

GETTING ON YOUR SOAPBOX

Jan Coetsee interviews David Hatchuel on his experiences as a Toastmaster.

Arriving in a new country is a daunting prospect – especially when you are not familiar with local people and their customs. There are new contacts to be made, job interviews to go through, and so many other activities where one needs to know how to interact with the people amongst whom one lives.

For David Hatchuel, the quickest way to meet people was to join a Toastmasters Club. He soon discovered that he was among friends, and he learnt that the ability to stand up and speak before an audience was worth a lot more than it seemed at first. His confidence in other situations improved: he was able to



conduct himself confidently in job interviews, and he enhanced his leadership skills. As David told me:

“When you visit a Toastmasters club you’ll see more than people giving speeches. You’ll see members performing various jobs in the meetings that help them develop leadership skills.



“Some of the skills you’ll learn as a member include: how to listen effectively, think critically, plan a meeting, manage time, motivate listeners, mentor a member and build a team. Those are essential life skills, and they have served me immeasurably in my job.”

Worried about embarrassing yourself in front

of an audience? In Toastmasters, that’s not possible. Club meetings offer a safe environment to fail – and learn from the experience. Everyone in the meeting was once a beginner and can identify with your nervousness.

As you watch them speak, meeting participants might look like experts to you, but they know the truth: were it not for repeated practice and the help of constructive feedback and a trusted mentor, they would not be as competent.

Communication and leadership abilities are only a fraction of the skills you can cultivate in Toastmasters. Other opportunities include experience in marketing, public relations, event-planning and many more!

Most Toastmasters meetings are comprised of approximately 20 men and women who meet fortnightly for two hours. A number of companies have their own Clubs, as part of their in-house training programmes. Many Clubs are led by women who have stepped up their careers as a direct result of their involvement in the organisation.

For David, as for so many other newcomers to New Zealand, membership in Toastmasters has been the best investment he could have made. “I would have had a much more difficult start here had I relied only on my very limited network when we arrived. Now some of my best friends are Toastmasters.”

To find out more about the organisation, visit www.toastmasters.org.nz or call 0800 PEOPLE (0800 736 753)