

"Unaccustomed As I Am..."

By Peer J. Oppenheimer

WHAT IS THE first need of a man who wishes to learn to speak in public? Education? A handy set of jokes? A good textbook?

"An audience!" insists Ted Blanding of Santa Ana, Calif., affable ex-landscape artist who is executive director of Toastmasters International.

Toastmasters International neither manufactures toasters nor acts as an agency for after-dinner speakers.

It is neither a fraternal group, though its members join partly for fellowship, nor a service club, though its purpose is community service through self-service. Actually, Toastmasters' purpose is to improve its members' personality, leadership, and general usefulness through development of their speech ability.

"But Toastmasters is not a speech course," Blanding emphasizes. "Our members teach one another how to communicate—and this means how to listen analytically as well as how to speak."

Toastmasters of Portland, Me., take to sea while they discuss being "Millionaire for a Night."



Toastmasters International
teaches its members how to
get rid of the platform jitters.

Blanding himself is an example of how the process can work. Born in Wisconsin and educated in North Dakota, he came to California at 21 and went to work as a landscape designer in his brother's nursery.

It wasn't long before Blanding found himself called on to address groups interested in gardening, but he was too nervous even to stand up and state his name.

"So I joined Toastmasters," he relates, "and attended its weekly meetings. Clubs are limited to 40 members, and each one speaks at least once a month. His speeches are evaluated by his fellow members. There's no professional teacher present, no glib super-salesman to cow the newcomer. I found that my self-confidence increased, and I developed an ability to think on my feet and communicate intelligently."

The Toastmasters was founded in 1924 by Dr. Ralph Smedley, a Y.M.C.A. executive in Illinois. Today there are clubs in almost every free country in the world. And as Blanding puts it, "The only reason we have no Toastmasters in Communist countries is that if there were any, undoubtedly they would have talked their way out from behind the Iron Curtain by now."

What started as a class in oral communications for Y.M.C.A. youths 34 years ago has now become the only world-wide organization of its type. In the last decade alone, it has grown from 250 to some 2,000 clubs with more than 80,000 members.

How does Toastmasters work? Under the guidance of Blanding and his staff of 32—the only paid personnel in the organization—it mails more than three million pieces of literature a year from its Santa Ana headquarters to its member clubs.

From the presses run such titles as "25 Ways to Build a Speech," "How to Run a Meeting," "How to Evaluate a Speech," "How to Organize a Toastmasters Club," "Speech Engineering," "Conference Manual," and many more. Since no member club employs a professional instructor, these publications are very important for self-training and mutual evaluation.

"Everyone has something to sell," says Blanding. "On the most intimate personal level, it may be a matter of harmony in the home. Then it broadens into community service. And now that Toastmasters has become world-wide, its ramifications are tremendous."

Indeed they are. The Army and Air Force, for example, have Toastmasters clubs to aid officers in communication.

"A Toastmaster member knows how to get his message over as intended," says Marine Corps Gen. Stanley Ridderhof. Long a Toastmaster himself, the retired general put his experience to community service on the Newport Beach (Calif.) city council.

Proper communication between people promotes understanding among races and nations. In San Francisco, for years there was serious friction be-

tween Italians and Chinese. Through discussions at weekly meetings of a Toastmasters club, this resentment has been eased.

Not a day passes that nonprofit Toastmasters International does not receive several inquiries on how to form a Toastmaster club. In reply, the writer gets a packet of organizational material.

First step is the organization of a five-man steering committee. Ultimately a new club is chartered and its officers furnished with texts of guidance for the conduct of their offices.

Individual clubs set their own fees, usually \$1.00 to \$1.50 per month, out of which 50 cents goes to headquarters to defray literature costs. Applicants have to be men of 21 or older. There are no other restrictions on membership—the grocery clerk joins with doctors and lawyers, and his self-importance grows as he sees his ideas listened to attentively by his fellow members. Most Toastmasters meet once a week, usually at dinner, although meeting places include private homes, boats, planes, and buses.

In the last few years, the popularity of the organization has caused it to become something its leaders didn't anticipate: big business. Its 1958 revenues will pass the \$600,000 mark. And while its publications are not available in book shops, some are sold outside the organization. Dr. Smedley's "The Amateur Chairman," for example, has sold more than 600,000 copies at \$1 each—enough to make any publisher drool!