

Effective Member Communications
By Ken V. Krawchuk, DTM
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Do your club members communicate?

Of course all Toastmasters clubs specialize in fostering and instilling communications and leadership skills in their members; that's the mission of Toastmasters. But going beyond that mission, there is another, more-personal type of communication. Do your members interact directly with one other in a venue outside of the typical meeting environment? They should.

Without a doubt, there are many reasons why it is important for a club to provide a direct, member-to-member communications channel. It provides each individual member with an easy means to volunteer for meeting roles, help to plan upcoming contests or other events, disseminate last-minute agenda changes, or simply chat about Toastmasters. It also helps create an air of community by allowing members both new and old to get to know one another better. But does your club facilitate such cross-communication among your membership?

Fortunately, there are several tools available for connecting your members with each other. Yes, the good old telephone is always there, to be sure, but typically it's only used for one-on-one conversations. Often there is a need for three, four, or more members or officers to communicate simultaneously in real time. One tool that accomplishes that goal – for free and with no technical assistance necessary – is any of the free conference call services offered on the Internet. One such service is FreeConfereceCall.com which provides... well... free conference calling. For the cost of a long-distance call (usually bundled at no cost with most calling plans these days), you can set up a conference call instantly, 24/7, with up to 96 participants. In a world of \$4-a-gallon gas, conference calling provides an economical, convenient alternative to physical gatherings for officers meetings, planning sessions, or other in-person discussions. And did I mention it's free?

Another great tool is the e-mail discussion list. Yes, FreeToastHost.com has such a feature, but many clubs lack the time or technical expertise to use that resource effectively and consistently; additionally, many members find it somewhat inconvenient, even daunting. One simple-to-use alternative is to create a free e-mail list for your club through YahooGroups.com. Anyone with a free Yahoo account can set one up in literally one minute, and it will benefit all your members for years to come.

The way the lists work is that any e-mail sent to the list is forwarded to all the list's members. To sign up for the list, you simply send a blank e-mail to a certain address, and that's it. There are no websites to navigate, no computer languages to learn, and virtually no maintenance is ever needed. In fact, once you sign up for your list, there's nothing else you need to do – all correspondence is sent automatically to your e-

mail address, or you can choose to view your list mail on the web, if you prefer. And did I mention it's free?

We at the Libertarian Toastmasters use two lists: one for the general membership and one for the officers. We also set up temporary ones for special events on an as-needed basis. We've used them for years, and it's proved to be a great way to keep us in touch with each other, and get to know one another better, with no effort on our part.

So whether you're the twentieth century telephone type of person, or the twenty-first century online type, there are many free tools available to help your club's members and officers communicate with each other quickly, easily, and directly. And did I mention they're free?

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