

LESSONS LEARNED – By Lance Webster, DTM

Awards & Installation Ceremony, Saturday, August 5, Odyssey Restaurant

I've been a Toastmaster for 17 years. I've belonged to 11 clubs – and personally started and trained 3. Between them they have some 15 years as President's Distinguished. But my involvement in - nay – love for effective speaking goes back to the Spring of 1966 at the University of Maryland. I was promised a graduate assistantship in television production, to be paid for by being a graduate instructor of public speaking for freshmen. So I spent my last semester sitting in on a speech class, taking notes on the instructor. To shorten the story, I didn't get the assistantship, but the head of the department took pity on me and fixed me up with a full time job teaching public speaking at the University of Baltimore. Impressive until you realize that it is the same school that gave Spiro Agnew his law degree. The only Vice President to every have to resign the post for lying on his tax returns.

None-the-less, I taught public speaking day and night for three years. More than 1,000 students. More than 7000 speeches having to be instantly evaluated on the spot. Let me summarize for you some of the key lessons I learned then, and which have been reinforced in my Toastmaster years:

- Life is progressively more complex, so you have to make things simple, understandable and most of all – relevant.
- Hence, The necessity of having a clear, simple, understandable, meaningful central idea.
- The importance of having clear, simple main points.
- The need for adequate, believable support for those points.
- If you don't get their attention and interest in the 1st 30 seconds, you risk losing them.
- You can use repetition and restatement....saying things over in the same words, and in different words....if you want people to remember. Parallel structure helps a lot.
- Some logical form of organization helps them see where you are going....and helps you remember what comes next.
- Eye contact for at least 5 seconds with SOME people, makes ALL people pay more attention.
- Move laterally on transitions, and towards the audience for emphasis.
- If they can't hear you in the back of the room, they'll start talking to each other. Or texting. Back the it was reading the newspaper. Sport section.
- Over time, I also saw that if I could get them to pay attention and learn something, their grades in other classes would improve, their relationships would improve, and their lives would improve.

I didn't realize at the time the value I was getting by immersing myself in public speaking – both the teaching of it, and the practice I was getting in front of a class day after day.

But every single thing I just listed that I learned....set me up for a lifetime in at least four lucrative, successful and satisfying careers: Public Relations, Media Training;

Association Management, and Life Coaching. Each of those depended on the abilities to get and hold attention, to get people interested enough to listen, to be organized, to be clear and concise, to be memorable. And to persuade and inspire people.

When I went as a guest to my first Toastmasters meeting 17 years ago – Rising Star Club #1653 – it was with an "I know it all" chip on my shoulders. But in that one meeting, I was able to see how much more there was to learn, and to practice. I joined on the spot, and gave my Ice Breaker at the next meeting.

My participation these past 17 years has continued for two reasons. First, I continue to grow and learn – with every speech, and with every leadership role I take on.

AND....second, I experience the joy of giving back, of sharing, of making a difference, just as I did in my first year of teaching, 51 years ago. I know for sure that many of you stay involved for the same or similar reasons. My hat is off to you.

And there is another reason – one more important now than ever.

Our communities, our nation, and our world CRY OUT FOR EFFECTIVE, ETHICAL COMMUNICATORS and LEADERS. NEVER have Toastmaster-learned qualities been more important – at every level of government, in corporations, in communities, and even in families.

There's increased need

- To be clear and complete in our communications.
- To have AND SUPPORT our assertions.
- To provide evidence.
- To be rational, and not just emotional.
- To speak truth to power in a way that is at once persuasive, inspirational, and ethical.
- To speak with sincerity AND honesty.
- And to honor the Toastmasters values of Respect for others, Integrity in our being, Service in our relationships and participations, and Excellence in whatever we take on.

Indeed, our nation is being tested as we speak. Freedoms have always been in a delicate balance, and are often challenged. Now more than ever it is the powers of effective speech, coupled with intelligent, principled leadership, that offer a path to true progress. Listen for quality speech, and leaders with Toastmaster values.

There are many ways we, each of us, can chose to spend our time and energies.

In all sincerity, am grateful to each of you for your friendship and the support you have given to the District this past year. I honor and acknowledge each of you for your unique strengths, you special contributions, and most of all.... for choosing to make a difference in the world through the lessons learned from Toastmasters.

Madam Master of Ceremonies.