

Advance Your Career with PROC TM!

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ABSTRACT

Most of us would like to advance our careers in one way or another. You may wish to become a respected technical expert in your field, move up into a leadership role, or even go independent as a consultant or small business owner. Regardless of your career aspirations, leadership and communication skills are critical to your success. Toastmasters International provides an avenue to develop these skills in a constructive and supportive environment. This paper will provide a summary of the Toastmasters program based on the authors' combined 20 years of experience with the program. We'll discuss how you can execute "PROC TM" and the benefits it can bring to your career.

INTRODUCTION

SAS programmers and statisticians are not typically known for being outgoing types. Most of us would prefer to spend our days working with code or numbers, interacting only with a computer screen, keyboard, and mouse. Many of us would prefer to communicate by email. Even participating in an online chat can sometimes be intimidating to the introverts among us! The very thought of giving a speech, running a meeting, or leading a team is often contrary to our innate personalities. Geeks are us!

THE TOASTMASTERS PROGRAM

Most people have heard of Toastmasters International, but those that are not members and have not visited a club meeting usually are not aware of the scope of the Toastmasters program. Toastmasters International is not an organization that solely helps people practice giving toasts at events. The educational program within Toastmasters is, in fact, a very comprehensive leadership and communication skills development program that has been fine-tuned over the past 90 years since the inception of the first Toastmasters club in 1927.

In 2018, there are 357,000 Toastmasters members worldwide participating in 16,600 clubs across 143 countries. The mission of Toastmasters International is to empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.

Those that participate as members in clubs follow communication and leadership training paths and build their skills by actively taking on leadership roles during meetings; by preparing and presenting speeches; and by giving responses during Table Topics (i.e., impromptu speaking) sessions in meetings. Several speech contests are held each year, providing an opportunity for members to voluntarily test their newly-developed skills. Members also prepare and give evaluations of other members' speeches and other members' leadership performance during meetings. Learning is thus reinforced by not just receiving evaluations, but also by giving evaluations.

Club meetings usually last an hour (a few clubs go 90 minutes) and follow a carefully defined agenda to efficiently use the time allotted for each meeting with the goal of giving all members an opportunity to participate to the extent they are willing to do so. Nearly all Toastmasters Clubs meet at least twice a month, and many meet every week. Clubs meet the number of times a month, the day of week, and time of day, as decided by a vote of the membership of the club.

Thus, in any large city, one will often find different clubs meeting at a wide variety of days and times. Nearly all meet during the workweek, with some meeting in the early morning, some at the noon hour, and others in the evenings. Meeting places are wherever clubs can find space to meet in their local area, and typical places are restaurant meeting rooms, churches, YMCA buildings, or government buildings. Some clubs meet in conference rooms at companies or government facilities and often, due to security restrictions at those locations, are "closed" clubs which means that only those working within that facility can join.

TOASTMASTERS IS A CLUB

The tools and techniques learned as a member of Toastmasters International, which has groups located in every major city worldwide and many smaller cities, can be likened to a “PROC TM (Toastmasters)” that you can execute repeatedly in settings throughout your career and your life. The setting where you will get to practice executing “PROC TM” in a “test” environment is in clubs, typically comprised of 10-25 members.

Clubs not only provide speaking opportunities, but also provide two sets of leadership opportunities. These two sets are the club officer roles and the within-meeting roles.

The club officer roles are elected either once every six months or once every year (frequency is determined by the club bylaws). These roles are the President, Vice-President of Education, Vice-President of Membership, Vice-President of Public Relations, Secretary, Treasurer, and Sergeant-at-Arms.

The other set of opportunities are the within-meeting roles, as defined on the agenda prior to each meeting (and members are typically identified for the roles several weeks ahead of a meeting). Standard roles are:

- Toastmaster – serves as the master of ceremonies for the specific meeting,
- Speaker -- gives a prepared speech that is one of the Education program projects; most clubs have two Speaker slots in each meeting, some have three slots depending on length of meeting,
- Evaluator -- evaluates a specific Speaker during the meeting; there will usually be designated evaluators for each prepared speech, and for Table Topics a common approach is to have two evaluators, one doing the even-numbered presenters and another evaluator doing the odd-numbered presenters,
- Timer – times all speeches and evaluations; there are pre-defined time ranges for all speeches and evaluations,
- Wordmaster -- provides a word of the day which members try to use in their speeches or responses; often the Wordmaster also serves as a Grammarian that keeps track of um’s and ah’s and other non-words that people use as fillers, and
- Table Topics Master -- comes up with sets of questions that members give impromptu “ad lib” responses that range from 1 to 2 minutes. In some clubs, members volunteer to respond to a given question; in others the Table Topics Master will state the question, then designate a member to respond. The Table Topics responses are also evaluated by other members, although evaluations for Table Topics are shorter in length than for regular speeches.

Some clubs also have “Best Speaker”, “Best Table Topics Response”, and “Best Evaluator” awards that are voted on and awarded by club members at the end of each meeting.

TOASTMASTERS IS AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Toastmasters International recently rolled out an exciting new educational program, called Pathways, that goes well beyond the previous educational program. This educational program is built around communications and leadership components that will help you develop real-world, transferable skills to meet the goals that you set. The program content is available in English, Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Arabic, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese. Pathways provides the opportunity to build up to 300 unique competencies.

Pathways includes 10 learning paths:

- Presentation Mastery
- Motivational Strategies
- Leadership Development
- Innovative Planning

- Visionary Communication
- Strategic Relationships
- Dynamic Leadership
- Persuasive Influence
- Effective Coaching
- Team Collaboration

In looking over the 10 pathways, there probably are two or three that a person will realize are aspects they need to become better at doing in their job or role. A programmer that is often asked to present to the rest of a team in meetings will probably find the paths of Presentation Mastery and Visionary Communication helpful. A programmer that wants to convince management of the value of a new process or procedure likely will find that completing the path Persuasive Influence very helpful, in addition to skills learned in the paths Presentation Mastery and Visionary Communication.

Each path has five levels. These levels are 1) Mastering Fundamentals, 2) Learning Your Style, 3) Increasing Knowledge, 4) Building Skills, and 5) Demonstrating Expertise. Each path is comprised of both required and elective projects. Path recognition (an accolade called "Proficient" that includes a formal Certificate of Proficiency) is achieved when 14 projects are completed across all five levels and includes a combination of 10 required projects and 4 elective projects chosen from a comprehensive list covering a variety of subjects. Each project includes at least one speech. You can let your employer know what you have achieved personal growth in Toastmasters, as Toastmasters (at your request) can send official letters to your employer when you complete Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5 in a path.

It is possible that you might not be able to look at the 10 paths and decide which one to do first. Toastmasters has a tool that will help you figure that out. There is an online assessment that you can take to evaluate your current skills, find out what your current interests are, and identify your goals. When the assessment is complete, the tool will identify three paths that best match your responses. You are not required to choose any of the three and can choose one of the others.

Something that is different from the previous education program is that members can earn online badges as they move through the program, in addition to certificates of proficiency. The "Distinguished Toastmaster" designation is still the highest level in the Toastmasters educational program and is earned by completing two of the paths plus several other requirements, including 1) serving as a club officer for 12 months and participating in a district-sponsored club officer training program, 2) serving as a club mentor or coach, 3) serving as a club sponsor or conducting Speechcraft or a Youth Leadership Program, 4) serving as a District officer for one year, and 5) completing a Distinguished Toastmaster Project.

TOASTMASTERS IS AN ORGANIZATION

Each local club operates independently of other clubs, although there is an ascending organizational structure that goes in this progression: club, area, division, district, region, international. Each level of the organizational structure has members that voluntarily serve in officer roles. All clubs follow a defined agenda (prepared by the club's Vice-President of Education) for each club meeting, with some minor variations in agenda structure as decided by club members.

Toastmasters Areas and Divisions typically hold meetings twice a year, and conduct speech contests at their level. Area Directors (are Toastmasters members serving in these roles as volunteers) will visit the clubs (typically 4 to 6 clubs) within their area twice each year and evaluate how each club is doing and provide feedback to the club officers. Division Directors (also Toastmasters members serving in the role as volunteers) likewise monitor the performance of each Area and provide feedback to Area Directors.

Toastmasters Districts generally comprise 150-300 clubs and there is a full slate of officers. District officers generally meet every other month and the meetings usually include all the division and area directors as well. The District officers and other volunteers plan and host the annual District conference, along with 2 to 4 educational and officer training programs each year.

Regions have a Regional Director that oversee the Districts within their Region and the Regional Directors work with the International officers of Toastmasters and the Toastmasters International home office staff. The Toastmasters International world headquarters, which has 150 staff members, and was formerly located in California, recently moved to Englewood, Colorado, a Denver suburb.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN TOASTMASTERS

COMMUNICATION

Better communication has been the keystone of Toastmasters from the beginning, and thus Toastmasters developed a unique and proven program for developing communication skills in a positive and supportive atmosphere. A member receives regular, constructive feedback from others as he/she practices organizing his/her thoughts and presenting them clearly. Members will not only learn how to make an effective presentation, but also along the way will conquer nervousness, improve their use of words and avoid non-words, learn how think quickly on their feet, and effectively use gestures, props, and audio-visual aids. Evaluating other members as they give speeches, responding to Table Topics, or carrying out roles in meetings also helps improve listening skills. Members often find that the process of evaluating others helps to internalize positive changes in their own speaking.

LEADERSHIP

Toastmasters not only provides material to improve a member's knowledge of leadership, but the clubs (and higher levels in the organization) provide a wealth of opportunities to put theory into practice. Members take on roles in meetings and their performance in those roles are evaluated and constructive feedback is provided at the end of meetings. Officer roles at the club, area, division, district, region, and international level provide a range of increasing leadership responsibilities and opportunities to hone leadership skills.

A key element of leadership is learning the art of persuading others to do what needs to be done, and to do so, one needs to communicate well and know how to work as a team. Toastmasters provides the opportunity to do both. You will learn how to vary your approach to suit the needs of different people, whether it is an audience listening to your speech, a committee or team at work, or even members of your own family.

Toastmasters leadership training will help you improve your ability to plan a meeting or event, create a meeting agenda, inspire participation, set direction for a team, deal with unexpected obstacles, mentor others, and handle that last item most of us have had on our job description "and other duties to be assigned"!

NETWORKING

Toastmasters did a survey in 2015 of its members to find out education levels and other characteristics of its membership. It was found that that over 75% of members are college graduates, with more than 30% of all members holding masters or doctoral degrees. And nearly all members (95%) had attended college at some level.

Female members first joined in 1970, and now comprise more than half (51.5%) of all members; in fact, the first female member, Helen Blanchard, to join Toastmasters in 1970 became, in 1985, the first female to serve as International President of the organization.

In 2015, 41.1% of members earned more than \$75,000 (US dollars). Age distribution of members in 2015 was quite uniform across the working life age groups, with approximately 20% in each of these age ranges: 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, and 55-64. The remaining membership is in the 18-24 and 65+ age brackets.

Programmers and statisticians thus should easily find clubs nearby with peers matching their own educational level, gender, income level, and age group. This means that most clubs will provide a new member with not only a varied group that can provide feedback and evaluation based on years of experience in both Toastmasters and in actual work life, but a Toastmasters club can also provide an extended professional network that goes outside your place of employment (in open clubs). You will be

able to build relationships with other professionals in your area, make new friends, become more aware of what is going on in your community, and gain perspectives you might not get otherwise.

GETTING STARTED WITH TOASTMASTERS

FINDING A CLUB

Finding a nearby local club is very easy; there is a link on the www.Toastmasters.org website to “Find a Club” and simply putting in your zip code will show you all clubs nearby, sorted by closest to you to most distant. For example, entering Indianapolis, Indiana (as of this writing) results in a list of 41 active clubs within a 10-mile radius from downtown Indianapolis! Clicking on the club name will take you to more information about the club such as key officers and contact information. Many clubs have their own websites and on those sites are details about the club, such as names and photos of club officers and members and club meeting minutes. The www.Toastmasters.org website for Toastmasters International has a wealth of helpful information for those wanting to know more about Toastmasters.

In the past couple of years, Toastmasters has begun permitting online attendance of meetings as a club option. This could be a great opportunity for a SAS programmer working remotely to participate in a club. In the above example, 4 of the 41 active clubs in Indianapolis currently indicate they provide an option for online attendance.

Each Toastmasters Club is unique and develops its own style of operation due to those who make up its membership. Experienced Toastmasters suggest visiting, as a guest, more than one club in your area to observe a typical meeting of those clubs. You will likely find that there is at least one club that has a meeting style that you will feel most comfortable participating in on a regular basis.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Guests are always welcome at Toastmasters Club meetings (just be sure and check that the club is not a “closed” club that only those from a specific company or organization can attend; this will not be a problem if you are a member of that company or organization). Note that even if your company or organization has a “closed” club, you can still participate in any nearby “open” club in your area. Another aspect you may want to check on is that some companies or organizations will pay all or part of the annual dues for those participating in Toastmasters, whether in “closed” or “open” clubs.

After determining the date and time and location of the meeting you wish to attend, it is a good idea to send an email or call one of the club officers to make sure the meeting date, time, and location has not changed from what is listed on the website. It is also a good idea to give the club officer a heads-up that you plan to attend a meeting so that they will be aware that there will be one or more guests attending a given meeting. You might also ask what the normal attire is for the meeting. Most clubs now specify “business casual” as normal meeting attire, but it still a good idea to confirm this aspect when you contact a club officer.

When you attend a meeting as a guest, dress in the manner expected (no less than business casual is a good rule of thumb), expect that you will be asked to introduce yourself (often this is only your name and why you are interested in Toastmasters). The club will typically welcome you to participate in the meeting to the extent that you are comfortable. Many first-time guests only observe, but some do volunteer to participate in giving impromptu responses to Table Topics questions while still attending meetings as guests. There is no reason to be nervous, as everyone else in the club has walked through the door as a first-time guest, and they want you to be comfortable being a guest at their meeting.

GOING BEYOND THE CLUB

Nearly all clubs conduct one or more contests each year. Participation in contests is entirely voluntary. Contests are held to see who can give the most humorous speech, the best tall-tale speech, the best “standard” speech, and there is also a contest to see who can give the best evaluation of a speaker.

In addition to clubs that typically meet 2 to 4 times a month, each District (which in our case in Indiana includes all of Indiana and part of Kentucky and includes over 165 clubs) holds an annual conference. The annual conference features numerous educational sessions, and the highlight of the conference is

always the district-level speech contest. Attending the district conference is a great way to learn from and network with other Toastmasters members outside your local club, and the speech contest provides an opportunity to see great speakers from across the district, that have already won club, area, and division contests to get to the district-level contest.

Toastmasters International holds an international conference each year. The next international conference will be held in Denver, Colorado, on August 21-24, 2019. In 2020, the international conference will be held in Paris, France.

CONCLUSION

Toastmasters International can help programmers, statisticians, and other technical professionals develop important leadership and communication skills within a positive and supportive environment. By running “PROC TM”, individuals can gain the ability and confidence to step out from behind the monitor and give an effective presentation, run a productive meeting, or lead a successful team. These skills, in conjunction with deep technical expertise, form a powerful combination that is in high demand in today’s marketplace.

Of course, there is always room for continued growth in communication and leadership skills. For maximum benefit, “PROC TM” should be run iteratively in both “test” and “production” during a career to continue the upward trajectory of advancement and achievement!

REFERENCES

Toastmasters International: <http://www.toastmasters.org>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge assistance provided by Meg Claxton, past Governor of District 11 of Toastmasters International, in reviewing the content of this paper.

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