

# TOASTMASTER®

October 2008

Special Leadership Issue

## THE WOODEN WAY

A legendary coach offers  
lessons in leadership.

### How to Lead Without a Title

U.S. Election '08:  
**How Do the  
Candidates  
Communicate?**

## ARTICLES & DEPARTMENTS

### 2 **Viewpoint: The Courage to Conquer Greatness**

*By International President Jana Barnhill, DTM, AS*

### 4 **Letters to the Editor**

### 6 **My Turn: Bam! Fighting Off the Fears**

Toastmaster really cooks in “Emeril” taping.  
*By Doug Palmer, CC*

### 8 **Profile: Clearing Cambodia**

Toastmaster speaks up for Cambodians injured by land mines.  
*By Julie Bawden Davis*

### 24 **Can We Talk? U.S. Election 2008: What to Look for in a Candidate's Speech**

Less show biz, more authenticity and relevant standards are needed.  
*By Bob Katz*

### 26 **Manner of Speaking: Campaign Miscommunication**

Even the most experienced speakers suffer from foot-in-mouth disease.  
*By Paul Serman*

### 34 **Update: A Winner in Many Ways**

TT's 2008 World Champion of Public Speaking overcame big obstacles on her way to victory.  
*By Paul Serman and Beth Black*

### 35 **International Hall of Fame**

### 38 **Funny You Should Say That: A Jargon of Our Own**

Let's hear it for the oral verbalizers.  
*By John Cadley*

**On the Cover:** John Wooden speaks at UCLA in 2003, at a ceremony honoring him and his late wife, Nell. See story on page 16.

## FEATURES

### Leading Without Authority

How to influence others when you don't have 'position power.'

*By Dave Zielinski*

PAGE 10

### The Wooden Way

A legendary coach offers lessons in leadership.

*By Craig Harrison, DTM*

PAGE 16

### How Do the Candidates Communicate?

Obama vs. McCain:  
Dramatically Different Styles

*By Linda McGurk*

PAGE 20

### Oh, Calgary!

Photos highlighting the recent 77th Annual International Convention in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

PAGE 28

#### The Toastmasters Vision:

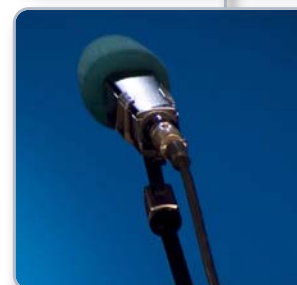
Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

#### The Toastmasters Mission:

Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.





*“Mentors are available at all stages of your leadership life – early, middle and late. Seek them out and listen; absorb their knowledge and use it.”*

– John R. Wooden,  
Head Basketball Coach, Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles

**A legendary coach offers lessons in leadership.**

# THE WOODEN WAY

By Craig Harrison, DTM

**W**hen John Robert Wooden speaks, everyone listens – not only because he is considered the greatest college basketball coach of all time, but because his legacy as a leader extends far beyond the basketball court. Aside from having guided his University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) teams to an unprecedented 10 U.S. national championships, Wooden is a highly principled man and a master motivator who offers invaluable insights about people and how they can best work together.

Recently, I interviewed the 97-year old marvel on the topic of leadership. Coach Wooden shared his wisdom on team building, conflict resolution, giving credit, dealing with adversity and pursuing excellence. His teachings are directly applicable to Toastmasters everywhere, be they officers or future officers.

## Leading and Motivating Teams

**The *Toastmaster* magazine:** *How can our leaders motivate people to do good work, and how can they motivate teams of people to work together toward a common goal?*

**John Wooden:** In my opinion, one of the greatest motivating tools we have is a pat on the back. It doesn't have to be a physical pat – it could be a smile, a nod. Everyone likes to be complimented in one way or another.



▲ A reporter interviews John Wooden at UCLA, where he coached from 1948 to 1975 and won an unprecedented 10 U.S. national championships.



▲ John Wooden speaks at UCLA in 2003, at a ceremony honoring him and his late wife, Nell. Earlier this year, the university's Anderson School of Management established the John Wooden Global Leadership Award.

Another technique is listening. A leader must listen to those under their supervision. I believe that has been overlooked a lot. We don't know a thing that we haven't learned from somebody else in one way or another. And one of the ways we do that is by listening.

### Tips for New Leaders

**TM:** Many Toastmasters members step, or are thrust, into leadership positions for the first time. Do you have tips on how they can build a cohesive team?

**JW:** Again, the first thing is listening. Get ideas from them. Lead, don't drive. And give credit. Don't blame. If an officer on your team suggested something and it worked well, give them credit. If it doesn't work well, *you* take the blame because you made the decision. Lastly, criticism must always be given in a gentle way, never harshly.

[As a coach] I had three rules, as I progressed through the years, for my teams:

1. Never be late. Always be on time. It's very important. Whether to practice, to the table, to the bus, to your classes.
2. You must never criticize a teammate. That's the leader's job. It's never your job.
3. I would not tolerate profanity from anyone, anytime. I'd blow the whistle, pull you from the court, put you on the bench and talk to you before I would put you back in.

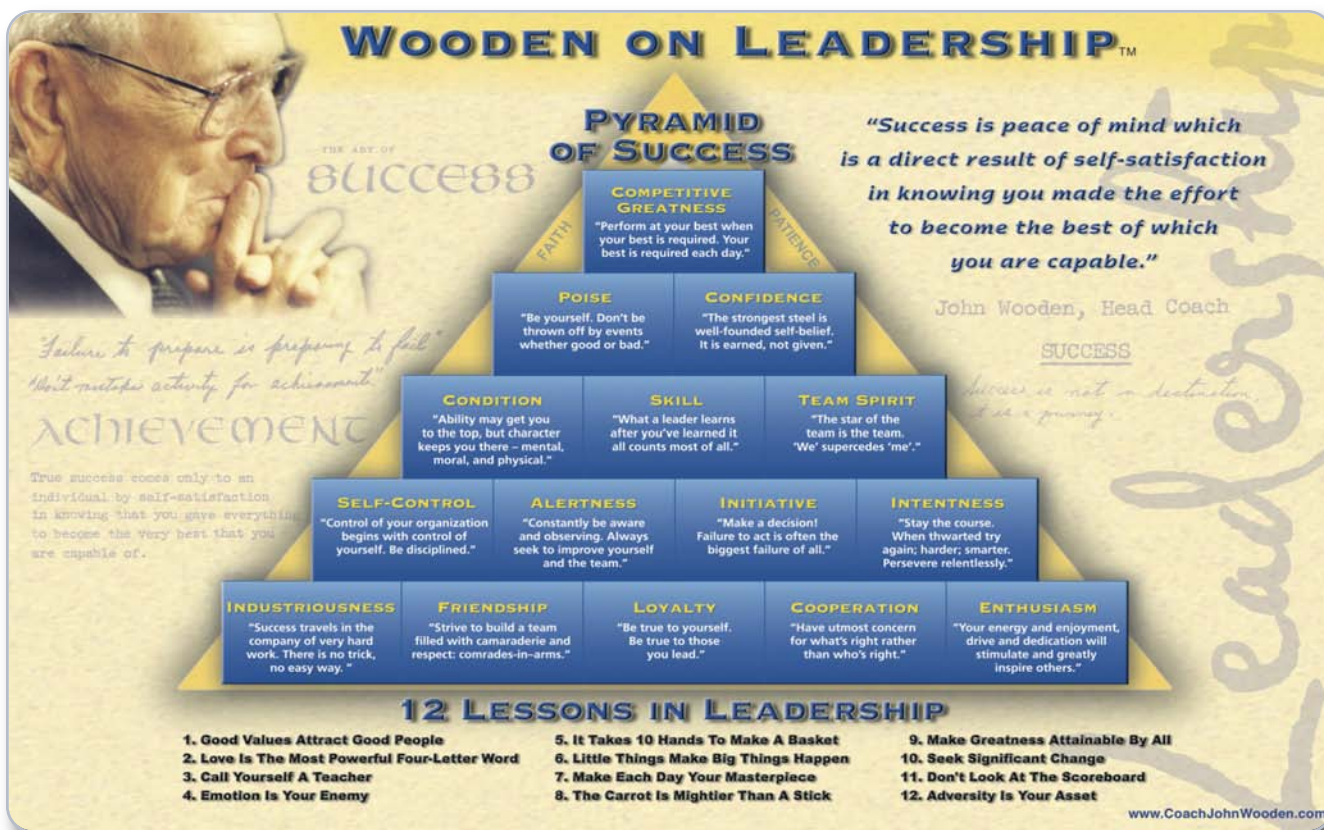
### The Pursuit of Excellence

**TM:** Each year our districts strive to achieve and/or maintain levels of excellence. You coached for 16 years at UCLA before you won your first national championship. Which was harder: climbing the mountain to win your first national championship, or maintaining that level of excellence in subsequent years when you were the recognized king of the hill and expectations rose?

**JW:** I think it's far more difficult to get to the top. You learn so much along the way, not only with working with other people, but other little things that can help you.

**TM:** As someone who has won at every level and set records that likely will never be broken, what is your definition of success?





**JW:** Too many people look at outscoring someone as winning. I never tried to get that across to my players. My bench never heard me mention winning. My whole emphasis was for each one of my players to try to learn to execute the fundamentals to the best of their ability. Not to try to be better than somebody else, but to learn from others, and never cease trying to be the best they could be; that's what I emphasized more than anything else.

**"A good banker isn't careless with pennies; a good leader isn't sloppy about details."**

– John R. Wooden

## Pyramid of Success

**TM:** Your Pyramid of Success is an inspiration to men and women around the world. How did you develop your model of excellence?

**JW:** When I was an English teacher, I found out some parents made their youngsters feel they had failed if they didn't get an A or a B. I never liked that way to judge. Nor do I like Mr. Webster's definition of success, which is more or less the accumulation of material possessions or the achievement of a position of power or prestige. I don't question the accomplishments, but I don't think they necessarily indicate success.

I wanted to come up with something that I hoped would make me a better teacher, and give those under my supervision something with which to aspire, other than just higher marks in the classroom or more points in athletic endeavors.

I coined my own definition of success. I used what my father said: "Never try to be better than someone else. Learn from others." I ran across a simple verse at that time that said:

"At God's footstool to confess, a poor soul knelt and bowed his head. 'I failed' he cried. The master said, 'Though didst thy best. That is success.'"

From those lines I coined my own definition of success in 1934:

*"Success is peace of mind attained only through self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable."*

After a while I wasn't happy with this definition. My youngsters didn't seem to understand it very well. I felt I needed to come up with something you could see. So I started the Pyramid of Success, started it in 1934, completed it in 1948 when I was teaching at Indiana State University after being discharged from the U.S. Navy in 1946.

Any structure must have a strong foundation; the cornerstones anchor the foundation. For some reason the cornerstones that I chose to begin [the Pyramid] with I never changed. I had a lot of ideas during those years.

Changed some, dropped some, substituted something else, and other names could be used, but never changed the cornerstones.

I think anyone's success depends on working hard – industriousness and enthusiasm, enjoying what you are doing. You can't work your best if you're not enjoying what you are doing. Those were the first two [cornerstones].

And gradually I built the rest of the blocks. Between the cornerstones I had *friendship, loyalty and cooperation*. Then I went up to *self-control, alertness, initiative and intentness*. Then I went up to *condition, skill and team spirit*. And those led up to *poise and confidence*. And it all went up to *competitive greatness*.

And then with patience and faith you can get to the top of the pyramid, which is my definition of success.

### On Resolving Conflict

**TM:** *What advice do you have in regards to resolving team conflict?*

**JW:** Certainly conflict will arise. I think you have to get both parties together and air everything out without trying to hold back anything – not be critical of either one, just try to listen to both sides and find out what might be the trouble. And sometimes you'll find out it wasn't too much at all. And it can be worked out without too much of a problem. Unless a problem is brought to the forefront, it will just continue to fester.

### Cultivating Leadership in Others

**TM:** *What advice can you give today's leaders about cultivating leadership in others?*

**JW:** Make certain that you give those under your supervision credit. Make sure that they receive...very little criticism, but when there has to be some criticism, it must be done in a gentle way that will not be embarrassing, and definitely not in front of others. You may need to take them aside and talk it over, but never do so while you're mad. No yelling; it has to be done in a gentle fashion, and with a pat on the back is the best.

### On Struggle and Difficulty

**TM:** *Any advice for leaders facing adversity or struggle of some kind on their teams or in their clubs?*

**JW:** Hardship brings people closer together if you share it. When I first came to UCLA, we had to have basketball practice for the first 17 years on the 3rd floor of the old gym, with the gymnastics team on one side and the wrestling squad on another most of the time. I grew

closer to those two coaches than the others because we shared adversity. It was tough for us all.

### Club Presidents: Listen and Lead with Love

**TM:** *What advice can you provide our thousands of club presidents – essentially the team captains – around the world, in terms of leading their squads of officers and members?*

**JW:** I wanted mine to have a definite part. Your officers should never be afraid to make a suggestion, but they should never be upset if the leader does not accept it.

I also wanted my basketball players to know that I *really cared* about them. Forget basketball; as a *person*, I cared. I cared about their family. I want to know each

**“Effective leaders are, first and foremost, good teachers. We’re in the education business.”**

– John R. Wooden

day: How's your mother? Did the job work out for your dad? Did your brother or sister get that position?

I think any leader should do this. You should really care. If you are fooling them, they will catch on.

### On Patience

**TM:** *What else would you like Toastmasters leaders to know in order to succeed?*

**JW:** At the top of my pyramid: patience and faith! Leaders must have patience for those under their supervision. Don't expect too much too soon. Maybe it was easy for you, but that doesn't mean it's going to be easy for somebody else. Be sure you have patience.

And then, you must *believe* in what you're doing, that what you're doing is the proper thing, the right thing. And you must have faith that things will end up as they should, which doesn't mean as you want them to, but things will work out as they should. Providing, of course, that you do the things that you should do to help it become that reality.

I think we are all guilty at times of wanting things to happen a certain way but not doing everything we are capable of to help that become a reality. We just want it to. And that's not life. That shouldn't be life. **T**

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Past District Governor **Craig Harrison, DTM**, is a member of Lakeview Toastmasters in Oakland, California. A former high school basketball coach, he is the author of *Cultivating the Leader in You* and runs the training firm Expressions of Excellence!™ Reach him at **[www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](http://www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com)**.