

District Director

What do you want to be remembered for? I initially thought of numbers, growth and ensuring we strive to keep the District Mission to the fore of every strategy and all communications. We are at our very core a people development organization. If numbers are used as a carrot/stick approach without considering respect for each member or volunteer who gives their time in a totally voluntary capacity, we have truly lost sight of what the organization stands for.

District Director Responsibilities include

- Guidance – *“That’s not the way I’d have done it”*, as I pull my hair out in silence! Guidance was an interesting responsibility that rested on my shoulders this year. Guidance was offered throughout the year in various forms to the wider team of District leaders.
- Financial Resources - As the ultimate signatory on use of the District finances, I ensured that only money that was budgeted and approved by the DEC was spent. To this end any changes to proposed spending was re-approved at a DEC meeting in March. It is the Districts money and ensuring accountability for its spending was a focus this year.
- Presiding Officer - Do not paraphrase policy. I’m sure the paid staff at TI headquarters will look forward to my retirement next year. In studying and reviewing policy to prepare for different scenarios, inconsistencies in policy arose. I’m sure they were thinking, Collins, get a life! However, it is not acceptable for District 71 to make up the rules as we go. What is not acceptable is to accept that *“that was the way it’s always been done, let’s not question it”*
- Operations - Several changes were enacted this year including introducing the Candidates Showcase at the District election in Manchester.

Perspective

Toastmasters is where members hone their skill so that they can speak and lead in environments outside of Toastmasters. It is important to bear this in mind. The more a member puts into the organization, the more that they get out. However, it is important that we put a bit of perspective on our roles in the organization.

SMART Goals

In the same way as the club strives to reach distinguished level, a reflection on the club’s performance, the District also has criteria which it will be measured by. Since my last update, I’ve revised our goal to reach Distinguished whereby the District needs to achieve

1. 192 Distinguished clubs, we currently stand at 187.
2. 10,607 individual member payments, we are currently at 9,853 payments.
3. 75 Distinguished Clubs, we already have 81.

Communication

Our main channel of District-wide communication is www.d71toastmasters.org and all our social media sites are linked through this central hub of communication. Over the year, I’ve also communicated one page “District Director Rants” targeted at the ordinary member.

Final thoughts

While on paper the role is about leading an organisation, it is very much about leading people. We should never lose sight of that. I sometimes get asked whether it gets political. While I’ve no doubt that there are similarities like being prepared to compromise, no one gets paid for taking on a voluntary role.

To my successor, I would say

- Always refer to Toastmasters Policy documents – light bedtime reading!
- Don’t treat it like a job, anyone is open to stepping down at any time.
- Find ways to motivate people.
- Find people that you can truly trust.
- Strive to build relationships and influence people in everything you do.

Michael Collins (District Director 2016 – 2017)