

“Why Toastmasters?”

By Scott Morgan, CC (District 68 Area 2 Governor & Evangeline TM Club President)

Has this ever happened to you? You’ve been asked to give the presentation of a lifetime for your company. You’d rather throw yourself out of an airplane with your hair set on fire. You wonder how in the world you’re going to pull this off. You get your research on, pulling the information needed for the presentation. And then comes show time. You get up in front of the group to present your findings...only to find yourself doing your best Marcel Marceau impersonation. You can neither speak nor find the words. Your palms get clammy, while beads of sweat starting to form on your forehead like condensation on a soda can. And all you can think of is whether it would be better to exit the building either through the front door...or maybe the window right there would be even better. Yeah, you’re on the third floor, but perhaps the shrubbery at the ground level will break the fall.

Perhaps. But maybe there’s a better way of handling your extreme reaction to public speaking. And admittedly, you might have never faced either that scenario or reaction. But chances are very good at some point in your life you’ve been asked to make a presentation, give some kind of impromptu talk about yourself or what you do for a living, give some kind of critical feedback on somebody else’s work, or asked to serve in a leadership capacity at either your company or a social organization. If you’ve ever had doubts as to how to go about doing any of those things and, frankly, you do find yourself getting nervous about the prospects and wish you had some resource available to you to help you build your confidence in your communications and leadership, then look no forward than Toastmasters.

Since 1924, Toastmasters has been a force for personal and professional development. With over a quarter million members worldwide in over 13,000 clubs, Toastmasters offers a variety of benefits to its diverse membership. Everybody has their own reasons for joining a Toastmasters club. Here are my Top 7 reasons to join Toastmasters...

- 1.) *Because communication isn’t optional.* That’s one of the marketing mottos of the organization, and few sayings could be more true. We live in a world that thrives on communication and we all must learn to communicate in as clear a way as possible. Toastmasters provides a regular opportunity (usually either weekly or every other week) to practice and hone your communications skills.
- 2.) *Recognition.* There are three types of people who like recognition: men, women and children. Toastmasters features an education program that rewards its members for presenting speeches and serving in a variety of leadership roles within the club and the district, all of which are immediately recognizable by all members of the organization. From attaining Competent Communicator and Leader levels to being presented the coveted Distinguished Toastmaster award, Toastmasters recognizes its members for the efforts made and the work done.
- 3.) *Camaraderie.* Toastmasters operates within what I call a “mutual benefit society.” Your fellow Toastmasters want to see you succeed, improve and grow within the organization. From that, new friendships are formed that often times result in lifelong relationships.
- 4.) *Competitions.* Every year, Toastmasters conducts several speech contests. Such competitions include humorous speech, table topics (impromptu speaking), speech evaluations and the famed International Speech Contest. The winner of the international competition is crowned the World Champion of Public Speaking and becomes part of an

elite group of recognized speakers within the organization. Most people don't enter Toastmasters for the sake of contests and many are surprised to find how much they enjoy the contests once they get involved. Whether at the club level or on the world stage, Toastmasters competitions give our members a vehicle for pitting their skills against others.

5.) *Leadership Development.* Most people only think of communications when it comes to Toastmasters. Leadership, however, is the other critical component of the membership experience. The world needs leaders. Our communities, our organizations, our companies, and even our families need leaders. Toastmasters provides regular opportunities to develop critical leadership skills such as listening, motivating, guiding, planning, and mentoring. Just as communications is of extreme value in the world in which we live, so is leadership. Toastmasters is quite possibly the finest organization in the world to develop the leader within each of its members.

6.) *Value.* Communications, public speaking and leadership courses can run hundreds of dollars for a relatively short amount of training or conference time. Even though you can never truly place a price tag on the ability to develop outstanding communications and leadership skills, it might be nice to find a place where one can attain these skills while not annihilating the ol' checking account. Between Toastmasters and club dues and fees, membership in Toastmasters typically runs less than \$100 (U.S.) per year. For the regular meetings, the resources you receive as a member (including introductory speech and leadership manuals for new members), the feedback given on your involvement and the resulting personal and professional growth, you're never going to find a better return on your investment. Anywhere. Period.

7.) *The chance to pay it forward.* As my own involvement has increased, I find myself becoming more and more a (pardon the expression) Toastmasters evangelist. My personal opinion is that how could somebody not want to become a member of Toastmasters? For all of the reasons I listed (and a score of reasons more), joining a Toastmasters club is nothing short of a winning proposition. And when you get immersed in the organization and your club, you want others to be a part of the fun and learning. They'll thank you for it and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you contributed something positive and valuable to somebody's life.

So we come to my own reason for joining Toastmasters. I walked into my first Toastmasters meeting in early 2009 already having a public speaking background. I had heard about the organization over the years from teachers and in some of the books by noted sales expert Zig Ziglar. All I knew was if it was good enough for Zig, it was good enough for me. I wanted to become a better speaker and I knew Toastmasters would help me do it. What I didn't know at the time was that, nearly three years later, I would be serving as my club's President, an Area Governor working with other local clubs, and participate in (and even managed win or place runner-up) a couple of speech and speech evaluation contests. Along the way I've met some amazing people and made wonderful friends. It's been one of the best decisions of my life and I encourage you and yours to look into making the same decision.

For more information about Toastmasters and the benefits of membership, access the organization website at: www.toastmasters.org .