

Guest Editor's Section — Stories from the Storm

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# Storytelling

MAGAZINE



*2013 NSN Regional Spotlight Events Announced*



"Achieving Greatness: Your Heroic Journey!" Conference keynoter Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman

## Storytellers Shine In Hornet's Nest

**Craig Harrison**

The request seemed simple, coordinate educational sessions for a daylong conference, helping showcase storytellers and speakers. Since I have produced many conferences and conventions, I was happy to oblige Northern California's District 57 Toastmasters.

Twice a year they celebrate the spoken word through keynote speakers, contests, and awards at District Conferences. They are usually held in conference centers with breakout sessions in smaller surrounding rooms. At a given time, some of the 350 attendees may be in up to seven simultaneous sessions.

However, this conference had a twist. It was to be held on a deck of the historic USS Hornet CVS-12 Museum, an aircraft carrier docked in Alameda, California. Envision gangplanks, scissor lifts, narrow stairwells in a hanger bay where planes are traditionally stored and serviced, cavernous spaces, dreadful acoustics, and steel floors. Did I mention the carrier is haunted?

For "Achieving Greatness! Your Heroic Journey" I was asked to schedule concurrent sessions,

orchestrating the movement of hundreds of adults of all levels of mobility, on the tightest of schedules. Every minute was scripted. The breakout rooms were unconventional, to say the least. Pipes and portholes. Odd angles, low ceilings, and a color palette of hospital green and Navy grey.

However were we going to mobilize masses of natively attired people of all ages and sizes from deck to deck? It took some doing, but we did come up with a way. Rather than move hundreds of people into cramped rooms for breakouts, we kept the audience in the comfort of the main area and streamed the presenters in and out. This saved travel time, avoided the stress of moving, and guaranteed no one would be disappointed to find overflowing breakout sessions in small rooms.

We altered sets from 45-minute educational sessions to shorter segments on the main stage. It allowed our tellers to use the primary sound system; attendees got to hear from *all* presenters, rather than having to pick a few; and attendees had more of a shared experience.





Left to right, Craig Harrison, Dorian Taylor, David Orris, Dilek Alkaya, partial conference team in front of USS Hornet in Alameda CA.

comprised of exactly 20 slides, with each one running for 20 seconds.

Presentations included stories of *Monkey Mind*, *Grandma's Mornings with Jack (LaLane)*, awakening one's inner hero, and a story delivered as a Pecha Kucha entitled *I Once Gave a Speech This Big!*

The conference went swimmingly. The reviews were stellar and we all landed happily without being stung by the world's largest Hornet.

Taking a page from the popular Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) Conferences, we booked presenters for 16-minute presentations, à la the 18-minute TED Talks ([www.TED.com/talks](http://www.TED.com/talks)). We also welcomed applicants to deliver Pecha Kuchas — slide presentations of six minutes and 40 seconds

**Craig Harrison's** ([Craig@HackinBoo.com](mailto:Craig@HackinBoo.com), [www.HackinBoo.com](http://www.HackinBoo.com)) last conference focused on Gizmology, simplifying technology for neophyte communicators. When not planning conferences, he tells tales of humor and humanity.

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