

How to Rebuild a Toastmasters Club

A Step-by-step Guide



THINK AND SPEAK
Club 9623849
Colorado Springs, CO

We provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth.





Toastmasters International recognizes the efforts and words of the many Toastmasters who have contributed to the creation of this manual.

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Introduction

Whether you are a club coach, considering becoming one, or you want to improve the overall health of your club this manual is for you. Walking into a club-in-need without preparation can be a difficult experience. You need the desire, knowledge, tools, team, and acceptance and support of the club members.

This manual will take you step by step through the stages of rebuilding a club:

- ▶ Understanding why clubs are rebuilt
- ▶ Determining when a club needs to be rebuilt
- ▶ Identifying who will do the work
- ▶ Building the club support team
- ▶ Determining available resources
- ▶ Developing an action plan

By following these recommendations, any experienced Toastmaster can help a club rebuild itself. Not all possible solutions are listed in this manual—each club is different and, therefore, has different needs. The members of some clubs desperately want to keep the club going, but do not know how. Some clubs may not meet any more, and you may need to track down the last members of the club and motivate them to continue with the club.

While this task may be challenging it is also equally rewarding—helping to rebuild just one club can positively impact tens if not hundreds of members. Prepare yourself by studying this guide and the materials that are available to you.

Good luck!

Why Are Clubs Rebuilt?

A Toastmasters club needs to be rebuilt when it's struggling to maintain club membership and engagement. This may occur because the club has lost its membership base to natural attrition or other circumstances. In many clubs, a group of members is the key behind a club's success and if one of those members leaves, a decrease in club motivation and engagement can occur. Sometimes, the need for a club no longer exists, as when a company closes a production site, population dwindles, or the demographics of a community changes dramatically.

One reason many Toastmasters choose to serve as a club coach is to satisfy a requirement for Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) recognition. The experience that you will gain while serving as a club coach is invaluable. You will have the opportunity to use all the communication and leadership skills you have learned as a Toastmaster. You will be recognized as a person who gets things done.

When Does a Club Need to be Rebuilt?

The first phase in a club's life occurs during and just after it is organized. The club's educational program is expanding and improving. The members are motivated and their enthusiasm generally makes up for their lack of experience. As their understanding of the educational program improves, their productivity increases.

As the club matures into the second phase, the club environment reaches a high level of productivity and successfully meets members' needs. The original club members are now experienced Toastmasters. New members join the club and quickly become acclimated into the club's culture. The length of time spent at the top of the curve varies from club to club.

At the beginning of the third phase, members become content with the status quo and resist change and new influences. Guests are greeted, but the club's internal cliques are sometimes difficult to break into. New members have a hard time fitting in and do not stay long. Productivity declines, and the club slips from the top of the curve and begins a downward slide. Attendance drops, the club experience falls apart, and guests do not join the club. Members may be more concerned with socializing than learning.

If the club continues its downward slide and nears the bottom of the curve, something must be done to keep the club from dissolving. In many cases a club coach is appointed to help the members revitalize their club. If the effort is successful, the club's productivity will increase, and a new life cycle will begin. An added benefit of having a club coach is that the club's life cycle is extended before the assistance of another club coach is needed.

The Club Coach Program

A club coach is appointed by the District Director or Club Growth Director to assist a club that is experiencing difficulties building and maintaining membership. The coach's goal is to help the club become a Distinguished Club. Up to two coaches may be appointed to each club. A coach's term of service is for a minimum of six months and can be as long as two program years. All successful coaching assignments end on June 30 of the program year the club was Distinguished or better.

The coach may not be a member of the club at the time of appointment, but may join the club after their assignment has ended. The club must have at least three but no more than 12 individuals who have paid for membership at the time of the appointment. A coach can receive a pin if requested after their appointment and a digital certificate upon successful completion of the assignment. A successful coach also receives credit toward the Distinguished Toastmaster award.

The club coach is a Toastmaster who has not been a member of the club in the past six months and not (yet) familiar with the club or its members. This perspective allows the coach to objectively view the club. The coach is a counselor, a source of knowledge, and a fountain of ideas. To be successful as a coach you will need all of your speaking, thinking, and listening skills—as well as hard work, determination, and patience.

The following is a summary of what a coach must do:

- ▶ Build a rapport with the club's officers and members.
- ▶ Assess the environment. Observe, analyze, and recommend solutions.
- ▶ Develop a plan with goals for improvement.
- ▶ Implement the plan and ensure that the changes are performed by the officers and members as much as possible.
- ▶ Instill enthusiasm, loyalty, and a sense of responsibility for the club's future.

These statements quickly summarize the large amount of time and dedication required. Each of them is discussed in detail later in this manual.

The Distinguished Club Program

The Distinguished Club Program is an annual program, running from July 1 through June 30. The program consists of 10 goals a club must achieve during the year. World Headquarters tracks the club’s progress and at year-end recognizes the club based on the number of goals achieved and the number of members it has.

To be considered for recognition, your club must either have 20 members or a net growth of at least five new, dual, or reinstated members as of June 30. Following are the goals your club should strive to achieve during the year:

1. Four Level 1 awards achieved
2. Four Level 2 awards achieved
3. Two more Level 2 awards achieved
4. Two Level 3 awards achieved
5. One Level 4, Path Completion, or DTM award achieved
6. One more Level 4, Path Completion, or DTM award achieved
7. Four new, dual, or reinstated members
8. Four more new, dual, or reinstated members
9. Minimum of four club officer roles trained during each of two training periods
10. On-time payment of membership dues accompanied by the names of eight members (at least three of whom must be renewing members) for one period and on-time submission of one club officer list

Clubs in good standing that meet the qualifying membership requirement and achieve the specified number of goals below are eligible for Toastmasters International recognition at year-end:

RECOGNITION ACHIEVED

Achieve five of 10 goals	Distinguished
Achieve seven of 10 goals	Select Distinguished
Achieve nine of 10 goals	President’s Distinguished

If the club earns one of these three awards during your assignment, you are a successful club coach and will receive a digital certificate and credit toward the DTM award.

Like any award program, the **Distinguished Club Program** has rules. Be familiar with all of them to ensure you and the club are not disappointed at year-end.

Who is Going to Do the Work?

Not just you! That is the good news. To be successful, you will need some help. The club's officers and members, the club coaches, the Area Director, and other District leaders make up the club support team, and they must work together to be successful. In most cases, the club coaches will coordinate the actions that are to be taken but the work is performed by the club officers and members.

Building the Club Support Team

Build a personal rapport with the club officers and members. It is important that you establish this relationship early. Visit the club and become acquainted with the club officers and members. Gain their respect and trust by actively participating in the club and setting a good example.

Prior to your appointment by the District Director or the Club Growth Director, contact the Club President and arrange for a meeting with the Club's Executive Committee. During this meeting you should:

- ▶ Discuss with the club officers the purpose of the club coach program, review the role of the coach in their club, offer your assistance as a coach, and ask for their support.
- ▶ Discuss with the club's officers their perceptions of the club's strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Formulate an action plan, following the guidelines in this manual, and set up a continuous review of the progress being made.

All members of the Club Executive Committee should attend this meeting—any other members of the club support team are an added benefit and will show their commitment.

Remember, you are there to help them rebuild their club. All team members must support the rebuilding effort. Be careful not to alienate them. Remember that every club is different and will achieve success using different methods. Avoid criticisms and enforcing your suggestions. Gently guide them toward achieving club excellence. Be optimistic, friendly, and positive.

Every person in the club support team and the members are invested in the club's success. Remember your role is to set the club up for success, which will help them continue to improve the club environment long after you have ended your coaching assignment.

Available Resources

Your experience as a member is your greatest asset. The first time you attend a meeting of the struggling club, you will probably be able to identify some concerns you would like to share with the Club Executive Committee.

Many promotional and educational materials are available from Toastmasters International. Visit the Toastmasters Online Store at www.toastmasters.org/shop. You may also wish to look through copies of the *Toastmaster* magazine. Each issue is full of suggestions and ideas regarding club and membership building, meeting planning, and educational programming. Share these with the members of your club support team.

Action Plan

Assessment

To fully understand the problems of a struggling club, you must first know the characteristics of a successful one. The mission of a Toastmasters club is to provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth. To do this, a club should hold weekly meetings with a friendly atmosphere and encourage members to give speeches from the education program. While this may be an arduous task for the club to accomplish, it will be the change with the greatest positive impact.

As a specific tool, use the **Club Coach Troubleshooting Guide** and the **Club Coach Progress Report** to assess the club's success in meeting the needs of its members. Observe two or three meetings to determine the true nature of the club before you attempt this analysis. As you consider each portion of the assessment and the progress report, objectively rate the performance and provide honest feedback. Do not be too negative or too positive; just be as realistic as possible. Examine the results of the club assessment. How does the club rate? What areas need improvement? Your next step is to plan ways of solving the club's most serious problems by recommending actions to take.

Writing the Action Plan

Working with the Club Executive Committee, develop an action plan and include a set of goals designed to bring the club to excellence. Remember, membership decline is only a symptom of the problem. What needs improvement is the quality and attractiveness of the meetings so that the people who visit the club as guests will want to join. Help develop a well-run, fun, and educational club meeting. Be sure all club officers have a copy of the plan.

The plan should include:

- ▶ A statement of goals that identify levels of growth and a timeline.
- ▶ Specific actions and programs to be undertaken to achieve those goals, along with the person(s) responsible.

Establish a special relationship with the club officers, especially the Club President. Encourage optimism. Let them know their efforts are valued and appreciated. Encourage club officers to ask questions and try new ideas. Get them involved in Area and District meetings (conferences, speech contests, etc.). It is vital that the officers attend the officer training sessions conducted by the District.

Internal Actions

Meeting Time, Place, and Location

The club should review its meeting time, place, and location; changing these could have a major positive impact on the club's rebuilding efforts.

Club Programming

In an ideal club environment:

- ▶ Club officers are responsible, dedicated, and effective.
- ▶ The meeting begins and ends on time.
- ▶ Club programs are well-planned and well-executed.
- ▶ All meeting participants arrive on time and are prepared.
- ▶ Members and guests alike are greeted as they arrive and welcomed to the meeting.
- ▶ All members present are engaged and have an opportunity to participate.
- ▶ Evaluations are helpful, constructive, and contribute to members' personal growth and improvement.
- ▶ The club places high emphasis on educational development
- ▶ Meetings are varied, dynamic, and fun.
- ▶ Members receive positive support and recognition.

Consult **Master Your Meetings**. This contains the information needed to conduct a quality club meeting. In it, you will find:

- ▶ How to create the right environment
- ▶ The elements of a club meeting
- ▶ The roles of club officers
- ▶ Best practices for a quality club meeting
- ▶ Club meeting theme ideas

Guests

Help guests feel welcome! The first steps of your action plan will bring prospective members to the club, but getting them to the club meeting is only the first step. If they are to return and join the club, they must receive personal attention. You should make sure the club officers do the following:

- ▶ Greet them enthusiastically, being sure to use their name and welcome them to your meeting.
- ▶ Introduce the guest to an experienced member who will explain Toastmasters International and the meeting agenda.
- ▶ If guests arrive late, welcome them at the earliest opportunity.
- ▶ Provide each guest with all the information they need about Toastmasters and your club, ideally with a Guest Packet or directing them to the Digital Guest Packet.
- ▶ Have the guests sign your club's guest book.
- ▶ Ask the guests for comments at the end of the meeting.
- ▶ Contact the guests and thank them for attending your meeting. Invite them back to the next meeting.

Today's guest is tomorrow's member! Recall how you felt at your first meeting. Ensure the club officers are making each guest's visit enjoyable!

Officer Preparedness

Encourage the use of the **Club Leadership Handbook**, and other manuals to solve problems. Be sure the club officers are thoroughly familiar with all educational and promotional materials. In addition, ensure they understand the proper handling of important administration tasks, such as semiannual reports, club officers lists, etc., that must be completed and submitted to World Headquarters on time.

Distinguished Club Program

Encourage the club officers to use the Distinguished Club Program as a guide for planning and goal setting. If the club is not participating in the Distinguished Club Program, explain how it works as a planning tool and offer your assistance in setting goals, identifying strategies, and monitoring progress toward goal attainment.

Meeting Participants

Ensure club officers are aware of the purpose and importance of the club meeting roles and that they are working to have each role filled for all club meetings.

Toastmaster – The Toastmaster of the meeting acts as a genial host and conducts the entire educational portion of the program. They enthusiastically introduce the speakers and other participants and creates a pleasant atmosphere. This role requires much preparation.

Speaker – Most of each meeting revolves around the speaking program. Three or more members present prepared speeches based on projects from the Toastmasters Pathways learning experience. Each speaker should present speeches from the education program, based on the path they are working through.

Evaluator – An evaluation, based on the project evaluation form is given for every prepared speaker and for members serving in various meeting roles during the meeting. The evaluator completes the form, then presents a verbal evaluation in front of the club. In addition, the evaluator gives the speaker or meeting role participant a copy of the completed evaluation form. The evaluation includes positive comments and helpful suggestions about what could be done better. Good evaluations are critical and allow members to improve their speaking and leadership skills.

Topicsmaster – The Topicsmaster presides over the Table Topics® portion of the club meeting. Table Topics provides those members not assigned a meeting role an opportunity to speak during the meeting. During Table Topics, the Topicsmaster gives each member a subject, and the speaker gives a one- to two-minute impromptu talk on the subject. Table Topics helps members learn to think and speak “on their feet.”

General Evaluator – The General Evaluator evaluates everything that takes place during the meeting. In addition, the General Evaluator is responsible for the speech evaluators, making sure they know their responsibilities as evaluators, and for the timer, grammarian, and Ah-Counter. The General Evaluator leads the club during the evaluation portion of the Toastmasters meeting.

Timer – One of the purposes of Toastmasters is to teach people to express thoughts within a specific time interval. The timer is responsible for monitoring time and emphasizing the importance of time to everyone. Each segment of the meeting is timed, and each speech is timed. The timer operates the timing device, which indicates to the speaker how long they have been talking.

Grammarian – Another purpose of Toastmasters is to help people improve their grammar and use of words. The grammarian introduces new words to members, encourages their use, and comments on members’ language use during the meeting.

Ah-Counter – When speaking, people often use “crutch” words or fillers such as “ah,” “um,” “you know,” “well,” etc., or they repeat a word or phrase, saying, for example, “I, I said . . .” or “This means, this means . . .” These words and sounds can be distracting to listeners. The Ah-Counter notes these words and sounds and helps the speaker become aware of them.

For more information, please see *Master Your Meetings* or *A Toastmaster Wears Many Hats*.

Encourage and Recognize Accomplishment

As the club coach, you should encourage club members to deliver speeches from the education program and work toward level completion and DTM awards. Work with the club officers in building realistic educational goals and an appropriate recognition system. Ensure that accomplishments are valid. While recognition is a key component of the club’s culture, it is important that the quality of the educational experience is prioritized.

As you work with the club, keep your District leaders informed using the **Club Coach Progress Report**. If you have problems or questions, contact your District leaders or World Headquarters for assistance.

External Actions

Attracting New Members

All low-membership clubs share one thing—too few members! Part of your responsibility in coaching these clubs is helping them find new members. Here are some ideas to help attract the new members the club needs.

First, and most importantly, make sure the meeting location is suitable for a dynamic meeting. If meeting on site, the location should be convenient, have adequate space, and be free of distractions such as music and other noises. Place a Club Meeting Sign (Item 384) in the entrance hall.

Get involved with other local clubs. Communicate frequently with the Area and Division Directors. Attend Area and Division Council meetings, District conferences, and the International Convention. Invite members from other clubs to your meetings and attend other club meetings to encourage partnerships with other clubs.

Membership Programs

Toastmasters International sponsors several programs each year that motivate members and officers to grow the club's membership. For more information, go to www.toastmasters.org

In addition, it is recommended that each club create its own membership-building program. Successful club initiatives have the following in common:

▶ Objectives

Determine the club's current membership level, then set a goal for the number of members the club must have by the end of the program.

▶ Calendar

To be measurable, the program must have specific time limitations. Short programs (three months) tend to be best for clubs.

▶ Promotion

If they are going to participate, members must know about the program and understand its objectives. A simple one page flier and frequent reminders in club meetings can be very beneficial.

▶ Awards

Experience shows that providing some type of incentive to top performers enhances productivity. Examples of possible awards include but are not limited to Toastmasters International gift certificates, simple and meaningful items, or award certificates and plaques.

▶ Success

Someone must set the example and make it happen. This demonstration of success will inspire others to participate and contribute.

Public Relations

Ensuring the club has a strong local and online presence will bring greater awareness and success. This can be accomplished by suggesting the following to the club officers:

- ▶ Send news releases to local newspapers and television studios.
- ▶ Use the *Let the World Know Publicity and Promotion Handbook* for materials, ideas, and formats for articles.
- ▶ List your club in free community calendar services on community websites and local newspapers.
- ▶ Use social networking.
- ▶ List your club with the local chamber of commerce, public library, and other community service boards.
- ▶ Take advantage of local events, trade shows, or by hosting an information booth. Have plenty of brochures and fliers available for handouts.
- ▶ Put Toastmasters International fliers on bulletin boards at local shopping centers, coffee shops, public libraries, and municipal halls.

Visit www.toastmasters.org/Logos or www.toastmasters.org/Marketing for more ideas and materials. When using fliers and brochures, be sure the club's name, location, and contact information are prominently displayed.

Other

- ▶ Conduct a Speechcraft program for community groups and companies in the area.
- ▶ Invite a newspaper columnist or editor, local politician, or other noteworthy local personality as a special guest or speaker. Promote the visit to local publications.
- ▶ Host an open house for the community and online guests. Send out formal invitations to businesses and community organizations. Promote the event using social media and display posters and fliers in local businesses, libraries, and community service boards. To ensure the open house is a success, it is recommended that you have experienced members fulfill the speaker and meeting roles. Invite your District leaders to attend. Be sure all guests are greeted and warmly welcomed. Arrange time for socializing so your members can meet all the guests.

The Club's New Climate

During your appointment, you should periodically re-evaluate the club using the **Club Coach Troubleshooting Guide** and the **Club Coach Progress Report**. Do this as objectively as possible. Compare the results to your original evaluations, and note improvements and areas still requiring work. After four to six months, the club should be functioning effectively.

Some of the club's members may be challenged with understanding the benefit of the changes being made. Change is difficult, especially when it is a required course of action. Check the **Change Communication and Engagement Guide** for tips on how effective change management will ensure any changes you make are positively received.

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