



TOASTMASTERS NEWSLETTER

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Let's Celebrate Our Achievements!

Our club has proved time and time again that we cultivate talent and encourage our members to strive to reach their goals. In the past few months, our members have achieved a number of awards and it is time to celebrate! Their accomplishments are well deserved and serve as inspiration for all of our members. Please see below for the contest results and "Of the Year" Division Awards.

Contest Results



Club Evaluation Contest
Helga Bender - First Place
Isaac Venneman - Second Place



Division Evaluation Contest
Isaac Venneman - First Place



Division Table Topics Contest
Isaac Venneman - Third Place

"Of the Year" Division Awards



Division Rookie of the Year
Isaac Venneman



Division Area Director of the Year
Lisa Branch

Fluor Communicators is the Right Place to Be!



The Toastmasters journey is different for everyone! As a self-paced program, we find ways to progress in the Pathways educational program that fit our life style and schedule. We choose specific skills that we are looking to build and practice. Pathways offers 10 different paths incorporating over 300 competencies that are relevant in the real world. There is no better time to be involved in Toastmasters!

When I started Toastmasters at Fluor, I wanted to learn how to incorporate proven tricks for more engaging presentations. The evaluations for each meeting, activity, and project, encouraged and inspired me to reach new goals and risk trying new ideas. I am grateful to all the people who mentored and coached me as I achieved each step. The leadership opportunities from Club Executive to District Team leader have pushed and challenged me, teaching me much more than just a check list of how-to's. It is through friends and building relationships that I have learned the most. The supportive atmosphere at meetings, the encouraging invitation to step out of my comfort zone, and the teamwork experienced in planning and executing training and conferences, are better learning labs than any academic program.

Looking to build your resume, searching for a mentor, or excited about having confidence in various social setting? We find these opportunities at Toastmasters! Recently, through my Toastmasters experience, I helped my father attend an online meeting by Zoom! Where else can we learn real world processes and gain confidence to jump in? Look around you, who else could benefit from this education and on the job leadership opportunity? Invite others, welcome guests, and support your fellow members. Fluor Communicators is the right place to be surrounding yourself with champions and award-winning leaders! The rewards are much bigger than you can imagine. What are you waiting for? Plan your next project and advance your own potential step by step. You are in the right place at Fluor Communicators!

Christina Krus, DTM
Club Growth Director District 42
Member of Fluor Communicators

Interview with Mark Brown



Mark Brown
Vice President and General Manager
Fluor Canada

Mark Brown, vice president and general manager for Fluor Canada, has graciously volunteered his time to allow me to pick his brain about public speaking and leadership. Mark has served in a variety of leadership roles ranging from project management to construction. In this role as general manager, Fluor employees have witnessed his way of delivering messages effectively with charisma and always a good amount of humour. His effortless appearance on stage has made many Toastmasters wonder how he got to his skill level of speaking, and how we can get there too. Today he shares his journey and encourages participating in programs like Toastmasters for our own development.

As Toastmasters we are always trying to develop good communication skills. What does good communication mean to you?

I think there are different types of communication and you can scale it from good to bad. Just being able to organize your thoughts and then be able to communicate them, that is good communication. I think that if you want to be judged as a good or bad communicator, you have to realize that some of the things you communicate are not always good news stories. So it might come across as bad communication if you're not able to put things into context, or if you're not able to give a thought process to somebody so that they leave with knowing something more than they did before. If you are just communicating for communication sake, or just complaining or critiquing things, but there's not really a purpose to why you are communicating, maybe it is best not to communicate.

When I was in construction, I had to communicate a lot. And sometimes the choice of vocabulary you use in a construction environment is colourful. When you get into an office environment, there is a change in the type of communication or the volume in which you speak because you are no longer at an industrial site where you might be communicating through radios or in a loud environment. The best part about this is that, one of my bosses when I came into an office environment said "when you go into the meetings with large groups of people in this role, since you don't know what you're talking about, you're not allowed to talk for the next three months in meetings". Which is a very traumatic and sobering thing to be told, but what was interesting from that was my ability to communicate after those three months was much more refined because I listened. Good communication is knowing what you have to talk about and having that storyline to be able to leave people with an impression. Those three months of not talking were extraordinarily painful for me, but extraordinarily valuable for me.

How is being an effective communicator able to benefit both Fluor and the individual?

If you're able to communicate your thoughts, challenges, concerns to your supervisor, or how you or the team was able to compete a task, it will help you as an employee at Fluor. It will help you be able to make sure that people understand what value you are bringing and therefore the benefit of Fluor achieving a task, or a milestone associated with a project. It shouldn't be reflected though that if you don't have all of the communication skills or haven't been exposed to certain experiences where you feel comfortable or have the courage to say certain things, that you as an employee may not get the benefits of other employees that are more of a communicator. It just means that we as leadership have to invert it and say, "okay, if this individual is not as extroverted as the other person that we give them the time to make sure that we are extracting information and are trying to encourage them to communicate".

Communication in its truest form is two ways. It is not just the projection of the employee, but also the receiving group to make sure they understand and are giving them the opportunity for those people to talk. One of the things about Fluor that you'll find is that always the most confident and courageous person will do most of the talking. But that's not always the best way to communicate because the rest of the audience might not have the opportunity or might not think it's worthwhile to voice their opinion. So if it's in a group session, I think that being an effective communicator might mean not being the first, or the loudest, but do take the opportunity and have your thoughts organized in a way that can be understood.

I have noticed how well you communicate both at town halls and on your monthly blog, what do you think is the secret of great communication, including how we connect with our audience?

I generally don't let my brain process what I'm about to say, and that story about the three months without talking, has taught me that if you're going to communicate at a town hall or through another medium that you make sure that people will take away the message you are trying to communicate, but also feel like they are part of what it is you're doing. I don't have any secrets, but I think that the key is practice. If you look at Toastmasters and other opportunities that might come up on your projects, you should take advantage of those. Be able to take on a leading role, take on an HSE or value creation topic, go to Toastmasters, or put your hand up to present at meetings. The more practice you get, the more comfortable you will be in front of people.

The second key would be knowing the audience. You want to make sure that you are on point and being punctual. That you are balancing the message with the severity that it needs to be delivered but also with the ability to look at your audience and make sure that they are respecting the way it is being delivered. The way that I speak to the general population, have a one-on-one conversation or do a performance appraisal, they are all different and the tone has to be different.

The third key is having enough confidence to have a little bit of fun. I think that sometimes you have to show people that you are human. A lot of people that have had struggles with communication, that I've known, get really nervous because they feel like they're being judged. But if you can build up the confidence and have a little bit of fun with it, it relieves your own personal tension. So what I try to do is put in a little bit of that so that is a little easier for me to communicate. It gives me a mental pause, especially if it is a difficult message, or gives the group a break so that they don't just hear my voice droning on and on. When we try to talk to people at Toastmasters and try to give them the skills to do these things, I think the best thing to do is try to put a personal spin on it and add the fun context. If you can make it personal then the audience can see the sincerity in your message. But it must be put in balance or you might be disregarded as the jokester or jester.



First impressions count, do you think it would benefit all employees of Fluor to be skilled at the art of communication, whether selling a proposal, convincing a client in a certain direction, or just communicating for alignment?

I think that a lot of the purpose of being in Toastmasters or various training for Fluor employees is to be able to project. If you want to take your career in certain directions, or express your gratitude to people, or express the successes or challenges, being able to have the courage and skills to communicate it at the end of the day is the goal. Yes, I think it would benefit employees to be skilled at the art of communication, but it's in different degrees of that. What might take me 45 minutes to communicate with a bit of fun and repetition is just my style. But someone else might be able to do it in 8 words and stop talking. And that is the true art of communication.

The same individual that asked me not to speak for three months, taught me through running effective meetings and trying to run a discussion to a conclusion, that sometimes you don't need the whole monologue or history. He would ask questions after I graduated from working with him, or what I would hope was graduation, in subsequent meetings and people would be compelled to offer first principles and dialogue and then he'd look at me and I'd say "yes" instead of all that. I think the "art is in the eye of the beholder" like the cliché says, but it also ties into some of the other principles that we talked about like getting to know your audience etcetera.

How has public speaking helped you attain the role you have today as General Manager?

Everyone is different and has a different set of skill sets as a general manager. I think that my hope of being transparent at town halls, and with people like yourself, and being involved with different things, has been a result of the company's confidence in my ability to know what to communicate and how to communicate. I think that it does have a potential impact in me being in the role I'm currently in or other roles I've had. This one is really important to be able to have a filter. Not to remove transparency, but to look at the audience and filter the information in such a way that it is consumable and doesn't cause dread or over reaction in a positive way, and finding the right balance in terms of that communication. And that's where I would like to say I still have lots to learn. So even though you have characterized some of these questions as me being an okay communicator, I still have some corners to round off because at the end of the day I still am a construction guy and that root in me wants me to make sure people know things. There's always more vocabulary, always more practice, always more engagement that you can have.

To that point, being able to stand in front of people still bothers me. This is a comfortable environment, this building is comfortable, a lot of the people out there, the people like yourselves, I can look out there and I can connect with a few people, which I think is always important. To find the employee faces that are nodding and clearly receiving the message, and build on the connection you're already making with them. If you put me in front of a conference or an external event, it's not as easy for me. I want to make sure that I'm projecting myself in a competent way, representing the company, the individuals, or the task at hand. So I've still got some experiences that I want to continue to do so that I feel more and more comfortable. Even the senior management in our company might tell you that even though they might stand in front of Wall Street or in front of Clients or Investors, that they still want to make sure that they are very prepared and have everything lined up, so that the message we've talked about has been thought through with what we want to leave them with.

About 50 percent of what I project has been somewhat scripted, this interview not being one. But I will sit with people like Joseph Connors, or other management reps, and walk through the types of messages we want to project, the method or the word, or bad jokes that I intermix is unscripted and makes people nervous.

What do you enjoy most about public speaking?

I think that what I enjoy most is making sure that the message is not too scripted but that it leaves something with the people. That's the goal. I think that's what every communication, even in a meeting when you're dealing with a task force or trying to communicate a complex engineering problem, you want to be succinct with it, but you really want to make sure people understand. I think it is human nature that you want people to consume what you're saying and take solace in it a little bit and understand what it is you are trying to communicate. But I do have a lot of fun with trying to communicate.

What advice do you have for becoming a better leader or public speaker?

I think that groups like Toastmasters will give you a lot more of the curriculum type of things that you can work on with examples and thought processes you can use. I think that's a fantastic idea and we need to do more. I think that the practice side of things, knowing your topic, and some of the things we talked about earlier are really important. The biggest thing would be to speak up and look for opportunities to try it and to try it with different audiences. I daresay that a lot of people feel very comfortable in their circle, their circle being friends, coworkers or family. Widen that circle. Find opportunities where you can bolt onto the circle. Opportunities like a PTA with your kids, or volunteering. Just keep looking for opportunities where you can do that.

Mark Brown, thank you for your time and support for Fluor Communicators. It is tremendously appreciated!

Mark shared some interesting anecdotes and messages we can all learn from. I personally will try to connect more with my audience through humour! What will you try to take away?





Get to Know our Members

Kaveh Shojaei



How long have you been a member of Fluor Communicators Toastmasters Club?

I've been a member about 9 months.

What was your primary reason for wanting to join Toastmasters?

I joined toastmasters to improve my public speaking skills and to be more comfortable in front of an audience.

What is your favorite hobby/activity?

My favorite hobby is drawing and wood working.

What is your favorite book or movie or TV series?

My favorite book is Kafka on the Shore by Haruki Murakami.

Please share something about yourself—do you have an education background you'd like to share, a personal success story, or anything you have or hope to accomplish in the next year—professional, personal, travel, etc.

I spent four months away from civilization on Vancouver Island learning how to build guitars—my plan for the next year is to build a jazz bass.

Jackie Rainforth

How long have you been a member of Fluor Communicators Toastmasters Club?

One year.

What is your favorite book or movie or TV series?

I'm a Netflix junkie! Bring on the popcorn and do a Netflix marathon!

Please share something about yourself—do you have an education background you'd like to share, a personal success story, or anything you have or hope to accomplish in the next year—professional, personal, travel, etc.

An avid reader and continual learner, I love anything business. After a highly successful career in corporate, private, and executive Sales, a near death scuba diving incident changed everything!

I am currently pursuing a career in public speaking in hopes of sharing my knowledge and life experience to help elevate others to higher levels of confidence, happiness, and success.

I have been truly blessed to have an incredibly supportive family who have supported and inspired me over the years enabling me to finish my degree, receive the 'RBC Woman Entrepreneur of Canada Award' nomination and pursue a number of my own highly successful businesses and certifications. My latest endeavour includes recently signing a publishing deal for a soon to be released sales book.

Personally, I love to travel (hubby and I recently celebrated our 30th anniversary in Asia and Australia) as well as spending time at the lake with family and friends, where I enjoy entertaining, golfing, gardening, swimming, boating, and sewing crafts—especially those for our annual Canada Day Golf Cart Decorating Contest where I have created a huge beaver and this year a giant moose! Can't wait for next year. . . big plans! Lol!

Can you say. . . RCMP and horse?!



Message from VP Public Relations



Hello fellow Toastmasters,

It's been another fun year of Toastmasters filled with a lot of growth, learning, and accomplishment. Our club has flourished and with the addition of new members, I think we have another awesome year ahead of us. I wish everyone a wonderful holiday season filled with lots of love, laughter, and of course, don't forget to practice your skills by volunteering to give that pre-dinner toast!

Cheers,
Leah Villanueva
VP Public Relations

If you would like to submit an article for the next newsletter, please email me at leah.villanueva@fluor.com