

Five Things Storytellers Can Learn from Toastmasters

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Storytellers and Toastmasters. Similarities abound. Each communicates with audiences, entertains, informs, inspires their listeners, and receives applause. Storytelling is arguably the oldest profession, enjoying worldwide popularity. Toastmasters have been meeting since 1924. This educational nonprofit has over 10,000 clubs in 90 countries.

There are Toastmasters clubs dedicated to storytelling, and Toastmasters conferences and conventions often feature storytellers. Some storytellers are active Toastmasters, using club meetings to polish their craft and develop content. As one active in both communities, I know each group has valuable lessons to teach the other. Here are five things storytellers can learn from Toastmasters

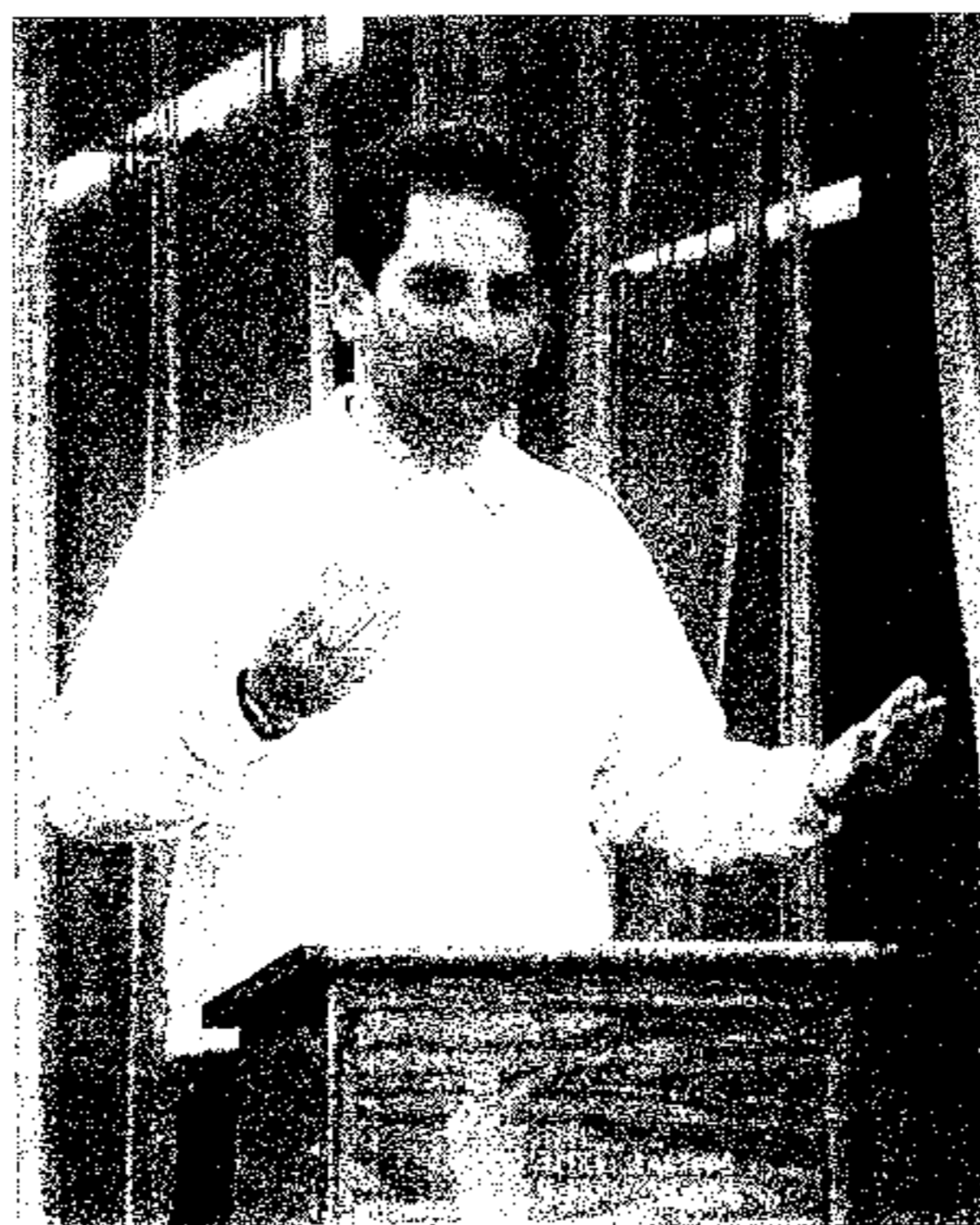
1. Develop an Internal Time Clock

Toastmasters time all aspects of their meetings, with special attention to presentations. Whether giving a five-to-seven-minute speech, or speaking "off the cuff" for one to two minutes, presenters develop an excellent ability to measure presentation time, performing in finite amounts of time—no more and no less.

Storytellers too can develop a feel for how to tell a two-minute tale, a seven-minute story, or something in between in Toastmasters.

2. Receive Immediate Feedback

Toastmasters evaluate all presenta-



Craig Harrison as Toastmaster

tions and are skilled at acknowledging strengths and recommending areas for improvement. Their blend of motivation and specific recommendations provides tellers with immediate feedback.

Tellers gather many data points about their stories through the written and verbal evaluations Toastmasters provide at each meeting.

3. Provide Live Audiences

Toastmasters provide their members with a ready-made audience. Imagine an audience of poised listeners who laugh, sigh, and cry in response to what they hear. How wonderful for tellers. Oh, did I mention Toastmasters' proclivity for applause?

As tellers, we can use audiences to refine our material, fine-tune our timing, and gauge audience comprehension, appreciation, and reaction. Why practice in isolation?

4. Speak in the Moment

Toastmasters regularly participate in Table Topics, where they are asked to speak extemporaneously for one to two minutes on a random topic. As a result, they become adept at thinking, listening, and speaking on their feet, reacting to whatever comes their way.

This skill helps storytellers with their pre-, post-, and between-story interactions with audiences, and even sharpens their emcee skills where ad-libs are used.

5. Value the Introduction

Toastmasters pride themselves on mastering the art of the introduction which draws in audiences, predisposes them to listen, builds credibility in the presenter, and foreshadows the presentation to come.

Audiences are naturally curious about tellers too. Your introduction can help audiences get to know you, appreciate and admire you, and deepen their connection to you and your stories.

It Does Not End Here

So what are you waiting for? This story does not end here. Find a weekly or monthly Toastmasters club to visit. Then join the one you like. Contact your local Toastmasters district or visit www.toastmasters.org.

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