

## Lift Your Club's Quality Bar

Imagine that you can choose between two different Toastmasters clubs: Club Smartstart and Club Dimwhim. Each meets weekly at a convenient time and place. Consider their traits and then decide which one you would want to join.

Club Smartstart has 25 active members who consistently attend and participate in weekly meetings. Meetings are scheduled and all roles are filled at least a week in advance. The Toastmaster selects an interesting theme, plans the meeting agenda and encourages everyone to incorporate the theme in the meeting in everything from Table Topics to the word of the day. Meetings are executed as well as they are planned – beginning and ending promptly. Members leave feeling excited and satisfied that their time was well spent.

Meetings are rarely themed and there is, at times, no written agenda to follow. Meetings end early for lack of content.

Do either of these scenarios strike a chord with you? Which club are you more likely to join and attend regularly?

Most people would want to join Club Smartstart, with consistent, high-performance meetings.

While it is the obvious choice, Dimwhim is not without hope – it can be transformed into a compelling club if members are willing to give the club some tender-loving care and lift the quality bar.

**“It’s the weekly meetings – how well they are planned, attended and executed – that motivate members to return and inspire guests to join.”**

Club Dimwhim has 20 members but only 10 of them are active in weekly meetings. Meeting planning is lax, as few members are willing to commit to filling a role a week in advance. Sometimes roles are filled the day before the meeting. Often, only five members show up for meetings and some need to perform two roles at the last minute.

Five years ago, I joined an established club that had dwindled to fewer than 20 members and lost much of its meeting protocol. After attending for several months, I thought about finding another thriving club. But instead, I decided to make that club into one I wanted to attend. I became club president and lifted the quality bar, which took

**Transform your club through courage and care.**



some courage. First, I had to invite visitors to the meetings.

I went back to the basics – I used a promotional flier, posted it on bulletin boards and e-mailed it to local companies. I asked members to spread the word to friends and colleagues. A member volunteered to build a Web site, which started a steady stream of guests. I explained the Distinguished Club Program, and encouraged members to work toward achieving a Distinguished award, which the club hadn't earned in quite a few years. By the end of June, the club had 20 members and achieved the Select Distinguished Club award! For the last four years the club has consistently earned Distinguished awards.

Toastmasters' annual measure for successful, quality clubs is the Distinguished Club Program. But it's the weekly meetings – how well they are planned, attended and

executed – that motivate members to return and inspire guests to join. Distinguished Club recognition often results from clubs with consistent, high-performance meetings.

What does it take to lift your club's quality bar? Jana Barnhill, DTM, Accredited Speaker and Toastmasters' International President, says that the answer is *courage*, emblazoned in her theme, "Toastmasters: The Courage to Conquer!"

When the *Toastmaster* magazine asked Jana how she hopes clubs and districts will fulfill her theme, she replied, "*One of the things I would like to see is an increased focus on quality, at every level. For clubs, that means a president may need to find the Courage to Conquer meetings that aren't as organized as clubs should be. It may mean challenging those who aren't following the program and are not delivering manual speeches or providing effective evaluations.*"

How do you lift the quality bar in your club? Give your club some tender loving care and proceed with courage:

■ **Be a meeting planner.** Wedding planners, event planners, corporate meeting planners and Toastmasters meeting planners work toward the same goal: to plan exciting, fun, engaging and full programs that attract participants. In most clubs, the vice president education leads scheduling, while the Toastmaster plans the meeting.

Both weekly scheduling and meeting planning are equally important, and it's everyone's job to proactively ensure fully planned meetings. How? Develop a scheduling system – whether it's an Excel spreadsheet, or a hand-written schedule – that shows the club's monthly programming. Ask members to schedule themselves or contact the scheduler with their dates and roles. If you are the Toastmaster, prepare a written agenda listing the theme, word of the day and roles along with the time breakdown.

■ **Take on a leadership role.** You, run for president? Yes! Think about it: Being president will challenge you to champion the club's quality; you can make a positive difference. If not president, consider another offi-

cer role: VP-education, VP-membership, VP-public relations, secretary, treasurer and sergeant at arms. When you commit to a leadership position, you will be inclined to attend meetings frequently, speak more often and develop your leadership skills. An added benefit is Toastmaster's leadership training, an excellent way to learn about your new job.

■ **Mentor new members.** Think back to the first time you set foot into a Toastmaster's meeting. What was it like? Did people greet you warmly? Did anyone brief you on how the meeting works? When you put yourself in a new member's shoes, you can imagine how insecure and overwhelmed they might feel at first.

Help ease some of their anxieties by befriending and coaching them along the speaking path. Explain what their Ice Breaker speech is all about and how to prepare and deliver it. They will appreciate your support and your club will benefit from their participation.

■ **Follow Toastmasters' protocol.** Toastmasters International has set up processes and designed educational

**Special  
Announcement  
Regarding April 2009  
Dues Renewals**

## Look for Your Renewal Invoice in Your E-mail Inbox!

**O**rganizations around the world are becoming more focused on environmental concerns, and Toastmasters International is no exception. In an effort to combine first-rate service to members with environmental stewardship, WHQ will send the upcoming member dues renewal invoice via e-mail, rather than through the postal service.

Members will benefit from this change in several ways:

- Renewal invoices will be delivered faster and more efficiently.
- E-mail delivery is cost-effective, saving the organization (and its members) from unnecessary spending.
- Delivery by e-mail is more convenient for many members.

Club officers, please look for the April 2009 dues renewal invoice in your e-mail inbox the first week of March. Remember, member renewals are due by April 1, 2009. Club officers will be able to submit renewals online through the Club Business login: [www.toastmasters.org/clubbusiness](http://www.toastmasters.org/clubbusiness) starting the first week of March.

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materials to maximize clubs' performance and members' skills development. Be sure to use them! Always give manual speeches, use the timer, ah-counter, evaluation forms and voting ballots. Don't skip the general evaluation, or proper speaker introductions – each plays an important part in weekly meetings.

▪ **Constantly recruit new members.**

International President Jana Barnhill urges every Toastmaster to stay in Toastmasters until they have at least earned their Competent Communicator award and served as a club officer. Core members who stay at least a year are the club's lifeblood, but short-term members exit for various reasons: a new job, busy schedule, relocation or to pursue other interests. Club membership is also cyclical, like the stock market. Every April and October when dues are renewed, clubs can expect some members to drop out.

As membership churns, a club's top priority should always be to recruit new members. To be Distinguished, a club needs at least 20 members or a net increase of five members at the end of the program year, no matter how many of the other requirements it meets. With 20-plus active members, earning a Distinguished award often seems to take care of itself and meetings are more likely to be fun and dynamic.

▪ **Sustain efforts.** Once you have lifted your club's quality bar to the top notch, don't count on past achievements to ensure continued success. Sustain your proactive efforts to continue the club's Distinguished success.

Winston Churchill said, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others." Your courage in championing high-quality meetings will result in achieving your goals to become a better speak-

er and leader, and the club's goal of being Distinguished... or beyond. **T**

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**Editor's Note:** Additional tools are available to help you keep your club meetings interesting. Visit [www.toastmasters.org/shop](http://www.toastmasters.org/shop) and search for the following:

- **Patterns in Programming** (Item 1314). A guide to exciting club meetings
- **Successful Club Series Set** (Item 289). Includes the module "How to Be a Distinguished Club"
- **Distinguished Club Program and Club Success Plan** (Item 1111). Available via the Toastmasters' Web store to view and purchase.

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