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## Funny table topics questions toastmasters

Mark Twain hit the proverbial nail on the head when he said, Usually it takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. Table Topics is Toastmasters' way of teaching impromptu speaking skills and is the perfect way to inject serious pleasure (uh-oh, oximoron) into club meetings. And as Dr. Seuss says, Fun is good. While Table Topics can be daunting for new members and those with presentation anxiety, injecting pleasure into them can help members engage with aspects of Toastmasters that they may (eventually) find fun. Thérèse Kinahan, CC, ALB, of the Athlone Club in Athlone, Ireland, believes that table topics attract members to each meeting. Our members were really involved with this part of the meeting and didn't like it being compromised, he said. When we went from three speeches per night to four, we had to start early, people don't want to lose topic time! But calling members to respond to a random list of topics can be stale. Instead, be creative and shake things up. Below are some ideas for doing a more entertaining Table Topics session. Pull From the Past Bring a bag of items from the past, such as rotary phones, protractors, abacus, slide projectors or other items. Members select an item from the bag and describe what it is and how it is used, even if they do not know. A speaker once carried a slide rule and the member who pulled it out of the guessing bag was used to measure the size of a person's foot. Everyone, including table top participants, had a big laugh. [Slide rules are mechanical calculators, used primarily for multiplication and division.] You can also close participants' eyes and ask them to select an object and describe it simply by feeling it. This can evoke a wave of laughter depending on the items in the bag. Story Story topics include several approaches that train the creative part of the brain. All involve telling a story or part of a story about a person, place or item. Don Wadleigh, ACB, of Burlington Area Toastmasters in Burlington, Iowa, uses a different approach to the Table Topic story. I printed about a dozen great photos of several different things: christening dresses, streams in the woods, windmills, dogs, etc. I put it face down on the table. Everyone should choose one and explain the story behind, or be told, in the photo. Heather Perkins of Schooner Toastmasters in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, describes taking another topic to this type of table. Give participants four random words and ask them to tell stories using those words. Give each participant a note with words printed on it so that the audience doesn't know the words. When participants finish speaking, ask the audience to guess where in that topic should be used. Follow-up involves piggybacking on other responses to the original Table Topic. Kinahan explains it this way: Someone is called by name to respond to table topics and is allocated two minutes. About two or more others may ask to 'follow up' by raising their hands. The Topicsmaster table will then recognize them and allow them one minute to talk to the topic. When calling members, in the first example, table topicsmaster calls those who do not have a role first, then those who have roles that do not speak, finally those who have speaking roles. Speed For everyone to participate in Table Topics, especially in well-attended meetings, try the Speed Table Topic. Create a list of numbered topics. Each member selects a number and responds to the appropriate topic. Each participant has no more than a minute to complete their response. Green signal timer at 45 seconds. At one minute, the timer signals red. Stop participants if they haven't finished responding to a red signal. Repeat this process until all members and guests have participated. Selling Something Sometimes is beneficial for us to stretch our comfort zone and do something we might not normally do, like sell something. Here's how it works: Bring in a bunch of ads from magazines and/or newspapers. Participants choose ads for products or services and sell them to club members. This method also works with items taken from the bag. Shake Table Topics with creative and fun themes to motivate guests to join and keep members entertained and retained. Page 2 I am not experiencing party life. Despite making a comedy writing career and telling jokes, I've spent quite a lot of my time standing on the wall, listening to ice cubes clinking in my glasses. For me, being funny is easy—being funny in a place is hard. You may be surprised to learn that most stand-up comedians are introverts. The word mingle makes me cringe. The problem, though, is that, no matter what you do for a living, you are often faced with situations where mingling really matters. Careers take off on network shows. Your talent proves what you're capable of, but people give you a chance. Being funny can't be prepared in advance. Reading anecdotes and canned jokes always rings fake. All you need is spontaneity. What you need is the mind of an improviser. I took my first upgrade class at the Upright Citizens Brigade in New York City and it changed my life. The increase in the long shape consists of the entire scene created on the spot. The longest, called monoscenes, can last an hour, which is a frightening amount of time to be funny without a script. This experience teaches you how to listen carefully, trust total strangers and find connections—all the tools you need to be the funniest person in the room in your real life. Look, look, Every party or work event has its character. The worst is loudmouths who enjoy their own voices. They tell jokes as if they were throwing darts at a dartboard. Every now and then, they hit a bulls-eye, but most of the arrows get stuck in the wall. Don't be so loud. In improving, the goal is to build something funny from scratch the person you're talking to, and the only way to build is to listen. The increase in long form is very similar to real life because you don't know what the person in front of you will stay until they say it. Have you ever caught your mind wandering around during a conversation waiting for your turn to speak? It's passive listening, and passive and humor don't go well together. Listen actively. Challenge yourself to focus on what the people around you are saying. Listening helps in many ways. First, it shows that you care, which is the basis of being funny. Every comedian will tell you the first step to funny is getting the audience on your side. The conversation is the same. When you care about the person, you create a lighter atmosphere that lends itself to laughter. In improving, the goal is to build something funny with the person you're talking to from the beginning, and the only way to build is to listen. Second, listening leads to thoughtful questions. Veteran improvisors know that the right questions will help you move the scene along. When you're at a social gathering, asking questions doesn't just show you're paying attention, it turns boring discussions into specific and personal conversations. Specific, private conversations are ready for humor because they touch on similarities. When you learn more about what someone cares about, you bond. Personal connection is the place where jokes are born, yes, and... We're all caught up in a conversation that sounds like this: They: It must be hot outside today. You: That's for sure. They: Really expect a cooler tomorrow. You: Me too. (Awkward silence) Interesting conversations have two attributes: This conversation has the first attribute, agree, but does not have the second attribute, expanding. As you learn to improve, the only way to create satisfying funny scenes is to make active choices and move forward. You should always ask yourself, yes, and...? As in, Yes, I agree with what you say, and here's a new way to think about it. Imagine how fun the above conversation would be if you decided to make an active choice by expanding your initial thinking. Boring conversations about the weather can be an opportunity to connect. They are: It must be hot outside today. You: That's for sure. Let's have our next party in Quebec. They: I'm on board. The party could use moreoutine. You: And what's a party without a good hockey fight? In fact, there are myriad ways these conversations can get away from the weather simply by expanding. The more you know about the person, the more you can intervene something that is and fun. Next time you meet someone new, try to avoid dry conversations by using your imagination. Learn about them by asking questions, then expand their responses and get creative. We all learn how to use our imaginations when we're kids, and somewhere inside every stiff entrepreneur is a kid who wants to get out. Tricks of Listening to Trade and and creative responses will help you be funny; but once you lay that foundation, you can expand it in many ways. Some of these structures work differently for different people. Experiment with what comes naturally to your sense of humor. Irony – When you agree with saying the opposite of what you mean. Instead of saying, yes, it's hot, you could say, No hot. The weather is perfect if you're an iguana. Hyperbole – Exaggerate your opinion to an impossible level. In this case, you could say, It's so hot I don't iron my clothes anymore. I just walked outside and let the humidity take care of it for me. The Callback – This is the easiest trick in the book. Simply bring up a topic from earlier in the conversation that everyone is worried about. Everyone loves a callback, and you already know it's going to work because it calls back to the laughter you shared earlier. What to Avoid There are other ways that try and be right to be funny in standing up and raise the overly risky in polite conversation. It's fine with friends and relatives you know well, but a major faux pas in mixed company. Shock - Shock comedians make people laugh by touching subjects that are considered taboo or make them feel uncomfortable. You may laugh, but more often, people will go out of their way to avoid you. Madcap – You might think acting silly is enough to be funny, but it's hard to do well without coming across like someone looking for attention. Canadian-American actor Jim Carrey is a great example of a comedian doing this well. The guy at the party with the lamphshades on his head is an example of someone doing badly. Wordplay - Ninety-nine percent bad humor is a word game. It includes double meaning, homonyms and puns, the kind of humor that, at best, leads to polite laughter, and, at worst, causes outright groans. Be safe and leave your father's jokes at home with the kids. Somewhere inside every stiff businessman is a kid who wants to get out. Anyone can be the funniest person in the room with exercise, but no matter what, it's more important to be the best person in the room. The good news is that being nice lends itself to being funny. Good people are good listeners. Good people find ways to connect with those around them. So smile. Think of a good joke and laugh when someone tells a good joke. I realized that the funniest people make other people feel funny too. If that doesn't work, count the ice cubes in your glass. It was fun, too. Viewed? Callbacks are easy. Page 3 To anyone who hopes to grow as one characteristic will definitely help: confidence. Whether you take on a leadership role during a club meeting or build leadership skills at work, coming across as confident can increase your influence. If you're not born a confident leader you want to be (and who?), don't fret. Confidence can be practiced and improved. You don't have to make big jumps or take big risks; even the smallest efforts will help build over time. Strategies include focusing activities every day, perfecting your skills before they are needed, leveraging the role of volunteers to practice new skills and work through challenges. Toastmasters provides an ideal environment for working on these four confidence-building strategies. 1 Make daily efforts. If you aspire to leadership in any arena, it should be a daily effort. Breaking down your skills development into smaller components and practicing in more manageable pieces is essential. What do you need to do to advance to the next level? Take various leadership roles in Toastmasters to learn which aspects of leadership interest you the most. Then take those skills and work on them outside toastmasters every day. As you progress to a higher level of leadership in the professional arena, opportunities for progress can be reduced. To gain confidence you have to keep pushing forward, it's important to practice and prepare every day. Those who progress to higher success are looking for a way to get there. 2 Build skills before you need them. The Roman philosopher Seneca is credited with saying, Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. If you're not ready, you won't have confidence in yourself when a new opportunity arises by itself. To be ready to advance to a higher level, you need to look ahead. Pay attention to what others at that level do. Ask yourself, What else will it take from me as I rise to my next success level? Develop your skills before you need them. Take advantage of every opportunity available at Toastmasters. Once you've taken on the leadership role of the club, consider taking on a district leadership role. The more you are involved, the more confident you will become in yourself and your leadership abilities. Preparation is essential to grow more confident, no matter the setting. Preparing will build your confidence when you are in high pressure situations such as interviewing a job, giving a speech, doing a sale or communicating with someone in a position of authority. You can practice your skills anywhere—at home, at school, in your work or in a club setting. Confidence comes to you faster when you train in a low-risk volunteer environment. It's also important to have a sustained focus as you practice. Do you need to build your confidence in presenting important information at work? Do you need to learn how to give feedback to your team members to improve their performance? Do you need to lead Effectively? By having special skills to target, you will not be dispersed in your efforts. 3 Practice new skills and prepare for success through volunteering. You may think you're too busy to take a leadership role at Toastmasters, or in another organization. Work and family responsibilities may leave little room in your schedule to take on onany outside leadership roles, but volunteering can have a tremendous impact on your career. You are take a big leap to success unless you first take small steps to build your confidence. Toastmasters are filled with volunteer opportunities designed to help you grow your confidence. By volunteering for the role of officer, you get the opportunity to practice the skills you need for your job or career. Confidence comes to you faster when you train in a low-risk volunteer environment. You may want to practice the skill elements you need to prepare for your next promotion. Or you can practice talking confidently in settings outside of your club meetings, including at toastmasters competitions. Your confidence will compound as you will have many opportunities to develop your skills. Volunteering also allows you to learn to work more effectively with diverse groups of people. You'll also expand your contact network. 4 Work through the learning curve. As you build your skills, you will inevitably experience failure. It's okay. Chalk it up to experience and decide to do better next time. The experience you gain in compounds those small steps over time. The ongoing feedback toastmasters offers will help you identify where you need to grow and how to do it. By repeatedly testing yourself at every club meeting and preparing for your next opportunity, you will be ready for greater success as you train and progress in your confidence and skill development. It takes time to build your skills to a level of deep mastery. It didn't happen overnight. With practice, you will build a deeper awareness of yourself. You will develop greater confidence. You will show your emerging growth in mastering your new skills. This will prepare you to maximize your chances of success. Consider how you prepare for your next level of success. To consistently move forward, you need to deliberately develop new skills and investigations for a deeper understanding as the problems you address become more complex. The quest to understand what will be taken to propel you towards your next leadership challenge never stops. Try to find people who can give you new insights into possibilities you may not have considered. When you see a greater possibility for your life, you will start looking for opportunities to make it real. As you practice and prepare for your future, you will build more confidence, and the sky can become You. Your sky. Your limits. Anything can happen. Page 4 Two hundred pairs of eyeballs are on you after you've just delivered a beautifully crafted dramatic sentence for a memorized district contest speech. Then your mind is completely blank. You stare back at the audience with deer expressions-in-headlights for what looks like an eternity as you frantically fumble for the next phrase. You can't believe it, but you don't know what to say next! Losing your train of thought can happen if you're not ready. But it can also happen if you have been diligent in your preparation do your best to memorize your speech. Memorizing your speech can actually cause problems, such as sounding overly rehearsed or unnatural. It can also lead to an increased risk of blanking. Proactively practice blank recovery plans like this. It's like a disaster exercise to talk. Imagine that every time you practice your speech with the exact same words, you create a deep burrow, a well-worn path in your memory with no alternative path. When you present a speech in a stressful situation (which could be in a different room, or in front of a different audience), you can be thrown out of your well-worn path. And, with no alternative path, you become lost. If you internalize; don't memorize your speech as 2001 Public Speaking World Champion, Darren LaCroix, suggests, you can reduce the likelihood of emptying. Having recovery tactics in place will greatly reduce your anxiety, and you may be able to recover without your audience realizing you have a memory lapse. After all, they don't know what you're going to say next, so if you change it a little bit, they might think you're planning it that way. Pause Recovery Tactics. Pause for a few taps. Give yourself a moment to remember where you are. Viewers will likely think you're pausing for effect. Maintain eye contact. When you pause, maintain eye contact with one person. Seeing one person (versus scanning) can be soothing. Retreat. Repeat the last sentence or phrase. It gives your mind time to think and a little restart jolt. One way to do this is to end the last sentence of one point with the word or phrase you will use to start the next point. For example, there are only three things to worry about: bad food, bad people and bad breath. Bad breath is a bigger problem than many people realize. The bad breath phrase is positioned at the end of the first sentence to serve as the trigger for the next sentence. Advanced. Jump to the content you remember. At some point in your speech, you may remember what you would have said before. You can work on it when it happens to you, and you might even prefer a new setting. Drink a sip of water. You will look controlled and relaxed. Of course, your mind might be racing. (If possible, drink from a glass instead of a bottle because you'll look more professional.) Check your records. Hopefully, you only have a few keywords in large fonts, compared to pages full of detailed notes, so your panic won't increase when you scan them. Go to the next slide. If you are using PowerPoint, you can use it as a teleprompter, to your memory. (But avoid reading every word on the slide aloud.) Smile. Smile like you have a secret and only see the audience for a while. You'll look confident and viewers will anticipate your next phrase almost as much as you. Have backup content. It has a short and relevant anecdote to share — a good idea for any presentation, to allow flexible time. Engage the audience. Getting Started session, or create a paired audience member to discuss important points or do activities. Even if they do that, you can review your notes. Make fun of your memory lapse and build relationships. I've been completely empty! (LAUGHS). Did that ever happen to you? My grandson says I have an old man's disease. Now, where am I? Have a recovery plan. Proactively practice blank recovery plans like this. It's like a disaster exercise to talk. Don't freeze like a deer in the headlights and be run away by panic anxiety. Review these recovery tactics, or create your own recovery plan for the next time you lose your train of thought. Page 5 type=audio/mpeg Your browser does not support audio elements. Click the play button for additional tips on improving the rhythm of your speech. When I was growing up, I had English classes every year at school. I was well educated in writing reports and compositions. On the other hand, I only have one semester in public speaking. My training is focused on the written word. Maybe it's yours too. As an adult, I worked for many years in voiceover, where I read scripts written by others. During that time, I observed that there were three types of writers: those who were good at writing for spoken words, those who were good at writing for written words and those who were just ordinary bad writers. But too many times, the script made by the author of written words is the hardest to read aloud. Why? Because they just don't flow. They have no rhythm, no regular beats. The words written and the words spoken are different. And the rules we learn to write may not apply to speaking. The spoken word is closer to the song than the essay. Think, for a moment, of your favorite song. It has a certain knock to it, doesn't it? That, in part, is why you like it. I was working on a recent speech in which I wrote phrases of principle, perspective and paradigm. The expression is fine. It is a triad, it has alliteration and every word has three syllables. Yet it feels awkward to say. That's because the accent pattern is jumbled. The accent is in the first syllable in principle, the second syllable in perspective and the first syllable again in the paradigm. I then switched phrases to principles, paradigms, and perspectives. Now the first and second words both begin with accents on the first syllable. The soft initial accent of the third word is bearing by and, thus giving the impression of following the pattern. That phrase is now rolling well from the tongue. It has a rhythm. Sometimes long sentences and phrases have holes in them. I've heard a speaker talk about a dog, and he said something He is a gold who won't swim and a retriever who won't. The second half of the sentence was certainly creative. And, in writing, it looks smart. But it creates holes when spoken. It was like something was missing. The spoken word is closer to the song than the essay, it would be nice to say, He is the gold swim and retriever that will not take. The first phrase sets the pattern and, hence, hope. If you violate that expectation, you distract your audience from your message. You might think, Bill, you can't use the same word twice in the same sentence. Au contraire. That's a rule made for the written word. You can get away with such repetition in speech if needed for rhythm or clarity. However, if using take twice still bothers you, the thesaurus can help. Another written word rule that doesn't always apply in the oral realm will surprise many Grammarians around the world toastmasters. Yes, you can actually start a sentence with and, now, but and even the dreaded so. (No, no, say not so!) Richard Dawis, in my favorite book on speech writing, The Lost Art of the Great Speech, writes, you don't have to feel self-conscious by starting sentences with and or but when it seems right. Let me be clear: You should not start your speech with that word. And you shouldn't start almost every sentence with that conjunction (or anything else, for that reason). But sometimes the rhythm of the sentence demands extra sound. In those cases, conjunctions are not filler words that fill the hole where there should be silence; instead, they are transition words, filling holes in the rhythm of sentences. Unfortunately, rhythm is more of an art than a science. Sometimes I build phrases with emphasis in mind. Usually, however, I go with the feeling. I just feel when something sounds right. To hone this understanding, pay attention to how each phrase rolls your tongue. You'll find some sounds awkward, some just OK and some pure pleasure to say. Get rid of the first one. Add more than the third. That's when talking becomes fun. Fun.

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