

Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C...Creativity!

Spice Up Moribund Meetings With Periodic Changes of Pace

By Craig Harrison, DTM, AL
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Over time, many clubs fall into the doldrums. It's possible for meetings to become a bit stale, for members to lapse into a routinized pattern each week. Sometimes it's a result of the sameness of the room, identical meeting formats, or the absence of enough new members to infuse your club with new energy. Over the years I've watched clubs succumb to lethargy. Yet the remedy is as easy as a little dose of vitamin C...Creativity. When you administer this vitamin to your club once every 4-6 weeks you'll see its life force return anew.

"Toastmasters is like a love-affair. Everything is exciting at first and then, if you're not careful, it can become dull and routine. Changing your meetings helps to keep it exciting."

— *Paula Tunison, DTM, past International Director
and currently District 55 Governor
(her third time in this role!)*

Consider these as some of the many ways you can introduce freshness, fun and vitality into your meetings:

1. **Alter your room layout.** Many times we accept the room layout as a given: the placement of the lectern, chairs and tables. For a change of pace, try reversing the location of the lectern before the next meeting. If possible, put it at the opposite end and feel the difference. Other variations: if your lectern is at the narrow end of a long table, try placing it opposite the wide side. Or consider removing the table and holding the meeting in a circle or semi-circle, a chevron or other configuration. Remember, environment informs experience. Add flowers, a scent or some fun decorations for further effect. Create a new environment and the experience will surely feel fresh and exciting.
2. Consider a **Joint Meeting** with another club that meets nearby and/or at the same time. You host them one meeting and they can reciprocate another time. It's exciting to entertain new guests who already know the Toastmaster mores. The extra people and energy from this joint meeting doubles your fun!

3. **The Grab Bag Meeting.** Designate your next meeting as a grab bag where, upon arrival, all roles are drawn from out of a bag filled with roles written on slips of paper on the spot. Use a fill-in-the-blanks agenda, or a flip chart or white board where you write in the roles chosen just prior to the meeting. Any member may end up as Toastmaster, Speaker or Evaluator. The drama adds a layer of excitement as even the "prepared" speeches feel like Table Topics!
4. **Theme Meetings** turn a normal meeting into a special event! Recently one club in the United States held an Academy Awards meeting where the Toastmaster wore a tuxedo, the Table Topics were related to movies and the winners gave acceptance speeches! Another club honored the baseball season with a meeting in which each member assumed a baseball-related role, The Toastmaster became the manager, the General Evaluator became the head umpire, speakers became batters and the Table Topic Master became the pitcher. Members fielded topics. You can dress the part as well!

Other themes may relate to topical holidays, current events of a local, regional or national nature. Celebrating the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japan, Independence Day in your country or even a club, district or company anniversary.

5. **Costume Parties** are types of theme meetings that are especially stimulating. You can wear masks and costumes for Halloween, caps and gowns at graduation time, or go green for St. Patrick's Day. Adornments abound depending upon the theme for your party.
6. **Enter the Time Machine.** Your costume party or theme meeting can be tied to a historical period. At this meeting people dress like a past generation: platform boots and silk shirts with wide lapels for the 70's, bobby socks and leather jackets for the 50's, or even the Gatsby look from the roaring 20's, you'll find a new energy comes with such wardrobes. Or go back further: The Renaissance era, Roman or Greek empires or even the Stone Age. Perhaps you'd rather fast forward to the year 2058 or 3008? When the time comes, come in character!

In addition to dressing for the epoch, use related language, phrases and speech topics. Methinks you speaketh the King's English in your Elizabethan era. For the Roaring Twenties, your closing thought may end with "twenty three skidoo." And your table and speech topics can relate to the themes of the era as well.

7. **Go Hollywood!** Themes abound from the world of motion pictures. Whether you take your inspiration from Hollywood, India's Bollywood or the movies of Hong Kong, there are wonderful ideas for movies, as diverse as The Matrix, Harry Potter or Ratatouille.

8. Replace the traditional Table Topics with a **Progressive Story** begun by the Topic Master and continued by all members. Collectively you will tell a story designated by the Topic Master. It's a co-creation of all members and requires listening skills, creativity and quick thinking to complete. Each member contributes a sentence or two in the co-creation of a new story.
9. At national election time it's natural to dedicate a meeting to **Debates**. Your Table Topics can have involved two participants arguing alternate sides of an issue. Or plan a debate with numerous candidates to involve as many members as possible. Another alternative: you can ask a Table Topic respondent to argue both sides of an issue. Table bunting is optional.

We The People, a club in Reno, NV, in its debate format, allows a Table Topic responder to rebut the previous participant's topic. This builds listening skills, persuasive skills and also challenges listeners to think more as divergent points of view are counter-posed in successive communications.

Even the speeches during such meetings focused on debates, prepared in advance, can take on a campaign tone, tacking issues and vying for the hearts, minds and votes of club members.

10. Turn one of your meetings into a **Television Newscast**. Your Sergeant-at-Arms can give the countdown until you go live, and also be the "voiceover" that introduces the newscast. Your Toastmaster of the day is the anchor, with Table Topics and General Evaluator as your Sports and Weather co-anchors. Speakers become field correspondents with reports, etc. You can even turn some roles into commercials.
11. Run a **Speech Marathon!** Devote an entire meeting just to prepared speeches. Help your members earn their educational awards as you dedicate an entire meeting just to prepared speeches. Especially for clubs with many members that meets for just an hour at a time, this periodic meeting helps more members speak and shortens the wait time between speeches. Like attending a speech contest, it's educational for audience members to see multiple speeches in rapid succession. Popular as June 30 approaches each year, these have sometimes been scheduled in addition to your regular meeting time and place, but can also be staged as a regular club meeting.
12. Once a year, whether on April Fools Day, or another time, consider a **Reverse Meeting**. You begin with the closing thought, hear speech evaluations before the speeches, and generally reverse the order of your entire meeting. Once in a blue moon this fun variation of the usual meeting format is refreshing and fun. Give it a try!
13. Hit the **Mute button**. In this meeting it's all done without sound. Oh you can mouth the words to your speech or topic, but it all needs to be done with facial expressions and gesticulations, hand and body movements. A less ambitious version: turn Table Topics into charades.

14. Every day is a **holiday** somewhere! There are even event calendars such as the annual CHASE'S CALENDAR OF EVENTS that provide fascinating and timely themes you can build meetings around. For example: September 24 is National Punctuation Day (www.NationalPunctuationDay.com) in the US. For that week's meeting, ask members to announce punctuation used in their speaking, *period*. Their speeches can be about punctuation semicolon; Topics, Opening and Closing Thoughts and more can include the speaking of punctuation, *comma*, and more, *exclamation mark!* Many holidays have their own websites to help you understand their origins, meaning and intent.
15. Once in a blue moon, or every April 4 ("Tell A Lie" day¹) you can dedicate a meeting to **Tall Tales**, where embellishment, aggrandizement and bold face lies are the order of the day. Everyone can get into the act. The truth is your point of departure for this meeting. Your speech introductions, speech contents, table topics and more can play fast and loose with the truth. Make outlandish claims, representations of gigantic proportions and pull each other's legs for comedic effect. Then, just to confuse your audience, through a boldface truth in the middle and see if they detect it! Make Pinocchio proud.

During Table Topics, play True or Lie. For some this is easy. For others, less so! Vote after each topic response on whether it was the truth or a lie. Alternately, confuse people with your version of *truthiness* — things that a person claims to know intuitively or "from the gut" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts.

If you're troubled by fostering lies in a Toastmasters meeting, rest assured that each April 30th you can honor National Honesty Day with a meeting dedicated to truth, which *is* often stranger than fiction!

I asked veteran Toastmaster Yew Kam Keong, Ph.D of Australia's Deloitte at the Barrington Club (763715-70), author of *You Are Creative —Let Your Creativity Bloom*, why we should deviate from our regular program formats from time to time: "These meeting ideas are effective because they contain the essential elements of creativity: spontaneity, humor, playfulness and doing the unexpected. Toastmasters meetings will never be the same again. They will be even more fun... and with fun comes humungous learning!"

Dr. YKK, also known as the Chief Mind Unzipper, is an international creativity speaker, best-selling author and consultant who specializes in fostering creativity in others; In his 22 years as a Toastmaster Dr. YKK has spoken to Toastmasters clubs in ten countries and inspired creativity in tens of thousands! His website www.mindbloom.net contains many creativity tools for clubs and members.

¹ . Warning: Taxpayers in the USA are cautioned not to celebrate Tell A Lie day in April 15!

Unleashing Your Creativity

CELEBRATING

THE SPIRIT OF INVENTION IN YOU!

IS THERE some Da Vinci, Edison or Hopper within you? Creativity isn't limited to the great inventors of the world. We all have tools with which to achieve greatness: vision, curiosity, creativity, perseverance and a can-do attitude. These skills can lead us to create and discover, innovate and invent. UNLEASHING YOUR CREATIVITY taps into *your* inventiveness during a fun, interactive and action-packed session.



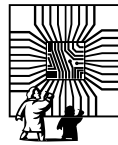
Whether by design or accident, geniuses and common folk alike have drawn upon inspiration, frustration, creativity, determination and occasional luck to bring us many inventions and innovations. UNLEASHING YOUR CREATIVITY opens your eyes and mind while taking a look at myriad inventions, great and goofy.



Learning Objectives

- ▶ Thinking Beyond the Box
- ▶ Dreaming the Dream (Asking "What if?")
- ▶ The Golden Rule of Invention (10% Inspiration / 90% Perspiration)
- ▶ Failing All the Way to Success: Failure as Fertilizer
- ▶ The Genius of Serendipity
- ▶ Naysayers as Motivators
- ▶ Role Playing Using Real Life Scenarios
- ▶ Creativity Potions

How The Presentation is Delivered

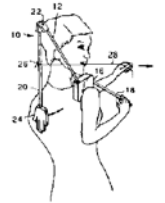


Pre-and post-session evaluations demonstrate the change in participants' perception of their own creativity. Through stories, examples, actual brainstorming sessions and stimulating handouts, participants tap into their own creativity and demonstrate how environment and mindset unleash creativity and spur innovation.



About Your Presenter

Patently entertaining, professional speaker and corporate trainer CRAIG HARRISON channels his creativity into unleashing yours. Craig trains us to see how a "what if?" attitude and the ability to think differently can lead to stunning results.



Let Craig help you and your group unleash their creativity as they 'Aspire & Achieve!'

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Whether you employ these or other ideas to spruce up your meetings it will breathe new life into proceedings. While you never want to eschew the educational value of meetings, such variations on our traditional meeting formats add a new dimension and keeps everyone fresh. Any time you apply creativity to your meetings the results will yield fun, energy and new perspectives. Ready? Set? Create.

Craig Harrison DTM, co-founder of LaughLovers (596430-57) of Oakland, CA, is a professional keynote speaker, trainer and principal of Expressions Of Excellence!™ For more resources visit www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.