

Keep Your Club Healthy

Ask these five questions to make sure your club is meeting members' needs.

BY JANET FUCHEK

On the road to good health, an apple a day keeps the doctor away, or so says the old adage. In the world of Toastmasters, the golden apple to keep a club healthy is an inviting atmosphere with opportunities for leadership, communication, and growth.

Never has that been more evident than during this pandemic, with social isolation making the need for connection more apparent, and the move to online and hybrid meetings allowing for a new way of looking at the health of a club. If you're feeling the need to revitalize and reengage your members, then maybe it's time for a club check-up.

Here are some questions to ask as you assess the health of your club.

Have You Evaluated Your Format?

The three tenets of a healthy club are making sure members are engaged, progressing through their goals, and most importantly, attending meetings. There is not a specific "medicine" for assessing success. Just like people, each club has different ways of measuring success. Some clubs have a professional meeting tone, other clubs have a more relaxed vibe. Neither is wrong, but the health of your club may rest in finding the right prescription.

Lynn Goodacre of the Thunderbird Toastmasters Club, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, is a coach specializing in relationships and effective



Thunderbird Toastmasters Club of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

communication. She knows the value of a nurturing environment, and as Club President, she tries to provide both structure and stimulation to inspire the membership.

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Goodacre recommends meetings incorporate practical aspects, like using Table Topics® to practice handling interview questions, along with opportunities for creativity, such as having a fun quiz on meeting content at the close. She also suggests a new-member orientation process, where new members receive an introduction to club agendas, meeting roles, and an overview of Pathways.

Do You Have a Strong Mentoring Program?

In the same way that a buddy system can help people achieve health goals, mentors and coaches help members and clubs be

the best they can be. Pairing up with someone can inspire you, hold you accountable, and help you feel part of a team.

When mentors and mentees create their buddy system, it is a mutually beneficial partnership. If a mentor can explain and demonstrate an area for improvement, they often improve their own skill sets. Additionally, a mentee may see something the mentor does from a different vantage point and share their thoughts.

“If a club is functioning well, members are learning, growing, and challenging themselves to try new things, so the Toastmasters experience is engaging long-term,” says Goodacre, whose club has achieved President’s Distinguished for 23 years. “Once someone has been in a club for a while, they may find that guiding other members is the main thing that keeps their love for Toastmasters alive.”

Are Leadership Opportunities Encouraged?

Goals and milestones assist in creating healthy lifestyles and the feeling of accomplishment, such as hitting a personal record in weightlifting or running distance. In Toastmasters, keeping goals top of mind will benefit those looking for fulfillment. Leadership opportunities are often a good benchmark.

Matheus Mourao, of Sao Paulo, Brazil, is District 111 Public Relations Manager,



Infomark Toastmasters, Hyderabad Prakriti of Hyderabad, Telangana, India

and says he appreciates the leadership opportunities in Toastmasters. “Outside Toastmasters, I’m more like a specialist and less like a leader, but in Toastmasters, I’m developing my role as a digital marketing leader, which has enabled me to break through some barriers at my job.”

Encourage everyone to run for office, and don’t let the same people rotate through the club officer roles. Everyone should understand the skills that leadership positions help develop. By learning what goes on behind the scenes, members gain a vested interest in the club.

Nadia Gilkes, DTM, Vice President Education (VPE) for Jackpot Speakers and Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) for Educationally Speaking, both in Las Vegas, Nevada, says her clubs encourage members to attend board meetings to see how decisions are made. “It’s a great opportunity for members who may be thinking about leadership to see what it takes to run the club,” she says.

Adnan Dodmani, a member of Infomark Toastmasters, Hyderabad Prakriti, in Hyderabad, Telangana, India, recommends leaders try matching people with club officer roles that suit their background and interests. For instance, if someone is an accountant, they might enjoy being Club Treasurer, or if someone is in marketing, they might like the VPPR role. “When you assign the work that

members crave, it is done efficiently with enthusiasm and helps them grow in their respective field,” he says. “When you show them that the club loves them, they will return the club the love it deserves.”

Are You Regularly Recognizing Your Members?

Just as hitting a personal health record and sharing the news with your accountability buddy or on a fitness app creates an opportunity for celebration and recognition, social media platforms help connect and recognize club members. As a digital marketing specialist, Mourao, of Brazil, considers the online platform a place to connect, inform, and engage club members.

His club, Avenida Paulista Toastmasters, has representatives take photos at each meeting and display achievements on a Facebook carousel post. They post photos of members and their stories on Instagram and videos of how members overcame public speaking challenges on YouTube.

Gilkes recommends regular contact and transparency with members. As VPE, she reaches out to every member once a quarter to ensure they’re reaching their goals. Her clubs conduct a *Moments of Truth* project at least once a year to incorporate member suggestions, such as highlighting special occasions for strong member recognition.

Infomark Toastmasters, Hyderabad Prakriti club, has a member recognition system that includes the circulation of a digital poster showcasing a member’s achievement on a WhatsApp group that reaches club members, the District, and alumni. The poster is shared during club meetings and in their newsletter. Social media posts, as well as certificates, trophies, and prizes, are other ways to recognize members’ achievements.

Are You Open to New Meeting Ideas?

As you evaluate the health of your club, don’t be afraid to try something new. Sometimes what worked in the past doesn’t work months or years later.

When District 111 in Brazil wanted to increase member involvement, it began offering a variety of new events, like debate contests. “A debate helps people respect another point of view, helps them listen better to others, be more engaged in meetings, and develop better arguments,” Mourao explains.

Gilkes recommends clubs carve a niche in the market to maintain membership. “Most clubs have a different personality,” she explains. “You really have to know what your identity as a club is. You have to find a way that sets you apart. What makes people want to come to your club?”

A healthy club isn’t something that just happens. Take its pulse, watch its heart-beat, and adjust accordingly. Go back to the basics on some aspects, and don’t be afraid to try something new with others. With the advent of online meetings across the globe, it’s easy to pop into another meeting for a fresh perspective and some good medicine. **T**

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