



District 4 Toastmasters

Where Leaders Are Made

Serving San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey Counties of California

Toastmasters Success: Ten Tips to Become Presidents Distinguished

Would you like to know how to make your club President's Distinguished? With the Toastmasters year rapidly coming to a close and clubs preparing to transition from this year's officers to next year's, I figured that this would be a great time to talk about ways to accomplish club goals. This is along the same lines as my prior post on Tips for Toastmasters.

1: Have regular and productive board meetings:

The operative words here are "regular" and "productive." Sure, it's fun to hang out and chat about the latest gossip in the club but keep in mind that the goal of each officer's meeting is to deal with club business.

We held officer meetings each month and reviewed our DCP (Distinguished Club Plan) at every meeting. Each meeting had an agenda and we'd review our progress towards the DCP. Every officer was given objectives to help us achieve our DCP goals and we'd each report on them at meetings. And yes, we had fun while we were at it too.

2: Complete your DCP early on:

Our District Governor requested that clubs send him a copy of their DCP within the first couple months of the fiscal year, so we made completing ours a priority. Again, doing so helped us figure out how we could reach our goals and how each of us could do our part so we could get there. Many clubs make the mistake of not putting a lot of thought towards the DCP until a few months before the end of the year. Start early – as soon as new officers are elected is a great time!

3: Encourage all members to get involved:

You might not be able to get every single member involved and excited about the club, but it's important to reach out to everyone. When I was Club President, I offered to meet with anyone interested in discussing how the club can serve them better. The VP of Membership would regularly call or fire off an email to members that hadn't attended meetings in a while to make sure everything was okay. All of the officers would take the time to welcome new members and talk to as many folks as possible during our social time at meetings (before, after and during the break).

This benefited us because every member had numerous opportunities to raise concerns with the officers and we were able to address the needs of everyone.



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4: Try new things:

Our VP of Education at the time came up with some creative theme meeting ideas. We found that the added hype that we put on these meetings generated interest in the meeting which helped with attendance. People participated, get involved and had a lot of fun (in fact, this past year the club made every meeting a theme meeting).

Remember that people get bored easily so try to make each meeting somewhat unique. If you have the same person telling a joke at the beginning of each meeting or the same three people giving speeches at every meeting, then you need to do something different. Bring in a guest speaker, have snacks (if you normally don't), celebrate a birthday, anniversary or random holiday by bringing a cake and singing. Make sure you give your members a reason for not wanting to miss the meeting.

5: Work With Other Clubs

If theme meetings are too radical a change for your club (which is okay), try having social meetings with another club in your area. I became friendly with another Club President in my area so we each visited each other's clubs and brought some members with us.

We learned so much from each other and got some great ideas so this is something I highly recommend. They were a corporate club and we were a community club and our meetings were at different times of the day so we really weren't competing with each other for members – which made our relationship even more helpful.

6: Deal with conflicts right away.

Again, conflicts happen and like everything else we like to procrastinate away, the longer it sits unattended the more it festers. If one person mistreats another, it's the responsibility of the club leaders to deal with it. Talk to both parties – separately, if need be – and get to the bottom of things. Many times, the cause is a small misunderstanding that can be set straight when dealt with right away. Other times, it can be more serious and in extreme cases, a member may need to be asked to leave. In any case, you need to deal with it before it has an adverse effect on the club.

7: Make tough decisions when you have to.

When I was Club President, a number of members suggested that we join our local Chamber of Commerce. The club officers unanimously agreed that it would benefit the club so we brought it to a vote during a meeting. The club voted 11-7 in favor of joining the chamber, but the vote



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was challenged because we didn't have two thirds of the members present (we were one shy). I was looked to for a final ruling (like the tie-breaking judge during a speech contest) so I decided that we join.

We could have done another vote at a future meeting but there was no guarantee we'd get two thirds of our ever growing club at any meeting. I wanted to move beyond the issue – since people on both sides were passionate about it, letting it linger on would have done more harm than good. Yes, we lost a couple members due to the decision, but we would have lost a lot more if we spent each meeting debating the issue. One of the downsides of being a leader is that not everyone will like all the decisions you make, but as long as you make decisions that you believe is in the best interest of the club, you'll grow from these tough choices.

8: Challenge the status quo.

Our theme for the year was “Moving beyond your comfort zone” so as officers we challenged ourselves, but we also challenged our members to try new things. Again, we were met with some resistance such as “we tried that before and it didn't work” or “that doesn't work in Toastmasters [4].” But that didn't stop us. I was always encouraging people to push the envelope and try new things.

My favorite example was that we had a woman who was a great speaker give a speech on a hot button issue. She was a lawyer and she gave a legal analysis of the issue without taking sides. This was the first time I had actually seen her act nervous during a speech. Afterwards, I spoke to her and asked her how she felt about the speech. She said it was the most nervous she had ever felt while giving a speech – even outside of Toastmasters. I told her I was glad she did it because she grew as a speaker that night.

A mistake that many Toastmasters make is that they get so set in their ways that they don't want to do anything different. In all my public speaking [5] classes, I discuss how public speaking is like bodybuilding. You have to change things up if you want to grow. To people who only speak in front of Toastmasters audiences, status quo is fine. But for those of us who speak (and desire to speak) beyond the club, it's absolutely necessary to put yourself in new and challenging speaking situations.

9: Hold people accountable.

I was Vice President of Education the year before I became Club President and one of my biggest frustrations was people signing up for roles and either not showing up or backing out at



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the last minute. This carried on into the following year, especially with speeches, as we started out with a small active membership base.

There were a number of things we did to remedy this. First, we led by example and showed our commitment to the club. When we sent out the board meeting notes, it was clear that each of the officers were putting in a substantial effort to grow the club. Our commitment began to rub off on our members to the point where people would call ahead to let us know if there was a last minute emergency preventing them from attending a meeting.

The other big thing was that at each meeting we collected signups for roles for the next two meetings. As our club grew, roles started filling up so when someone had a speaking role, they were more likely to prepare for it knowing that it could be another two or three meetings before they'd have another chance.

10: Give credit where credit is due.

Running a Toastmasters club is truly a team effort so it's important to recognize the people that make things happen. When I say that the group of people I worked with was fantastic, I'm not just saying it to be nice. These folks were truly dedicated to making the club the best it could be and each of them truly added some value to our board. We'd all recognize each other for our efforts and when someone in the club (members or officers) did something great, it was recognized. Again, not in a patronizing way but in a sincere and appreciating way – people want to know that their efforts are appreciated. Sure, you don't want to overdo it and spend ten minutes praising someone for coming up with a creative theme for table topics. But taking the time to tell someone in sincere way that you learned something useful from their speech or that they did a great job planning your guest night is a sure way to make club's morale healthier.

To everyone else, here's a bonus tip: have fun. Enjoy your Toastmasters experience and get to know your fellow members. Develop friendships and learn from each other. Give your best effort and make the most out of every speaking opportunity you can get.