

Where leaders have always been made

Toastmasters is now widely known by its tag line, the place where leaders are made.

This statement, Madam Toastmaster, ladies and gentlemen, more than anything else perhaps reflects the heritage and contribution of this club.

A quick look at some key statistics will show you just how true that statement is.

- In our time, we have had two International directors
- Six past district governors as members
- we have produced 42 Area Gov's and 25 of our members have achieved the ultimate Toastmasters award the gold Distinguished Toastmaster or DTM. Indeed 15 of our current members are DTMs, more than the membership of many clubs.

Further, six different members have won the district evaluation contest final. This is the most challenging contest of all because it measures both communication and leadership skills and is only won by true leaders.

All this is a record that far surpasses the achievements of any other club in Australia.

Our pattern of producing leaders started from our very beginning in 1966 with our charter members. These men made sure that Parramatta was an outwardly focused club that took a big interest in the wider sphere of Toastmasters. This was reflected by our early dominance of the club championship as reflected on our old banner. It was also no wonder that a Parramatta contingent went to the Gold Coast in 1971 to see District 70 formed and to ensure that Parramatta was chosen to host the first ever district conference at Katoomba in 1972.

From then, to this day, Parramatta has always had a major presence in district conferences, an outgoing attitude to encourage members to participate and grow as leaders outside our club.

Not that the history of our club has been one of plain sailing, though. Rather, our history has been one of four distinct phases or periods, each lasting 10 years or more, and finishing in each case, with a double whammy crisis that nearly wrecked the club. The double whammy's I refer to are those two things which are critical to the ongoing success of this club -- leadership and venue. Each time that we had a venue problem develop, it coincided with a time of weak and ineffective leadership.

Yet on each of those three occasions, we recovered quickly and with revitalised leadership came out of each crisis within a year or two, stronger and better than ever before.

The first was in 1974, when we had to move out of the Leagues Club our traditional home, while it was remodelled for six months. But then an in-club Speechcraft course in 1975 restored our fortunes and took us over 40 members for the first time and began a new phase as a 40+ member club.

The second crisis was at the end of 1989 when we were forced out of the Leagues club after yet another remodelling and found that we could no longer afford it. We moved to Parramatta, and settled uneasily at Courtney's restaurant. So short were we of leaders in 1990 that 4 past presidents had to go back on the executive, including myself as Sgt at Arms. That was the year we had a cultural change and decided to admit women to membership. The next year, was one of transition before we

moved to Berlini's restaurant in 1992 where a major expansion took us back over 40 members and started another golden era. During this period we moved to this RSL club and we again dominated the club championship scene, being four times a top 10 club in the world in the old Distinguished Club Plan.

But at the end of the decade they didn't want us here any more. So we moved to the Parramatta club on Hunter Street in 1998 and then again the move coincided with leadership issues. 1999 was the year that the current distinguished club plan was introduced, which sets 10 goals for clubs to achieve. The fact that we only achieved five goals in that year reflects the level to which we had so quickly sunk from being a top club in the world.

But again in 2000 we turned it all around, restoring our culture and were fortunate to have many talented members join around then who went on to become very good leaders. Not only did we score 10 out of 10 goals that year, but we established a pattern that has enabled us to complete 19 years in a row this July of achieving 10 out of 10 Distinguished Club goals. To put that into context, there are nearly 16,000 Toastmasters clubs in the world. Of those, only 34 have achieved 10 out of 10 goals for 15 years or more. Yes, you belong to one of the absolute elite 0.2% of clubs to be so distinguished.

That we have done so is because we have taken greater steps than ever in the last 20 years to recognise, preserve and develop our culture. Every club, every school, every company, even every family has a culture, an outlook, an atmosphere. Although hard to pin down, it can be immediately sensed upon entering a club as those who have visited many clubs will know, just as you can on entering school yards, offices and family kitchens.

One key to maintaining our culture in this fourth major phase of our existence has been our club website. For here we have had a place to document our history, our winners and leaders and our traditions. We have been able to record our procedures and best practices and to educate our incoming members and executives into all that is good about our club. For this we thank those in particular who have established our online guide to assignments, our detailed officer duty statements and our Speechcraft resources. Their work has been so important.

Finally, Speechcraft itself has been critical in our role of making leaders. By having all our new members come through Speechcraft, those who have joined the club have been at a level where they are able to participate, not only in taking from the club, but more importantly in the giving as an equal in our quality meetings. We have also encouraged newer members to go back to Speechcraft to work there as advisers and coordinators. This has been done in order to help them grow in accordance with the motto of the club that we adopted in 1992, of being a club that helps members, help themselves, develop the skills to help other people.

So many people have gone back into a Speechcraft to learn these skills and have then served on our club executives, growing while serving as Club President and gone on to district and corporate success. Thus we can be totally proud of the fact tonight that for fifty-three years, Parramatta Toastmasters Club has indeed been the place where leaders are made.