

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | DECEMBER 2024

TOASTMASTER®



Joy TO THE WORLD

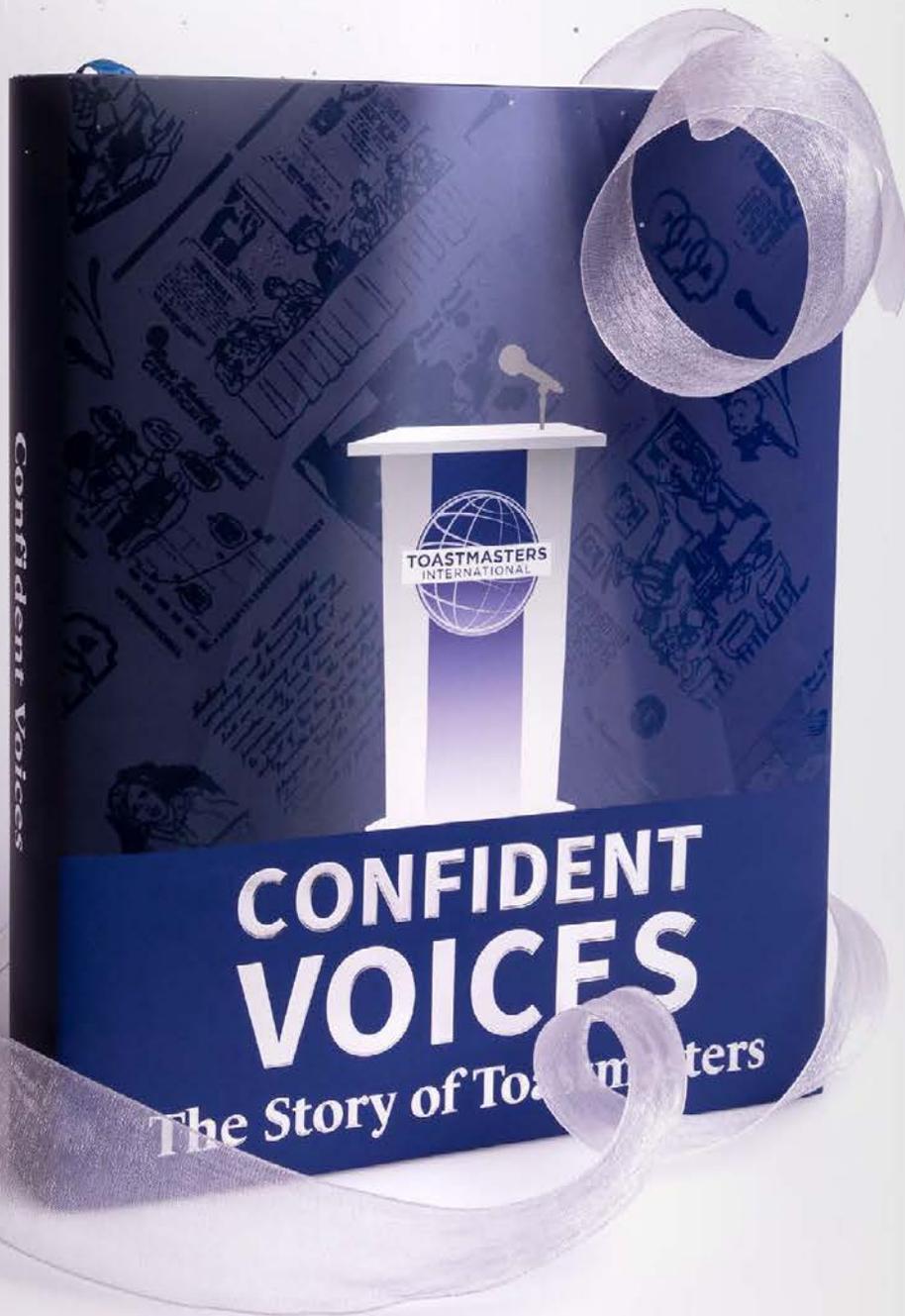
INSIDE:

Celebrating All Holidays
This Season

Turn a Mishap Into
a Speech Topic



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Making a Difference

My Toastmasters club meeting is something I look forward to every week. It's a place where I connect with

old friends, make new ones, and experience remarkable speeches that are both entertaining and educational.

Every meeting offers the opportunity to learn something new, whether it's about the speaker or the topic they present.

What stands out most in these meetings is the diversity of members. Some are seasoned speakers, while others may be at the beginning of their journey, still finding their comfort in speaking before an audience.

Yet, within just six months of active participation, the transformation is undeniable. Members who were once reserved become more confident, engage more actively, and show clear improvements in their self-esteem and communication skills. "Toastmasters changed my life" is a common sentiment among longtime Toastmasters.

Another common refrain you hear from those who see the value of Toastmasters, myself included, is, "I wish I had found Toastmasters sooner." One of the silver linings of the COVID pandemic is that we've expanded our skills and adapted to new ways of meeting. Now meetings can be held in person, online, or in hybrid formats. This increased flexibility means that anyone can join Toastmasters.

For those skeptical about whether public speaking skills can truly be developed through

online meetings, I like to share this story of a fellow club member who joined just before the pandemic.

He had attended only a few in-person meetings before we transitioned entirely to virtual

sessions, so his Toastmasters journey was entirely online using the Pathways program. Barely a year and a half after he joined, the state of New Jersey (where our club meets) lifted its pandemic restrictions. He was then asked to officiate his niece's wedding, which had over 100 guests.

The ceremony was a huge success, and he later wrote to me and the club officers with the subject line, "THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!" He mentioned receiving numerous compliments, including from his wife. As he shared in his email, "My wife, with whom I shared no info beforehand, was particularly effusive in her praise. It was very nice, though a little irksome how surprised she was regarding how well I did! To be fair, she hasn't seen firsthand how much Toastmasters has helped me."

Fellow Toastmasters, we all know Toastmasters works! If you haven't already, I encourage you to take the [Plus One Pledge](#) and help spread the benefits of this amazing program to even more people!

Radhi Spear, DTM
International President



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Making a Positive Impact

By Toastmaster magazine staff

Snapshot



Members of **Eaton Valinhos, Brazil Toastmasters Club** in São Paulo, Brazil, celebrate achieving President's Distinguished Club status at a Toastmasters event in Brazil.

Traveling Toastmaster



Vijayalakshmi Soundararajan, DTM, Mohanakrishnan G, DTM, and Aswathy Rajan, DTM, all from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, visit Universal Studios Hollywood after attending the 2024 International Convention in Anaheim, California.

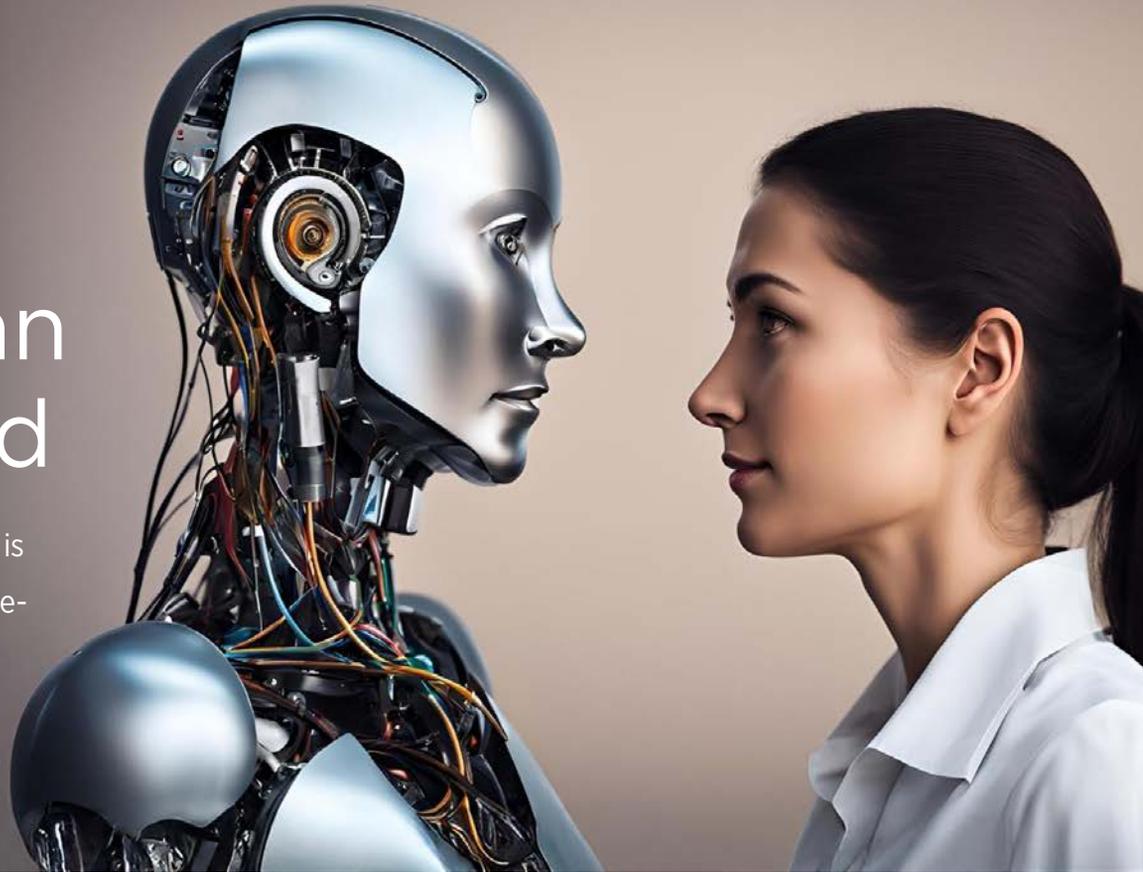


Ashwin Iyer, DTM, and Anand Iyer, both of Mulund, Maharashtra, India, visit the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, during a family trip.

How to Stand Out in an AI World

While artificial intelligence is here to stay, it's an enhancement, not a replacement.

By Victor David



As machines have become capable of doing human work—think computers and self-driving cars—people keep pushing the next frontier of technology. Recently that frontier has been artificial intelligence, or AI.

With its rapidly developing technology, AI is now not only able to mimic human-written text, but can also sound empathetic, wise, humorous, and even flirty. Who needs a real person when we can get it all from a machine?

But we will always need real people, perhaps even more so amid the surging momentum of AI. Despite all that it can do, AI is inferior to a human's complex problem-solving capabilities and deep array of emotions. It cannot exist without humans.

The Value of Human Values

An AI program can quickly provide an estimated best response out of thousands, perhaps millions, of examples at its disposal. And AI gets it incredibly right, almost every time.

While a person may be limited or influenced by their personal beliefs, values, experiences, and ways of dealing with situations, an AI program

has no preconceived opinions. And that's exactly the issue: Anything we care for as humans, be it a value, right, or personal experience, is only a concept, an abstraction for an AI program. It can *sound* empathetic and enthusiastic, but deeply felt grief, joy, love, or awe means as much to artificial intelligence as pavement, earwax, or plutonium means to you: not much more than a descriptor.

That ability to feel the meaning of a word, and on top of that, to pronounce that word, the pause, intonation, attention, and emphasis it's been given, can only be understood by a real human.

A listener to your speech may feel touched, awed, and inspired. This skill to move an audience rather than logically arrange words by estimation and probability in the hopes it might awe is what makes humans stand out in an AI world. With an overload of computing power available for everyone, our soft skills are what make us stand out more than ever before.

Artificial intelligence programs can endlessly compare, analyze, assess, and rank human traits like communication, teamwork, leadership, and creativity. They can even write about these traits in detail. However, only humans can truly experience them. That experiential factor is our leading

I've tried having ChatGPT write my Toastmasters speech, and the result is mediocre at best, a bit robotic, and quite generic, even after a few iterations.

edge over AI, and no one can take that away.

Consider nuanced questions: Should the business expand or reorganize? Does the red or yellow dress suit you better? Is candidate A or B a better fit for the team? AI can only list pros and cons and, at most, make a logical analysis, while a person has the experience and complex thinking that AI does not have.

The "Human Line"

It's becoming more and more apparent that search engines and social media have more information about us than we are likely comfortable

Anything we care for as humans, be it a value, right, or personal experience, is only a concept, an abstraction for an AI program.

with—information we've freely typed in, as well as what's gleaned from algorithmic probabilities and the cookie crumbs of information we leave behind on the internet.

This has led to the coining of a new term: "the creepy line." The phrase was uttered by Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google, as he attempted to explain the point up to where large data platforms and IT companies felt they could reasonably go without crossing a line—that line being drawn partly out of ethical concerns, partly to save face with the public.

Similarly, there is what I would call the "human line": AI can synthesize all the bits of information around empathy, wisdom, human dynamics, and insight up to the point where it can reasonably estimate a human response—and no further.

Just as people fear that search engines and social media will cross over the creepy line and manipulate our opinions and buying decisions, there is a fear that AI will secretly become more intelligent than us, even gain the intelligence to outsmart us so we continue to think we are in control while in reality, AI has taken over.

I understand the scare, but even though AI can be cunningly smart, it will never be able to actually cross that human line and show genuine empathy based on feelings and personal experiences. Nor can it come up with something truly profound that's not a re-work of existing knowledge.

Of course, developers constantly train AI to cover up its human line, and they continue to shave off the sharp edges. For instance, you may have noticed that ChatGPT responds in a chattier and more apologetic manner than a person would. Most likely, this is a cover-up of its human line, or perhaps even this will improve over time. However, while the human boundary is not solid, it will always remain a line.

No one can feel and think like you, express and create like you, and therefore speak and engage like you. I've tried having ChatGPT write my Toastmasters speech, and even after a few iterations, the

result is mediocre at best, a bit robotic, and quite generic. Even though AI can analyze endless examples and estimate what an audience likes to hear, I don't anticipate that a great, motivating speech could ever be written by it.

The best way to utilize the endless computing power of AI is to shake up your own thinking. AI can act as a sounding board for ideas. You can turn to it for help when you are stuck on finding the right angle to your point, or if you need help brainstorming ideas for another point in your speech.

Wondering about a way to say things differently? Ask AI to come up with 10 variations.

Curious if there is a speech in a life experience on your mind? Ask AI if it can come up with a few structures.

Not all of AI's suggestions are brilliant, but they can tickle your imagination and help you string a useful new approach together. Then it is your turn to shine making these content ideas into something that comes from you.

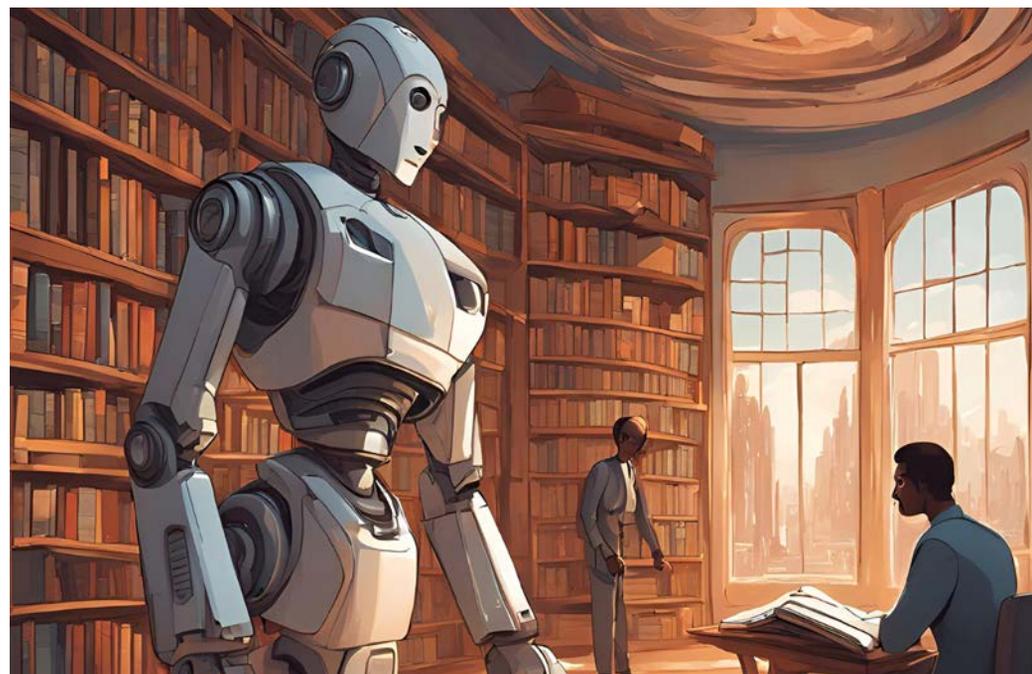
Recently, AI was able to help me come up with a new angle for my Toastmasters speech, navigate a difficult situation at work, and tactically negotiate rental agreements with my landlord. In all three situations, AI helped me to refresh my viewpoint. Even though it doesn't have human feelings, it can mechanically indicate where you are stuck, and how you can improve from there.

AI can beat a human on computing power, but its responses will always sound calculated. AI can come up with an almost never-ending list of solutions, but only a human can pick the right one. And while AI can estimate how you feel, only a human can connect to the feeling.

As a sounding board, AI can help improve your communication skills at work and at Toastmasters, but only you can lift those nudges into true creativity and surpass the human line by being you.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This article was written without the aid of AI (but the images were made with AI).*

Victor David is a Past President of the City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, Australia, where he works for the government as a senior communications advisor. He is founder of aixplainer.com, a platform that helps people to understand AI better. Contact him at victor@aixplainer.com.



Don't Sweat the Speech Contest

How competition made me a braver and better speaker.

By Lin Hitt

Participating in a speech contest worked like a remedy, curing 80% of my stage fright like magic.

Sometimes I have to make decisions in a split second just to keep my energy flow going. I call this a burst of courage triggered by impulse. Such snap decisions are sometimes irrational. Deciding to enter the 2024 International Speech Contest while I was in a sauna room on a cold January day was one such irrational decision.

My head might have been overheated from the sizzling hot rocks to have such a crazy idea, but I quickly grabbed my phone and emailed Amy Hernandez, who at the time was the Club President of the Priority Speakers Club in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As soon as I hit the “Send” button, I wished I could recall the message.

To make matters worse, Amy replied within five minutes. “Great, you are in!”

There was no way I could eat my own words. There is a Chinese saying that means “Jumping on a tiger is easy, but getting off is something else.”

It took guts for this shy, non-native English speaker to join Toastmasters. (Taiwanese is my first language and Mandarin Chinese is my second language.) It took even more guts to enter the speech contest. All things considered, the stakes were high.

I would no longer be shielded by the kind comments of my club members and mentors. Instead, I would be judged critically as a speech contestant. This automatically produced stress. But the process could also help me develop a tough skin.

It's appropriate that I was in a sauna room when I decided to enter the contest. Sauna and stage share a common theme for me. For one thing, they raise my heart rate and induce sweats. The sauna is also a place where people share icebreakers—not the formal kind we deliver in Toastmasters, but the ones where we reveal our most private thoughts to other people about different life situations.

I've made many friends in the sauna room, and many of my speeches were born in the sauna and later delivered on the stage.

I joined Toastmasters in 2010 to learn public speaking after an embarrassing presentation at work—one that I totally bombed. When I joined, my goal was just to not shiver when standing in front of a group of people.



Lin Hitt



Do you suffer from stage fright? If you are in the mood for a growth spurt, enter a Toastmasters speech contest. I learned so much in my contest journey. I practiced my speech over and over again, including at other clubs that I visited. This helped me improve my writing and speaking skills. I took notes on the speeches of other contestants, and I learned from them.

I placed first at the Area and Division levels of the International Speech Contest in District 13 (Northeastern United States). The taste of those wins pumped up my confidence to stand on the District stage. I didn't win there, as I was not as good as I thought. But I won my own race. My skin grew thicker than ever. I gained more confidence and courage as a non-native English speaker.

I loved the English language with all my heart, but English did not always love me back. I got easily confused with grammar and made mistakes all the time. Practicing for the speech contest forced me to use the right verb tense consistently and enunciate words clearly, so my spoken words could be music to the judges' ears.

Participating in a speech contest was like a dose of medicine for me, and it worked like a remedy, curing 80% of my stage fright like magic. The other 20% will always stay with me as a tiny butterfly in my stomach that never goes away—and I can live with that.

The speech contest gave me the push I needed to become a better speaker on a larger stage. The most important lesson I learned was to break through my own ceiling with a surge of confidence.

Becoming a Toastmaster has turned out to be a triple win for me. I've learned to speak and write American English, overcome my fear of public speaking, and even deliver a speech in Chinese at a moment's notice.

I also have another brave story to tell. I ended up succeeding Amy and became the President of the Priority Speakers Club for the 2024–2025 program year.

Lin Hitt is a member of two clubs in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and one in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is a coach for the online *Elegant Speakers & Listeners (ESL) Toastmasters Club*.

Lessons From a Toastmaster

Uncover 10 tips to make the most of your membership.

By Bill Brown, DTM



There is a lot to Toastmasters, such as speaking, leadership, and other skills that translate outside of the organization.

I've learned a lot since joining in 2006. Some lessons I have passed on through my [Toolbox articles](#) in the *Toastmaster*, but many topics can be addressed in just a short paragraph. Let's take a look at some of those.

Here are my top 10 tips for Toastmasters.

1 Take the time to learn new skills.

Public speaking is more than just opening your mouth and talking. It involves planning, organization, word selection, and delivery. And there are many subcategories under each of these. If you want to be an effective speaker and accomplish an objective, then dedicate yourself to learning new skills and becoming excellent in each of these categories.

2 Speech delivery can take you to a whole new level.

There are some objectives common to each speech. First, you want your listeners to stay awake. Second, you want them to understand what is truly important in your message. And finally, you want them to take some sort of action, even if it is just caring about the information you give them. This is where [speech delivery](#) comes in. While words communicate information, delivery communicates emotion. It moves the heart, which is where decisions often come from.

3 Seek to take giant steps. The Toastmasters program gives you the opportunity to grow. Do you want to be slightly better than you are now, or do you want to truly transform

your speaking? You have a choice. Strive to have a breakthrough experience with every speech.

4 If you are an officer, take the time to learn your position.

The leadership structure of a Toastmasters club is designed to support members and aid in the club's success. It can be easy to agree to sit on the Club Executive Committee and then do nothing, but it's important to know what your responsibilities are. Know what your tasks are by learning your role.

5 Use the resources Toastmasters provides.

There is a wealth of information in the [Toastmasters Resource Library](#). Some of it relates to the education program and some pertains to the officers. But there are also a lot of resources that can help you grow your speaking skills. Take time to learn what the organization offers.

6 Toastmasters can help you uncover new skills—beyond speaking.

From time to time, you may be asked to take on a project that is outside of your comfort zone. For example, years ago I was asked to write an article for the *Toastmaster* magazine. I did not view myself as a writer, but I said "yes" anyway. That ultimately resulted in me writing this monthly column. What hidden skills can you discover?

7 Don't rely on one person to do it all.

Some members band together to handle all the club meeting functions. Others rely on one person to be the chief, cook, and bottle-washer. I have been in both of those situations.

The second option is not conducive to a strong club. It can also cause burnout for the person in that role. Don't let this happen in your club.

8 Don't neglect joint club officer meetings.

Occasionally, your District may have meetings where the various club officers share information. This is in addition to Club Officer Training. Attend as many of these events as you can. It will help you become a better club leader.

9 Toastmasters is an opportunity to expand your network.

Don't be reluctant to get involved in Area, Division, and District activities. Those who attend are leaders. They are good people to know and to learn from, and who knows where these connections may lead.

10 Toastmasters is a great way to break into a new hometown.

Four years ago I moved to a small town in a new state. I didn't know anybody here. The local club gave me instant access to the community. If you are moving, get involved in a local club as soon as you can. It will make the transition so much easier.

Hopefully these tips encourage you and challenge you to strive for excellence. They have for me. Happy Toastmastering.

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.

Focus Your Presentation on Solutions, Not Challenges

Flip a difficult topic into a message of hope and opportunity.

By Joel Schwartzberg



None of us enjoys delivering challenging messages. Unfortunately, at some point, many of us find ourselves needing to present less-than-desirable information or describe ominous obstacles to progress. Perhaps your business or organization is experiencing tough times, a current course of action isn't working, or you simply need to address the perils in your path.

Whatever the reason, communicators of bad news are prone to a common mistake: Rather than trying to inspire their team with solutions, they overemphasize obstacles in a way that severely diminishes the message's purpose and intended impact, leaving the audience feeling overwhelmed and disengaged.

A speech with this misplaced priority might be constructed like this:

1. The challenge
2. Challenge consequence #1
3. Challenge consequence #2
4. Challenge consequence #3
5. What we're doing to solve the challenge
6. What the audience can do to support the solution

This framework is problematic because rather than focusing on ways to solve a problem (the

primary purpose of leadership communication), it dwells on obstacles standing in the way of that solution. In the aforementioned structure, over half of the presentation is spent describing the challenge before it even starts proposing ways to address it.

The problem of burying solutions under challenges arose when I was counseling a client, Robert, who developed innovative ways to improve the quality of public schools in under-resourced communities. His presentations led with data on severe gaps in educational achievement, enormous challenges in attracting talented teachers, public safety concerns, and the devastating consequences of economic inequality and food insecurity. By the time he finished this bleak report, he was halfway through the entire speech.

While these elements established the need for his solution, he focused on them for far too long, weakening the impact of his most valuable takeaway: the breakthrough ideas.

Flip Obstacles Into Opportunities

So how do you balance challenges and solutions in a presentation? By turning obstacles into opportunities. Replace the first presentation structure with this one:

1. The challenge
2. What we're doing to solve the challenge
3. How the solution overcomes challenge consequence #1
4. How the solution overcomes challenge consequence #2
5. How the solution overcomes challenge consequence #3
6. What the audience can do to support the solution

In this structure, the most important takeaway—a solution—is mentioned early and is consistently referenced throughout the speech. Each assertion of “how this is bad” is flipped into “how we're making this bad thing better.”

In Robert's case, we revised the speech to convey the challenge much more briefly and quickly transition to how reimagining school leadership and community involvement can increase economic parity and food security.

Notice the adjustment of the challenge-focused phrases “economic inequality” and “food insecurity” into the more idealized conditions of “economic parity” and “food security” enabled by the solution. It's the same information, reprioritized and restructured to direct the audience, not depress them.

Other examples of flipped messaging:

- Replacing “The carbonated beverage marketplace is saturated with soda brands” with “How our brand stands out in a crowded beverage marketplace.”
- Replacing “Government funding for cancer research is at an all-time low” with “We’re supplementing historically low government funding with other sources of financial support.”
- Replacing “Climate change will eventually destroy the planet” with “Our climate change awareness campaign can help save the planet.”

Send the Right Message

I frequently see presentations focus on the challenges of a situation, not just in the content of presentations but in their topics and titles. It’s better to flip the narrative. For example, the following topics and titles could easily switch from negative to positive, from gloomy to galvanizing.

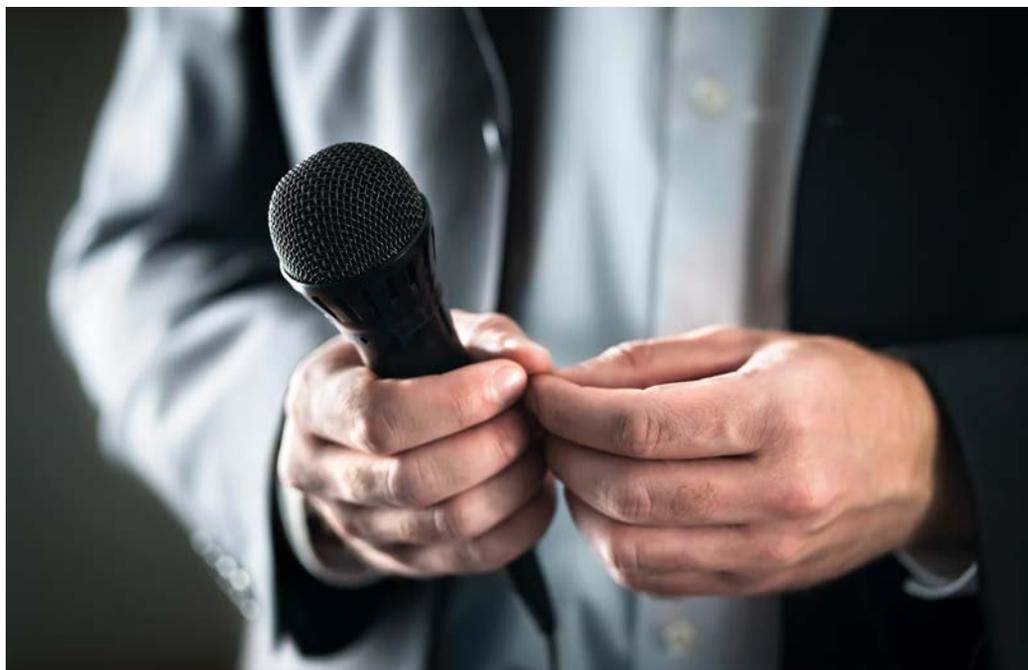
Gloomy:

- The tragedy of animal homelessness
- The flaws in our juvenile justice system
- The devastating cultural consequences of the pandemic

Galvanizing:

- How innovative shelter programs give homeless animals second chances
- How modern rehabilitation programs are reforming our juvenile justice system
- How to undo the cultural consequences of the pandemic

These titles are more inspiring and inviting because they’re hopeful—and expressions of hope and optimism attract audiences more effectively than expressions of despair and doom. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the 1963 March on Washington did not focus primarily on pervasive prejudice and discrimination but on his hope and encouragement for equal opportunity. U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address didn’t stop with the admonishment, “Ask not what your country can do for you,” but forcefully encouraged civil service and responsibility: “Ask what you can do for your country.” Each spoke predominantly—and memorably—of hope, correction, and solution.



By staying in solution mode, you’re going beyond delivering information and education—you’re encouraging your audience to be the best they can be.

Apply the “Hope Hack”

The word “hope” comes up often when leaders talk about solutions that aren’t fully proven yet. To incorporate the word in a message effectively, it should be used as a noun, not a verb.

Used as a noun, “hope” has baked-in optimism (“This milestone gives me hope.”), whereas hope as a verb is merely a desire with limited faith in the outcome (“I hope this situation improves.”). It’s the difference between pointing the way (projecting leadership, confidence, and vision) and crossing your fingers (conveying fear and admitting that the situation is beyond your control).

Extra Benefits for Leaders

Being a problem solver versus a problem describer is particularly beneficial for leaders, because it sustains your team’s morale, reinforces their sense of purpose, and elevates your own reputation as someone they can trust to

steer the ship, not just marvel at the water.

Remember: The more time you spend on a point, the better it will be remembered.

The more optimistic your point, the more it will inspire.

The more your point recommends a solution, the more likely an audience will want to embrace it.

By staying in solution mode, whether you are presenting or talking about your presentation, you’re going beyond delivering information and education—you’re encouraging your audience to do the most and be the best they can be.

Joel Schwartzberg is a professional speaker, presentation coach, and author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team and Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on X @[TheJoelTruth](#).

Celebrating the Holidays in a Multicultural Workplace

8 tips to make everyone feel welcome.

By Dean Foster

Your organization's success depends upon the hard work of its people, which is why it's important to ensure that everyone feels valued, seen, and respected. This is especially true when bringing people together for special occasions, such as end-of-year holiday celebrations. Increasingly, many of us work in multicultural workplaces, so the variety of ways to commemorate the season needs to be welcomed into the celebration.

Just as having people from a variety of cultures brings new ways of thinking into

the organization, holiday celebrations can be more interesting when you incorporate new ways of celebrating.

Partying only with Santa and his reindeer-sweatered helpers at a Christmas party does not represent other cultural holidays. Ignoring the different ways people on your team celebrate does not communicate "I understand and value you, and thank you for your unique contributions to the team." In the workplace, it's important to make everyone feel valued and welcomed.

As someone who has spent more than 25 years as an intercultural consultant, I've gathered some tips to help bring your holiday celebrations into the global 21st century.

1 Understand that holiday symbols vary for different cultures.

While many people enjoy the well-known symbols of the season, such as Santa Claus, red ribbons, tree lights, and decorations, don't assume everyone understands them or is automatically comfortable with them.

Some people might have recently come from a culture where these traditions are not as well-known, and they may be eager to join in the fun ... or they may not. For example, alcohol is often a part of the holiday celebrations in Western cultures but would likely not be in many cultures in the Middle East and Africa.

2 Learn about the various holidays your coworkers celebrate.

When planning a celebration for your organization, be sure to reach out to potential event attendees, and non-judgmentally and sincerely inquire how they celebrate the holidays in their respective cultures. There are likely special foods, traditions regarding gifts (especially for children), clothing styles, and holiday activities that may be different from what you are familiar with.

Enjoy the opportunity to learn something about your colleagues that you might not have known before! A group within your team can be tasked with coordinating this kind of outreach.



Enjoy the opportunity to learn something about your colleagues that you might not have known before!

3 Avoid using religious aspects in your celebration.

For many cultures, end-of-year holiday celebrations do not have any religious connotation. Instead, the celebration is more about recognizing the end of one year and sending best wishes for the new year coming up. For other cultures, holidays are celebrated because of a specific religion. However, religious beliefs are personal, so unless someone asks, religious traditions should remain private activities and not be included in your organization's holiday events.

4 Recognize other cultural holidays.

End-of-year holidays are big annual celebrations in the West; however, other cultures have their own major holiday celebrations. For example, New Year's celebrations occur at different times throughout the year in many other countries, such as Iran, Israel, Ethiopia, many parts of Africa, and most of East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam).

Additionally, in India, Diwali is a much more important holiday than New Year's or Christmas, and in most of Latin America, Three Kings Day is a more important holiday than Christmas Day. Even Christmas itself is celebrated at different times, and with different traditions around the world.

5 Celebrate various holidays throughout the year.

Why wait until the end-of-year holidays roll around? A great way to keep the "Welcome" sign lit throughout the year, and for the organization to benefit from other cultural ways of thinking, working, and solving problems, is to celebrate the different cultural traditions of team members all year long.

Why not gather a team together to find out about the special holidays and traditions that mean so much to your colleagues? Ask them what makes these holidays special. Why are they important, and what should others know about them? Then invite these individuals to

participate in an event hosted by the office that celebrates these holidays when they roll around on the calendar.

6 Determine when to host a holiday celebration.

In such a multicultural world, important events can happen year-round. Be prepared to schedule your holiday celebration far enough in advance so a convenient date can be selected that does not conflict with other culturally important dates around the same time. For example, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are celebrated over several days, often around the time when end-of-year events are held. Ensure the dates and times of your celebration do not interfere with significant holidays, family events, or religious activities.

7 Share the details of the event.

Before the celebration, share details about the event with attendees, including planned activities, the dress code, and who is invited. Some people might need to be informed about how to dress for events that are not common in their home country.

Additionally, different cultures may also socialize differently. Some colleagues may come from cultures where single men and women do not typically interact at social events. By sharing the details of the event beforehand, you can help attendees prepare and feel more comfortable.

8 Plan virtual celebrations for remote employees to attend.

Holiday celebrations are usually in-person events, but in today's global world, your closest colleagues may be thousands of miles away, with most of your time spent with coworkers on the screen, not down the hall. So, it is important to create holiday celebrations that can be experienced virtually, as well as face-to-face.

With a little planning, you can schedule a virtual celebration around a specific holiday that may be of special importance as a way of building team spirit. Perhaps a colleague from



India might like to share the meaning of Diwali with the team on a Zoom presentation. They could even share a favorite Diwali recipe ahead of time, and suggest participants bring their dish to the online meeting! This is an exciting way to keep the celebration spirit going all year long, and around the world.

Keep in mind that these activities work well for all teams, whether you have a very diverse, multicultural team or not (if you don't today, you likely will tomorrow). Having strong cross-cultural communication skills and interactions is vital in today's global world. We will all be working increasingly with people from cultures different than our own, and while they are working hard to understand our ways, we need to assure them that they—and their unique ways of working, seeing, thinking, and being—are welcomed ... and celebrated!

Dean Foster is founder and president for over 25 years of the world's largest premier intercultural consulting company, and the author of five books on global culture and work. He is also host of the podcast *Oops, Your Culture's Showing!* Learn more at deanfosterglobal.com.

Finding Story-Worthy Moments

Collect memories and speech material this holiday season.

By Megan Preston Meyer

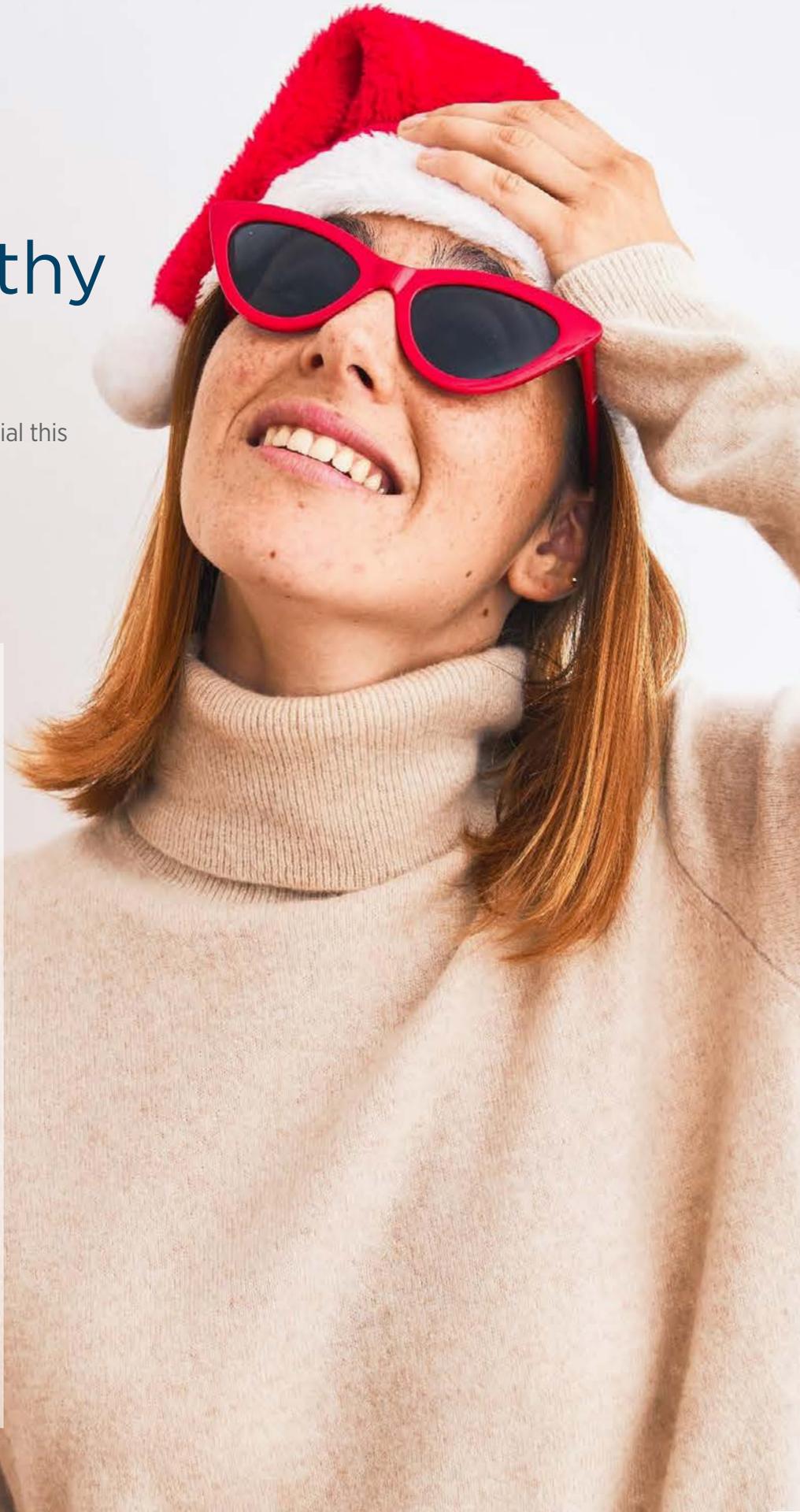
Holidays are rife with memorable moments, and some stand out more than others. For me, it was Christmas morning 1994. Snowdrifts reflected the weak winter sun, sending it streaming into our living room through frostbitten windows. The tree lights glowed brightly, carols sang out from the CD player's speakers, and my sister and I were opening the last of our presents.

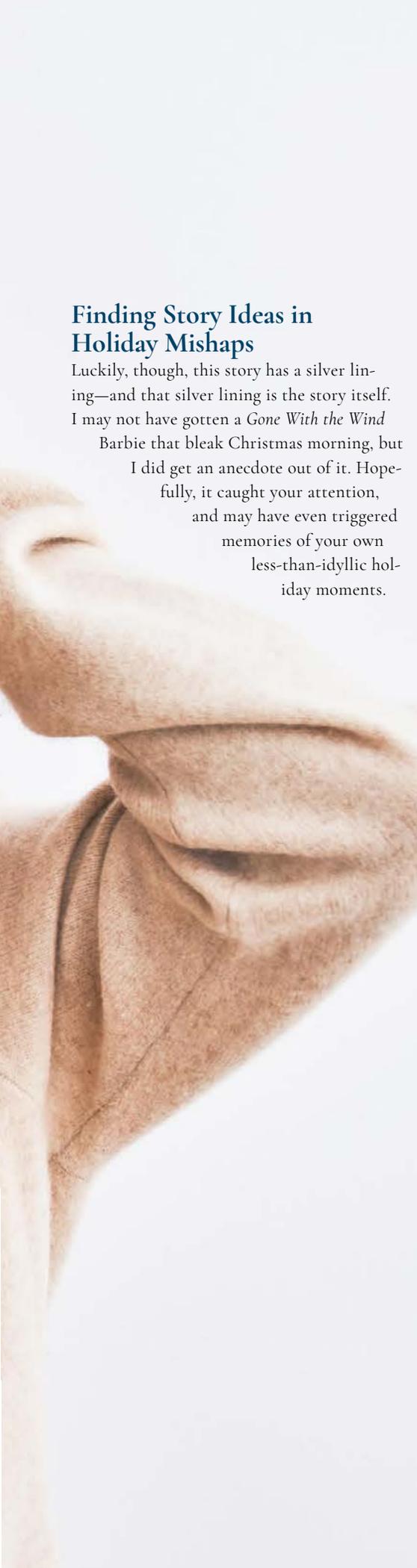
I knew what mine would be. It was all I had wanted—the only thing on my list. A *Gone With the Wind* Hollywood Legends Barbie doll, dressed in Scarlett O'Hara's barbecue frock, with its jaunty straw hat and dainty parasol. The white-and-green gossamer hoop-skirted dress was as wide as my smile as I tore open the wrapping in anticipation.

But then, in an instant, my mood turned less merry.

I don't remember what my final gift was—something thoughtful and fun, I'm sure—but it wasn't my barbecue-frocked doll. As I was coming to grips with this tragedy, my sister opened her last present. It was, of course, in the ultimate of ironies, a *Gone With the Wind* Barbie.

"Santa must have thought you'd like the other present better," I recall my parents saying. "And maybe he ran out of ideas for your little sister." I was dejected, and my parents felt terrible. It wasn't the best Christmas ever.





Finding Story Ideas in Holiday Mishaps

Luckily, though, this story has a silver lining—and that silver lining is the story itself.

I may not have gotten a *Gone With the Wind* Barbie that bleak Christmas morning, but I did get an anecdote out of it. Hopefully, it caught your attention, and may have even triggered memories of your own less-than-idyllic holiday moments.

That's because stories help us connect.

"In the Toastmaster context, you often need to win over the audience, and you can do this with a little anecdote [to] make people smile," says Jyoti Guptara, a Switzerland-based organizational storytelling consultant and founder of Guptara Strategy and Story. "Think, 'What are things that people can relate to?' Christmas is the perfect opportunity, because everyone else is going through the same awkwardness, the same travel, stress, juggling the same responsibilities."

It's safe to say that this dynamic applies to all holidays. Ideally, most of your experiences will be joyful and bright, but a few may be disappointing, awkward, or stressful. Whether it's gift-giving gone wrong or a botched batch of cookies, a flight cancellation or a sprain on the ski hill, there's always a chance for a less-than-fond memory. If you can look at a mishap and say, "At least it's a story!" you'll come out of it happier—and with speech material to boot.

Look for Story-Worthy Situations

Stories are everywhere—we just need to notice them. "It's really important that we can prime our subconscious to recognize story-worthy moments, because we experience them all the time, especially around occasions like [the holidays]," says Guptara, "and yet we neglect to capture them, because we're not thinking in terms of story." A simple mindset shift can help.

When we look at the world through a storytelling lens, we start to see things differently. *Everything* is potential material, from the joy that wells up, when you see the glow of a candle to the irritation you tamp down when your train is delayed. Any time there's emotion, either positive or negative, pay attention—if you're reacting strongly to that situation, others might too.

As you slip more and more into the storytelling mindset, you may start to see story potential in everything.

"One thing that can help you spot interesting story material [is to ask yourself], 'Why am I feeling so anxious, upset, or thoughtful?'" says Guptara. "That's a good clue for what could be an interesting story."

We as humans react to emotional messages; the stronger the emotion, the more easily we can relate. We love a feel-good story, especially around the holidays, but uncomfortable moments can grab us, too. Think of that awkward conversation during your family's holiday dinner or that embarrassing moment when you gave someone the wrong gift.

"Some of the best stories are when we cringe," says Guptara, so we don't need to completely avoid awkward anecdotes. Add some humor to your speech to make sure your audience isn't *too* uncomfortable and use the emotion to make your message resonate.

Store Your Stories

As you identify anecdotes that might spark a connection with an audience, make sure you have a way to collect them. In his bestselling book *Business Storytelling From Hype to Hack*, Guptara suggests creating a Story Bank, a physical or digital repository where you can store your material. Whether you use a paper notebook, a document on your computer, or a note-taking or voice-recording app on your phone, the important thing is to start building up your supply base.

As you slip more and more into the storytelling mindset, you may start to see story potential in everything. Some experiences will clearly warrant inclusion in your Story Bank, while some may feel important but you don't yet know why. That colorful menorah you saw in someone's front window or the intricate Diwali decoration at a front door? Create a section labeled "Fragments" and add it there. "Even if it's not a full story," Guptara says, "maybe it has the seed of a story in it." Review your fragments every so often to see if your seeds have grown.

If you're not sure whether a particular anecdote is worth recording, err on the side of including it anyway. "Don't think of it [in terms of] 'Is this a good story?' because that gets us into 'judgment mode,'" says Guptara. "That's not what we want. We want to start off curious, with a sense of wonder and discovery and adventure." A sense of wonder is a wonderful thing to have during the holidays; if it can help you recognize potential speech material, even better.

Mine the Moment for Meaning

Having a storyteller's mindset can be especially useful when we find ourselves right in the middle of a story-worthy situation. Consider a recent business trip that Guptara took. He experienced all the worst that travel can offer—delays, cancellations, red-eye flights. But he still managed to make the best of it. He took a step back and asked, "The kind of character that I want to read about, that I want to admire—how would he react in this situation?"

The answer allowed him to treat the disruption as an adventure, talking with his fellow pas-

A sense of wonder is a wonderful thing to have during the holidays; if it can help you recognize potential speech material, even better.

sengers and having fun. "Thinking of it as a story ... helped me respond differently than I might have done otherwise." This perspective can help us be more resilient in negative circumstances, as well as more present in positive circumstances.

By approaching the holidays with a storyteller's mindset, with a sense of wonder and a Story Bank at the ready, you're setting yourself up to fully experience the season—and to be able to share it with others through your speeches.

(Un-)Wrapping Up

I shared the story of that long-ago Christmas with my parents a couple of summers ago. We had just watched *Gone With the Wind* together, and the subject of the Barbie debacle came up. I was over the disappointment, I assured them;

30 years of emotional distance can cure many wounds. They apologized for Santa's callousness, and we all had a good laugh.

That laughter came back on Christmas that year, when I unwrapped my final gift. There, fresh from eBay, was my *Gone With the Wind* Barbie. That seed of a story from three decades before had already had a silver lining ... and now it had a happy ending.

Megan Preston Meyer is the author of the *Supply Jane* and *Fifo Adventures*, as well as *Firebrand: A Corporate Elements Mystery* and 'Twas the Month Before Christmas: A Supply Chain Carol. She lives in Switzerland and is a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at supply-jane.com.



MASTER YOUR SELF-TALK

Filter out negative influences and talk to yourself compassionately.

By Lauren Parsons, DTM, AS

Your thoughts are incredibly powerful. They determine your habits and ultimately, the direction of your life. As the American businessman Frank Outlaw famously said:

Watch your thoughts, for they become your words.

Watch your words, for they become your actions.

Watch your actions, for they become your habits.

Watch your habits, for they become your character.

Everything you do in life starts with a thought. Before you know it, those thoughts become the things you say and do. Soon, those actions become regular habits that will either help or hinder your well-being and success.

The great thing is, you have the power to direct your thoughts.

You may not be able to control the thoughts that spring up in your mind from time to time, but you can control what you expose yourself to, the words you absorb, and where you focus your thoughts.

Here are three practical steps to improve your self-talk, or as I like to call it, thought life:



1 Monitor Your Thoughts—Picture a Sieve

If you pay attention and monitor your thoughts, you will notice how external influences affect your emotional state. Everything you're exposed to is a potential seed from which thoughts can grow. It's vital you protect your thought life by filtering out the things you want to avoid.

Be selective about what you take in—the books and magazines you read, music you listen to, and programs you watch—and try to filter out the negative and unhelpful influences.

Even the conversations you engage in affect your thoughts. Research shows that you are the average of the five people that you spend the most time with. For instance, if you hang out with people who go to the gym, play badminton, or go hiking regularly, you'll be more likely to do these activities too.

If you spend time with negative people, their words will seep into your thinking. Choose wisely and surround yourself with people who lift you up with interesting and inspiring conversations.

It may not be possible to avoid certain people altogether, of course, but you can control how much you allow them to affect you. When you start noticing the negative influences around you, you can decide how much weight you place on those words.

2 Feed Your Thoughts—Picture a Sponge

As well as filtering out and limiting the negative stimuli in your life, be intentional and feed your mind with positives. Your brain is like an incredible sponge, constantly soaking up everything around you. The problem is, if a sponge is sitting in a puddle of dirty water, it will be full of dirty water.

Instead, deliberately choose what you fill up your mind with. Maybe you want to plan time into your daily and weekly routines to read inspiring books or listen to informative podcasts or TED Talks. Perhaps you want to join a group that provides a supportive and positive atmosphere (hey, that's Toastmasters!).

Imagine if you started every day with 20 minutes of learning time, soaking up new and positive information. Picture the positive ripple effect of that on your life.

Damaging self-talk is like listening to a negative audio recording playing over and over in your mind.

3 Direct Your Thoughts—Picture a Remote Control

Understand that at any given moment you have the remote control to your thoughts in your hand. You can choose the thought channels you want to tune in to. Decide which ones to turn the volume up and down on. Be prepared to switch some channels off.

The best way to do this is to refocus your thinking. If you try not to think about something, you'll only think about it more. Instead, switch your thinking over by focusing on what you're grateful for right in this moment. Think about something you're looking forward to or set a positive intention about how you want your day to be.

You can also interrupt unhelpful thoughts by being present in the moment. Become aware of how your body feels and pay attention to the sounds and sights around you to get grounded and get out of your own head.

Elevating Self-Talk

The person you spend the most time listening to is yourself. Your self-talk is the internal dialogue you have running through your mind throughout the day. It can set you up for success or leave you fearful and missing out on opportunities.

Often, we've held certain thoughts for so long we're no longer aware they're there, or how much they affect us. It's common to fall into unhelpful thought patterns, using unkind words and making self-punishing statements like: "Stupid me," "I can't do it," "I'm not good enough," "They won't like me," or "I'll never be good at this."

These beliefs can cause you to doubt yourself and rob you of confidence. Damaging self-talk is like listening to a negative audio recording playing over and over in your mind. Even when those statements aren't true, by thinking them, they can become self-fulfilling prophecies because they inhibit your actions.

If you find you're berating yourself, it's vital you interrupt your thoughts, hit the eject button, and re-record over that negative self-talk with true positive statements. Start watching



Some days you'll produce a great result, some days you won't. Either way, you're still you. Not perfect ... but perfectly okay in your imperfection.

for your most harmful thoughts. When you start really paying attention to what's going on in your mind, you can more quickly identify negative ones, and flip them. For example:

"Stupid me" becomes "I'm learning more every day."

"I'm not good enough" becomes "I am enough, just as I am."

"I'll never be good at this" becomes "I'm getting better every time I practice."

Take a moment and jot down your most common limiting self-talk. Look at what you've written, then choose some statements to replace the old messages. Affirm these to yourself on a regular basis. Look in a mirror and remind yourself of the new truths in the present tense, to replace the old lies.

I am capable. I can do this. It will work. I am strong.

Dealing With Self-Doubt

Often the most capable people doubt their own abilities, yet they often think they must be the only ones to feel that way. This is called impostor syndrome and it's incredibly common with both men and women, especially among high achievers.

Those who suffer from impostor syndrome minimize their successes and focus on their failures. They tend to feel like a fraud, as if only luck has gotten them to where they are—rather than their own talents and abilities—and fear they might be "found out" and exposed at any moment.

To combat this feeling and reset your self-talk, look for evidence around you of your significance, worth, and skills. You can do this by paying attention to small successes, and



rather than discounting their value, record them in some way.

Build up a bank of evidence, whether it's keeping a success journal, writing down feedback you receive, making a list of things you're good at, or setting up positive feedback loops.

For example, whenever I get an email out of the blue from a client telling me how something I've shared has changed their life, I copy and paste the text and save it into a word document labeled "Spontaneous Feedback." On days when I doubt myself, I open that document and read their words. It reminds me of the impact I've had and the value of what I'm doing.

Take time to reflect on your successes and celebrate your achievements. Always remember that your results don't define you. You are not your results.

Some days you'll produce a great result, some days you won't. Either way, you're still you. Not perfect ... but perfectly okay in your imperfection.

Your self-worth doesn't need to fluctuate based on results. The great thing about self-talk

is the more proactive you are in cultivating supportive thinking habits, and replacing old thought patterns with the truth, the more positives and successes you'll notice, perpetuating the positive cycle.

Once you learn to monitor and lead your thoughts, you can interrupt damaging thinking patterns and replace them with thoughts, words, and actions that support you. You'll find that you will be much calmer, more relaxed, and able to enjoy more success and happiness in life.

Lauren Parsons, DTM, AS, is an Accredited Speaker, award-winning wellbeing specialist, New Zealand's Keynote Speaker of the Year and Educator of the Year 2023, TEDx speaker, author of *Thriving Leaders*, *Thriving Teams*, and host of the *Thrive TV* show. She is a sought-after speaker who helps organizations create a positive, energized team culture where people thrive. Visit laurenparsonswellbeing.com.



Use Your Brain to Calm Your Speaking Nerves

How neuroscience can keep you calm and nimble onstage.

By Katie Stoddart

You are about to go onstage. The words of your speech are echoing in your mind. You know each sentence; you even know the planned pauses. The world slows down as you approach the stage. You can feel your heart-beat pumping in your chest, and your hands are dripping with sweat. You take a few deep breaths. This is it!

Next thing you know, you are onstage, the audience is applauding, and your words come pouring out, until ... you go blank.

I'm a high-performance and leadership coach, speaker, and podcaster, and I have coached and interviewed hundreds of high performers. One of the greatest fears of most speakers is forgetting their words. Let's explore why this mind-blanking phenomenon happens, and the best neuroscientific tricks you can use to cope with it or prevent it from occurring.

1 Hijack Your Brain's Hijack: The Amygdala Alert

To best understand your mind's reaction to stress, it helps to study the place where it all begins: in the brain.

The amygdala is the part of your brain that identifies if your current situation is a threat or not. If the amygdala sends the signal to your body that you are safe, you will act in a calm, relaxed manner. However, if it signals that the situation feels threatening, you may experience an "amygdala hijack," which is when your body goes into a fight-or-flight (or in many cases, freeze) response.

Going blank onstage is a typical freeze response. Your amygdala has identified that you are in a situation that feels dangerous and has hijacked your body and brain. In such moments, you have a feeling of total panic and anxiety.

You grasp for your words but can't find them.

Though this is [every speaker's worst nightmare](#), it is actually good to experience it once or twice, because you will realize that you can get through it. Eventually your pre-frontal cortex (the most evolved brain region) kicks in, and you remember your words again, or you improvise and find a way to move forward, even if it's not how you planned.

That's why being part of a group such as Toastmasters and practicing regularly can provide support—if you face this freezing while you rehearse, it's easier to regain control if the same thing happens when you are onstage.

What to do

- In the case of an amygdala hijack, one option is to pause, focus your gaze on the audience, and repeat your last few sentences, prefaced

by “As I was saying, ...” This calms your amygdala and gives you space to remember what you wanted to say.

- You can also shift your perspective. Remember, this is not truly a threatening situation. You are not alone in having this reaction. Showing compassion to yourself can go a long way toward calming your mind.
- My favorite trick is to remember that the audience doesn't instantly realize you've forgotten your words, so you can just say, “Let's all take a moment now and focus on our breathing.” You can just tie it into whatever you were saying before.

As you do this, a few magical things happen:

- You switch the focus from yourself to the audience.
- You calm down your own breathing.
- You give yourself time and space to remember what you were about to say.

This may seem like a counter-intuitive approach in the middle of a talk, but it works. People love to take a few deep breaths. You can justify it by saying something like, “I can sense the energy is shifting right now,” or “This may seem complex, so let's re-center before we continue.”

All you need to do is remember this: Go *blank*—let's breathe. If you do, you will have an emergency lane on the highway. And it works!

2 Build Good Habits: The Basal Ganglia Routine

Although it's great to have some tricks up your sleeve for when you freeze, I think we can agree that it's even better if you can prevent going blank in the first place.

One way to stave off freezing onstage is to develop a [pre-speaking routine](#). In this case, the part of our brain we want to tap into is the basal ganglia—it supports you in building and breaking habits, something entirely possible since our brain cells have neuroplasticity and can form new habits.

Three fundamental habits:

- **Before Your Talk:** Develop a few power moves before entering the stage. These can include taking deep breaths, doing squats

Visualizing trains your brain to be prepared for any changes to your plan while remaining calm and focused.

or push-ups (which releases cortisol, helping regulate your stress response), saying a few core affirmations, smiling, or anything that makes you feel strong and capable.

- **During Your Talk:** Tap into what you learned while practicing. Include some pauses and breaks in your speaking to allow the audience time to process what you are saying and to give yourself a moment to consider your next step. The more you practice, the more at ease you will feel when speaking to a group.
- **After Your Talk:** Create a routine to celebrate your presentation. This will help you unwind and calm your nerves. When you train yourself to feel good after a talk, you'll get a boost that will make you want to speak in public again.

By having before/during/after routines, you help your basal ganglia create lasting speaking habits. This allows you to speak easily and smoothly. It also helps prevent an amygdala hijack, as your brain will feel this is a comfortable position and not a threat.

3 Visualize Your Success: Anterior Cingulate Cortex Practice

Your anterior cingulate cortex is the area of the brain that loves novelty. It notices what's new and ignores what is familiar. Multi-tasking actually shrinks the anterior cingulate cortex, whereas meditation strengthens it.

What separates an amateur speaker from a professional speaker is their ability to deal with uncertainty and sudden changes. Here's a great exercise to do before any speaking event:



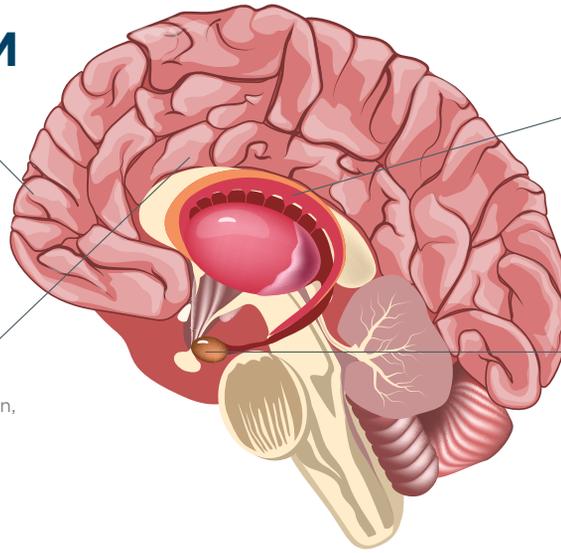
LIMBIC SYSTEM

PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX

Controls rational thinking, decision making, and focus

ANTERIOR CINGULATE CORTEX

Controls motivation, emotion regulation, and learning



BASAL GANGLIA

Motor control, working memory

AMYGDALA

Recognizing threats, emotional responses

- **Visualize what could go wrong AND visualize yourself dealing with it well.** Anticipate the microphone not working, the schedule being changed, your slides not coming up, or your mind going blank. The key here is not to freak out and think: *Oh no, what if that happens?!* Rather, pause, feel calm, and visualize these problems AND see yourself coping. Imagine yourself making a joke about the microphone or slides not working, being able to adapt to speak at a different moment, or not being rattled by a loud noise outside.

Visualizing trains your brain to be prepared for any changes to your plan while remaining calm and focused. Your brain can't necessarily tell the difference between reality and imaginary, so create a positive scenario for yourself. (Think about a time you were really angry with someone,

then imagine yourself having a heated confrontation with them—your heart rate probably went up and you may have even been shaking.) By flipping the script and imagining yourself speaking confidently in front of an audience, your brain is tricked into remaining calm. Thus, when something does happen, your brain has already practiced overcoming the challenge.

4 Avoid Multi-Tasking: The Pre-Frontal Cortex Focus

Your pre-frontal cortex is the CEO of your brain. It's the part that is responsible for decision-making, rational thinking, and ... coherent speaking. Chances are if we had a scan of your brain at the moment you are onstage delivering your talk, your pre-frontal cortex activity would be high.

When you experience an amygdala

hijack (that fear-flight-freeze response), your pre-frontal cortex gets your brain back onboard. It loves deep, focused attention. And the more you train it, the quicker it pops back to action (and with it, your words!).

To train this area of your brain, practice the following:

- **Practice focusing on one activity at a time and avoiding multi-tasking** to strengthen your pre-frontal cortex. Each time you resist the urge to multi-task, you increase your willpower, discipline, and focus.
- **Incorporate some deep breathing techniques, such as meditation.** Meditation improves your ability to focus. When you meditate, you focus on your breathing, and each time your mind gets distracted, you bring your attention back to your breathing. This improves your focus and strengthens your pre-frontal cortex.

W. Timothy Gallwey, author of *The Inner Game of Tennis*, wrote that “peak performance is the function of a still mind.” The more still your mind is before you deliver a presentation, the less likely you are to feel anxious and experience an amygdala hijack, and the more likely you are to be in the flow and give an amazing talk.

5 Keep Your Entire Brain Healthy

Lastly, by keeping your brain healthy, you are ensuring you feel great and give a fantastic talk. By investing in its health, you are providing your brain with the fuel it needs to feel amazing the day of your talk.

Here are six fundamental ways to doing that.

- **Socialize and play.** In studies on life spans, the number one longevity factor is socializing. Your brain needs to be social



as much as it needs food and water.

And play is equally beneficial for a high-functioning brain. I heard about a World Champion of Public Speaking who spent the night before the competition playing games with friends, and then won the next day!

- **Focus your attention.** Activities such as learning, reading, and focused work all help the brain to be healthy and highly functional. Incorporating some type of meditation practice and avoiding multi-tasking helps your brain become stronger.
- **Watch what you eat.** The brain cells (neurons) fire together thanks to different chemicals such as calcium, iron, selenium, etc. Guess where these chemicals come from? Food. For example, if you eat blueberries, which are filled with antioxidants, your brain will think more clearly and effectively. On the other hand, if you eat doughnuts filled with sugar, your brain becomes inflamed, and your cognitive function decreases. Pay attention to what you eat before your speech.

Your pre-frontal cortex loves deep, focused attention. And the more you train it, the quicker it pops back to action.

- **Exercise.** Movement and physical activity make the brain flexible and give you energy. The endorphins rush through your body, boosting your mood. That energy translates onstage and people can actually feel it. Before each talk, try to at least fit in a walk.
- **Sleep.** That's when your brain repairs itself—an absolute must. Don't reduce your sleep to prepare more; it isn't worth it. In his book *Why We Sleep*, neuroscientist Matthew Walker explains that sleep is a fundamental aspect for everything in our body: from increasing our immune system to heightening brain functioning.
- **Take time out.** Relaxation, reflection, and taking time out help your brain process everything. We didn't evolve to be "on" all the time; on the contrary, we need to

balance full on and full off. In other words, work hard, play hard.

Finally, here you are. You are about to go onstage. The words of your speech are echoing in your mind. There is a smile on your face. You feel still, calm, confident. As you walk on the stage, the audience cheers, and your words flow out of you. You merge with the audience, you feel amazing, and you know: You've got this!

Katie Stoddart is founder and CEO of *The Focus Bee*, a transformative leadership platform. She is an award-winning transformative coach and leadership facilitator; the host of the weekly podcast *The Focus Bee Show*; and the author of *The Magic of Focus*. She lives in Stockholm, Sweden. Learn more at [linkedin.com/in/katiestoddart](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katiestoddart) and katiestoddart.com.





Making a Positive Impact

Members draw on their skills to help society.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

Throughout Toastmasters' 100-year history, members have employed their communication and leadership skills to achieve humanitarian goals, speak out about social issues, support people in need, change the lives of children, and help others in many other important ways.

Here's a small sampling of members' good work over the years.



Famed actor Gregory Peck (at right), an advocate for the American Cancer Society, honored Toastmasters members in 1966 for giving talks to raise awareness about cancer.



As a leader of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Toastmaster Don Curren used his public speaking skills to advocate for physically disabled individuals, earning him Canada's highest honor, the Order of Canada, in 1980.



In 1952, after their fellow member spoke about the need to donate blood, Toastmasters in Michigan visited a blood bank.



Having fought his own battle with depression, Australian Greg Van Borssum, AS, today speaks about mental health issues, including suicide prevention.



Toastmaster Cynthia Long, DTM, worked for more than 10 years as a pediatric surgical nurse in St. Petersburg, Florida.



Jimmy Thai, DTM, who fled Vietnam as a child, used his Toastmasters training to build schools and provide more educational resources to children in Vietnam.



Members of the Port Louis Toastmasters Club and Port Louis Rotary Club, both in Mauritius, teamed up in 2022 to hold a fundraiser for a shelter for unhoused teenage girls.



Nara Venditti, DTM, discovered Toastmasters after fleeing to the United States in 1990 from what was then the Soviet Union. She started an organization to assist other immigrants with workplace-focused English skills.



Takako Osawa of the Kesenuma Toastmasters Club stands amid the wreckage created when a giant earthquake struck Japan in 2011, triggering a tsunami. In the disaster's aftermath, Toastmasters from around the world sent messages of support to clubs in Japan and even gifts of clothing and food.

In honor of Toastmasters International's 100th anniversary, this is the 12th and final article in a year-long series commemorating historic milestones.

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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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