



A Brief History of Toastmasters

Since Toastmasters began more than 75 years ago, millions of men and women have benefited from the Communication and Leadership program of the organization.

The first club was formed in October 1924 when a group of men assembled by founder Dr Ralph C Smedley met in the basement of Santa Ana, California, YMCA to form a club “to offer practice and training in the art of public speaking and in presiding over meetings and to promote sociability and good fellowship among its members.”

The group took the name “TOASTMASTERS”.

A year later, a second club was started in Anaheim, California, followed by a third in Los Angeles. By 1930, it was apparent that a federation was necessary to coordinate activities of the clubs and provide standard methods. After formation of a club in Victoria, British Columbia, the group became known as TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL and its first International President was J Clark Chamberlain of Anaheim, California.

Membership in TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL increased rapidly after the end of World War II and by 1954 the number of Toastmaster clubs had approached 1500.

Gavel clubs were formed in 1958 to accommodate groups wanting Toastmasters training but were not qualified for Toastmasters membership. These clubs provided communication and leadership training in correctional institutions, hospitals, mental institutions and schools. In 1966, the Youth Leadership Program, for young people in junior and senior school, was added to the list of established community programs being presented by Toastmasters.

In 1962, World Headquarters offices were moved to a new building in Santa Ana, California, not far from where the first club began.

In 1973, Toastmasters clubs membership was opened to women, enabling them to benefit also from self-development in communication and leadership. In the same year, a comprehensive listening program was introduced to further help members develop their communication skills. The following year saw a celebration of the organization’s first 50 years and the promise of an even more successful second half-century.

New programs, including the modular Advance Manual Series, Success/Leadership Series and self-study cassette tape programs were added to the Communication and Leadership program. Growth in new clubs, especially in the corporate sector, reached new heights in the mid 1980s with the number of clubs exceeding the 5,000 mark.

Today TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL remains the undisputed world leader in public speaking training with the promise that the best is yet to come.