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—Jo Anna Shaw
Jefferson State Toastmasters
Phoenix, Oregon

Pause Instead of Ah

I read with curiosity Bill Brown's article “An Empty Tradition?” about the Ah-Counter function [March 2018]. I was wondering if he had found any club that adopted the approach we take at Jefferson State Toastmasters in Southern Oregon.

A few years ago, our club decided to shift the focus of our Ah-Counter role to acknowledging the skill that replaces unnecessary fillers: pausing. We renamed the role the Pause- and Filler-Counter. This encourages the Pause- and Filler-Counter to listen for and note effective pauses so they can be celebrated at the end of the meeting. Our members are now more focused on pausing and breathing than counting their own fillers.

We are experiencing far fewer uses of filler words overall. New members, who happen to be very self-conscious and self-critical, are more relaxed and able to shift from fillers to pauses. Others are enjoying more relaxed and engaging speaking styles.

I am so happy this article was written so I could have this opportunity to share. Best wishes for emphatic and magnetic pausing.

Jo Anna Shaw
Jefferson State Toastmasters
Phoenix, Oregon

Strike a Balance

As always, I very much enjoyed the March *Toastmaster*. Bill Brown's article about the Ah-Counter tradition caught my attention. He gives the option of either continuing with the usual report that points no one out with little effect, to bringing immediate attention to the offender.

I would suggest a practice that I have seen in several clubs. The Ah-Counter congratulates by name those in the meeting who used no filler words, and further names those who used just a few. Others in the meeting know how they did without being embarrassed in some sort of Pavlovian “clicking” exercise. This practice seems to strike a good balance of positive motivation while giving the appropriate message to those who can improve.

Len Bulmer, ACS, ALB
The Court of Blarney club
Aurora, Ontario, Canada

Delivering with Notes

The article “Good Notes: A Public Speaker's Best Ally” [March 2018] is an excellent commentary for speakers who use notes. However, I feel a few points are important for the advanced speaker.

First, whether an excellent speaker scripts material or develops it as an oral journey, they don't “memorize” it; they know it the same as actors. Bill Gove, the first President of the National Speakers Association and Toastmasters' 1991 Golden Gavel recipient, implored others to “know what comes next” so you never have to pause and think about it. When you do so, notes are superfluous.

Also, many speakers fret over not making a mistake from their delivery. Why? If you're performing Shakespeare it's important, but I perform Hill and do not give an audience copies of what I intend to say, except in seminars and workshops. Even then it's a topical handout.

When I work with a speaker I encourage them to refine a personal approach—scripted, outlined, bulleted or otherwise—and always rehearse so well it flows naturally. Joel's article provides a sound basis from which to develop a personal style.

Gordon Hill, ACS
Los Chismosos club
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Magnificent Meera

The March article about Meera Manek, “Coaching, Communication and Comedy,” was enlightening. This is a woman who is or should be taking over the world right now!

Coming from Kenya and establishing herself in the U.S. with a solid sense of self, a steely determination and, judging from her photograph, a smile on her face, this is the sort of character that I would very happily have in our Toastmasters meetings.

Speaking, speechwriting, mentoring and comedy—she's a quadruple threat and an inspiration. Her life is a lesson in believing in one's self, doing what you love and loving what you do. When that is the case, you attract people, and they will come to you for your help, advice and services—something which I believe Toastmasters does so well for its members.

I'm taking on the Presentation Mastery route in Pathways, and Meera is a great example to follow. Let us know when you are coming to Scotland!

Ikenna Oguguo, CC
Clyde Communicators Toastmasters
Glasgow, Scotland

Power of Persuasion

I found the communication column by Dean Brenner in the March issue interesting and relevant. I recently completed the third project in the Advanced Communication series: Speeches by Management, “Persuade to Inspire.” The column provides great advice and presented the characteristics of persuasive communication. I quote the five characteristics “Clarity, Brevity, Context, Impact and Value.” Combining this framework and organizing the message in a speech to persuade and inspire will be effective. I will definitely implement this approach in the future. Thank you for sharing.

Cecil Dharmasri, CC, CL
Talking Together Toastmasters
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write it in 200 words or less. State your name, member number and home club, and send it to letters@toastmasters.org. Please note: Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity, and may be published in both the print and electronic editions.