

Intelligent Coaching

Published July 7, 2012 | By [johnmurphy](#)

Editor's Note

In this week's coaching story, Sandy Kardis tells us about how she worked with a 16-year-old club, County Communicators, in Clayton, Missouri. The club had been intermittently distinguished over the last few years, and membership had fallen to just 12 (enthusiastic) members. Sandy worked with the club president to devote a meeting to the Moments of Truth module, helping the club to understand their strengths, and their weaknesses. This gave them a short list of specific areas to improve upon, such as freshening up the web site, organizing meeting roles in advance, and ideas for promoting the club. The club also prepared a Club Success Plan to ensure their work would result in a Distinguished club. The club took ownership of the plan and worked together to implement it, officers and regular members alike. They filled in missing club officer positions, organized an open house, and assessed their progress at mid-year. The club has reached nine DCP goals and is just one member short of the needed 20 members. They are celebrating their successes in helping members meet their goals, and laying the foundation for a strong club for many years to come.

Part I. Club History and Assessment

County Communicators Toastmasters was chartered in May of 1995. The club started out with County employees but is now an open club that meets the second and fourth Tuesday of the month in the World Trade Center in Clayton. I was the Area Governor to this club and visited it several times. I was even invited to their Holiday Party which I attended. This club had enthusiastic members and great camaraderie among all members, but their membership was at 12. In my area governor reports, I recommended they needed to implement a membership building program to gain more members. When the opportunity for club coaching came up, I wanted to be one of their club coaches to help them with a membership building program. I felt a sense of responsibility for the future of County Communicator Toastmasters club and wanted to instill in them a sense of responsibility for their club's future.

I found it easy to approach them about me being one of their club coaches because I had already built a rapport with the club leadership and members as Area Governor. In a speech to club members, I spoke about why a club is rebuilt, what is a club coach, the 3 major components to coaching: assessment, plan, and implementation, who was going to do the work, and club coach program requirements. At the end of my speech, I asked for a call to action. I asked the club President to have the club vote to be a Distinguished club and to work with Ralph Morrissey and me.

I recommended moving ahead with an assessment and suggested Moments of Truth be presented during an entire meeting by the newly elected club President. The club discovered what was working and what was not working.

First Impressions

- Members do a good job with greeting guests warmly but would like to be more outgoing with introducing guests to officers and members.
- Members do not invite guests to join on their first visit.
- VPM needs to have more personal and aggressive follow-up with guests at meeting or afterwards.
- Club has a guest packet and would like to improve it.

New Member Orientation

- New members are assigned speaking roles right away. Online duty roster is good for this.
- Club does not assign a mentor to new members. Mentoring is difficult with thin membership but could be intentionally promoted to make membership more attractive to visitors and help retain existing members.
- Briefing on how the educational program helps develop speaking and leadership skills has not been pursued much in recent years.

- Annual survey of member goals and needs would be good for retaining members and keeping them active and should be done semi-annually or at dues time.
- Do better at keeping new members involved in all aspects of activities.

Fellowship and Variety

- Club meetings have a theme, and members have fun with themes.
- Club members attend area events such as area speech contests but don't attend district events such as spring and fall district conferences.

Program Planning

- Club hasn't been strong in publishing agenda. Need to organize member meeting roles earlier.
- Club would like to find a better way to sign up on the duty roster. Meeting roles need to be filled the week before the next meeting. Try to get members to commit to key roles at end of meeting for the next meeting.
- Website hasn't been maintained. Could improve the user friendliness of the website. A lot more could be done with it by a technically-savvy member.

Membership Strength

- This category was identified as a "screaming issue".
- There is not enough new blood coming in.
- Many left due to new jobs and retirement.
- Ideas to promote the club included marketing at the Dual Membership Station at TLI, displaying TI brochures, a sign to advertise club meetings, and a new meeting location.
- Have post-club meetings to discuss membership, members' progress in manuals, and DCP.

Recognize Achievements

- The club does acknowledge past club leaders. Outgoing president is presented a plaque.
- Club does not recognize achievements immediately. A club officer should formally recognize members' educational achievements.
- Club does not display a Member Progress Chart.
- Member and club achievements are not publicized. Consider putting an article in County newsletter and in a community paper.
- Distinguished Club Program is not used for both planning and recognition.

Part II. Plan

After Ralph's speech on S.M.A.R.T. goals, the VP PR facilitated a meeting to establish the 10 goals the club members would work to achieve. Those goals included earn 4 CC educational awards, earn 1 advanced communicator award, increase membership with a minimum of 5 new members plus strive to maintain current membership, 4 officers attend training, become a distinguished club, identify, train, and mentor the VPE, create an effective guest to member engagement, and assign a mentor to new members. The members established these goals as their plan for rebuilding the club.

Since membership strength was identified as a screaming issue, members volunteered to make a club announcement on LinkedIn, contact the World Trade Center Intern Program and St. Louis County Government paper, look into the County Intranet, hand out brochures at Wonderful Wednesdays, and establish a committee for a fall Open House.

With my assistance, a Club Success Plan was created based on a model plan from Bradley Harris, DTM, the Region 5 Marketing Director in 2011. The club success plan included the 10 DCP goals and the notes from the club assessment and goal setting. Member names were identified to achieve individual awards and goals. It was distributed to all club members.

Part III. Implementation and Results

It was the club members who were responsible for implementing their plan. It was great to see officers as well as members volunteer to make improvements. Ralph and I were involved as mentors. Ralph mentored the VP Membership sharing many TI membership resources, and I mentored the VP Education working with him in a supportive role. A mentor survey was distributed to all members, and I assisted the VPE with the mentor program. For members who didn't want a mentor, another form was distributed which focused on how Ralph or I could help coach them about their goals.

The club got off to a good start when a member stepped up and volunteered to be the VPE. The VPE began tracking the progress of speeches and leadership projects. The President had been serving in both officer roles. Thanks to a technically-savvy VPE, the club updated the FreeToastHost website to 2.0 and improved its user-friendliness. Before the end of each meeting, members now commit to key roles, Toastmaster, Table Topics Master, and Speakers, for the next meeting. Those roles are updated. Several days before the next meeting, an email is sent to all members asking them to sign up for open roles.

Significant preparation went into their October Open House, and they took away lessons learned for their second Open House in May. All guests completed a contact info sheet and received a follow-up email or phone call. Because the club participated in the District 8 Public Relations Fall Open House Campaign, it received a Guest Information Card and Badge Set of 25.

At mid-year, the club President, Ralph, and I met to reflect on what County Communicators accomplished and what needed to be accomplished to become a great Toastmasters club. The three of us presented a pep talk to the club which was organized in 3 parts: education and training by me, membership by Ralph, and the DCP goals by the club President. The club President hit a home run by relating the goals attained to a baseball game! The club president created a DCP Progress Report which is displayed each meeting. When a goal is reached, it is identified and shared with the club. When a member achieves an educational or leadership award, the club President presents the member with a club award.

Lessons Learned

I would not have been a successful club coach without the guidance of John Murphy, DTM. He shared many ideas with me. He prepared me for the three major components to coaching: assessment, plan, and implementation.

It was the club vote to be a Distinguished club and to work with Ralph and me that fostered a sense of responsibility for the club's future. In June, County Communicators Toastmasters Club earned President's Distinguished status in the Distinguished Club Program. At the June 26 club meeting, the club president thanked me for assisting the club and presented me with a bouquet of flowers from the club.

Club coaching is an exciting and wonderful experience. It taught me that I could teach club members how to face and overcome their challenges by leading not telling them. Attending their meetings regularly and filling in meeting roles demonstrated to the club that I cared about the future of County Communicators Toastmasters club.

By Sandy Kardis, DTM
County Communicator Club Coach

A Letter of Praise

Sandy Kardis and Ralph Morrissey did a great job as coaches of County Communicators #5823. Right from the start they set the right tone and maintained it. Sandy let us know they were not in the club to direct us but to make suggestions. They remained positive, never pointing out what we didn't do well but emphasizing how we could improve. Sandy in particular was very involved and committed but discreet about it.

At Sandy's suggestion the entire first meeting in June (we meet twice a month) was devoted to the Better Club series module Moment of Truth. It produced an open discussion about the club. We talked about what we did well and where we needed improvement. The energy of the members was a pleasant surprise. Problems were addressed, ideas thrown around and commitments made. Sandy was in the back of the room taking notes which she wrote up in a clear easy to read form. Each member was given a copy.

At the first meeting in July again at Sandy's suggestion we discussed and made club and individual commitments to Distinguished Club Program Goals. Again Sandy took notes which were written up and added to the previous month's notes and given to members. On those pages was an honest accounting of our club and a step by step plan to improve.

By August our guest relations plan was in place and active. By September two more Better Speaker Series modules had been given, one by Sandy. In October we had an open house. And in January, at Sandy's suggestion we had a midyear review.

It is now the end of the year and I'm proud to tell you how we did. We have 8 new members and will receive a Presidents Distinguished ribbon. It was a good year. That is what our club needed. But more importantly our members became involved in making our club succeed. It was an effort brought about by the tone, suggestions and commitment of our coaches.

By Dan Chrenka

President, County Communicators.