

Westside Toastmasters is located in Los Angeles and Santa Monica, California

Eight Steps To Successful Mentoring



Helping a fellow member grow is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the Toastmasters program.

When new members join a club, they undertake a great journey - one filled with traps and triumphs, fear and confidence. They expect to gain specific benefits (usually self-confidence) in return for their membership. The club's obligation is to help new members achieve these goals. Most of the time we just give them their manuals, tell them to pay attention at the meeting and expect them to attain what they seek.

Is it any wonder, given this situation, that many members find themselves back in Kansas without achieving their goals? Has the club helped them as promised?

A guide through the land of Oz can make the difference between success and failure for a new member. Instead of the Good Witch of the North, the Toastmasters guide is a mentor. The mentor is important not only to the new member, but also to the health and development of the club. The more satisfied members are, the longer they stay in the club as active, contributing members.

As a mentor, you should take a proactive approach with your new member. Remember your own first steps of the journey down the yellow brick road of the manual and put yourself in the new member's shoes. Most likely that person used every bit of courage he or she could muster to walk through the door. The thought of delivering these first few manual speeches is terrifying for most new members.

The following guidelines will help your new members progress through the Toastmasters program and reach the Emerald City - ensuring they receive the benefits for which they joined. They also will make mentoring a rich and rewarding experience for you!

1. Look at your club's meeting schedule. Highlight your own duties, and also those of your member. Think of that person's responsibilities as your own. Take ownership of your member's progress.
2. Take time to review your basic manual for the guidelines of your member's next project.
3. Call the member a few weeks before a speech and review the project together. At this point, new members often start regretting their decision to join. Like the cowardly lion, they probably joined hoping the club would wave its magic wand and bestow them with courage. Your job is to demonstrate that courage is not the absence of fear, but doing what one fears most. So help alleviate fear by putting the wheels in motion. For instance, tell them that focusing on the manual project takes attention away from fear. Answer questions and discuss future speech topics. Encourage your member to think - not to worry. Offering a solution is half the battle.
4. Follow up a week later to see if your member is having problems constructing the speech. Help with writing if needed, but don't take on the project yourself. Simply ask questions to guide the member through it. Questions should start with the speech, move to the main ideas behind it and then to the individual points. Brainstorm with the member and explain how to organize.
5. Offer to listen as your member practices the speech. Be sure to provide positive feedback - don't criticize. Tell what you like, what might be improved upon and then show how to improve it. After the speech has been delivered, compliment the new member and offer one (and only one) tip on how to improve. Sending a congratulatory note after the Icebreaker (or another major project) can go a long way toward building a person's confidence and usually is greatly appreciated. If the new member was unhappy with the performance, send him or her a note of reassurance. This could make the difference between the person giving up or continuing on the journey. Make the person want to do better the next time!
6. Offer some tips for controlling nervousness. If you don't have any advice to offer from personal experience, a little research could benefit you, also. The best cure for nervousness is preparation and more preparation. The more prepared people are, the more likely they are to feel comfortable. (Trotting to the lectern, squeezing the chair I'm sitting in and pacing in the back of the room to release excess energy before the speech works for me.)
7. Review the responsibilities involved in I serving as a Toastmaster, Table Topics Master, Evaluator and General Evaluator. Many fledgling Toastmasters are concerned about giving their first evaluation. Flush out their fears by explaining the fundamentals of a good evaluation. The evaluation guide sent with the basic manual offers good tips.
8. Encourage new members to run for club office, participate in contests and district functions. One-on-one encouragement from more experienced Toastmasters can make a difference in the growth and development of fledgling members. The more involved they are, the more likely they are to receive the benefits for which they joined. Facing the Wicked Witch of the West by constantly testing and stretching their comfort zones is the only way they will improve.

While serving as a mentor usually does not take much time or effort, the responsibilities are great. You have the opportunity to make a profound and lasting difference in another member's life. Watching a fellow Toastmaster grow is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the Toastmaster program.

When your member decides to click his or her heels together three times and return to Kansas, it will be because they received the benefits for which they joined. The gift of self-confidence is one that will benefit them for the rest of their life. You get the satisfaction of having helped make it happen.

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