

Club Strength

A Guide to Building or Rebuilding Club Strength



Rodney G. Denno, DTM

Rodney is an avid writer and sharer of his Toastmasters leadership and communication experiences. You can find more writings by him at <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>

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Who Should Read This Guide?

This Guide was developed to act as a centralized resource for.....

- 1 – **All Club Leaders** - to help them continue to build stronger clubs.
- 2 – **miniMentors** - when they decide to help clubs in the **Danger** or **Failing** zones.
- 3 – **Club Coaches** - when they decide to coach a **Failing** club back to health.

What is ‘Club Strength’?

Think back to the first Toastmaster club you joined. Did you join because they had a certain number of members? Most likely not.....you probably joined because it **felt like the right fit** and it seemed as if the club and the Toastmasters program would give you what you wanted. In other words your overall assessment of the value you would get (from spending time writing, practicing and delivering speeches and participating in club meeting) was greater than you would get from spending all that time and effort doing other things.

Club Strength is derived from the combined efforts of all the club’s members and how they collectively contribute to creating and producing dynamic meetings.

When you asked and answered the question “Whats In It For Me?” you decided in favor of joining the club.

That’s what I mean by ‘Club Strength’.....the value you perceived you would receive by joining and participating in the club was strong enough.....the **Club** had the **Strength**.....to attract you to it and persuade you to give some of your time and energy to it and to your own development.

Club Strength has two main components – the number of members and the excellence with which the Toastmaster meetings are structured, created and produced.

This document looks at how to build - or rebuild - Club Strength by increasing the number of members WHILE ALSO ensuring that each members overall club experience is valuable to them.

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Why Do The Numbers 20 And 12 Matter?



Question: Why are the numbers 20 and 12 significant in the life of a Toastmasters club?

Answer: Both are 'tipping point' numbers!

To understand the importance of the numbers 20 and 12 - and why I call them tipping point number - we need to look at a typical Toastmasters meeting agenda.

- Sergeant at Arms
- Toastmaster
- Toast
- Jokemaster
- Harkmaster
- Ah Counter
- Grammarian (Word of the Day)
- Timer

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- Chairperson (Business Meeting)
- 2 Speeches
- 2 Speech Evaluators
- Table Topics Master
- 4 Table Topics Participants
- Table Topics Evaluator
- General Evaluator

Healthy Zone - If each role is taken on by a different member then it takes about 20 members to fill out the roles in a typical Toastmasters meeting. For clubs that meet weekly this means that each member – on average - gets to give a speech once every two months or so.....and each member gets to take on all the other roles once every four months or so. A nice pace at which to practice giving speeches, learn how to give impromptu speeches (Table Topics) and learn how to actively listen and provide feedback. With an audience of 20+ club members also gain the benefit of speaking to a larger group.

Danger Zone - What about clubs between 12 and 20 members? This can be referred to as the 'slippery slope'. If membership continues to slide it is usually a significant indicator that members are not getting enough value from meetings. If something is not done to increase value – membership, and Club Strength, may continue to slide.

Failing Zone – Clubs that have 12 - or fewer - members. To fill out the roles in a typical Toastmasters meeting some members must now take on more than one role. For clubs that meet weekly this means that each member will have to give a speech once every six weeks – or even more frequently - and each member must now take on the other roles once every two and a half months – or even more frequently. The pace at which members have to give speeches and take on multiple roles means a heavier load for all members. With an audience of 12 or fewer - club members do not get the full benefit of speaking to a larger group.

Note: The above scenarios assume that all members come to every meeting and fully participate. This is typically not the case.....so club membership would have to be even larger in order to ensure that the numbers of members participating in a meeting was equivalent to the numbers in the scenarios above.

The number 20 is also the number of members a new club needs in order to officially become a club --- to receive a **Club Charter** from Toastmasters International.....and more importantly it's the number above which a club is typically successful. It's not an arbitrary number that TI simply picked out of the air.....it was born of practical experience. It means that the club has enough members to produce high quality meeting that are valuable to its members.

The number 12 is the number of members a club needs to be below for it to qualify for the assistance of a **Club Coach**.....and it's the number below which a club is typically struggling to exist. Again, it not an arbitrary number but one that TI has determined from practical experience to be the number of members below which the club is at significant risk of failing/closing.

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Why Leadership Matters

Anyone who's been to a dynamic, entertaining, well-run Toastmasters meeting knows that the feeling stays with you long after the meeting is over.

This feeling is the end result of a lot of people giving of their time, energy and intellect to make it happen. It requires leadership across the spectrum of club activities – leadership from each individual member in performing their meeting role to the best of their ability – and leadership from the club leaders delivering on the promise of building a stronger club that is attractive to both existing and potential members.

Leadership matters!

Leadership in **Healthy Zone** clubs is provided by the club leaders/executive. If, at the beginning of each Toastmaster year, the incoming club executive commits themselves to leaving the club a little better off than they found it, then – unless significant unforeseen negative events happen – the club should continue to remain strong.

Leadership in **Danger Zone** clubs should still be provided mainly by the club leaders/executive. However, some external leadership may be of substantial assistance in helping determining the root cause(s) of the fall-off in club strength. This guide recommends the **miniMentor program** as a way to formally bring in external leadership to help the club identify the root causes/reasons for the reduction in club strength and help the club find solutions that the club can then implement.

Leadership in **Failing Zone** clubs should still be provided by the club leaders/executive to the extent that there is still a functioning executive. Failing Zone clubs typically continue to struggle and may continue to lose club strength as a result of fewer members feeling burdened by more responsibilities. Toastmasters International created the **Club Coach program** for clubs in the Failing Zone. The Club Coach program – administered at the District level – provides a Failing Zone club with either one or two experienced Toastmasters to work with the club executive – and the club as a whole. They act as coach, mentor, cheerleader, an external pair of analytical eyes, provider of possible solutions from other clubs, etc.

What are the miniMentor and Club Coach programs?

miniMentor Program – This program is for clubs that are starting to have some membership attraction and/or retention issues.....where membership is below 20 but above 12. It was created by Rodney Denno, DTM (District 21 - Division B Governor 2009 - 2010) during the summer of 2009. It was born from the necessity to find a quick and effective way to help struggling clubs (**Danger Zone** and **Failing Zone**) that **Rodney is an avid writer and sharer of his Toastmasters leadership and communication experiences.** You can find more writings by him at <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>



either did not qualify for a club coach or where a club coach was not available. It was used successfully in Division B to help over two dozen clubs. See Appendix A for more details.

Club Coach Program – This program is for clubs that have significant membership attraction and/or retention issues and may be in danger of closing. It was designed by Toastmaster International to help clubs where membership is 12 or below. The club must apply to the District (usually through the Area Governor). **Up to two club coaches may be appointed per club.** Club coaches are selected and assigned by the District. A club coach cannot be a member of the club at the time of the appointment. See Appendix B for more details.

What's In It For You as the miniMentor or Club Coach?

Why should you even bother taking on the challenge of being a miniMentor or Club Coach? Isn't it the club and its membership that benefit? What do you get out of it?

If you see the challenge as one of pushing a rock uphill then I suggest that you do not take on either role.....it will most likely end badly – with frustration and not much accomplished.

If however you see this as an opportunity to help others and at the same time a golden opportunity to share your experience, exercise your current talents, develop latent talents and discover aspects of yourself that you didn't even know were there.....then being a miniMentor or Club Coach is the kind of challenge that will provide these personal growth and refinement opportunities.

Being a miniMentor or Club Coach is about working with people to help them find their strengths and then help them use those strengths. It's about leveraging yours and their marketing and sales and persuasion talents and knowledge to bring the club to a much higher level. It's as much about human skills as it is about your knowledge and experience.

Ultimately what you get out of the miniMentor or Club Coach experience depends on who you are and how successfully you interact with the club leaders and members.

Club Strength Building Resources

Toastmasters International Resources

From Prospect to Guest to Member - <http://www.toastmasters.org/108>

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How to be a Distinguished Club - <http://www.toastmasters.org/299>

Speechcraft - <http://www.toastmasters.org/speechcraft>

Moments of Truth – <http://www.toastmasters.org/MomentsofTruth.aspx>

Let the World Know - http://www.toastmasters.org/let_world_know.aspx

District 21 Resources

Build Membership with an Open House (Karen Knight, DTM)

Part1 - http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=6N6p_OpV_O4

Part2 - <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=ONmydosVlh4>

Making Meetings Fun & Exciting (Joanne Morrison, DTM, PDG)

Part 1 - <http://www.youtube.com/user/TMDistrict21#p/u/27/KMDmxa6ZzFw>

Part2 - <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=CKFF29O6M6s>

Speechcraft (Barry Monaghan, DTM)

Part1 - http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=l7b-l5D_zBc

Part2 - <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=lcycBFdXfhM>

Club PR & Marketing (Haddy Abra, DTM)

Part1 - <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=sYy9dyR1Z2M>

Part2 - http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=N9k_FLx8htl

Moments of Truth (Lanny Donald, DTM)

Part1 - <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=VC2HwcW9o4E>

Part2 - http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=uKz8Kmm_-kM

Part3 - http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=KGa_vlKeaHA

Successful Small Meetings (Dr. Doug Thiessen, DTM, PDG)

Part1 <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=eGky1tp81xo>

Part2 <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=ppvEdz5YA0Q>

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District 23 Resources

Increase Membership - http://www.district23.org/?page_id=293

Plan a Great Meeting - http://www.district23.org/?page_id=123

Take Care of Your Current Members - http://www.district23.org/?page_id=116

Marketing Flyer Library - http://www.district23.org/?page_id=77

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Strengthening Clubs in the **Healthy Zone**

Clubs remain strong and healthy because they continue to create dynamic, valuable meetings for members and guests. Members want to stay longer and complete more of the Toastmasters program and guests want to become members so they can start to benefit from attending, participating and contributing to successful meetings.

Here are some of the TI programs and documents that Healthy clubs should be doing in order to remain healthy. See the Club Strength Building Resources section above for links that will take you to the appropriate website.

- From Prospect to Guest to Member
- How to be a Distinguished Club
- Speechcraft
- Moments of Truth
- Membership Building Contests
- Let the World Know

Here are some of the District 21 videos that will help you maintain a healthy club status. See the Club Strength Building Resources section above for links that will take you to the appropriate website.

- Build Membership with an Open House (Karen Knight, DTM)
- Making Meetings Fun & Exciting (Joanne Morrison, DTM, PDG)
- Speechcraft (Barry Monaghan, DTM)
- Club PR & Marketing (Haddy Abra, DTM)
- Moments of Truth (Lanny Donald, DTM)

Strengthening Clubs in the **Danger Zone**

Clubs that enter the danger zone can quickly recover if they continue to create dynamic, valuable meetings for members and continue to encourage members to bring guests. This is where a miniMentor can be valuable (temporary) addition to the clubs executive team. See Appendix A for a description of the miniMentor program and apply to the District Lt. Governor of Marketing (LGM) for a miniMentor to be assigned.

In addition to the miniMentor program here are some of the TI programs and documents that Danger Zone clubs should be doing in order to quickly get back to being a healthy club. See the Club Strength Building Resources section above for links that will take you to the appropriate website.

- From Prospect to Guest to Member

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- How to be a Distinguished Club
- Moments of Truth
- Membership Building Contests
- Let the World Know

Here are some of the District 21 videos that will help you quickly get back to being a healthy club. See the Club Strength Building Resources section above for links that will take you to the appropriate website.

- Build Membership with an Open House (Karen Knight, DTM)
- Making Meetings Fun & Exciting (Joanne Morrison, DTM, PDG)
- Club PR & Marketing (Haddy Abra, DTM)
- Moments of Truth (Lanny Donald, DTM)
- Successful Small Meetings (Dr. Doug Thiessen, DTM, PDG)

Strengthening Clubs in the **Failing** Zone

Clubs that enter the Failing Zone can sometimes recover quickly but more-often-than-not the recovery is slower as a result of the heavier load that each club members is carrying. Recovery from the Failing Zone still has to be based on creating dynamic, valuable meetings and continuing to encourage members to bring guests.

A Club Coach can become a valuable addition to the clubs executive team and the club as a whole. See Appendix B for more details on the Club Coach program.

If a Club coach is not immediately available a miniMentor may be more readily available. A miniMentor would be able to start the process of bringing the club back to health.

Additional Toastmasters International resources such as the Club Coach Flier, Coach Appointment Form, How to Rebuild a Toastmasters Club, can be found here.....

<http://www.toastmasters.org/Search-Results?keyword=club%20coach&it=content&mpp=12>

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Appendix A – The miniMentor Program

The **miniMentor program** was created by Rodney Denno (District 21 - Division B Governor 2009 - 2010) during the summer of 2009. It was born from the necessity to find a quick and effective way to help struggling clubs. It has been used successfully in Division B to help over two dozen clubs.

It was created for two reasons:

- 1 – As a way to assist clubs in the **Danger Zone** (these clubs **do not** qualify for a club coach).
- 2 – As a way to assist clubs in the **Failing Zone** (these clubs **do** qualify for a club coach) until a club coach can be assigned.

It's much easier to find an experienced Toastmaster willing to help a club for four weeks than it is to find an experienced Toastmaster willing to commit 6 months or more as a club coach. Any Toastmaster with a service oriented leadership style and personality who has completed most of the Toastmasters program is a good candidate for miniMentor.

The miniMentor visit's a struggling clubs – with the permission of the club executive - to help the club understand why their membership/club strength is dropping and encourage, motivate and inspire them to build membership by creating meetings that are REALLY valuable to both members and guests.

By creating interesting and dynamic meetings that get members and guests alike saying "That was a REALLY valuable use of my time!"the clubs will find that members will come out more often, stay with the club longer and guests will be more likely to become members.

The time commitment is four meetings.....during which the miniMentor will (Listen/Observe ---> Contribute ----> Advise)

Meeting One: Establish rapport and get to know the club....(Listen, observe and participate if asked)

Meeting Two: Evaluate one of the speakers or be General Evaluator.....(Contribute by demonstrating how to give thoughtful feedback)

Meeting Three: Give a speech.....(Contribute by giving a speech that demonstrates some of the qualities of a good speech/speaker)

Meeting Four: Do the Moments of Truth module from Toastmasters with the club (help the club identify what the clubs strengths are and where they could build additional strength)

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miniMentor Assignment – email

This email is sent to the miniMentor once the person has agreed to be a miniMentor for a particular club.

Email Subject:

miniMentor assignment

Email Body:

Thank You --- *miniMentor name* --- for agreeing to be a miniMentor

The vision of the miniMentor program is to have an experienced Toastmaster visit a struggling club – with the permission of the club executive - to help the club understand why their membership/club strength is dropping and encourage, motivate and inspire them to build membership by creating meetings that are REALLY valuable to both members and guests.

By creating interesting and dynamic meetings that get members and guests alike saying "That was a REALLY valuable use of my time!".....the clubs will find that members will come out more often, stay with the club longer and guests will be more likely to become members.

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Meeting Three: Give a speech.....(Contribute by giving a speech that demonstrates some of the qualities of a good speech/speaker)

Meeting Four: Do the Moments of Truth module from Toastmasters with the club (help the club identify what the clubs strengths are and where they could build additional strength)

The Club President --- *name* --- and club executive have agreed to work with you to help build club strength.

Thanks Again!!

Rodney Denno

Introductory email to Club President and miniMentor

Email Subject:

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miniMentor for --- *club name* --- Toastmaster Club

Email Body:

Hello --- *club president name* --- and --- *miniMentor name* ---

miniMentor name - *club president name* is the President of the ----- TM Club. I spoke with her about having you join them for four of their meeting as a miniMentor.

club president name – *miniMentor name* is a very experienced Toastmaster and has agreed to be your miniMentor. This program is intended to help clubs with less than 20 members build membership by identifying the areas that are club strengths and the areas that clubs could strengthen so that they keep members longer, more members want to attend meetings and guests want to join the club.

Thanks to you both for taking on the challenge.

Here are the guidelines that define the miniMentor program:

The miniMentor program provides clubs with an experienced Toastmasters to help build membership by creating meetings that are REALLY valuable to both members and guests.

By creating interesting and dynamic meetings that get members and guests alike saying "That was a REALLY valuable use of my time!".....the clubs will find that members will come out more often, stay with the club longer and guests will be more likely to become members.

The miniMentor program has three phases (Listen/Observe ----> Contribute ----> Advise) spread over four meetings.

Meeting One: Establish rapport and get to know the club....(Listen and observe and participate if asked)

Meeting Two: Evaluate one of the speakers or be General Evaluator.....(Contribute by demonstrating how to give thoughtful feedback)

Meeting Three: Give a speech(Contribute by giving a speech that demonstrates some of the qualities of a good speech/speaker)

Meeting Four: Do the Moments of Truth module from Toastmasters with the club (help the club identify where the club is strong and where they could build additional strength)

I wish all of you the best as you take these important steps in building up club strength.

Rodney Denno

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Appendix B – The Club Coach Program

Coach Assignment Procedure

1. Clubs with fewer than twelve members may request a coach or two coaches, either directly or through their Area Governor. (Area Governors are encouraged to suggest coaching to these clubs, but not to “force” coaching on them.)
2. Coaching requests should go to the LGM and include:
 - a. Club name and number;
 - b. Contact person and contact details;
 - c. Notes (if any).
3. The LGM will forward details to the appropriate Club Success Coordinator (CSC).
4. If the request came through the Area Governor, the CSC contacts the club to ensure their agreement.
5. The CSC maintains a list of possible coaches and matches coaching requests with coaches. Prospective coaches can NOT be a current member of the club, and cannot join the club until after Toastmasters International confirms the appointment.
6. The CSC fills out Toastmasters Club Coach Appointment form and forwards to the LGM.
7. The LGM submits the form and copies all involved parties (club, Area Governor, CSC).
8. Once Toastmasters International confirms the appointment (usually within 2 weeks), the coach may proceed.

Club Health Checklist

1. Is the meeting location easy to find and get to?
2. Is it well signed so that non-members know it's there?
3. Are you greeted as you come in (try to arrive approx. 10 mins early)
4. Are there any other guests? Are they greeted?
5. Does the meeting start on time?
6. Do (m)any of the members arrive late?
7. If guests arrive late, how are they greeted?
8. Is there an agenda?
9. If there is, do many changes need to be made to it?
10. Are a lot of people filling double roles?
11. Is there a theme for the meeting?
12. What is the energy level like?
13. Does one person seem to dominate the meeting?
14. If so, are they club promoters? Nay-sayers? Happy so long as things are going the way THEY want them to go?
15. Are the speeches manual speeches?
16. Are the evaluations encouraging? White-washes? Unduly critical?
17. Does the GE point out useful areas for improvement in the meeting? Are any obvious problems missed?
18. Is the meeting interesting and fun?

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19. Are the guests asked to join?
20. Does the meeting end on time? (According to TI, the majority of people leave Toastmasters because the club doesn't respect their time!)
21. What does the relationship between the members seem like? Friendly? Are there conflicts?
22. Does anyone use meeting time to promote themselves, gripe about outside matters or in other ways hi-jack the meeting?
23. Is there much side chat while other people are presenting?
24. Are roles scheduled well in advance, or are they assigned at the end of the meeting?
25. Are the key executive roles filled (President, VP Ed, Secretary)?
26. What is your gut feeling regarding what the key problem(s) is?
27. Do the members seem willing to change things and try new ways of operating?
28. Other comments/observations.

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Appendix C - Be a Club C-O-A-C-H!

C - CHEERLEADER

The Club Coach is a cheerleader.....building enthusiasm and uniting the onlookers to support the team.

- Supports the Executive Committee and praises the officers
- Supports the Toastmaster and meeting participants and leads the applause
- Boosts morale when spirits flag

O - OBJECTIVE

The Club Coach brings much needed objectivity to the struggling club. Toastmasters International furnishes the Coach with a survey by which the Coach can evaluate the Club's strengths and weaknesses. This survey forms the basis for an action plan to rebuild the Club. Objectivity is not brutal. However, it is important that the Coach homes in on real problems inhibiting Club progress.

A - ABLE

New Toastmasters may be enthusiastic and even objective. However, the Club Coach must be a knowledgeable and experienced Toastmaster. Knowledge is especially important in these areas:

- The qualities of dynamic and successful Club meetings
- Methods and techniques for building membership
- Mentoring
- Area Toastmasters who can help with meetings and program assignments

C - CONFIDENT

The Club Coach must bring optimism and confidence to the Club environment. The struggling Club does not need someone to join in the hand wringing. Defeatism is the Club's greatest enemy.

H - HELPFUL

A Club Coach is willing to get in the trenches and bring his own resources to bear on the problems at hand. This may mean calling on Toastmasters outside the Club to fill in meeting roles, provide mentoring, or to provide an audience for meetings. It may be to obtain materials from World Headquarters or discover TI policy or procedure on a certain item. It might be to bring ideas to the Club based on best practices of successful Clubs in the area. It may be to promote the Club elsewhere. It is not the role of the Coach to take over the duties of the Executive Committee. Instead, the Coach helps in a supporting role.

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Rodney G. Denno, DTM



Since late 2006 I've spent a lot of time in the laboratory that is Toastmasters! It's a wonderful place to develop new skills and hone existing ones.

Through the years I've served in most of the club officer roles multiple times and as Area and Division Director, District 21 Public Relations Officer and District 21 Communications & Technology Officer. In 2008 I led the effort to create and deliver the first Online Club Officer Training program in the Toastmaster world.

While I was busy learning, enjoying myself and giving back to Toastmasters I received the two highest Toastmasters honors in District 21 (the province of British Columbia, Canada) - the **2009 Rookie of the Year Award** and the **2010**

District 21 Toastmaster of the Year Award and **2018 District 96 Toastmaster of the Year Award**.

I believe that in order for a society to grow and prosper we must give back more than we take. Over the years I've volunteered whatever time I could to various non-profit organizations. Since 2006 my volunteer efforts have been focused, through Toastmasters, on the development of leadership and communications skills in the almost 6,000 Toastmasters throughout British Columbia.

I write about what I'm involved with in Toastmasters so I can share it with other Toastmasters and hopefully make their Toastmasters journey more enjoyable and valuable to them and to the Toastmasters organization worldwide.

You can find more Toastmaster writings by me at <https://www.rodneydenno.com/toastmasters.php>

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