

Taking Flight - the Newsletter

February, 2005



Taking Flight is a nonprofit association of prison Toastmasters clubs, club sponsors, and supportive individuals. It evolved from activities begun in 1998, was incorporated in the State of Texas in 2002 and registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in 2003. The ultimate goal of Taking Flight is inmate rehabilitation through development of critical societal skills as learned in the prison Toastmasters club format.

This newsletter is intended to provide information, help, and encouragement. It is to be a vehicle in which people interested in prison Toastmasters clubs can share ideas and experiences so that we can benefit from the successes of each other.

Contact Information

Paul Jagen

Phone: 1-877-883-0922

Fax: 1-409-883-6308

E-mail: info@takingflight.org

Web page: <http://takingflight.org>

USPS address: Taking Flight
PO BOX 2161
Orange, TX 77631-2161

Table of Contents

Click on title to go directly to that article

A Success Story	3
What is Taking Flight.....	5
How to Raise Funds	7
Club Tips	9
Grammarian.....	9
Ah Counter	9
Wordsmith.....	9
Jokemaster.....	9
Listenmaster	9
An Inmate's Speech	10
Readers Respond	12

A Success Story

This letter is from a Toastmaster in California:

Paul,

I want to share with you my experiences this past Friday. I went with the Division D Governor to visit one of the two state prisons in Blythe (only a 190 mile each way for me.) When we got there, we gave the Resource Manager a copy of some of the material you sent me (the testimonies and some information about why clubs in prisons.) Then, I said I wanted to give him a little background on how we got started having Toastmaster clubs in prisons within California. Less than 2 minutes into the set up for sales pitch, and he said "You don't need to sell me. I'm completely sold."

He then went on to tell of a meeting that he had on the previous day with prison management and 19 prisoners to establish a budget for the prisoner leisure activities. Two of the prisoners had mentioned that they had been in Toastmasters and they went into a 30 minute dissertation as to the benefits of the program.

Then, he told us that he had been a toastmaster until he moved over 100 miles from the nearest club. The acting warden is sold on the program. He just wanted to know when we could get started (demo meeting with prisoners and day of the week to have the meeting.) He said that he will arrange the funding (our major concern.) In fact, he said that he wants at least two clubs within this prison (there are 4 yards and the prisoners are not allowed to mingle with people who are not assigned to their own yard, so there may wind up being 4 clubs in this facility.) He, also, said that the other prison,

which is less than 1 mile away, has four yards and will be watching to see if this program should be started there.

Needless to say, we left there on a very high note. We have scheduled the demonstration meeting for February 12th and expect to start the first club before the end of February.

This was the first time that the Division Governor visited a prison. He is very enthusiastic right now. I wonder how high he will get when he starts to see the reception the prisoners will give and when he sees the growth that they attain.

Yes, this is another reward of service leadership. You and your organization are helping all of us make a difference and change lives, one at a time.

Darrell Zeller
Club 12-4039 - Enthusiastic Embarkers



What is Taking Flight

Taking Flight is a nonprofit association of prison Toastmasters clubs, club sponsors, and supportive individuals. It evolved from activities begun in 1998, was incorporated in the State of Texas in 2002, and registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in 2003. The ultimate goal of Taking Flight is inmate rehabilitation through development of critical societal skills as learned in the prison Toastmasters club format. Its work is principally carried out through regional “satellite” groups which promote prison clubs throughout the world.

With the continued growth of the US prison population and cut-backs in prison budgets, it is increasingly difficult for prisons to staff rehabilitation programs. This leads prisons to reduce programs and/or seek volunteer support. Volunteer-coordinated Toastmaster clubs have a successful track record in US prisons for over 25 years. Until the formation of Taking Flight, they were largely the result of uncoordinated efforts by individual “free-world” members of Toastmasters International.

Prison inmates typically have backgrounds that de-emphasize critical societal skills, such as listening, effective communication, and taking and giving criticism or in a positive manner. As a result, they tend to find themselves on the fringes of mainstream society and in situations with increased opportunity for crime. These characteristics tend to be encouraged by their incarcerated peers, and when they are ultimately released to society, they quickly find themselves returning to their old habits.

In the Toastmasters club environment, the prison member learns and practices such skills as communicating with clarity, giving and accepting constructive criticism, organizing thought, listening, and making and keeping commitments. Continuous constructive feedback results in reinforced and directed continuous improvement. With these skills and learned behavioral modifications, members become model inmates. Released inmate members are more likely to successfully reintegrate with society, secure meaningful employment, and become tax-paying citizens. Often, they combine their new-found speaking skills with past life experiences and work within the community in opposition to the root causes of crime and drug abuse. Wardens of prisons with Toastmaster clubs uniformly praise the clubs for their impact on inmate behavior and provide positive referrals to other wardens. Statistics indicate a 90% reduction in the recidivism rate for program graduates. Testimonials from wardens document behavioral improvements in members while incarcerated.

Taking Flight services are designed to increase the number of prison Toastmaster clubs, help sustain existing prison clubs, and promote awareness of Toastmaster clubs in prison. The program brings cohesion, uniformity, experience, and directed expansion to the current uncoordinated prison club efforts led by isolated individual members of Toastmasters International.

Participation of “free-world” Toastmasters is motivated by: expanded speaking opportunities, increased club membership, new club formation, increased publicity, and social service opportunity. Prison participation is motivated by: concern for inmate welfare, improved inmate behavior, reduced recidivism statistics, a no-cost rehabilitation program conducted by volunteers, and favorable publicity.

The only alternative to Taking Flight for the primary market is inaction or independent action. No other organization serves the global or US market of people who want to form Prison Toastmaster clubs. Within the secondary market (prisons), competition is in the form of diminishing internally-sponsored programs such as college equivalent courses, GED courses, and spiritual growth programs.

Fundraising has consisted primarily of grants and gifts by individuals, corporations, and churches. 52% of expenses is for support and start-up of prison clubs, 21% is related to Satellite support, 27% covers miscellaneous and administrative costs. Taking Flight Board Members and Officers receive no compensation for their efforts. Tax deductible donations to Taking Flight can be sent to the location shown on the cover page of this newsletter.

As of 1/1/2005, Taking Flight was affiliated with 22 clubs and 8 Satellites.



How to Raise Funds

Raising funds is one of the most pressing issues many existing and new clubs face. How do we support the program? We all prefer chartered clubs over gavel clubs, but how do we get the money to pay for them?

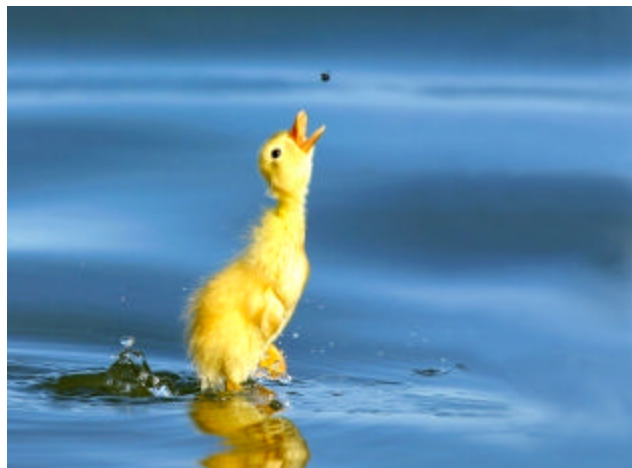
Some prisons allow prison Toastmaster clubs to be self-supporting through inmate dues. Some prisons pay all club fees through their educational budget. Others require all expenses be supported and processed by outside organizations.

Recruiting members for a club in which the inmates have to pay their own way can be difficult. It is not unusual for an inmate to have to spend one month's worth of prison wages to pay for one year of Toastmaster dues. Most inmates will not consider such a large expenditure unless they already have a background in Toastmasters. It might be easier to start the club with external donations and then to transition to an inmate funded club once it is established.

If the club costs are not paid for by the

inmates or the prison, then they will need to be covered through outside support. Supporting a prison Toastmasters club is very economical. A full Toastmasters club can be started for under \$1000, and a gavel club can be started for under \$200. On-going club support can be much less, depending on the variety of materials used and the number of members.

Asking for money is a speaking skill that should be developed. Consider having a club seminar on it. You might even have some practice runs in your club meeting. Look upon this as an opportunity to develop a skill and have direct application for it. When making contacts, take advantage of the opportunity to raise awareness of Toastmasters and to gain members for your club.



Fund Raising:
its within your
reach

The three best ways to get donations are:

- ? Have a Toastmaster go to his/her church - mission committee, evangelism, women's group, etc and ask for a \$100 - \$200 donation
- ? Have a Toastmaster go to his/her employer and ask for \$100 - \$1000 depending on size of employer
- ? Have a Toastmaster contact his/her doctor, dentist, family members, etc

General public appeals also work, but are not as effective as one-on-one personal contact. Here are some methods that have been successful in raising funds and recruiting members:

- ? Speeches to Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Bar Associations, and other civic or professional organizations
- ? Newspaper articles
- ? TV and radio interviews. Most stations have Public Service time that they need to fill and are always interested in good things being done locally.
- ? Letters to acquaintances or business contacts - following-up with phone calls helps.

Grant Applications can be effective but are often time consuming to fill-out. Contact:

- ? Local utilities – many have community support programs and are very generous
- ? Religious groups and prison reform ministries
- ? Large local industries
- ? National philanthropic organizations
- ? Local Foundations
- ? Arts Foundations – oration is one of the earliest art forms
- ? Banks – are often legally required to return money to the community

Many organizations will only donate to groups which have a 501(c)3 classification. The Federal Government confers this status after certain forms have been submitted. Toastmasters International will provide the submittal forms as part of the club chartering process.

One of the easiest ways to raise money is through direct mailings to likely donors, such as, friends, relatives and associates. Examples of fund raising letters are contained in the attachment.

Club Tips

Got so many members that some spend the meeting as observers? Need some easy things for your most recent members to do? You might find an answer by creating new functions and splitting up old ones.

Here are some ideas:

Grammarians

The Grammarian comments on the use of English during the course of the meeting. Being grammarian is truly an exercise in expanding one's listening skills.

Ah Counter

The purpose of the Ah Counter is to note words and sounds used as a "crutch" or "pause filler" by anyone who speaks during the meeting. Words may be inappropriate interjections, such as "well," "but," "so," "you know." Sounds may be "ah," "um," "er." The Ah Counter also notes when a speaker repeats a word or phrase such as "I, I" or "This means, this means."

Wordsmith

A vocabulary building word of the day is selected, defined, and used in an example. Each time it is used correctly during the meeting, the Wordsmith records who used it and how often. A report is presented at the end of the meeting.



Jokemaster

Tells a non-offensive joke or brief humorous story at the start of the meeting

Listenmaster

Near the end of the meeting, the Listenmaster asks 3 people questions based on what was said in the meeting. The purpose of this function is to encourage people to pay attention to what is said.

An Inmate's Speech

Then and Now

When I was growing up, I lived with my family on a small farm just outside Kerrville, Texas. Since both of my parents worked, I rode a bus to school every day. One morning, some new kids got on the bus. I was amazed that there were seven from the same family. The oldest boy was my age and he had braces on his legs.



Some of the other kids started making fun of his handicap and I recognized the hurt look on John's face. I knew how he felt because as a skinny child, I had been a victim, too. I took up with Johnny and that was the beginning of a long

friendship. John had nine brothers and sisters and there seemed to be something wrong with all of them. One had epilepsy, another cerebral palsy, most had bad eyesight, and some had birth defects. John Sr. was an albino with snow white

hair and pink eyes and his mother had been crippled by polio. You would think that with all the problems facing this family they would be emotionally crushed. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

John Sr. worked at the Lions' crippled children's camp teaching blind children. Since he was legally blind himself, it was truly a case of the blind leading the blind. I had the privilege of going with their family to the camp and there were so many children struggling against overwhelming physical and emotional handicaps. I saw their pain and frustration and discouragement, and at the same time I saw such courage and determination to accomplish even the smallest task that you and I take for granted every day.

I saw one small boy struggling to button one small button on his shirt. He worked to make his damaged little fingers put the button through the hole and when he got it, he looked up at me with this triumph in his eyes that I will never forget. These children had to find their own way of overcoming their handicaps because no one else could do it for them.

In addition to the material things these kids needed, the Lions club members gave their time and encouragement and praise for a job well done. They put their

arms around these precious children and told them how proud they were of them. You can't come away from an experience like that without realizing that our children can overcome anything. If we give them the chance.

I have spoken with a lot of troubled teens through the Outreach programs since 1995 and have come to the conclusion that drugs and violence are not the real problem, but the symptoms of the way children feel about themselves. Drug addiction is a feeling disease and the children I have talked to feel worthless and hopeless and helpless to do anything about their situation. They want to make their own decisions and we should let them by giving them the support they need. Then we need to encourage and guide them to build their own personal drug and violence program. The whole community needs to let the children know we are behind every responsible choice they make.

When they see their programs working and saving lives, they will have those accomplishments to pull from for the rest of their lives. Besides learning how to solve problems, they will learn to face the future with confidence and optimism. What better legacy can we give them.

Tom N.

Readers Respond

The whole purpose of joining together through Taking Flight is to make it easier for us to start and sustain prison clubs. Here is your chance to contribute. Responses will be condensed and published in the next newsletter.

Question 1:

How are your prison clubs funded? What are your operating expenses? Do your prison members pay for themselves. Do you accept money from members' relatives? What fund raising techniques have been successful for you?

Question 2:

What unique things does your prison club do in its meetings.

Question 3:

Do you have any prison photos you could share with us? Inmate speeches? Success Stories? Please send them – we want to put them to good use and share them with others



Question 4:

What do you think of this newsletter. How can it be improved?

Question 5:

Are you interested in helping administer the Taking Flight program? No matter where you are, there is much you can do.