

The SLICE

BURNT TOAST

Toastmasters Club 764388

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Adventures of a Wedding MC

How Burnt Toast has positively impacted one person in a rather niche activity

By Darin Wong

Like many others in their late 20s, I have had several friends and colleagues enter marriages. Although one could argue that the ceremony is probably more important to the couple (at least symbolically) than the reception, the reception is the event that most people remember about a wedding. Most people look forward to attending a wedding reception because food and beverage are served, speeches and presentations that shed some light onto the married couple are given, and games are played; in short, a wedding reception offers guests the opportunity to laugh and enjoy themselves. As one can imagine, a wedding reception does not happen without hours of meticulous planning and a group of supportive volunteers. One such volunteer that is integral to the reception is the Master of Ceremonies (MC).

At first glance it may seem that the wedding MC's job of keeping the reception moving is a fairly simple one. Often, the part of the reception that requires the most work is crafting the agenda and that task is typically handled by the engaged couple or their wedding planner.

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The Slice

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Meetings

Tuesdays / 5:30–6:45PM
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Did you notice ... ?

Toastmasters International has rebranded!

According to International President Pat Johnson, TI didn't want to change the brand significantly but instead give it a fresh, modern look. Check out the new logo below and visit www.toastmasters.org for more information.



Although the sequence of events is put together in advance, the MC must be able to breathe life into that agenda by establishing a presence at the beginning of the reception, managing transitions between events, being prepared to think quickly if any unexpected challenges surface, and facilitating the enjoyment of both the guests and the married couple.

Being a wedding MC is not an easy job, but whether by coincidence or design, much of what we work on and reinforce regularly every Tuesday evening at Burnt Toast Toastmasters actually mirrors what a successful wedding MC does.

Before joining Burnt Toast earlier this year, I had been the wedding MC for three weddings. However, despite my previous public speaking experience (on which my friends so heavily relied upon), I made many mistakes during these receptions that would seem rather amateurish to the seasoned Toastmaster. In particular, the first wedding I MC'ed was a baptism by fire. During the first five minutes of this wedding, my lack of experience in leading an event showed. I opened the evening with a weak introduction that failed to do an adequate job of establishing my presence before the guests. Following some opening remarks, my unsettled nerves led me to make a joke that was not well-received by the guests (e.g. speculating on a couple's sexual history!). As the evening wore on, I eventually settled into a rhythm, but at times, I still felt awkward leading transitions from one section of the reception to the next. Over the next two weddings, I was able to make some adjustments like thinking of things to say between segments, but after these weddings, I still felt that I could have done a better job if I had more structure to my preparation.

When I joined Burnt Toast, I knew that I would be able to improve on some of my more noticeable weaknesses such as filler words and maintaining eye contact with the audience. But, during the 9 months I have been a member of Burnt Toast, I have been challenged in other ways: establishing a presence before the audience before any speech, thinking on my feet, listening to what is being said by other speakers, making smooth transitions from one part of a meeting to the next, and being conscientious of how much time I have to speak. For example, our familiar greeting, "Good evening fellow Toastmasters and honoured guests" has taught me the importance of establishing one's presence before an audience. Also, the timing of each of our speeches has given me a good sense of what I can expect to say in 2, 3, or 7 minutes. Furthermore, having had the opportunity to chair meetings on a couple of occasions has required me to listen to what is being said and focus on what is happening over the course of a meeting so that I can make fitting bridging comments and lead transitions from one segment to the next.

Since I joined Burnt Toast 9 months ago, I have adapted the skills, strategies, and techniques we work on in our meetings in 2 more gigs as a wedding MC. In each of the weddings, I made sure that I established a presence on the podium with a strong introduction (similar to our familiar Toastmasters greeting.) Although I did not have a Timekeeper to guide me through each reception, I paid close attention to how much I said so that others would have an ample amount of time to speak and that each reception went according to schedule. Furthermore, I listened carefully to each speaker and paid careful attention to the audience's mood so that I could provide suitable commentary and facilitate transitions.

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Why name it “Toastmasters?”

During the early 1900s, the word “toastmaster” referred to a person who proposed the toasts and introduced speakers at banquets. Ralph C. Smedley coined the first group “The Toastmasters Club” because he thought it suggested a pleasant, social atmosphere.



For example, following a groom’s speech, I commented on how he should seek a career as a screenwriter because he incorporated all of the elements of a successful Hollywood movie into his speech including drama, humour, romance, and product placements. The audience absolutely loved my comments about the groom’s speech and this allowed me to successfully transition to the games portion of the evening. During a debrief of the reception with the couple, the groom specifically referred to my comments about his speech and asked me if they were scripted. I confirmed that they were not.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being a wedding MC on five separate occasions. I derive enjoyment from the challenge of leading an event which both the married couple and their guests value greatly. As I have learned, being a wedding MC is not an easy job. A wedding MC needs to be prepared, be able to listen, think quickly on his feet, and most importantly be confident in his abilities to lead the festivities. Although Toastmasters is not a program that is specifically catered to improving the art of wedding MC’ing, as an amateur wedding MC, I have nevertheless benefited greatly from 9 months that I have been a member of Burnt Toast. I hope that my adventures as a wedding MC have captured the curiosity of the rest of my fellow Burnt Toasties. Perhaps someday, when one of you receives the call to act as a wedding MC for a friend’s wedding, you will have the confidence in yourself as an esteemed Toastmaster to answer it.

What’s in a club?

By Danielle Vlemmiks

People are social animals. As such, we tend to form allegiances, groups and relationships with others based on our needs and interests. We are often more likely to succeed at our goals if we surround ourselves with like minded people who can challenge and support us on our journey.

I came across a blog the other day that highlighted some of the reasons why people join clubs:

- 1) Extracurricular experience: Clubs look great on applications/resumes
- 2) Networking: The opportunity to meet and network with other people with similar interests
- 3) Promote Awareness: They help promote education and awareness about the field/subject
- 4) Exposure: Clubs expose you to new experiences and opportunities
- 5) Belonging: Being a member automatically gives you a feeling of closeness to other members, you share something meaningful with other members
- 6) Enrichment: Being part of a club or organization is an educational experience
- 7) Growth: Members in clubs/organizations will be encouraging and supportive of your personal growth.
- 8) Social: They are a great way to meet great people and have a lot of fun

For me, the first four items in the above list were what inspired me to try out Toastmasters. It is the last four: belonging, enrichment, personal and professional growth and the social aspect of Burnt Toast that keeps me coming back.

A Note on Accountability ...

To be accountable to something or someone is defined as an obligation or willingness on your part to accept responsibility or to account for your actions.

When we join teams and clubs to accomplish certain goals, we are creating an obligation to others. This pushes us to keep our commitments and keep practicing.

After all, if we don't practice - how else are we going to become great public speakers?

Seek Your Challenge

by Heather Allen

"Seek challenge and experience the success!" is a line my home room teacher in high school would shout enthusiastically each morning as we stumbled out of the classroom. This line is embedded in me – to always do well through personal pursuits, education; to set my sights high and do my very best each day.

Months ago I sought out the challenge to run the San Francisco Half Marathon. On Sunday, July 31st before 8:30am I completed my 21.5km gallop along the city's waterfront, over the Golden Gate Bridge and up (and up!) through colourful neighbourhoods. The tag line for this event was "worth the hurt." It was a wonderful feeling, a good hurt as my legs took me over the finish line. I experienced the glory of another successful run.

Taking my shoes out for training runs, walks and bike rides, I had ample thinking time. Running is like Toastmasters, or maybe Toastmasters is like running.

- We all start at zero
- It's easier to accomplish with firm goals
- It takes time, energy and focus. Go slow and steady
- Feeling comfortable in your shoes will take you to greater heights
- It's nerve-racking in the beginning. "What if...?"
- There are no shortcuts
- It always ends with claps and high fives (and even cold drinks at the pub!)

Recently there have been speech topics and underlying tones on the subject of running. Some members run to meetings to not be late, others have experienced the glory of crossing multiple marathon finish lines; some are in training for their first event.

Whether it's running, preparing for speech one or another goal you're working towards, seek your challenge and experience the success.



First Encounters ...

We asked our newest members to recall their first role at Burnt Toast and what made them the most nervous. Here's what some of them had to say:

"My very first role at Burnt Toast was Timekeeper, and I was most nervous about maxing out on ums and ahs."
- Sean

"My first role was Sargeant at Arms, and I was most nervous about standing up in front of everyone and messing up my role."
- Zdenek

"My very first role was Grammmarian, and I was most nervous about standing up in front of everyone and having nothing come out of my mouth!"
- Jo

"My first role at Burnt Toast was Sargeant at Arms. I was most nervous about whether or not I was able to physically say what I was prepared to say mentally."
- Emily



Club Updates

Here's a review of what's been happening at Burnt Toast over the last few months.

Toastie of the Month

Since its inception a few months ago, we've awarded six Toasties of the Month! The Toastie of the Month program was designed to recognize some of our outstanding members every month. At the end of every meeting, members are asked to vote for their favorite "performer" of the evening. The votes are tallied at the third meeting of every month and the winners receive a free beverage of their choice at pub night (pub night is held on the third Tuesday of every month). The recipients so far are as follows:

Melanie Berger
Danielle Vlemmiks
Darin Wong (x2)
Heather Shields
Heather Allen

So remember, the more meetings you attend, the more votes you get!

New Members

Burnt Toast welcomes the following new members to the club and looks forward to being part of the journey to improve their public speaking skills:

Jo Demmler
Sean Elbe
Zdenek Sychrava
Emily Kwok
Yu Zhang
Jessica Lee

Finally, welcome back to past member Jennifer Au - it's great to see you again!

New Location

Due to some unforeseen circumstances, Burnt Toast had to change locations this past spring and we're happy to announce that our temporary location is now going to be permanent! Look for us every Tuesday 5:30 pm at 900-1188 West Georgia Street in Vancouver.

Thank you ...

Special thanks and farewell to the following executive committee members who dedicated much time and effort in ensuring a successfully run club:

Thomas Luo, outgoing Treasurer, has decided to pursue a career in medicine. Good luck Thomas!

Melanie Berger, outgoing Secretary, has completed her Competent Communicator Manual and is ready for her next project.

Steve Boland, outgoing VP Membership, is nearly finished his CC manual and planning his next adventure.

Farewell



A Few Introductions

Well folks, it's that time of year again to welcome the newest members to the Burnt Toast executive committee! This year's committee is a mix of new members and some familiar old ones. Please say hello to:

Darin Wong - Treasurer
Jo Demmler - Vice President, Membership
Zdenek Sychrava - Secretary

Returning members include Lisa Krueckl, President; Danielle Vlemmiks, VP Education, Rosine Hage-Moussa, VP Public Relations and Jordan Taylor, Sargeant at Arms. Thanks for your continued service!

We asked our new executive committee members some ice-breaker questions and here's what they had to say:

What do you hope to learn from Burnt Toast? What do you hope to contribute?

"As Treasurer, I hope to learn how to keep a bank account, besides my own, in the black. I also hope to contribute some ideas to keep the club and its activities fresh and challenging."

- Darin

"I hope to learn many professional skills from my fellow executive team members. I am looking forward as Vice President of Membership to encouraging visiting guests to take the same leap I did and challenge their selves to the wonderful and rewarding world of public speaking and being a member of Burnt Toast."

- Jo

"I want to learn the dynamics of communication in a group of decision makers and how decisions are formed in consideration of other members. I also want to help grow the club so that members walk away with positive experiences that benefit them in their personal and professional lives."

- Zdenek

Pet peeves?

Darin - Little grammar mistakes like interchanging 'your' for 'you're'

Zdenek - Selfish people

Jo - People who are late!

What are three things you can't live without?

Zdenek - Health, family and friends

Jo - Travel, the great outdoors, and food & wine

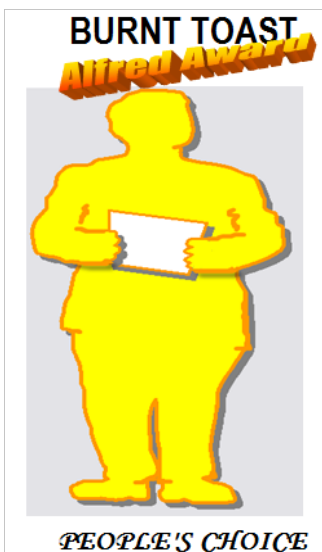
Darin - Pizza, music and the internet

The Alfred Awards

This spring, Burnt Toast held the 3rd Annual Alfred Awards. These awards were named after founding member, Alfred Kwong. Hollywood has the Oscars, theatre has the Tony Awards and we have the Alfred Awards. These awards are a variant of Table Topics and involve recipients making impromptu acceptance speeches.

The winners are chosen at random with the exception of the People's Choice award which is presented to a member who has made the greatest contribution to the club and is based on a poll of the membership. This year's People's Choice award winner is Lisa Krueck!

Congratulations Lisa!



Note: any similarity between the gold statue and Alfred himself is entirely intentional.

Burnt Toast Hall of Fame

Burnt Toast is a bit like a sports team in that, as the years go by, veteran members retire and then newer members step up into leadership positions. And, just as the Canucks have inducted past stars like Trevor Linden into a hall of fame, Burnt Toast recognizes the contributions of former Toasties through its own Hall of fame. These members are:

Alfred Kwong - Inducted 2009

Alfred Kwong was a founding member of the club – in fact, he came up with the name Burnt Toast – and he chaired many of the early meetings. Alfred was the first member to complete ten speeches and receive the Competent Communicator award. He consistently had the highest attendance, participating in about 90% of the meetings, and he served on the club executive.

Alfred set the tone in those early days and helped establish the club's distinctive style of relaxed professionalism. He was known for his quirky sense of humor that gave the club a bit of an "edge". There were a few occasions when Alfred may have gone slightly over the edge, but that was all part of making Burnt Toast the unique club that it is today; and he will be remembered each year as the namesake for the Alfred Awards.

Henry Rutgers - Inducted 2010

Henry was the first president of Burnt Toast and the second inductee into the Hall of Fame. He deserves enormous credit for leading the club through the challenges of its first year and setting the base for the thriving club that we know today. Henry once said that prior to Burnt Toast he had "never been president of anything" and he is a prime example of how Toastmasters provides the opportunity to develop leadership skills.

In 2009 Henry retired from Burnt Toast for a most Canadian reason – the meeting time conflicted with his son's hockey games. But thanks to his early example, successive Club Executives have carried on the tradition of strong professional leadership that he established.

David Swetlow - Inducted 2011

David was Burnt Toast's VP of Education in its first year and the second club President. He introduced many aspects of the club that we now take for granted such as computerized role scheduling. He also began the process of setting goals for the club leading it to achieve "Distinguished Status" based on criteria such as growth in membership and Competent Communicator awards.

In 2010, our loss was Saskatchewan's gain when David moved to Regina. In 2011, he visited Vancouver and attended a Burnt Toast meeting where he received his Hall of Fame Award and saw how the club continues to work toward the goals that he established in its early years.