



A Chinese proverb says “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

It’s true. If we seek help from knowledgeable and experienced people, we can avoid making unnecessary mistakes that waste valuable time and ultimately achieve our goals faster. This is the concept behind the Toastmasters mentoring program.

I joined Toastmasters in July of 2006. I’ll never forget it. It was during a time in my life when I was stuck. I had low self-esteem and no ambition. Then one day I met a woman who told me how Toastmasters had changed her life. I’d heard about the organization, but public speaking always made me feel extremely nervous. She invited me to attend a meeting that night. When I arrived, I was warmly greeted by the club president, who immediately introduced me to other members. It felt as if they were inviting me to become a part of their family. I joined that evening.

Soon I was asked to serve as the Sergeant at Arms. I realized that by taking on an officer role I would not only learn leadership skills, but I would be forced to build my confidence. Shortly after that, I asked Barry, the club president, to become my mentor. He not only worked with me in developing my speeches, he taught me about meeting roles, club protocol, speech standards and more. He also encouraged me to take risks.

Because of his encouragement, I learned to become the best I could be. Soon I was attending Toastmasters conferences. I became club president and then area governor. I even began to teach Speechcraft classes to business executives. Thanks to Barry, I went from being quiet and introverted to a confident go-getter in fierce pursuit of my greatest dreams.

New Members Need Guidance

Take a moment to think about your first Toastmasters meeting. How did you feel? Once you joined, did you have a mentor who showed you the way and helped you get the most from the Toastmasters program? All new members could use someone to teach them club protocol and customs and show them how to prepare and participate in various meeting roles as well as help them prepare and rehearse their first few speeches. Mentors provide this valuable service.

Last year my mother decided to join my club. As we drove home after her first meeting, she said, “Wow, it’s a bit overwhelming; there’s so much to learn. There are so many great speakers. Will I ever get to that point?” She reminded me that most new members join because they want to improve their communication skills. Remember: They’re not familiar with your club’s agenda and meeting roles such as Ah-Counter, timer or grammarian. Everything that happens in your club is new to them. It’s important to quickly assign each new member a mentor so they won’t get discouraged.

Toastmasters International defines a “mentor” this way: *“A mentor helps an inexperienced person, sometimes called a ‘mentee.’ A mentor serves as a role model, coach and confidante by offering knowledge, insight, perspective and wisdom that will allow a mentee to learn and advance more quickly.”* Mentors aren’t just for new members; experienced members can benefit, too. For example, say you want to add humor to a speech and there’s a club member who excels at “the funny.” Why not ask them to mentor you on your speech?

I’ve learned the rewards of being a mentor both inside and outside Toastmasters. You can, too. Perhaps a colleague comes to you for advice on a project because you have experience. You can provide your own insights on the subject, refer them to books or other material that you found helpful, introduce them to other people who can help and provide feedback on their work.

Qualities of a Mentor

To become a mentor, you must be:

- **Available.** Spend at least 15 minutes a week helping with speech assignments, answering questions and reviewing meeting roles. During the first few weeks most new members may require more time.
- **Patient.** People learn at different speeds and some need more guidance than others.
- **Sensitive.** Tact and diplomacy are vital. Some people join Toastmasters to overcome shyness or fear of speaking. As a mentor, always keep comments motivating and encouraging.
- **Respectful.** Each person is unique. Respect your mentee’s wishes and don’t push too hard.
- **Flexible.** Life happens. Always remember that not everything goes according to plan and you may have to allow for last-minute changes.
- **Supportive.** Show pride in your club and what it has done for you. Be an advocate for the Toastmasters program.
- **Knowledgeable.** Before becoming a mentor you must have completed at least five speeches in the basic manual, served in most meeting roles, developed enough speaking skills to help another member and be familiar with your club’s routines as well as the Toastmasters education program.
- **Confident.** A mentor should come across as self-assured and friendly, eager to help.
- **Listening.** By being a good listener, you enable the mentee to articulate any problem and sort things out.

- **Concerned.** You must truly want to help others.

Mentoring Steps

Explaining the entire Toastmasters program right off the bat to a new member can be overwhelming and confusing for both of you. Take it one step at a time. In addition, be patient with your mentee, your schedule and yourself. If you can't fit all the following action items into a single meeting, plan additional time with your mentee, going at a pace that works for both of you. With that in mind, here are guidelines for planning what to do before, during and after each meeting:

FIRST MEETING

1. Get acquainted and establish your mentoring relationship.

- Help your mentee become comfortable and feel welcome in the club.
- Share how you've benefited from Toastmasters in your personal and professional life.
- Explain the basic parts of the club meeting. Answer any questions about what is taking place.
- Introduce the mentee to other club members.
- Use the new-member information survey as a tool to determine your mentee's short- and long-term goals.

2. Orient the new member to club customs and procedures.

- Describe in detail the various elements involved in the meeting (i.e., prepared speeches, Table Topics, evaluations and voting).
- Review how to use the CC and CL manuals in the New Member Kit, if they've received it, or show them what to expect, using your own manuals as an example.
- Invite your mentee to attend any upcoming special events.

3. Help your mentee connect with resources.

- Review the Toastmasters Promise together and explain its value.
- Make your mentee aware of all resources, such as the Toastmasters Web site, the *Toastmaster* magazine, conferences, training workshops and manuals.

Remember, new members tend to be shy. Take the initiative to contact them between meetings and follow up on a regular basis. Keep in mind that new members can offer fresh perspectives and ideas.

SECOND MEETING

1. Help your mentee leap into action.

- Show this person how to sign up for meeting roles, such as the Ah-Counter, timer or grammarian. Make sure they're on the rotating agenda schedule.
- Provide a club contact list. Point out who to contact if your mentee is signed up for a role but cannot attend.

2. Encourage your mentee's skill development.

- Schedule your mentee's Ice Breaker speech as soon as possible. Be available to help with speech ideas and organization.
- Use the "Sandwich" approach when critiquing a mentee's progress. Provide positive feedback (acknowledge progress), offer a suggestion or two and then end with positive comments.

THIRD MEETING

1. Maintain support for your mentee's skill development.

- Continue to help with your mentee's speech assignments and preparation for meeting roles.
- Praise your mentee on activities done well and offer encouraging comments about their progress.

2. Help your mentee discover a path toward leadership.

- Explain club officer duties and help them to understand why being an officer develops leadership skills and requires a commitment to helping the club and its members be successful.
- Invite your mentee to workshops, lectures or other programs that may enhance their growth as a public speaker or leader.

3. Introduce your mentee to opportunities in the Toastmasters organization.

- Explain speech contests and how they work at the club, area, division, district and international levels.
- Describe the TI organization and opportunities for leadership beyond club level.

Mentoring Helps Everyone

The next time you find yourself at a professional sporting event, pay attention to what's happening on the sidelines. Chances are you'll see that young superstar standing alongside an older player who's not in the lineup. That more-experienced athlete is helping the young player navigate unfamiliar territory. Similar mentoring takes place in every field of human endeavor and provides numerous opportunities, challenges and rewards. Become a mentor and experience them for yourself.

If you want to grow as a Toastmaster and meet your potential in a faster way, *get* a mentor. If you want to expand your potential and experience deeper satisfaction as a Toastmaster, *be* a mentor. My life has been transformed by my mentoring experience and so can yours.

Karen Elyssa Novek, DTM, is a member of the Boca Raton Toastmasters in Boca Raton, Florida. Reach her at Karenovek@aol.com.

Toastmasters Products

Interested in starting a mentor program within your club? Check out Mentoring (Item 296). It is part of *The Successful Club Series* and includes a script, PowerPoint presentation and Club Mentor Program Kit (Item 1163).