

Harness the Power of Mentoring

By developing a member's skills you improve your own.

BY JULIE BAWDEN-DAVIS

It might be depicted as made of metal, but the ladder of success is actually a network of interlocking hands. Those on an upward climb make it to the next “rung” thanks to an outstretched hand, and many of those hands belong to mentors.

Mentoring is the hallmark of success in the Toastmasters program. Members excel when helped by a more advanced member—and new and established members alike accomplish goals they might not otherwise reach on their own. Mentees benefit greatly when mentors pass on their own unique brand of knowledge, insight, perspective and wisdom.

In turn, mentors get a chance to give back to their club by helping mentees improve their skills and grooming them for leadership roles.

A prime example of this dynamic is the Management Development Program for Women (MDPW) Toastmasters club in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. In 2011 the club formalized its mentoring program by creating a mentoring committee. “There is no better place to inspire, nurture and support positive growth in yourself and in others than in the Toastmasters pay-it-forward culture,” says Shirley McKey, DTM, a founding member of the club and a mentor.

When the club was getting ready to charter 10 years ago, McKey and others received help from a dozen or more members from





A Toastmasters mentor gives back to his or her club by nurturing another member's growth. This leads to self-reflection and benefits both parties.

District 61. “As founding members with little Toastmasters experience, we learned from our main mentors, Richard Inomata and Mark Ashmore, who had gained experience in other clubs,” she says. “We quickly learned from them how to mentor each other and succeed as a club.”

The club came out of the MDPW program at the Centre for Research & Education on Women and Work, based at Carleton University’s Eric Sprott School of Business in Ottawa. The program stemmed from research that showed women were not advancing in their careers at the same pace as men, says Aemilia Jarvis, the center’s associate director and a club member. The MDPW program, which focuses on the soft skills women

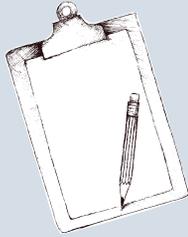
need to lead effectively in the workplace, pairs nicely with Toastmasters. “Having a mentor is very important to any woman who would like to advance in her career,” Jarvis says.

Anatomy of a Mentoring Committee

In the club’s early years, charter members learned from each other as they moved through the Toastmasters program. “We didn’t think about openly sharing what we had learned with new members because we didn’t want to seem pushy,” says McKey. “Unwittingly, we had expected that new members would learn through osmosis, much as we had. We didn’t recognize that new members were seeing us as cliquish and unwelcoming.”

Through a member survey, the founding members analyzed why guests were not joining and new members weren’t staying. It was then that they put a formal mentoring program into place. In 2011, one of the club’s founding members, Margaret Walton, was named chair of the group’s first official mentoring committee. Walton, ACS, ALB, gathered all the information she could find on Toastmasters mentoring and developed customized tools for the club. Walton sent an email to the club’s most experienced members, asking for mentor volunteers. The original mentoring committee, which started with five active members, now has 13.

To ensure the success of the mentoring program, and to help mentors and mentees



A Mentoring Checklist

With the advice and guidance they offer, mentors can dramatically improve a fellow member's Toastmasters experience. To be as effective as possible in this role, mentors are expected to:

1 Clarify expectations. Initially, and throughout a mentoring partnership, both parties must openly communicate their expectations for the relationship to be a success.

2 Be available. Your mentee should feel confident that you are available, within reason, to answer questions and provide support. To make your mentee feel supported, try to take time for a quick chat, email or text whenever possible.

3 Check in often. Mentoring is a two-way street. For fear of being bothersome, a mentee may hesitate to reach out. If it's been a while since you heard from your mentee, pick up the phone to keep the communication open.

4 Encourage goal-setting. Chances are your mentee has goals, which is why your mentorship was requested in the first place. Keep the mentee on track by providing challenges, and then shepherding the process to help the member achieve his or her goals.

5 Be patient. Mentoring is not a race to the finish line. Yes, there are goals to be reached and skills to be learned, but just because your mentee isn't moving as quickly as you would if given the same circumstances doesn't mean your mentorship skills are lacking. It is important to recognize that every member is essentially a volunteer with different goals, time constraints and values.

6 Be positive. Stay upbeat and encouraging. Your mentee will have ups and downs. Not every speech will go as planned and not every goal will be met the first time around. It's your job to point out the positive and keep your mentee motivated to keep trying.

7 Be kind. Take a page from the Toastmasters code of conduct and always be courteous. Your mentee may not always give the best speech, but you never want to make the person feel inadequate, so choose your words carefully. Always be honest, but diplomatic.

8 Don't push. A mentee should never feel obligated to take your advice. Mentoring is not a dictatorship. It's counterproductive to expect a person to always agree or feel comfortable with your suggestions.

— Julie Bawden-Davis



From left: Margaret Walton, mentoring committee chair for the MDPW Toastmasters club, Monique Tremblay displaying the first-place award she won in a division-level Table Topics contest in March, and Monique's mentor Shirley McKey.

connect, Walton gathers information on all members and matches mentors to mentees based on what she knows about their personalities. She asks all mentees to complete a questionnaire regarding their background, interests and objectives, including areas in which they want to improve.

Each mentee also gets a development worksheet with the name and contact information of his or her mentor, a place for goals

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— Toastmasters mentor Jack Nichols

and objectives, suggested actions and target dates, and a checklist to help mentees know what to expect after the first week, first month, second month and so on.

Mentors are also given direction regarding what is expected of them, including specific tasks such as explaining club roles to new members, discussing the communication and leadership tracks and providing assistance with speech topics.

The committee meets twice a year, or more as needed. Walton keeps communication flowing via email. Although she remains hands-off when it comes to the mentee/mentor relationship, she follows up with all participants every six months. As chair, she handles any problems or concerns that may arise in these relationships, and encourages members to give her feedback.



Mentors, like Margaret Walton (left), Shirley McKey (in black jacket) and Michelle Reis-Amores (tan jacket), allow others to benefit from their knowledge and experience by openly sharing lessons they have learned.

Should You Mentor?

Ask Toastmasters who are dedicated to mentoring and they'll tell you that the benefits of guiding members are numerous. A mentor's responsibilities typically include the following:

- Welcome new members and explain the Toastmasters program
- Recognize and nurture the skills a member already has
- Inspire mentees to take on more challenging roles and goals
- Help members avoid common mistakes and attain goals faster and more efficiently
- Motivate mentees to complete the Ice Breaker and move on to manual speeches
- Direct members as they navigate new terrain
- Nurture members' confidence in every area of life

Mentors who excel share certain qualities, including the ability to listen well, empathize and motivate. Jack Nichols, DTM, a 25-year veteran member, was mentored by longtime Toastmaster H. Al Richardson, DTM, PID, and now mentors others. "Great mentors actively listen to their mentees so that what is being said is

fully understood," says Nichols, who is a member of the Professional Speakers Club 9 in Anaheim, California. "They allow their mentees a chance to speak and then ask specific, clarifying questions that reveal the motivations and goals of their mentees."

Effective mentors consider what it was like when they were new members. Many of the thoughts and feelings mentees

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experience are similar to the ones they had, and mentors who more easily see from a mentee's perspective are better equipped to offer valid suggestions.

As chair of the mentoring committee, Walton often talks about the importance of growth and motivation. "When both of my mentees got to a certain level with their speeches, I began encouraging them to take on executive roles, and both had terms as president of the club," says Walton. "It became very important to me to keep mentoring them through their term to pass on my experience as former club president."

One of Walton's mentees took some time off, but when the mentee resumed her membership Walton suggested she take an executive role to get back into the

fold. "Sometimes pointing out members' qualities boosts their confidence enough that they realize they can take on these roles," Walton says.

To remain effective, mentors must also stay relevant, says Nichols. "As a mentor, it's my responsibility to keep myself educated and up-to-date, so that I'm passing on current real-world information

that will help my mentees in the here and now," he says. "When you're dealing with someone's future and they're relying on you, relevancy is really important."

Enjoy the Journey

Mentees undoubtedly benefit from the wisdom of more experienced members. But mentors also profit from the relationship. Become a mentor, and you, too, will have an excellent opportunity to reflect on yourself, your goals and what you want from the Toastmasters program. **T**

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