



WHAT IS TOASTMASTERS???

By Fran Watson, ATM-S, CL

Mr. Toastmaster, fellow Toastmasters, welcome guests.

Toastmasters.... Toastmasters....What is Toastmasters? Is it a bunch of guys in stuffed shirts & suits standing around and pontificating about people. Is it a secret society where everyone looks furtively from side to side before giving the secret handshake? Is it a cooking class where everyone brings in their breadmaker and makes the latest recipe and then toasts it to see how it tastes? Or is it a bunch of guys drinking in a bar?. – “Here’s to Joe, what a schmoe, so grab your beer, let’s give a cheer -- to Joe”.

Toastmasters is an international, not-for-profit organization designed to help people become more confident in public speaking.

Why would anyone want to go to Toastmasters? What do you do there? What kind of things do you learn? Do you have to talk all the time? Why would I go? I’m afraid to go there – what if someone asks me to get up and speak? I can’t do that – what would I say?

The most common reason given for joining Toastmasters is to conquer shyness, stage fright or fear of public speaking. Some members have said they couldn’t enter a room without worrying about talking to people.

There are many courses designed to help people develop their speaking skills. Most of which cost hundreds or thousands of dollars and may require you to travel long distances to the training location. Toastmasters cost is less than \$100. per year and training takes place in a supportive atmosphere at local club meetings. People progress at their own pace through a professionally prepared program. There are manuals which offer a step-by-step approach to speech organization and presentation, covering topics such as: Speaking With Sincerity, Organizing Your Speech, Vocal Variety, Working With Words and Using Props to Add Impact.

Did you know that success in your occupation is directly related to how well you can speak? Research shows that people who can express themselves effectively advance further and faster in their careers than those who have difficulty speaking. Toastmasters provides the tools you can use to improve your performance in a variety of situations.

Club meetings include opportunities to practice spontaneous thinking and speaking with an activity known as Table Topics. It is fun and participants are often very creative in their responses to their topic. But Toastmasters is not just about speaking. It is also about listening.

At the end of each meeting the person who is appointed Quiz Master quizzes the group about things that have been said during the meeting. As the “Ah” counter, you will listen for filler words such as um, and, er, or lengthy pauses during a speech. The Evaluator listens carefully for strengths and weaknesses of the speeches or the meeting. Listening is a large part of Toastmasters.

Observing also plays a part in Toastmasters. If you are not the person speaking, you have the opportunity to observe how a speech is given, how props might be used, or the effective use of gestures. You can observe the audience reaction to the speaker and the connection between them. All these observations will help you when it is time for you to give your first speech.

Toastmasters membership offers:

- Unlimited opportunities for personal and occupational advancement based on improved abilities and expanded experience.
- Experience in leadership development through training and club involvement.
- Increased confidence, the ability to organize thoughts logically and present self-assuredly,
- The opportunity to develop a better understanding of human relations.
- Opportunity to assist others to develop their communication and leadership abilities as you develop your own
- The chance to share your Toastmasters experience by telling others about the program and inviting them to join.

For example, my experience in Toastmasters started last September, although my first call to find out information about Toastmasters was over 5 years ago. At that time I wasn't ready to take the first step. I was afraid to speak in front of strangers. Most people who see me now find that hard to believe, but it's true.

Over the past few years I heard a lot about Toastmasters. I went to the website to check it out and contacted the local club. I decided that it was something I needed to do. Recognizing that to learn is to risk, I joined and started right away on my first speech – my Icebreaker. My goal was to achieve my CTM – Competent Toastmaster within the year and I did my final speech in June 2003. Although I had experience presenting in workshops, giving a speech was a frightening task for me.

I was able to make it through with the support and encouragement of my mentor, Nigel, and the other members of the Pembroke Club. They listened as I spoke and made suggestions on how to improve, not only what I was saying, but how I was saying it. I gained confidence with each speech. Recognizing how much I have benefited over the past year, I can only wonder what my life would have been like if I had started sooner.

I would like to leave you with this thought...“If you wish to grow and achieve...to feel confident in public communication or leadership roles...to interact with other individuals who have the same objectives – Toastmasters is your answer.

Toastmasters International is a not-for-profit organization and is the premier organization in the development of communication and leadership skills, having helped millions of members around the world to improve skills on both fronts, leading to increased self-confidence.

Upon joining one of our clubs, for a very small registration and membership fee, members receive extensive educational materials from Toastmasters International. Members learn how to prepare and deliver speeches, provide constructive evaluations, chair a meeting, think quickly and speak confidently in response to a question, or present a joke. *These skills and many more, including leadership skills and the ability to work effectively with people are vital in today's ever-changing world.*

In addition, Toastmasters offers opportunities to attend educational workshops and training sessions and to be mentored. At the heart of Toastmasters is the opportunity to practise skills each week in a positive, fun and supportive environment.

Anyone who has to make presentations of any kind would benefit from membership in Toastmasters.

For more information on the Pembroke & Area Toastmasters Club, contact Fran Watson at 432-3424 or 649-2950. Meetings are held in the Library at Bishop Smith High School, 362 Carmody Road, Pembroke on Tuesdays at 7:15 p.m.

The Renfrew Toastmasters Club meets in Renfrew at 236 Hall Avenue in the Common Room. The meeting runs from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Contact Fran for more information.