

# TOASTMASTER

January 2009

## What's the Scoop on Your Group?

Evaluate your group with this handy checklist.

Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C...

# Creativity!

Step Away From Self-Sabotage



Let's  
Get  
Creative!



# Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C...

# Creativity!

By Craig Harrison, DTM

**O**ver time, many clubs fall into the doldrums. It's possible for meetings to become a bit stale, for members to lapse into a routine pattern each week. Sometimes it's a result of the sameness of the room, identical meeting formats, or the absence of enough new members to infuse your club with new energy. Over the years I've watched clubs succumb to lethargy. Yet the remedy is as easy as a little dose of vitamin C: Creativity.

## Spice up lackluster meetings with periodic changes of pace.

Administer this vitamin to your club once every four to six weeks, and you'll see its life force return stronger than ever. Paula Tunison, DTM, past International Director and three-time District 55 Governor, agrees. "Toastmasters is like a love affair. Everything is exciting at first and then, if you're not careful, it can become dull and routine. Changing your meetings helps to keep it exciting."

Here are some of the many ways you can introduce freshness, fun and vitality into your meetings:

▪ **A different room layout.** Many times we accept the room layout as a given: the placement of the lectern, chairs and tables. For a change of pace, try reversing the location of the lectern before the next meeting. If possible, put it at the opposite end and feel the difference. Other variations: If your lectern is at the narrow end of a long table, try placing it in front of the wide side. Or consider removing the table and holding the meeting in a circle or semi-circle, a chevron or some other configuration of chairs. Remember, environment informs experience. Add flowers, a scent or some fun decorations for further effect. Create a new environment and the experience will surely feel fresh and exciting.

▪ **A joint meeting with another club.** Find one that meets nearby at the same time. You can host them for one meeting, and they can reciprocate another time. It's exciting to entertain guests who already know the Toastmasters traditions. The extra people and energy from this joint meeting doubles your fun!

▪ **A grab bag meeting.** Designate your next meeting as a grab bag where, upon the arrival of members, all meeting roles are drawn from a bag filled with slips of paper. Use a fill-in-the-blanks agenda, or a flipchart or whiteboard where you write in the roles chosen from the bag. Any member may end up as Toastmaster, speaker or evaluator. The drama adds a layer of excitement as even the "prepared" speeches feel like Table Topics.

▪ **Theme meeting.** Turn a normal meeting into a special event! Recently one club in the United States held an Academy Awards meeting where the Toastmaster wore a tuxedo, the Table Topics were related to movies and the winners gave acceptance speeches! Another club honored the American baseball season with a meeting in which each member assumed a baseball-related role, the Toastmaster became the manager, the General Evaluator became the head umpire, speakers became batters and the Topicsmaster became the pitcher. Members fielded topics. If your club tries this, you can dress the part as well!

Other themes may relate to topical holidays or current events of a local, regional or national nature. Celebrate the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japan, Independence Day in your country or even a club, district or company anniversary.

▪ **Costume parties.** These types of theme meetings are especially stimulating. You can wear masks and costumes for Halloween, caps and gowns at graduation

time, or go green for St. Patrick's Day. Adornments abound depending upon the theme for your party.

▪ **A time machine.** Your costume party or theme meeting can be tied to a historical period. At this meeting people dress like a past generation: platform boots and silk shirts with wide lapels for the '70s, bobby socks and leather jackets for the '50s, or even the Gatsby look from the roaring '20s. You'll find a new energy comes with such wardrobes. Or go back further: the Renaissance era, Roman or Greek empires or even the Stone Age. Perhaps you'd rather fast forward to the year 2058 or 3008? When the time comes, come in character.

In addition to dressing for a particular epoch, use related language, phrases and speech topics. *Methinks you speaketh the King's English* fits in your Elizabethan era. For the Roaring Twenties, your closing thought may end with "twenty three skidoo." And your Table Topics and speeches can relate to the themes of the era as well.

▪ **Go Hollywood!** Themes abound from the world of motion pictures. Whether you take your inspiration from Hollywood, India's Bollywood or the movies of Hong Kong, you'll find wonderful ideas from films as diverse as *The Matrix*, the *Harry Potter* series, *Jodbaa Akbar*, *Ratatouille* or *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

▪ **A progressive story.** The Topicsmaster begins the fun and it's continued by all the members. Collectively, you will tell a story designated by the Topicsmaster. This requires listening skills, creativity and quick thinking to complete. Each member contributes a sentence or two in the co-creation of a new story.

▪ **A debate.** Your Table Topics can have two participants arguing alternate sides of an issue. Or plan a debate with numerous "candidates" for a fictitious election to involve as many members as possible. Another alternative: You can ask Table Topics respondents to argue both sides of an issue. Decorating a table with politically themed bunting is optional.

We The People, a club in Reno, Nevada, allows a Table Topic responder to rebut the previous participant's topic as a debate activity. This builds listening skills and persuasive skills and also challenges listeners to think more, as divergent points of view are posed in the successive responses.

Even the prepared speeches for such meetings can take on a campaign tone, tackling issues and vying for the hearts, minds and votes of club members.

▪ **A television newscast** brings the world of journalism to your club. Your Sergeant at Arms can give the count-

down until you go live and also be the “voiceover” that introduces the newscast. Your Toastmaster of the day is the anchor, with Table Topics and General Evaluator as your Sports and Weather co-anchors. Speakers become field correspondents with reports, etc. You can even turn some roles into commercials.

- **A speech marathon!** Help your members earn their educational awards as you dedicate an entire meeting just to prepared speeches. For clubs with a lot of members and the constraints of a one-hour meeting time, this periodic pumped-up housekeeping event helps more members speak and shortens the wait time between speeches. It's educational for audience members to see multiple speeches in rapid succession. These popular events can be staged at a regular club meeting or scheduled in addition to your regular meeting time and place.

- **A reverse meeting.** Once a year, say on April Fool's Day, you begin with the closing thought, hear speech evaluations before the speeches, and generally reverse the order of your entire meeting. Once in a blue moon this fun variation of the usual meeting format is refreshing and fun. Give it a try!

- **The mute button.** In this meeting it's all done without sound. You can mouth the words to your speech or topic, but focus on communicating with facial expressions and

claims, issue representations of gigantic proportions and pull each other's legs for comedic effect. Then, just to confuse your audience, throw a bald-faced *truth* into the middle and see if they detect it! Make Pinocchio proud.

During Table Topics, play True or Lie. For some, this is easy. For others, less so!

Vote after each topic response on whether it was the truth or a lie. Alternately, confuse people with your version of *truthiness* – things that a person claims to know intuitively or “from the gut” without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination or facts.

If you're troubled by fostering lies in a Toastmasters meeting, rest assured that each April 30th you can honor National Honesty Day with a meeting dedicated to truth – which is often stranger than fiction!

Veteran Toastmaster Yew Kam Keong, Ph.D. (Dr. YKK) of Australia's Deloitte at the Barrington club explains why we should deviate from our regular program formats from time to time: “These meeting ideas are effective because they contain the essential elements of creativity: spontaneity, humor, playfulness and doing the unexpected. Toastmasters meetings will never be the same again. They will be even more fun...and with fun comes humongous learning!”

Dr. YKK, also known as the Chief Mind Unzipper, is an international creativity speaker, consultant and best-selling author (*You Are Creative – Let Your Creativity*

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gesticulations – use body language. A less ambitious version: Turn Table Topics into charades.

- **Every day is a holiday somewhere.** There are event calendars such as Chase's Calendar of Events that provide fascinating and timely themes you can build meetings around. For example: Sept. 24 is National Punctuation Day ([www.NationalPunctuationDay.com](http://www.NationalPunctuationDay.com)) in the USA. For that week's meeting, ask members to discuss punctuation used in their speaking. Many holidays have their own Web sites to help you understand their origins, meaning and intent.

- **Tall tales are terrific.** Once in a blue moon, or every April 4 in the U.S. (“Tell A Lie” day), you can dedicate a meeting to embellishment, aggrandizement and bald-faced lies. Everyone can get into the act. Your speech introductions, speech contents, Table Topics and more can play fast and loose with the truth. Make outlandish

*Bloom*). In his 22 years as a Toastmaster, Dr. YKK has spoken to Toastmasters clubs in 10 countries and inspired creativity in countless people. His Web site, [www.mindbloom.net](http://www.mindbloom.net), contains many tools for clubs and members.

Whether you employ these or other ideas to spruce up your meetings, that extra shot of Vitamin C will breathe new life into proceedings. While you never want to eschew the educational value of meetings, such variations on our traditional formats will add a new dimension to your Toastmasters training and keep everyone fresh. Any time you apply creativity to your meetings, the results will yield fun, energy and new perspectives. Ready...set...create! 📌

**Craig Harrison, DTM**, founder of LaughLovers club in Oakland, California, is a professional keynote speaker, trainer and principal of Expressions Of Excellence! For more resources, visit [www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](http://www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com).