

A Letter to Toastmasters Club Presidents

Congratulations on getting elected to lead your Toastmasters Club as President. I want to take this moment to appreciate you for all the efforts you have put into your club that has led you to this moment. Indeed, you have come a long way and you stand here as the President of your club because you deserve it. People of your club have put their trust in you and have chosen you to be the one they think can lead them and the whole club.

Leadership expert John Maxwell states in his book '*The 360 Degree Leader*' that he was once asked how one can pick the best leader from a group of leaders. Maxwell's answer was to suggest that the questioner look at those who were leading volunteer groups. This is an acid test of true leadership ability, due to the lack of traditional leadership levers, such as financial incentives, or the ability to fire someone. "It takes every bit of leadership skill you have to get people who don't have to do anything to do what you ask".

Here comes in Toastmasters and the position of Club President. You are now leading a group of volunteers and if successful, then according to John Maxwell you will have passed the acid test of true leadership ability. So the question is, how to effectively lead a Toastmasters Club. That too without any financial incentives for everyone involved?

As a Club President, it is your challenge to see that your club enables its members to achieve their educational goals. It is also your challenge to see that your Club helps the Area, Division, District, and Toastmasters International to meet their goals.

Having said that, in order to accomplish the above mission, you need to have clarity to see the next year through. Without it, you won't be able to communicate your vision effectively to club officers who will help and support you in accomplishing the goals. Wait a second here! Is it really the club officers who are going to support you, or YOU as a Club President will support them to get to the goal?

In a volunteer group setting, the dynamics of leadership are different. Being the Club President, your duty must be to make each officer believe that they are the CEO of their respective roles and you as the Club President are there to support them and help them whenever it is required. Yes it is you who will delegate them tasks, but with tasks delegate them the sense of responsibility, give them the freedom to do the task their way and above all inspire them through your actions.

In the first few months of my tenure as club president, I noticed that some of the club officers were not doing their tasks effectively and up to the mark. At that point in time, I had two options in mind:

1. Confront them and ask them to do the task effectively in a commanding tone.

The belief behind this action is that the officers are going to help and support **ME** in accomplishing the goals of club and I will do whatever in my power to have them do the tasks effectively.

2. Do the task myself and inspire them through my actions.

The belief behind this action is that I, as a Club President will support **THEM** (club officers) to accomplish the goals of club and give them the inspiration they need to do the task effectively.

Well, you guessed it. I choose the latter, and it did wonders. With the passage of time. It gave a sense of responsibility to the team and myself even. It made them believe that they are the CEO of their respective roles and I am there to help them, assist them & support them.

“When I becomes We, even illness becomes wellness”

How about you as Club President assist Sergeant at Arms in setting up the meeting room, assist VP Education & Membership in finalizing the agenda and submitting memberships respectively and the rest of the roles. What do you think will ultimately happen? You will start inspiring your team through your actions and as John Quincy puts, **“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader”**

I am not saying that you as Club President keep on doing the tasks of other officers, all I am suggesting that if you wholeheartedly go along with your team, assist them in their tasks during initial period of your tenure and whenever needed afterwards there is no way that they will not give back with all what they have.

In Stealing Fire book, the author tells the story of how Navy Seals operate. In a group of four Navy Seals Officers, there is no one leader. When they navigate through their mission, if an enemy appears from the left side, the Navy Seal on the left side will take the command and become the leader, rest of them will follow. Similarly if the enemy appears from right side, the one on right takes the command becomes the leader and rest follow, so on and so forth.

How about applying the same rule in Toastmasters Club? Imagine if all the club officers become so empowered and responsible that they take full ownership of their roles and lead their role by themselves. During Executive Committee Meetings, if you feel like one of the officer is showing confidence in a certain area, make him/her the leader and ask everyone else to follow. While organizing a recent contest, we were facing a challenge selecting the menu for the after-contest refreshments. One officer who was a foodie himself started suggesting us various options to

choose from, judging from his confidence we made him the Co-Sergeant at Arms of the contest and gave him the lead. This is how you can give charge to your team members.

Besides all this, you need to make effective use of the presiding address at the start of the meeting. Just few rules to keep in mind, talk only about the club & keep bigger picture in mind while addressing. Use the presiding address to give important announcement regarding the club, make the club members feel that you care about their progress, welcome the guests and make them feel they are in the right place, set the tone of the meeting. If the president is energetic, the meeting will be energetic.

Apply all this and you will witness miracles of leadership unfolding for everyone involved. You will witness exponential growth of your club, success of your members and your team.

Above all, keep the Toastmasters values in mind. Integrity, Respect, Service & Excellence.

Integrity: Doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.

Respect: Everyone deserves it, be humble.

Service: Give your best, without expecting anything in return.

Excellence: Do ordinary things, extraordinary well.

As the president, you are a member of your team as well as a leader. Team is more than a collection of people, an emotional force rooted in feelings, thoughts and actions of all members with a common goal of achievement, sharing and mutual support. Work along your team members to create a healthy, dynamic club—a club of which everyone will be proud.

TM Qamar Sheraz

IPP, Islamabad Toastmasters Club

Qamar began his Toastmasters journey in November 2012 in order to expand his personal and professional network. He is thrilled to be serving as IPP of Islamabad Toastmasters Club. His crowning achievement is of announcing 4 new clubs in Punjab & KPK region in 2019, one of which is about to charter. While he is not attending Toastmasters meetings, he is utilizing his communication skills as a corporate trainer in The Missing P (Learning & Development Company). After work, Qamar spends most of his time with family and his four month old, leisure time listening Coke Studio, writing and researching.

Islamabad Toastmasters Club is awarded the best performing club in the whole non-district region of Toastmasters International in tenure 2017-18 under the leadership of TM Qamar Sheraz. According to Qamar, the credit goes to the team of dedicated officers who have served the club with zeal and zest.

<http://dashboards.toastmasters.org/2017-2018/district.aspx?id=U&hideclub=1>

<http://dashboards.toastmasters.org/2017-2018/ClubReport.aspx?id=01154846>