



## Making Contact with the Missouri Toast of the Town

Missouri Toast of the Town #9384 Club was chartered on October 1, 1999. They are a closed club allowing only employees of Bank of America to attend their biweekly meetings. They meet in a huge facility that stretches for one city block. The employees play a supporting role working with real estate titles, appraisals, mortgages and customer service. When I became Area 8 Governor, in July 2010, I emailed my Area clubs to arrange a visit and establish a professional relationship.

After a few emails, I got a response stating that the club wasn't meeting, but a meeting was scheduled for September 15th. The day before the meeting, I learned that the meeting was canceled. During the recent financial crisis, a new system was installed and the workload became very challenging. The employees were too busy for Toastmasters. Any further inquiries were unsuccessful: email, postal mail and phone calls did not work.



What worked for me was getting the e-mail addresses for all of Missouri Toast of the Town's officers and then contacting them all. Not once, but repeatedly. I stated that I was interested in meeting them. In my letter I wrote about the benefits that I had received from Toastmasters and the benefits of coaching. I told them that they could read inspiring stories about club coaching success on the District 8 website. I tried to make it easy. I was willing to meet anytime, it would be a short meeting, I would bring refreshments and the results would be highly beneficial. Who could refuse that? Here is a copy of the email that I sent in early October (see page 3).

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## Find the Leaders in Your Club

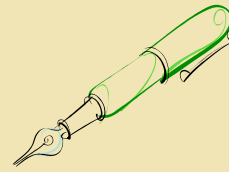
Leaders are important during and after your coaching appointment. They will help you rebuild the club and keep it strong and healthy long after you're gone.

Here are three ways to find and/or develop the leaders in your club...

- (1) *Ask for help.* Coaches should not have to do all the work, rather, the members should be learning to do the work under your guidance.
- (2) *Create opportunities.* Use the Competent Leader manual to transform a typical meeting into a training session, where each member is working on his or her goals.
- (3) *Broaden horizons.* Introduce the members to the larger world of Toastmasters. Attendance at a conference, a sister club or a contest will give the members perspective on the club's problems and expose them to new ideas.

Hello Missouri Toast of the Town,

I'm writing this letter to arrange a meeting between us.



I'm very happy to serve as your club's coach. I've enjoyed numerous benefits from Toastmasters proven program of self-development. As a coach, my intention is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to benefit through involvement in healthy, strong Toastmaster Clubs.

In the beginning of the rebuilding process things can seem tough. The Young Shepherd's Club, a Bank of Montreal Toastmasters Club, was facing tough times last year. Their coaches facilitated a discussion of the club's strengths and weaknesses that led to a strategic action plan. The coaches and club's members worked together to achieve success. The Greater Opportunity Toastmasters Club, a corporate banking club in Charlotte, North Carolina, was falling apart last year. Their coach consulted with the members and helped them make a few small changes that led to a successful end to the 2009-2010 Toastmaster year. You can find these inspiring stories on the District 8 website... <http://www.dist8tm.org/clubcoach.html>

We can create an inspiring story too. As a coach, I can facilitate the recovery of your club. In other words, I can facilitate the recovery process by sharing my knowledge, advice and resources. However, I can't do anything unless the club takes responsibility and works with me. The first step is to get together for a meeting.

Let's get together to discuss strategies for the improvement of your Toastmasters Club. We'll determine your club's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Then we'll create a plan that maximizes your strengths and overcomes your obstacles.

I'm available at a time and location convenient to you. If you would like to meet before work I'll bring coffee and refreshments. If you want to meet after work I'll buy appetizers.

Sincerely,

Debra Morrissey ACG, ALB  
Area 8 Governor

## **Making Contact with the Missouri Toast of the Town, continued...**

I was very happy when I received a few responses. The members were interested in the meeting. Then like a light in the darkness, I received an email from Taffy Cobb, Treasurer.

Hi Debra

Thank you for contacting our club members in an effort to schedule a meeting. I called a meeting of our club's officers today. I'm happy to report that we have all decided that we want our club to continue. We were able to do some brainstorming and discussion and have made some new commitments for our club.

We are ready to move forward and would love your assistance in jump starting and coaching our club. Our next team meeting will be Nov 4th at 12:00pm here at our work site in a conference room.

This is the same day you suggested but at a different time. Will you be able to attend at 12:00 noon?

Please advise.

Taffy

From my conversations with the District 8 Club Coach Chair, I learned that the coaches typically organize a meeting with the club's membership to brainstorm, discuss and obtain commitments. Taffy had already done it. She made our coaching job easier. After a protracted beginning, a meeting was finally arranged for November 4th, 2010.

There were 9 people at the first meeting! At this point, I decided to perform a brief assessment to complement the club's prior assessment. They met in a small conference room. Taffy, my primary contact, had been a member of the club for the past six years, but didn't have a CC. In fact, the membership didn't really give manual speeches, or work toward any educational goals. When they did meet, they simply got together and had a discussion or something.

## Enhancing the Club's Plan

The club's membership created a plan to rebuild their own club. It involved a change of leadership, meeting frequency, attitude and most importantly expectations. No longer would the club simply meet, now they would gather to improve their communication and leadership skills. Taffy assumed the role of President. She arranged to have weekly meetings until the end of the year. During these weekly meetings, every interaction would be positive and supportive. The site was closed for Veteran's Day, so the next meeting was November 18th.

As a coach, I recognized a few areas where I could make a contribution. Namely, being present, being positive and being persistent. I made plans to attend as many meetings as possible, but three of my Area's clubs met on the same day, at the same time. To solve this conflict,

Ralph Morrissey  
as co-coach in  
This enabled  
of us to attend

“being present, being positive and being persistent”

I asked  
to join me  
December.  
one or both  
every

meeting. Moreover, Ralph served as a mentor for the men in the club. Ralph and I made a special point of providing positive impact at each meeting. We educated the members, praised good actions and offered feedback for improvement. Education consisted of sharing resources for membership improvement and the recruitment of new members. This material came from the Toastmasters International website, Google searches and our own experiences. Specifically, I suggested that a notice be placed on company bulletin boards, on the intranet, in the company newsletter and ask everyone to bring a friend. I can sum up our strategy in one sentence. My job as coach was not to do the work, rather, it was to provide the resources, training and encouragement for the members to rebuild their own club. I mentioned persistence because we did these things every meeting.

## Filling the Room

After our great first meeting of November 4th, the club wouldn't meet again for two weeks. Fortunately, the energy returned for our next meeting on November 18th. Taffy was the first



to catch the vision and her enthusiasm spread throughout the club. Every time a goal was accomplished it was celebrated. I kept encouraging Taffy and her upbeat attitude. Taffy, Ralph and I clearly understood each other and were unified in our expectation that the club would be Distinguished. It was this underlying expectation of a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (S.M.A.R.T.) goal that kept us going. On a lighter note, Taffy brought food during the early days to encourage attendance.

## Filling the Room , continued...

In January, the momentum continued to grow. Meetings were moved to Fridays so the club could meet in the large Presidential Conference Room for weekly meetings rather than the small room. At the first meeting in the new room, I commented that I envisioned the entire room full. I received instant validation of our methods when each member agreed with me. To close the month, I installed officers for the final six months. It was a special occasion because the new officers were motivated, committed and involved. To make the event more meaningful, I awarded them with a set of officer pins (which I purchased). I wanted them to feel proud. The expectation of success was beginning to spread to the members.

“The expectation of success...”

The commitment to success shifted into a higher gear at the January 22nd Toastmaster Leadership Institute. With firm expectations, Taffy politely told each officer that they will be attending TLI. All agreed, and for the first time in recent memory all 7 club officers attended TLI. Each officer learned new ideas and brought them back to the club. We were energized and educated.

In the last six months the members achieved wonderful individual awards. Saqib Salman, Verna Henry, Taffy Cobb, and DeAndre Whitner obtained their CC. Taffy Cobb, Edna Cosby and Casetta Stevens obtained their CL. Taffy Cobb and Casetta Stevens obtained their ACB. By the end of the year, Missouri Toast of the Town achieved President's Distinguished Club Award!

At the final meeting of the year, the incoming Area Governor installed the new officers. I watched with pride as each officer agreed to their responsibilities and passed the gavel to the next officer. The outgoing officers also passed their officer pins to the incoming group. These pins were symbolic of the great strides taken by the members to improve their club. It was understood that the new officers would continue the newly minted tradition of club success. Two members, Taffy Cobb and Casetta Stevens, have both accepted Area Governor appointments for the 2011-2012 year, Area 6 and 20, respectively. This is another reason to celebrate and another positive result that makes coaching worthwhile.

“It was understood...”

## Letter of Praise

Hello, my name is Taffy Cobb and I am the President of MO Toast of the Town #9384. My club is a closed corporate club and had diminished to almost nothing in the 2009-2010 Toastmaster year.

I'm writing to inform of the invaluable service our club has received from our club coaches Debra and Ralph Morrissey. The Morrissey's served as coaches to our club from November 2010 through June 2011. Because of their expertise and willingness to assist our club members, we had a very memorable and successful time working together.

Our coaches were diligent in coming to our club meetings and educating the club on things we didn't know. Debra and Ralph always kept the lines of communication open with the members and that is what made the difference.

Debra and Ralph are successful club coaches because they not only helped us achieve our goal of becoming a Distinguished Club (April 1st, 2011) but they also showed us how to solidly rebuild our club and grow as Toastmasters.

Ultimately the club pushed along until we achieved President's Distinguished Club status (May 27, 2011). We accomplished this status by changing, adapting and persevering. Some of the things we changed in our club were our officers, our meeting frequency, and our number of members.

We made each meeting about learning, practicing our communication and leadership skills, and most importantly – having fun.

I thank Debra and Ralph for all of their assistance in helping us become a great club and better Toastmasters.

Taffy Cobb  
Club President  
MO Toast of the Town  
Bank of America Corporate Club  
Club #9384, District 08



## Lessons Learned

Every club coaching story is unique. The Missouri Toast of the Town #9384 asked for help to get started. Ralph and I were able to provide that initial help, then we watched with joy as the club grew. Although my experience was relatively straightforward, I can offer two pieces of advice to club coaches: don't give up and give the requested help.

First, never give up. It was difficult to make contact with this club. It was discouraging to be ignored. I can tell all prospective club coaches to keep trying. You'll make contact. Don't give up. If the doesn't respond, route such as member. Make for them to

“don't give up and give the requested help”

main contact try an alternate each officer or it worthwhile respond.

I asked for a brief meeting, not a marathon session. I offered to bring refreshments. I also advertised the benefits of Toastmasters and gave them hope by sharing the stories of how two similar clubs rebuilt themselves.

Second, give the requested help. This club made their own assessment, designed their own plan and implemented that plan themselves. The members asked for encouragement and knowledge. Ralph or I attended every meeting. We kept encouraging the club. We spoke about the benefits and praised the members every chance we got. We kept demonstrating commitment and enthusiasm and made sure they understood the elements of a quality meeting, including all functionary and officer positions. I sent articles, posters, flyers, everything I could get my hands on. I also invited the members to contests, to TLI and to other events. President, Taffy Cobb, understood the benefits of TLI. Officers were changed, where necessary, and all of the new officers committed to attending TLI. We offered a brief educational/feedback on the end of each meeting to teach the members a little more. In retrospect, the combined effect of information and praise made the members, especially the developing club leaders, feel confident and inspired them to achieve amazing results.

By Debra Morrissey

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