



Five reasons to take the stage in a Toastmasters club

#1. You want to challenge yourself and overcome fear

It is very common to be nervous about speaking before an audience. The most seasoned speaker feels it too. In fact, it is natural! It is natural because there is an inbuilt mechanism in our brains which causes fear/anxiety as an automatic and instinctive response to certain stimuli like unknown situations, or possibility for appearing foolish as a speaker. That's what makes most of us experience discomfort when we start doing it. But with practice, support and the right environment, all of us can overcome it. Toastmasters Clubs worldwide are known to provide a safe and supportive learning atmosphere where you can hone your public speaking skills. But you should be willing to challenge yourself. *Do you have it in you?*

#2. You desire to improve your collaboration and teamwork

All Toastmasters Clubs are volunteer efforts of our members and the meetings are a result of collaboration and teamwork. When you attend the meeting as a member you might wonder about the smooth and orderly manner in which the activities take place – it is only when you become a member that you realise how much volunteer effort and teamwork happens behind the scenes. There are roles, duties, responsibilities, executive positions and speech deliveries which are assigned to various members (all volunteer-based of course). Plus the real team spirit comes to the fore when the members have to cover for a member who is suddenly absent, for example. This leads to thinking on the feet, helping each other, taking up additional tasks and so on. And all in the right spirit – there is no one bossing around anyone.

#3. You are eager to organise yourself better

Good delivery is about organising your communication especially when the communication is in the form of a speech delivery or a monologue. Sometimes we come across well organised speakers who encapsulate their ideas in short words and full of wit. We are impressed. But little do we know that such impressive communication deliveries are usually preceded by laborious rehearsals. Ideas are reframed, sentences are shortened, new words are found, jargon is cut out and time limits are practised. Good practice is about good research and good research is about focused effort. Toastmasters will help you by presenting before you examples of successful speakers. When it will be your turn to present a speech within 5-7 minutes, you will understand the struggle to fit all your ideas into sentences into a fixed time frame. You will make mistakes and learn. And you will organise yourself better.

#4. You believe in creative solutions

When faced with a tricky situation, what do you do – think on your feet to find an escape route? Or freeze? Of course, the former is a better approach. In matters of communication, we frequently encounter this tricky situation, when we have to speak ex-tempore (without preparation). Job interviews, elevator pitches, friendship proposals – there are plenty of real-life situations when we have to think on our feet and come up with meaningful, relevant stuff to say. Toastmasters provides us a platform to practice this life-skill in every meeting. There are activities such as *Table Topics* which are meant to help members bring out creative and positive ideas in seemingly incongruous situations. After a while we all relish doing it.

#5. You are keen to develop active listening skills

In the excitement of attempting to speak impressively and express ourselves well, many of us tend to forget that communication is not a one-way street. It is not merely about speaking well. It is a two-way street. For the communication to be effective, one must speak well AND listen well. Active listening is the practice of listening consciously and attentively including receiving verbal and non-verbal messages, and then providing appropriate response showing attentiveness to the speaker. This form of listening establishes a mutual understanding between speaker and listener and the communication is more free flowing. Have you ever practised active listening? You will have plenty of occasions to listen actively, attentively and even intensely in various roles at Toastmasters. For example, "Ah counter" has to listen to all speeches and try and capture all instances of use of filler words like, ah, umm, so etc. Similarly, "quiz master" in a meeting must listen to all speeches and at the end ask audience quiz questions – the answers to which were contained in the previous speeches.

BONUS REASON: You take the Toastmasters stage because you like to have fun while learning ☺