

Scared Speechless?

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Did you know that the fear of public speaking outranks the fear of death by a two-to-one margin? Maybe you're not surprised. After all, many writers profess a love for words--as long as they can write them, not speak them! But lest you think that once your book is published, your work is finished--guess again. That's when the real work--that of marketing and promoting yourself and your book--begins.

If the thought of actually talking to people, whether you're signing books at the local Barnes & Noble or being interviewed on national TV, makes your heart race and your palms sweat, get thee to Toastmasters!

Toastmasters International is a non-profit organization conceived and developed in 1924 by Dr. Ralph Smedley as a way of helping others to speak more effectively. At Toastmasters, members learn by speaking to groups and working with others in a supportive environment. A typical Toastmasters club is made up of 20 to 30 people who meet once a week for about an hour. Each meeting gives everyone an opportunity to practice the following:

- Conducting meetings. Meetings usually begin with a short business session which helps members learn basic meeting procedures.
- Giving impromptu speeches. Members present one-to two-minute impromptu speeches on assigned topics.
- Presenting prepared speeches. Three or more members present speeches based on projects from the Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Program manuals. Projects cover such topics as speech organization, voice, language, gestures, and persuasion.
- Offering constructive evaluation. Every prepared speaker is assigned an evaluator who points out speech strengths and offers suggestions for improvement.

The Tools You Use. Upon joining a Toastmasters club, each new member receives a variety of manuals and resources on speaking. Members also have access to other books as well as audio and video cassettes on speaking and leading. They also receive the award-winning *The Toastmaster*, a monthly magazine that offers the latest insights on speaking and leadership techniques.

I've been a member of South County Toastmasters for five years. Toastmasters deserves all the credit for my current career in which I lead training programs to help adults improve their writing and interpersonal communication skills. If anyone had suggested 10 years ago that one day I'd be a public speaker, I would have thought they were crazy. I once turned down a promotion

because it would have required making presentations to coworkers! I joined Toastmasters to help me overcome this career-breaker.

Visitors are always welcome at Toastmasters. South County Toastmasters meets every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Best Western Hotel at I-55 and Meramec Bottom Road (behind Cracker Barrel).

In June, South County Toastmasters is offering a series of four educational seminars during our regular meeting. The topics are listed below:

- **June 1 "Overcoming Nervousness and Fear"**
"Speech Mechanics: Adding Style to Your Content"
- **June 8 "Organizing Your Speech: Roadmap to Success"**
"How to Conduct an Effective Q&A Session"
- **June 15 "Running Effective Meetings"**
"Getting to the (Power)Point"
"Evaluations—Striking the Balance"
- **June 22 "Making the Sale"**
"Awards—The Art of Giving and Receiving with Style"

These educational programs are free; however, space is limited. Please call Klaus Dobler at 314-845-2832 to register. And don't forget to mention you saw the information here on the St. Louis Writers Guild website!

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