

# District 71 Lunchtime Corporate Series

19<sup>th</sup> September 2025, 12:30-13:25



**Keynote Speaker**  
**Bob Ferguson, DTM**

*Engineer, Author, Executive Coach*

*"From Club to Company – Developing your  
Toastmasters' skills into strong career assets"*

Hurry and Register!

## Notes from the session

By



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## **Introduction**

It's not always easy for employers to see exactly how a scheme like Toastmasters helps their employees. Sometimes we think of professional speakers and people strutting their stuff on stage and think why would we want that in our business? And I have some sympathy with that. because that style of presenting doesn't always fit in business.

I remember from my own background I was in the space industry, and I had to give a presentation to the European Space Agency, and I was third in the row and the two speakers before me were typical engineering presenters. Bullet point, bullet point, blah, blah, blah, bullet point, bullet point, blah, blah, blah. And then after they finished, I sprang onto the stage in full competition mode and I could almost see them recoil in horror thinking, oh my goodness, what has arrived here?

However, there is a place for that in business and those of you who are actively engaged in business pitching will know that is the case. But it's not the case for general business.

Today what I want to do is demonstrate to you why Toastmasters is so powerful in the workplace.

If you're an employer you'll end up with employees who have boosted confidence. Your organisation will make better decisions because the information will flow more concisely, and your meetings will be more productive and shorter which will save you money.

If you're an employee it will offer an incredible boost to your career prospects.

But also, it's quite interesting that we think of public speaking as talking one to many as I am now. However, you'll find that the skills that you learn in public speaking roll over into your one-to-one communications which is incredibly powerful.

I want to demonstrate this with three things.

I want to show you how Toastmasters does it, how it achieves these big benefits.

Secondly, I want to show you why the Toastmasters method is probably one of the most effective you'll come across in training your staff.

And thirdly, I want to show you why it's such a cost-effective way to train staff.

## **How does Toastmasters do it?**

Let's start at the beginning. How does Toastmasters do it?

Well, to understand that we need to understand that there is a spectrum of speakers.

## The speaker Spectrum

# The Speaker Spectrum

	Business Speakers		Professional Speakers
Notice	Short		Long
Subjects	Many		Few
Practice	Little		Lots
Notes	Notes		No Notes
In Ti	Table Topics	Club	Competition
In WP	Q&A	General	Bid
+Eval	Opinion	Staff	Assess

The left-hand end of the spectrum are the business speakers. People like yourself whose main job is not speaking in public, but who use those skills as a part of their work.

The right hand of the spectrum is where the professional speakers are. These are often the people who are held up as an example of what good speaking should be like. However, they should be good because this is their job. It's often the majority of their work and they focus on nothing else but their subject and speaking about it.

There are a number of significant differences between the two types of speakers. People often aspire to be like the professional speakers but that's not always the best thing for business speakers and so I want to show the differences between the two, and how Toastmasters covers the complete spectrum.

The differences are:

- **Notice**  
Business speakers often have to speak at short notice. There may be put on the spot to deliver an update on their work with perhaps only an hour or two, or little more warning. The professional speakers tend to have much longer notice of up-and-coming speeches. Often that will be a minimum of a month, but frequently much longer.
- **Subjects**  
Business speakers generally have to focus on a wider group of subjects. Yes, it may be largely focused around their work but it's likely to have a variety of audiences that need the information in very different formats.

Professional speakers tend to have very few subjects. They focus on their core expertise, and I know professional speakers who only have one speech. They still customise it for the different audiences but it's largely the same speech every time they speak.

These two differences have an impact on the way you have to present as follows:

- **Practice**

Business speakers often have little time to practice or rehearse. Because of the short notice they given they have to prepare quickly and present without the luxury of extensive rehearsal.

Professional speakers will rehearse extensively. It would be very common for a professional speaker making a big conference speech, to have over 20 full rehearsals of the speech. It's not unknown for professionals to even reach 100 rehearsals. This is one of the reasons it's wrong for business speakers to compare themselves with professional speakers. If the business speakers were allowed the same amount of time preparation and rehearsal for each speech they would achieve the same results.

- **Notes**

There is some emphasis when learning public speaking to not use notes. To me this is a barmy approach. If you're going to be given short notice times on different subjects, then it only makes sense that you will need some form of aide memoir in order to ensure that you cover all the material effectively. In my opinion it's far more important to learn to use notes properly when you start to speak. That way if you're under pressure you can use notes, but if you got more time to rehearse and practice you can use them less. Whatever you do, I still always recommend that you have your aide memoir in your pocket or somewhere convenient in case you forget what's coming up next.

How do the requirements of these four different factors in speaking get reflected by the Toastmasters training system. You'll see typically four types of speaking in Toastmasters that will allow you to cover any eventuality within this speaker spectrum.

- **Table topics (impromptu speaking)**

Training in table topics is absolutely brilliant for when you're put on the spot and asked to speak. This other situation is often when you're in a meeting and you're listening to someone else's presentation, and then the boss asks you for your opinion.

This is where the thinking on your feet that has been developed at Toastmasters comes into its own. If you've learnt well, you will be able to structure your answer in a very brief mirror of the way you would structure a speech. This will mean that the answers you give will be confident, clear, and carry real impact.

- **Club speeches**

Generally as you build your skills, the club speeches are the middle ground of preparation. You'll be able to pick your own speaking slot, and you have adequate time to do reasonable preparation, perhaps two or three weeks. Then you deliver your speech, consider the feedback and move on to your next project. This is ideal for learning to prepare the sort of presentations you're likely to be asked for in the workplace. You're most likely to be given a week or two's notice and so the club

speeches the perfect development ground for this type of presentation.

- **Competition speeches**

It may seem like the competition speeches are very different from anything you're doing the workplace. For a competition you will start some months ahead. Remember the six months between each of the Toastmasters competitions so you have plenty of warning. That allows you to develop your speech perhaps take it out to a practice audience polish it and make sure it's word perfect when the competition comes round.

This will be the sort of presentation that generally accompanies a bid. You'll find bid teams work on their presentations for ages because often the result of the bid process can hinge on the quality of the presentation. No one wants to lose a decent proposal just because they presented badly on the day.

- **Evaluation speeches**

If you hope your career will take you into the role of management it's unlikely you can survive without effective feedback evaluation to your staff. Good quality evaluation can make the difference between motivated staff ready to learn and move on, or disengage staff who don't connect well with your leadership style.

Not only is the Toastmaster evaluation training valuable for giving good quality feedback, it produces some habits that are fabulous for impromptu speaking too. I talked about being put on the spot in a meeting in the table topics section. Because I now naturally evaluate everything using the letters C for commend and R for recommend in the left-hand margin, I do exactly the same in meetings now. As I listen, I write down the key points and put a R or C in the left-hand margin. When I'm asked for my opinion it's very easy to put over a balanced, comprehensive and yet concise viewpoint.

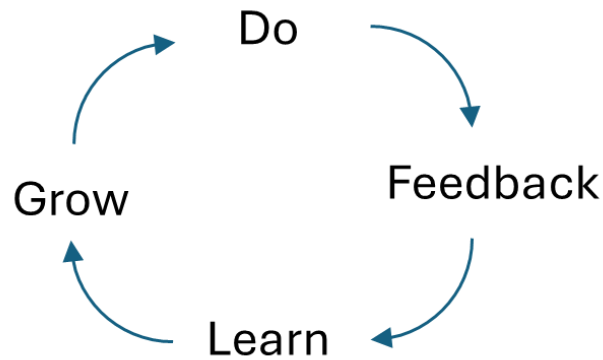
### **Why is Toastmasters training so effective?**

There is a very narrow set of circumstances in which one day training is particularly effective. If you have to get a lot of information over to an audience quickly, then one day sessions can work well. In general, they're not the best mechanism for developing people unless it's in a very restricted skill set.

My analogy is that if you were to take up the violin, we could offer you Yehudi Menuhin for the day to teach you everything you knew about playing the violin. The rest would be up to you. That clearly wouldn't work you be unable to absorb a vast amount of the experience he has to offer and trying to implement it as the novice would be almost impracticable.

I know day courses are often selected because they're convenient for the company, they're convenient for the diary of the delegates, and they're convenient for the trainer. But none of this convenience is reflected in the improvement of performance in the delegates.

The Toastmasters system works on a different basis.



The system you learn in Toastmasters follows the Do, Feedback, Learn, Grow pattern above. It is a perfect example of an experiential development cycle.

First through the Pathways system and the peer-to-peer learning that is so strong within Toastmasters you learn new techniques and theories to improve your communication.

The second step is you have to do it. You're always welcome to progress at your own pace, but ultimately you have to give speeches and get feedback. It is this doing stage that embeds the knowledge far deeper and ensures that you understand the new techniques you're using. If you don't understand it and use it poorly then that will be picked up in the feedback and you will receive help to make sure you do understand it before you move on to the next stage.

When you've embedded this knowledge, you will have grown as a person. Then when you come to learn your next tranche of techniques and theories, you approach it as a different person. You're now a person who has some experience and who understands the last step you took and therefore your very different from the person who started out.

This is the strength of Toastmasters that you're continually learning appropriate to your skill level.

This is why one day training, or the online training that is often an alternative is so weak by comparison. Because there is far less focus on the true implementation and embedding of the knowledge, delegates don't get a chance to grow. As a result, when they receive the next set of instruction, they are almost the same person and lack the experiential learning that is so effective.

### **Why would you invest in the Toastmasters system?**

For me there is absolutely no doubt that the skills you can learn from being in Toastmasters will provide a boost to your communication and your career. However, it's true that it's going to take effort on your behalf. The effort you make is for me the biggest part of your personal investment in developing.

I personally have invested around 5% of my annual income in my own personal development. That may sound like quite a lot, but I believe that the rewards are significant.

Just in financial terms, Warren Buffett reckons that learning the skill of public speaking alone can increase your lifetime earnings by 50%. 50% back for 5% invested is indeed a considerable return. But the money is just part of your investment.

A far bigger part of your investment will be the time you spend building these skills. But again, there are significant gains to be made.

When you first start at Toastmasters, you'll probably find that it will take you quite a while to structure your talk, flesh it out with the detail, and then prepare ready for delivery. After you been doing this for a while you notice all these timescales of compressed. You'll be able to take on short notice speeches with the same confidence that you got from taking two or three weeks to prepare. Structuring your language will become like second nature to you, and you feel completely confident undertaking any public facing activities.

I know this sounds like a considerable investment but ultimately you should ask yourself if you're not willing to invest in yourself, how do you expect anyone else to invest their money in you.

Financially it's good for business. The average cost of a Toastmasters is around £200 per year. For that you get around 40-50 hours development.

In commercial training you'll probably pay around £350 and for that you'll get about 6 hours including your activities.

## **Conclusion**

for me, there is no doubt that Toastmasters is a superb development system. It has been honed over a hundred years now and caters for every ambition.

If you just want to improve your speaking, you can do it at your own pace. If you want to be a far better speaker moving towards the professional speaker end, the competitions will help drive you to that objective.

If you want to improve your management skills to perhaps enhance your promotion prospects, then the leadership path will allow you to do it.

Almost any objective that you have the Toastmasters development system will allow you to develop in a supportive and encouraging environment. You just have to decide what you want from it.