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TOASTMASTER®

Leading With a *Laugh*

The many
benefits of
humor in the
workplace.

ALSO INSIDE:

**Toastmasters Connect
on Holiday**

**Secrets of
Moderating a Panel**



Members of clubs in Division G gather for their Toastmasters en Familia event in Puerto Rico.

Get Outside Your Club Space

Events beyond standard meetings forge camaraderie and creativity.

By Andrew Miller

Is your Toastmasters routine getting stale—too much “same old-same old”? If so, it’s time for bold new ideas. Try things that are different, social, and outside of your typical club space or format. Get together for a picnic, a party, or a mountain retreat. Hold your meeting in a busy restaurant or a local park. Put on a variety show and invite the public.

Social activities allow people to get to know each other—their interests, strengths, and backgrounds. It has become clear that productivity and morale improve when employees get together after work hours. While Toastmasters isn’t work, external events can have the same benefits for your members, therefore reinvigorating your club. An enthusiastic and fulfilled member is more likely to sign up for meeting roles, give a speech, or fill an officer role.

I attended my first such event soon after joining We Can Speak-Hablar Podemos Toastmasters Club in Tallahassee, Florida. It was the club’s second annual Picnic in the Park. There were games, swimming, an awards ceremony, lunch, and plenty of networking at this Division-wide activity. While at the picnic, I learned that another member had a scientific background very similar to mine, and I watched our members interact, got to know their families, and learned about their likes and dis-

likes. When we met again on Zoom, I knew them better.

According to Bobby Blackmon, DTM, former Club President, members hungered for something different after the pandemic. The picnic was a welcome alternative to Zoom. “And some of us made new friends,” Blackmon says.

Later that year, several clubs wanted to connect again, and a group picked grapes at a local vineyard. In the fall, we went bowling.

It’s possible that some members will feel like they are too busy to participate in anything beyond the standard club meeting. Blackmon suggests highlighting the fun you can have spending time with fellow members. He also says, “Schedule things far enough in advance so they can prepare.” And get them involved. “They’re more likely to attend if they helped with the planning.”

Remember: People Are Social

Boyan Kelchev, President of Speak and Lead Toastmasters in Sofia, Bulgaria, points out that social gatherings foster new experiences and discoveries. They encourage members to connect in ways they haven’t before. “We build camaraderie every time we get together,” Kelchev explains. People are social animals, and Toastmasters provides a

group identity. Club members are proud to say, “I am a Toastmaster.”

Speak and Lead members gather at a local restaurant after each meeting. In April 2023, they held a two-day retreat at a resort in the Rila Mountains. In addition to conducting a formal meeting and a speech contest, they ate, danced, and sang. Spouses, children, and non-members attended.

In March 2023, 11 clubs in Division G held Toastmasters en Familia in a park in San Juan, Puerto Rico. “Many of us had not seen each other since COVID,” says Nora Mújica Trenché, DTM. “We especially wanted friends and families to attend.” They ate and played paddleball, Jenga, and dominoes. This family day attracted the attention of others in the park, and many

sternwheeler, for a three-hour dinner cruise on the St. Johns River. The club also has fireside educational chats in members’ homes and holiday-themed parties.

Embrace Unique Events and Holidays

During the warmer months, Madrid Advanced Speakers and other local clubs meet in El Parque del Buen Retiro. They had a memorable holiday meeting in December, followed by a festive lunch. They are committed to helping Toastmasters prepare for contests, and every year they purchase contest recordings from the International Convention. They meet to watch and evaluate the speeches given by the World Champion of Public Speaking, and the event

those in attendance. This allows Toastmasters Versailles to publicize their club and attract new members.

Entice New Members

Eric Muehling, DTM, Vice President Membership of Tundra Talkers Toastmasters Club in Fairbanks, Alaska, says, “Because we lost members during the pandemic, we decided to ramp up outside activities.” Last summer, they met in a city park for a picnic and officer induction. They hosted a holiday party in December with a potluck and gift exchange. Existing members were enthusiastic, and new people joined.

Natalia Garibay, Vice President Public Relations for Club Tm De Ensenada, in Mexico, said their club holds several events every year to promote Toastmasters and increase membership. Recently she organized “Unidos por La Voz” (United by Voice) to publicize Spanish-speaking clubs throughout the world. Their Zoom event was an expanded version of a regular meeting with six prepared speeches, Table Topics®, evaluations, and networking opportunities. About 125 people from 18 countries participated, and the event attracted new members. The club is no stranger to strong turnouts. Last year, they celebrated their 51st club anniversary with participants from 15 other countries on Zoom.

“We build camaraderie every time we get together.”

—BOYAN KELCHEV

requested information about the organization. That’s another benefit of doing public activities: You might end up gaining potential Toastmasters.

Add Variety

Wayne Tuttle of Raising Champions Advanced Toastmasters in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, says his club holds one external event every month. This past March it was Laugh your Socks Off (LYSO), an online variety show. Over 50 members and guests listened to goofy songs, jokes, and a performance by Tuttle and his hand puppet, Ted (The Turtle-Neck) Turtle. “Variety is important,” Tuttle says. “It keeps people coming.”

The idea for LYSO originated with Niagara On The Lake Toastmasters in Canada. Charlie Kennedy, DTM, says their club started LYSO in 2018, and it is usually held at a cafe in St. Catharines, Ontario. Although not an official club event, the emcee promotes Toastmasters and directs the audience to tables with information about local clubs. Throughout the show, members circulate and talk about Toastmasters.

Winter Park Toastmasters Club, in Winter Park, Florida, draws on a unique venue for outside activities. Each year, the club rents pontoon boats and tours nearby lakes. In the spring, they board a remodeled steam-powered

is hosted for all the clubs in Madrid and any others who would like to attend.

Gavel Clubs operating in prisons can’t meet outside the compound. However, they find ways to spice up their meetings. Last December, the Phoenix Gavel Club at the Walton Correctional Institution in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, held a themed meeting. Members described memorable holiday traditions. Instead of exchanging gifts, the Men of Tomorrow Gavel Club at Madison Correctional Institution, also in Florida, hosted a Secret Santa Claus. Speakers took turns making positive comments about a member without mentioning his name. The others had to guess who was being described. For these Gaveliers, such celebrations provide a much-needed link to the free world.

Marius Popescu, President of Toastmasters Versailles, in Versailles, France, explains that their club meets in restaurants during the holiday season. This helps prepare members to speak in real-world settings with many distractions—which standard meetings don’t provide. These restaurant get-togethers often attract bystanders who later join the club.

Toastmasters Versailles also participates in the Forum des Associations outside Versailles Castle every year. The event invites associations from all over the city to present what they do to

Put Ideas Into Practice

If you want to invigorate your membership, think up some new activities. If you’re short on ideas, visit another club to find out what they’re doing or borrow ideas from clubs highlighted in this article. Regardless, plan events that are innovative and exciting to invigorate your club members and possibly attract new ones.

As Blackmon, my fellow club member, says, “People are happiest when they’re busy. They need to have a sense of purpose.” By bringing together your club members outside of your meetings, they will come back to club meetings with stronger bonds, greater intention, and a renewed sense of excitement.

Andrew Miller retired in 2013 from a career that included research in aquatic systems and university teaching. He is a member of We Can Speak-Podemos Hablar Toastmasters Club in Florida. He volunteers in prisons, restores antique stained-glass windows, and writes. His website is andrewcmiller.com.