helping me move outside of my comfort zone."

—COREY BARKSDALE

love of colors—generously expressed with bold strokes—represents the richness and vivid expressions of all cultures. Life would be pretty plain without color.

My art celebrates the local Atlanta community, music, and culture, promoting love and acceptance for the things that bring us together and the differences that make us unique. I try to produce a rich drumbeat through dynamic creative expression.

### How did *The Night Before Freedom* book project come about?

*The Night Before Freedom* came about through a collaboration with the talented writer Glenda Armand. Random House contacted me and expressed interest in me illustrating approximately 40 pages for this inspirational book. *The Night Before Freedom* is a children's book told from the perspective of a child named Bess. Before emancipation [the end of slavery in the United States after the Civil War], she dreams about what emancipation means to her—she dreams of angels flying through the sky and glory forever after. I was so excited to work with such a significant topic as emancipation.

engagements. I participated in my first major book signing at the Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, which also has large mural-size images of my artwork displayed in the food court. I had a great time connecting with the event's travelers and supporters. Connecting with the community through my art creations is a significant mission of mine.

In the future, I plan to speak at book fairs, literary festivals, and community events, where I will share insights about the book and discuss its themes. My experience as a member of Toastmasters helped me feel more comfortable and articulate during the first book signing.

### Do you give speeches about your artwork in your Toastmasters clubs or community?

I regularly give presentations about my art in my Toastmasters clubs and other local Toastmasters clubs that I visit. I receive valuable feedback and hone my presentation skills in the clubs. Additionally, I have been invited to speak at several local schools, which, once my schedule allows, I plan to do.

I also had the honor of speaking in 2012 as the official artist for the esteemed Atlanta Jazz

### How is Toastmasters helping you personally and as an artist?

I'm an introvert, so Toastmasters is helping me move outside of my comfort zone. I enjoy getting into my art studio and creating art to the sounds of jazz, blues, and house music. Still, over the years, I realized that I needed to sharpen other business and social skills to survive as a visual artist. Developing my skills as a public speaker through Toastmasters will benefit me to go to a different and higher level of speaking, and art-wise, to build networking relationships with clients and fellow artists, and promote my artwork.

After joining Toastmasters, I find myself engaging people in public or social spaces more often, whereas, in the past, I wouldn't be so interested in communicating with strangers. I get to practice and develop social and business skills through Toastmasters.

My mentor Susie Corbett has been a crucial part of positive reinforcement in Toastmasters, telling me to keep going and improving.

**Editor's Note:** You can view Corey Barksdale's art at [coreybarksdale.com](http://coreybarksdale.com).

**Marian Barilone, DTM**, was the 2022–2023 District 14 Director, and is a member of the CVS EnterpriseMasters Toastmasters Club and the Gwinnett Harbingers Toastmasters Club, both in Lawrenceville, Georgia. She is a senior paralegal in the legal department of the CVS Health pharmacy chain.

# How To Be a Powerful Panelist

Advice for shining as a brilliant conversationalist.

By Kristin Arnold

**H**ave you ever been invited to share your unique perspective or expertise at a panel discussion? Congratulations! While you may be asked to prepare some initial remarks, there is more to being a strong, engaging panelist than just showing up and presenting your wisdom. You may or may not know your fellow panelists, the questions in advance, or the direction of the conversation.

Knowing that your reputation or your company's is on the line, it is worth taking the time to prepare to be a powerful panelist.

**Get the details.** Have a quick conversation with the meeting organizer and/or the panel moderator to confirm the event details, panel objectives and format, names of your fellow panelists, audience demographics, and logistics. The panel moderator may also schedule a meet-up with you and the fellow panelists as you get closer to the event.

**Think about the audience.** Imagine the types of people who are likely to attend. What would make them lean into a scintillating conversation among experts? What do they care about most about the topic? What questions would they like to have answered that they can't get on Google?

**Research your fellow panelists.** Research their work and views they hold on the topic. This will make it much easier to connect and converse with them, as well as discern the areas where you agree and disagree.

**Have a goal in mind.** What do you want to achieve on this panel? Do you want to educate your audience, inspire them, or persuade them to take action? Share new insights and knowledge? Solve a particular problem? Challenge conventional wisdom?

**Make a list of potential questions.** Enlist the meeting organizer, panel moderator, and well-informed colleagues to help you identify questions the audience might ask about the topic. Consider the obvious, most

frequently asked questions as well as the not-so-obvious, harder, and more difficult questions that could come up.

**Be thoughtful.** Based on your role, diverse viewpoint, and relatability to the audience, determine what contribution you can make to the conversation. Is there something provocative or that pushes the envelope and could grab the attention of the audience? If you are wondering if it is too controversial, seek legal advice about what can and cannot be said.

**Craft three to four key messages.** Keeping your goal in mind, identify three to four crisp key messages that speak directly to your audience's interests. You may or may not use all your key messages, but you will have some "back pocket" messages to share.

**Provide examples.** With each of your key messages, identify a concrete and specific example that illustrates your point. Personal stories, best practices, demonstrations, and props can help make your ideas come to life and engage your audience. Your examples should be short, compelling, and easy to understand.

**Create a headline.** Anchor your main idea in the form of a memorable theme, concept, or principle that holds your key messages together and remains long after the panel is over. It can be a word, a phrase, a favorite quote, or a catchy "headline" that captures your key point(s) and reinforces a call to action.

**Create calls to action.** Think about a final takeaway, insight, or idea you want to leave the audience with. Ask the audience to do something based on what they heard. Come prepared with at least three different calls to action so you won't be repetitive with your fellow panelists.

**Practice.** If a bit nervous, role-play answering your list of potential questions with a colleague. Push yourself to answer the easy *and* the tough questions as concisely as possible while making sure you are giving tremendous value to the attendees.

Now that you have your answers, key points, headline, and calls to action, make sure the conversation is lively and informative. Listen for the panel moderator's pre-planning messages that encourage you to engage, interact, converse, be curious, and challenge each other.

Based on how the moderator wants to facilitate the panel, here are some ideas for how to be a brilliant conversationalist:

**Actively listen.** It can be easy to sit passively, waiting for your turn to show off your knowledge. But if you're not listening carefully, you could miss key opportunities to ask follow-up questions or add on to your fellow panelists' insights.

**Don't be shy.** The moderator may ask questions that are directed to one person or questions that are open to the entire panel. If directed to one person, let that person answer before you chime in. If the question is open to the entire panel, jump in or signal to the moderator that you wish to speak first.

**Keep it short.** People prefer snappy, well-thought-out answers to interesting questions. Then "pass the ball" by asking another panelist to chime in, passing it back to the moderator or getting the audience involved.

**Watch your airtime.** You do not need to answer every question. Be aware of how many



**Piggyback.** Pick up an interesting bit from another panelist and add to the idea (remember to be additive, not repetitive!). Brainstorm in the moment and bounce ideas off each other.

**Link ideas.** Quickly paraphrase and/or comment on a thread of ideas or differences of opinions along with your point of view. For example, "In revealing their struggles, Keisha and Sean were highlighting the importance of ..."

**Disagree respectfully.** Yes, there should be some disagreements, otherwise, it would be a mighty boring panel. Don't disagree simply

such as: "Like many in the audience, I ...," "We all have ...," "Who among us has (or hasn't) ..."

- **Shout out.** Perhaps there is a subject-matter expert in the room who deserves a mention from the stage. Point to them and ask them to wave their hand, stand up, or offer a different opinion or comment on the subject.
- **Pose a provocative statement.** Then ask the audience if it is true or false (fact or fiction) or if they agree or disagree.
- **Take an informal poll.** This is especially helpful if you don't know the cast of characters in the room or want to gauge the level of interest.
- **Do something.** You can ask them to "Write this down ... [your headline]," "Applaud if you like vanilla ice cream," or "Stand up if you are committed to making ice cream available all summer long!"

Being a powerful panelist requires a combination of preparation, active listening, and conversational skills to create a panel discussion worthy of the audience's time and attention.

**Kristin Arnold** is on a crusade to make all panel discussions lively and informative. She is a meeting facilitator, moderator, and keynote speaker with over 30 years of experience making meetings more engaging, interactive, and collaborative. You can find more information about her latest book, *The Powerful Panelist*, at [powerfulpanels.com](http://powerfulpanels.com).

## Based on your role, diverse viewpoint, and relatability to the audience, determine what contribution you can make to the conversation.

times you have spoken as compared to your fellow panelists and give others a chance to weigh in.

**Acknowledge others' expertise.** Let your fellow panelists know that you took the time to learn about them and their work. For example, "Keisha, I was reading your newsletter last week and thought your point was right on the mark."

because you can. Disagree because the discussion will benefit the audience *and* your reputation.

**Engage the audience.** You may not be the panel moderator, but you still can involve the audience in small ways without hijacking the conversation.

- **Use inclusive language.** Use phrases that represent them and their interests and concerns



By Cathey Armillas, DTM

# Is Coaching Your Calling?

A professional coach can empower people to achieve things they never thought possible.

I never intended to be a coach. Although I grew up being coached my entire childhood, the thought of being called a “coach” for my career sounded like a fancy name for someone who was unemployed.

As it turns out, I was wrong.  
And I couldn't be happier.

I grew up knowing coaches of the athletic type. I played at the Olympic development level as a fast-pitch softball player. From a young age, I understood the value of a good coach. I knew that to improve, I would have to put in the work, but I also knew there were coaches who were working with players at the highest level. Having a coach who knew the process and

could guide me through it ensured my fastest way to success. If I was practicing the wrong things, it was going to get me nowhere quickly.

Fast-forward to when I started my company as a marketing strategist. One of my clients was a world-class videographer and was asked to give a TEDx Talk about a viral video he created. I had been a Toastmaster for over a decade and was a professional speaker myself at the time, so I figured I could help. I ended up coaching him through his TEDx Talk.

It was at that moment that I officially became a coach. What started out as something I did to help a client has now become one of the biggest income streams in my business.

And as I've gone down this path, it's become clear to me that being a great coach is an art form. It's not just about having the right knowledge and skills—it's about knowing how to inspire and motivate, how to build trust and make a connection, and how to bring out the best in your clients.



Writer Cathey Armillas, DTM, in a coaching session.

Coaching is a craft that takes time, dedication, and a whole lot of heart. In some ways, we're all coaches. In other ways, we're all being coached. Any time we try to help others by giving advice or telling people about our experiences, we're playing the role of "mini-coach." Whenever we find ourselves in a situation where we are seeking advice or counsel, we are looking to be coached.

Working with a coach is like having a wise and supportive friend who helps you become a better version of yourself. It's a journey that involves setting goals, gaining new perspectives, learning new skills, having a better process to evolve, and working toward your aspirations. With the help of a skilled coach, you can receive guidance, feedback, and encouragement to overcome obstacles, develop your skills, and achieve your desired outcomes.

## Types of Coaches and Skills Needed

In the 1990s, coaching started steadily moving beyond sports and into the world of professional development. Today, people in all professions turn to coaches to help them achieve their personal and professional goals. In a world where we are constantly bombarded with information and faced with ever-changing challenges, coaching has become the ultimate life hack, offering guidance, support, and a shortcut to success.

The profession of coaching has been on the rise. From academic to creativity, from career to relationship, from financial to personal development—there is a coach for just about anything you strive to become better at. There are even general life coaches.

All the way to what I am: a speaker coach.

Being a coach requires a diverse skill set that encompasses both extensive knowledge and emotional intelligence. To be successful, you must have a polymathic mindset, capable of drawing on a wide range of expertise

across multiple fields to tackle complex issues and provide effective solutions. And that's not all.

To be a great coach (not just an okay one), you must also be good at psychology. You have to understand how people work, what motivates them, and how you can get them to change their behaviors.

With that being said, coaching is a remarkable profession that brings immense satisfaction. The ability to utilize acquired knowledge to help others and witness its impact firsthand is an unparalleled experience.

It's also a good way to help people while enjoying a flexible schedule and earning good money.

Toastmasters can make excellent coaches because they are already regularly practicing one of the most important skills that a coach needs: listening.

## Becoming a Coach

I always tell people that I didn't become a coach, a coach I became. I never sought out coaching people in speaking, nor did I ever in a million years think that I could make a business out of it. But I did. And it's possible.

If you have the desire to become a coach and start a business around it, the first place that I would start is in your sweet spot. What's that thing that people always seem to be coming to you for? Where do you possess a perspective that other people might not have—what do they value and seek from you?

People sometimes ask if you need credentials to coach. The answer is maybe. Some types of coaching could require credentials or at least may be wise to have credentials for. There are many ways to go about getting credentials or certifications; it depends on what type of coach you want to become. The reality is that whatever you do you have to put in your time. You have to know your craft. Your clients are relying on you for your expertise, and you owe it to them to be the expert they need.

It makes sense that my client asked me to help him with his TEDx Talk; I was a Toastmaster and Toastmasters practice a lot of speaking (and evaluating). On that note, Toastmasters can make excellent coaches because they are already regularly practicing one of the most important skills that a coach needs: listening. And the best Toastmasters don't just listen, they listen well.

In fact, something that makes Toastmasters particularly good coaches is that we're taught to look for things that others often don't see. For instance, many times the grammarian of a club meeting focuses on tallying the "um's" and "ah's," tracking the word of the day, and occasionally offering mild grammar suggestions. However, there often isn't an exploration of the "why." And for coaches, the "why" is the most important question to ask. A good coach is someone who is able to point out specific instances where a speaker used filler words, enabling them to learn and modify their behavior.



**C O A C H**

COACH represents the essence of a coaching relationship. A coach is someone who:

- C** - Cultivates growth and development.
- O** - Offers support and guidance.
- A** - Advocates for your success.
- C** - Challenges you to push beyond your limits.
- H** - Helps you achieve your goals.

## Coaching Is More Than Advice

Toastmasters is where I learned the value of coaching. It's also where I learned that the value of advice is the most important aspect of coaching.

Advice is just advice if there isn't experience and knowledge behind it.

The difference between a mentor and a coach is that a mentor imparts advice from personal experiences, whereas a coach guides skill development using structured techniques and knowledge-based feedback. I've run into many people who call themselves coaches but are just glorified mentors.

My philosophy is that before you can teach or advise on a topic, you have to both practice and theorize. When you're teaching or advising, you're in "theory mode." You're telling your students, or clients, something you have a theory about based on what you've learned and experienced. But you get that experience when you're in "practice mode." If you never practice (and there are many ways to practice), your theories are based on what you believe to be true, not what you have witnessed to be true.

When I was working on my "How to Rock a TED Talk" coaching program, I decided I needed to spend more time in "practice mode." I ended up watching over 1,000 TED Talks to study and carefully analyze. It took me over a year of watching multiple TED Talks and then nine months to write out the program to gain the

experience I needed. That was in addition to all the speakers I coached. It's never enough. You should always be on a path of continual learning.

As a coach, you need to keep growing and expanding your knowledge so you can offer the best and most relevant advice to your clients. It's a never-ending cycle of self-improvement, and that's where the best coaches really shine. They come up with innovative tools, systems, and processes to help their clients move forward and achieve their goals faster.

To that end, I developed a tool called the Idea Map to help clients prepare for TED Talks. It's a simple but extremely powerful tool that helps speakers organize their ideas and think through how to support their main message. When clients use it, they often feel like they've discovered a secret hack to creating a unique and powerful talk.

For example, not long ago, I worked with a client who is the executive director of a large state organization that focuses on land use in Oregon. He was giving a TEDx Talk about it, and people couldn't believe how exciting he made such a seemingly boring topic. I have always believed that there's no such thing as a boring

Advice is just advice if there isn't experience and knowledge behind it.



## What makes a great coach? Experts respond.

"Knowing when to toss or keep—sometimes the harder part of coaching is to toss the whole thing and start over again. Sometimes it is a matter of tweaking some parts, keeping others, and reworking sections while keeping THEIR voice and their story."

—**Tammy Miller, DTM, AS,**  
*speaking coach*

"A great coach is someone who can listen, comprehend, and relate to your specific needs and tailor your speaking in ways that highlight your authentic voice, personality, and message."

—**Dr. Sherri Raftery, DTM,**  
*communications professor, leadership and speaking coach*

"A good coach understands that he has the training and skills to coach. But it is always about the client. A good coach removes himself from the solution. And a great coach becomes a guide that challenges, digs deep, and allows the client to find their own strengths and discover their path."

—**Samuel Moran,**  
*communications and presentation coach*

"A great coach provides insight and perspective, along with helping clients see their true abilities and potential despite any ingrained beliefs of inadequacy."

—**Michelle Winsor,**  
*leadership coach*

"A great coach can get one to do things they thought were unthinkable!"

—**Tim Beavers,**  
*manager/leadership coach*

"A good coach believes in you, a great coach helps you believe in you."

—**Carolyn Pelletier,**  
*Toastmasters mentor/coach*



"A great coach is one who inspires others to make a change, to work harder, and to become a better version of themselves."

—**Amy Savolainen Kampe,**  
*teacher, sports coach assistant*

"A great coach is someone who is present when they are coaching you, as in undivided attention, authentically invested. Someone who has integrity."

—**Amber Darby,**  
*early childhood special education educator*

"One who can listen intently without judgement."

—**Greg Gazin, DTM,**  
*PDG/District 42, podcast coach, host/producer for The Toastmasters Podcast*

"A great coach is somebody that sees the human (not the athlete or performer); takes time to know them and their story; sees their magic; helps them to identify their gift, hone/train their gift (even if it requires tough love and hard feedback or picking them up while they fall); and believes in that person enough to make them believe in themselves and want to share that gift with the world. Then the coach steps back to become the biggest cheerleader, encourager, and supporter."

—**Ramonita Smith,**  
*brand coach/strategist*

topic, only boring speakers, and this was a great example of that. When he was asked how he did it, he immediately credited the Idea Map for helping him organize his thoughts and ideas.

As coaches, our role is to empower people to achieve things they never thought possible. That's our job.

Ultimately, people seek out coaching because it offers a shortcut to success. If it lights a fire inside of you to help others find that shortcut and achieve great success, then coaching might be your calling. And if you

genuinely enjoy diving deep into strategies, and creating tools and methods to help people unleash their fullest potential, chances are you'll make an exceptional coach.

**Cathey Armillas** has been a Toastmaster for 20 years. She is a Past District Director and three-time DTM. She is also a world-renowned speaker coach who runs a successful business coaching CEOs, business leaders, and TED speakers on delivering talks and sharing their stories. Find out more at [catheyardmillas.com](http://catheyardmillas.com).



# The Power of Influence

How getting others on your side can boost your position at work or in your club.

By Greg Glasgow

Even if you're not the boss of your company or the leader of your Toastmasters club, it likely is still important to you that people value your opinion, listen to what you have to say, and include you in new initiatives.

Your influence can help you build your connections and implement your projects. It's a concept that leadership professionals say is more important now than ever, given the fractured and hectic nature of the modern workplace.

"All of us these days are in organizations that have been stripped, to a greater or lesser extent, of their hierarchy," says Dorie Clark, bestselling author and branding expert. "You often need to get things done by working in collaboration with people who don't directly report to you. That could be people in different departments, people in different offices, different teams. The challenge becomes how can you get them to want to do the thing that is important and necessary for you, but may not be their top priority?"

The simple answer? Be nice to others. Not in a scheming way, Clark stresses, but by taking a genuine interest in others—their personal lives and what they value about their work.

"It's the philosophy of digging your well before you're thirsty," she says. "If you have built a good relationship with this person over time—maybe you've done favors for them in the past—you are paying into a reservoir of goodwill that, hopefully, you will be able to tap during key moments when you're the one needing assistance."

One influence-building strategy Clark recommends is asking for others' opinions and recommendations—perhaps a favorite book on leadership or public speaking—as a way to show you value their input.

"Showing somebody—in a genuine way, of course—that you respect them enough to ask for their opinion is a powerful testament, and it's likely to trigger some form of reciprocity where the person says, 'Oh, wow, that's pretty cool that he respects me enough to ask for my opinion,'" she says.

Gratitude, focus, and follow-up are key in any situation where you're looking to build influence, Clark adds—read the book someone suggests, or thank them for their help if they do you a favor. When they respond to a question you ask, really listen to the answer, and give them your undivided attention.

"That makes them look at you in a slightly different way," she says. "It begins to change the tenor of the relationship so that they're predisposed to be a bit more positive toward you than they might otherwise have been."

## Communicate the Context

When the moment arrives that you need to tap into the reservoir of goodwill that you've built, Clark says, it's also advantageous to make clear the stakes and context of the request—what it means to you personally, and what it means to the organization as a whole.

"It is rare that someone will go out of their way to do something if it doesn't seem important or they don't



Doric Clark

really understand why it's necessary," she says. "But if you actually take the time to walk them through it and say, 'This is a really big deal to me,' or 'This is a really big deal to the company, and here's why,' they may realize, 'Oh, this is actually an important thing where my help can make a difference.'"

Another way to gain influence is by developing your knowledge through classes, conferences, and other means. This will not only help you be seen as an expert worth listening to but will also help you more easily communicate information to others.

## Pick a Style

Our natural inclination is to influence others the way we ourselves like to be influenced, but as you're getting to know others in your organization, it's also important to pay attention to the way they relate to others.

"If you are a facts and figures person, you'll tend to influence others using a logical approach," says Tim Baker of Australia, a former Toastmaster and author of *The New Influencing Toolkit*. "However, the person you're influencing may not be persuaded the same way. To improve our ability to influence, we need to be more versatile in our approach and not just stick to what we feel comfortable with."

In his book, Baker shares four influencing strategies, grouped by how they are communicated and whether they appeal to logic or emotions. "Investigators" use logic, facts, and figures to make their case; "Calculators" highlight the positives in a proposal and point out the weaknesses of staying the course; "Motivators" influence with emotion and oratory skill; and "Collaborators" involve others in the decision, engaging their hearts and minds to enlist their support.

"The key is to use all four strategies at the right time, in the right way, with the right people, for the right cause," Baker says. "Being flexible and adaptable is the way to go to become a great persuader."



Tim Baker

## Estimate Your Influence

Research shows that people tend to underestimate the amount of influence they have, says Vanessa Bohns, professor of organizational behavior at Cornell University and author of *You Have More Influence Than You Think*. One way to gain insight about your influence is to simply ask people how they think or feel about a presentation you made or an idea you presented.

"Our guesses about how we are seen by others often turn out to be wrong, and our misperceptions can most easily be corrected by asking for feedback," she says.

Another method Bohns recommends is the post-game review: Take 10 minutes to visualize a recent conversation or interaction you had with someone in your organization, trying to see it from a neutral, third-person perspective. How would an outsider describe your dynamic with the other person? What did you say or do that made them respond?



Vanessa Bohns

or maybe they just don't know you that well, and red if they have no idea who you are or if there's been a problem in the relationship," she says. "That gives you a quick, at-a-glance sense of who you feel confident would do you a favor if you asked, and who you maybe haven't spent enough time with. Maybe you prioritize inviting them out for coffee or just spending more time building that relationship."

## Keep It Real

While it's important to increase your influence, Clark says, it's even more important to do it in an authentic way. Used correctly, influence is a positive tool. Be careful not to cross the line into manipulation.

"It's fine to assume that, in a broad sense, if you do good things for other people, they will want to do good things for you," she says. "Where we get in trouble is if someone takes that philosophy to a Machiavellian extreme,

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## Your influence can help you build your connections and implement your projects.

"So much of our influence happens where we don't see it," Bohns says. "It happens in someone else's head. It could happen a week after we talk to someone, when they remember something we said; it could happen once someone else confirms to that person something we've said. Because we can only guess how much influence we have based on what we see, and because so much of our impact is invisible, we may chronically underestimate it."

Clark recommends another way to keep tabs on your influence: Create a color-coded chart of the 10 to 15 most important people in your professional life or your Toastmasters network.

"Color them green if you feel like you have a really good relationship with them, yellow if you feel like the relationship is not optimal

where they're mapping it out: 'I'm going to do this favor for someone so that eight moves down the chessboard, they will be forced to do this other thing for me.' Usually, that doesn't play out very well."

If you maintain your authenticity, keep tabs on your network, reflect on your interactions, and communicate appropriately, your increasing influence can boost your credibility and connections.

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**Greg Glasgow** is a Denver-based author and freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the Toastmaster. His debut nonfiction book, *Disneyland on the Mountain: Walt, the Environmentalists, and the Ski Resort That Never Was*, was published in September 2023.

# Advance Your Career Through Self-Leadership

Three steps to empower yourself.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Greg Van Borssum says he was never destined to do anything. “My kindergarten teacher pulled my parents aside and said I’d be the reason she’d quit the profession. In high school, I was voted by the principal as the most likely kid to be in prison or dead by 21.”

Van Borssum knew it wasn’t true. He wasn’t a bad child. In school, he was active, sharp, and bored—and determined to prove the nay-sayers wrong.

He became a multi-Academy-Award-winning movie director, karate master, national bodybuilding winner, and



world pistol champion. He joined the Sea Eagles Toastmasters Club in Brookvale, New South Wales, Australia, in 2013 and became an Accredited Speaker in 2019, the first Australian to receive the designation.

Van Borssum's success is due to what many experts call self-leadership.

## Self-Leadership Defined

Cate Valentine is a leadership consultant based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and associate faculty with the Center for Creative Leadership, a global, nonprofit provider of leadership development. She defines self-leadership as “the willingness, combined with the ability, to evolve yourself, shape your life path, and take ownership of your choices and actions.”

Some people call self-leadership “managing oneself” or use the terms interchangeably. “Personally, I like ‘self-leadership,’” says Valentine, “because managing implies control and leadership is about empowerment.”

Christina DeLucia, director of leadership programs at the Association of American Medical Colleges, agrees. Similarly, she says, “Self-leadership is the process of leading oneself through personal reflection and self-discovery to achieve personal and professional goals. It is cultivating individual effectiveness through a process of self-reflection and continuous learning.”

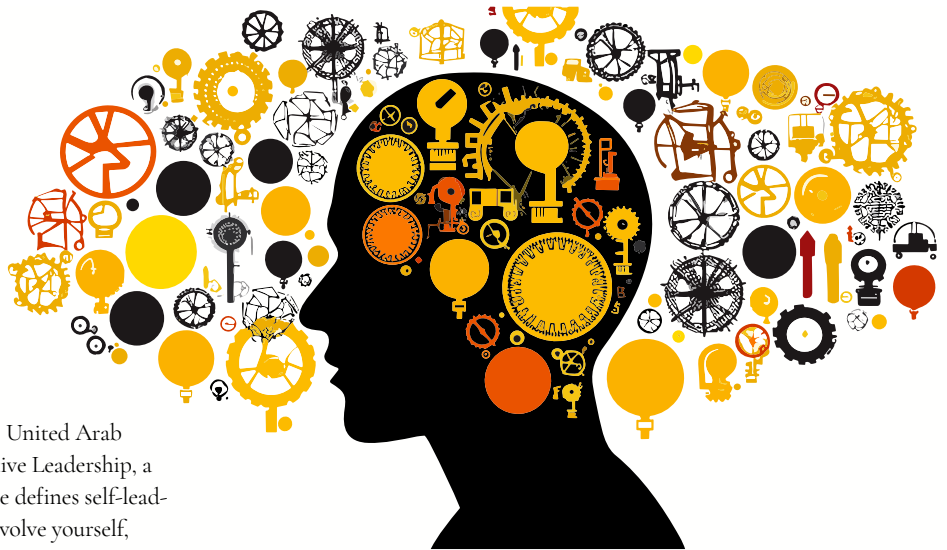
Valentine highlights three key components of self-leadership: a sense of purpose or direction, self-awareness, and learning agility.

## Develop a Sense of Purpose

To develop a sense of purpose, it's essential to know yourself—your values, strengths and weaknesses, priorities, and interests. “Where our values and our talents come together is a good starting point for discovering a meaningful path forward,” says Valentine. Many people think this is easy

or they know themselves well enough already, but it can take time to gain life experiences and reflect on them to truly understand ourselves and for a sense of purpose to emerge.

You also need self-knowledge and time for a successful career. Valentine recommends understanding what career advancement means for you and why you want it. Consider what a promotion or new job would mean for



your life. Most people focus on what they would gain. It's also important to acknowledge what would you lose.

Identify what aspects of your work give you energy and what depletes it. Ask for the chance to do more of what you enjoy and are good at. Find people who have similar interests. Join a community of practice or start one yourself to connect, learn, share resources, find opportunities, and collaborate with others.

If you're playing by the rules, but systems, processes, or people undermine your happiness and success, Valentine says it's important to remember you're not stuck there. You can be brave by walking away gracefully and trying something new.

If you want to make a change, don't be afraid to try. “You have to have the courage to change direction or start again,” says Van Borssum. “People don't do that. They go down a wrong path and say, ‘It didn't work. I screwed up. I'll give up.’ Don't do that.”

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“Self-leadership is the process of leading oneself through personal reflection and self-discovery to achieve personal and professional goals.”

—CHRISTINA DELUCIA

Instead, reframe your thoughts: Now you know what doesn't work. Try a different route.

## Strengthen Your Self-Awareness

Self-awareness can be strengthened through feedback from others and self-reflection. You can obtain feedback through formal work structures,

such as regular performance reviews with your supervisor or 360-degree surveys that integrate input from all levels of people who work with you. You can also complete a self-assessment, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or DiSC, to gain insights about yourself.

While your work environment can be an important source of feedback, it's not the only place. You can also obtain input through other formal or informal channels. DeLucia suggests considering mentoring and coaching relationships.

"Mentorship presents an opportunity to grow, learn and practice new skills, and build a professional network," says DeLucia. Finding the right mentor is essential. That starts with understanding what you're seeking in a mentor and the mentoring experience. Mentors can help in a range of areas, such as increasing your skills and capabilities in a specified area, navigating the workplace environment, directing you to the right resources in and beyond the organization, expanding your knowledge of a field, and providing personal and professional advice.

Toastmasters is another place where you can obtain feedback on your skills and cultivate mentor relationships. Talk with your Vice President Education about the possibilities, even if your club doesn't have a formal mentoring program.

Coaching can help you maximize your professional and personal potential. DeLucia notes that while mentoring can be a bit more directive, an effective coach will focus more on active listening and asking questions that enable you to develop an action plan. "Coaching allows people to uncover solutions themselves and unlocks long-term potential for success," she says.

For Van Borssum, there's a clear path to strengthening your self-awareness. He recommends going toward your greatest fear to find your greatest asset.

"Everything I'm known for now as an adult was my greatest fear as a kid," he says. "I was picked on. I was bullied. I was beaten up because I was skinny and couldn't fight. I had no courage to speak. Turn toward your fears. That's what made a difference in my life."

### Cultivate a Learning Agility

Learning agility involves actively seeking out new experiences to learn from them. But it's not enough just to try something new; you must engage in self-reflection to gain a true understanding of what the experience means for you. Try discussing with trusted others or journaling about what you experienced and its impact on you. "Time must be made for reflection, sensemaking, and integration," says Valentine.

## Tips to Maximize the Effectiveness of Your Workplace Performance Review Process

Most organizations hold annual performance reviews. If your workplace doesn't, recommend the process to management or initiate a conversation with your supervisor.

When done well, the performance review process is an opportunity for you to formally document and discuss achievements, assess skill growth and areas for advancement, and set goals for the coming year that align with the organization's and your own professional priorities.

There should be no surprises during an annual review. Christina DeLucia, director of leadership programs at the Association of American Medical Colleges, emphasizes that to be effective, it should be a continuous process with open communication and a goal of employees' continued development.

Try these approaches to maximize your performance review process:

**Establish a two-way dialogue.** Dedicate time, ideally weekly or monthly, to share updates and discuss insights and challenges with your supervisor about achieving your work portfolio and professional goals. Doing this throughout the year makes preparing for the annual review conversation less burdensome.

**Document achievements.** Maintain documentation of accomplishments, milestones, and praise or gratitude from colleagues or customers to share during performance review conversations. DeLucia calls this a "kudos folder." It can also be a confidence booster during challenging situations.

Cate Valentine, leadership consultant and associate faculty with the Center for Creative Leadership, says it's important to remember that feedback is always subjective, and it's never the whole truth about you. If you feel the feedback is unfair or incomplete, don't try to defend yourself in the moment. Propose a follow-up meeting so you can gather facts and discuss them with a cool head. If you think the process is flawed, make suggestions to improve it.



“Where our values and our talents come together is a good starting point for discovering a meaningful path forward.”

—CATE VALENTINE

Years later, Van Borssum was working on a movie that was shut down. His movie career stopped, and he returned to construction. “I went through a massive depression for over a year,” he says. “I thought, *What can I do to get out of this mess?*”

He started listening to inspirational speakers. He joined Toastmasters.

“Things started to turn around for me, but it was really hard to do,” says Van Borssum. “It took time.”

She also recommends staying curious, which requires letting go of judgment and preconceived ideas. This helps to imagine alternative ways of being and doing. A curious mindset helps you see options you might otherwise have missed.

“At the end of the day, it’s what you make of yourself along the way and the people you meet and the process and all the great experiences you have,” says Van Borssum. “Awards and accreditations mean nothing unless you keep improving. You have to keep learning.”

## Leading Yourself Through Your Career Journey

Early in his career, Van Borssum worked in construction, but wanted to be in the motion picture industry. He would get home from the building site in the afternoon, work out, and eat dinner. From 7 p.m. until 2 a.m., he wrote screenplays and learned how to make films. Then he would go to sleep and get up at 5:30 a.m. for work. He did that every day for years. After he started making enough money from movies, he transitioned to the film industry full time.

Self-leadership guided Van Borssum to movies and now professional speaking. Think about what you want in the next phase of your career and how to strengthen your sense of purpose, self-awareness, and learning agility to obtain your goal.

“Reflect upon what you can do now that will enable you to move closer toward your goals,” says DeLucia. “This process takes time, so have patience, do your research, reflect, and do not be afraid to request feedback from others.”

Remember, you are in charge of your career journey and can make your own path. Use self-leadership to get you where you want to go.

“Self-leadership comes from deep down,” says Van Borssum. “You have to dig. If you can truly look inside that hard place and get inside the guts of your body and find out what makes you tick, you’ll find it there.”

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## Three Things To Do When Asking for Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback are essential skills for everyone. Toastmasters know this and practice at every meeting. Remember to apply those skills at work and wherever you’re engaging in feedback discussions.

Whenever you request feedback, here are three things Cate Valentine, leadership consultant and associate faculty with the Center for Creative Leadership, recommends you do first:

**Be specific.** Instead of making a general request for feedback, identify one key area instead. For example, ask for feedback on how you delegate or communicate.

**Select the right person.** Choose someone you trust who has had first-hand opportunities to observe your behavior.

**Consider the timing.** Give a person enough notice to prepare, and choose a time and place where you won’t be interrupted.

# When You Need to Apologize

Learn the right and the wrong way to make amends.

By Sandra Lee Stuart

## Apologizing shouldn't be that difficult.

You bump into someone in the hallway. You apologize. You arrive at a dinner engagement late. You say you're sorry.

You spill coffee on the person sitting next to you. You say you're really sorry.

## Apologizing is pretty straightforward ... until it isn't.

You said something you didn't realize was offensive, but it was.

A colleague overhears you gossiping about them.

Your child didn't invite a classmate to their birthday party and now that parent is upset.

Here you find the good, the bad, and the oh-so-ugly of apologizing. Those situations can be awkward and full of nuances and pitfalls, and it's often tempting to ignore them and hope they just go away.

For some people, admitting they are wrong makes them feel vulnerable, incompetent, and foolish. Many people choose not to apologize and simply hope the other person forgets or overlooks the transgression.

However, good apologies go a long way toward strengthening relationships and actually make the transgressor look stronger, more trustworthy, and definitely more likable.

## Effective Apologies

What makes for a good apology? Over the years there has been a lot of research on the topic, but it boils down to some fundamental elements.

To begin with, it's important you understand that what you did was unacceptable and take responsibility for your actions. No equivocating.

Then you say you're sorry—and mean it.

Marjorie Ingall and Susan McCarthy, authors of *Sorry, Sorry: The Case for Good Apologies*, argue you must also make it crystal clear what you are apologizing for. Be specific, but not too specific. You don't want to reinforce what it was that caused the grievance in the first place.

The late psychiatrist Dr. Aaron Lazare, an expert on apologizing, said at some point you must express remorse.

"If you regret the error or feel ashamed or humiliated, say so: This is all part of expressing sincere remorse."

There is a tendency to want to explain your actions, perhaps hoping that mitigating circumstances will lessen the sting. Don't, unless you absolutely need to. It's better to leave it be rather than listing off the endless possibilities that went into your comments. Take responsibility without excuses.

Here's an important alert—assure the person you won't repeat the mistake. Then make sure you don't.

## If the Above Offends You ... or How Not To Apologize

So, what constitutes a bad apology?

- Starting with the word "if." *If I offended you . . . If I hurt you . . .* You're throwing partial responsibility back on the offended person. There are no "ifs" involved in a good apology. You did offend the person. You did hurt them.
- Saying, "I want to apologize." That's not an apology. If you say you want to lose weight, that doesn't mean you lost those dreaded extra pounds. Be direct, avoid vagueness, and insipid clichés.
- Using the word "regret." Ingall points out that "regret is about how I feel. We're all regretful. An apology is about how the other person feels, and you have to keep the other person's feelings at top of mind."
- Stating, "I'm sorry you feel that way." Psychologist Dr. Abby Medcalf, an author and podcaster, warns this is basically saying the other person is at fault for being thin-skinned and is far short of an apology.
- Inserting the word "but." As in, "I'm so sorry I called you that name during our fight, but..." The word "but" voids what you said before it. You're making an excuse and blaming, not apologizing.

Once you've accepted that you are at fault for harming someone else, you need to apologize. The question then becomes when. You want to apologize quickly, but not too quickly.

Shoba Sreenivasan and Linda E. Weinberger, psychology professors at University of Southern California





Keck School of Medicine, are the authors of *Psychological Nutrition*. They caution that: “An apology that comes too quickly may be perceived as false. Timing therefore matters. A powerful aspect of an apology is that of asking for forgiveness; however, it is tricky and can backfire if the hurt individual is not psychologically prepared to do so.”

Shonna Waters, vice president of executive advisory at BetterUp, a human transformation company, argues, “Good apologies are especially important at work. An inability to apologize can lead to toxic leadership and toxic workplace culture. When people in the workplace are unable to own up to their mistakes, resentment between colleagues can develop over time.”

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Good apologies go a long way toward strengthening relationships and make the transgressor look stronger, more trustworthy, and definitely more likable.

However, waiting too long is detrimental as well. If too much time passes, the other grievance can grow in both parties minds, making the situation more fraught and uncomfortable.

There’s no hard-and-fast rule for when to apologize. Sometimes you’ll want to wait a few hours, or even give things a day or two to calm down so you can both discuss the situation rationally. Other times, immediately works best.

### Workplace Apologies

While all these rules and suggestions might be good for dealing with family, friends, and acquaintances, there are those who believe that company leaders who apologize to direct reports or subordinates are showing a sign of weakness.

What do you do if you’re the manager and one of your direct reports commits a transgression that affects people outside of your department?

“Being a great team leader means that you’re partly responsible when someone on your team makes a mistake,” says Waters. “Even if you did everything right, the appropriate measure should be to apologize. If you’re apologizing on behalf of someone on your team, don’t make excuses for them. Keep the apology focused on you.”

For example, Waters advises that rather than saying: “They [person on my team] should have used better judgment, and I’m sorry they didn’t.”

She recommends saying instead: “I should have kept a closer eye on what was going on. I’m sorry I failed to do so.”

### Over-Apologizing

Is it possible to apologize too much? Yes, it is.

It’s a case of “too much of a good thing.” If you apologize too frequently, even for minor or perceived grievances, the apologies start sounding insincere and trite. Apologizing too often can also signal a lack of confidence; however, if you find you’re always apologizing for the same thing, it could be a sign of a bigger problem, and something you need to work on.

Women are more likely to over-apologize. Some studies have found it’s because they blame themselves more than men. According to Dr. Juliana Breines, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Rhode Island, “Over-apologizing can stem from being too hard on ourselves or beating ourselves up for things,” something women are more prone to do than men.

Even Barbie, the iconic plastic toy with an improbable figure, has weighed in. In an animated short, she warned young girls that over-apologizing “is a learned reflex, and every time we do it, we take away from our self-confidence.” And who is going to argue with Barbie?

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**Sandra Lee Stuart** is a writer, editor, and the author of 12 books. She lives in Lakewood, Colorado, with her husband, son, and Finnish Lapphund, Finn.

# Political Rhetoric

Name-calling. Back-biting. Gossip-mongering. Ah, 'twas ever thus.

By John Cadley

Remember those innocent, carefree times when I could write about political rhetoric, skewer any political party in equal proportion for their flying, fallacious flapdoodle, and everyone would have a good laugh. Well, as we all know, nobody's laughing anymore.

In fact, you can't even say "politics" without everybody's adrenal glands pumping out stress hormones like a garden hose. This is a shame, because for people who care about language, politics is still the funniest thing going, an enormous seam where miners for comedy gold never fail to strike it rich. No matter how much politics has changed, remember—it's still the same game: Promise people you'll serve their interests so they'll vote you into a position where you can serve your own. That's pretty funny.

It's basically a shell game and political rhetoric is how they cover it up. Think about how many times we've heard "Let me be clear." Just those four words yield a duet of guffaws. *Let me be clear?* I'm sorry—have we *not* let you be clear? Have we yelled, "Please, don't be lucid and transparent! Confuse us with obfuscation, sophistry, and pure drivel!" Or when they say, "Let me be *clear*." Gee, that sounds like being clear is something new for you. Haven't you always been clear? You're not hiding anything, are you?

It's really quite amusing. Here's a person who thinks he or she is scoring points for honesty when in fact they're practically shouting that whatever they're saying at the moment is a sharp deviation from their normal practice of dishonesty. That's funnier than nutrition information on a bag of buttered popcorn.

Now, I know these times are different. (And if I hear "unprecedented" one more time, I'm going to say, "This unprecedented usage of the word unprecedented is setting an unprecedented precedent." Maybe that will get them to shut up and reach for a thesaurus.)

And yes, I know about cancel culture, which is ridiculous. When you cancel a person, it's



final. It would be wiser to postpone them, which offers the possibility of reconciliation. You never know when you might need to borrow their leaf blower.

Back to this matter of today's political discourse. According to the Pew Research Center, 85% of Americans think it's too negative. Well, it's supposed to be. Let us remember that no matter how soaring the rhetoric, the single, immutable message of political discourse is and always has been the

When you cancel a person,  
it's final. It would be wiser  
to postpone them.

same: *Everything's wrong and it's your fault.* What concerns me more is the 15% who apparently *don't* think politics is too negative. What do they want—cage boxing?

Another Pew finding reports that a majority of voters don't think a politician should mislead

the public about his or her opponent's record. Well, of course they shouldn't. That's lying! Unfortunately, America's laws against false advertising only apply to commercial products. General Mills has to print how much sugar is in Honey Nut Cheerios but Senator Claptrap can stuff a hundred pounds of pork into his spending bill and never say a word.

Here's another interesting fact: People don't like it when politicians call each other stupid. That's funny, because *voters* call politicians stupid all the time. Apparently, it's a privilege we prefer to reserve for ourselves. I think the citizenry is being a tad prudish here. Look back to colonial times and you will find General Charles Lee calling George Washington—*George Washington, for heaven's sake!*—a "dark, designing, sordid, ambitious, vain, proud, arrogant, and vindictive knave." I'll take stupid over that any day.

Look back even further and things really come into perspective. As you may recall, Julius Caesar presided over the Roman Senate until he offended its members by wanting too much power. They didn't call him stupid. They simply effected a plot by which they could call him dead. And so it has gone through the ages, with exile, imprisonment, and the executioner's block all acting as the means for settling political differences. Compared to that, stupid seems downright polite.

No, I am not naive. I know today's political differences are a bit more divisive than what we are used to. My own family contains a multitude of political positions. We deal with it at Thanksgiving dinner, where everybody gets to express their views without interruption or criticism. Then we ask: Which is more important, family or politics? If anyone says politics, we still love them ... but they don't get any pie.

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

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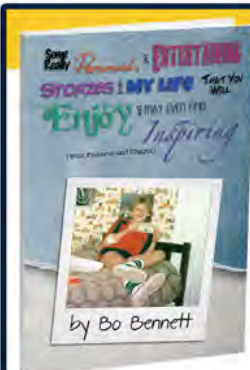
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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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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