



District Director Report

4 September 2020

There is a positive vibe around the District. However, last year was a tough year and we will need more of the can-do attitude to see us through. The good news is we are well capable of achieving what we need to do to rebuild membership, continue on the positive vibe and develop better speakers and leaders and the confidence that ensues from that.

Legacy is gone and Pathways is in. The teething problems have mostly been ironed out but, regardless, the knowledge base is such that everyone can choose their path, find their projects and focus on what's important – learning new skills. It has been sad to lose some members, experienced and new, through Pathways but that's a conversation for another day. Now, our focus is on enjoying our club meetings and remembering that there is much more to membership than whether our projects are online or printed. A summary of Pathways projects is now easily accessible from the toastmasters.org.nz website so any conversations with mentors or last-minute prep can be done if need be. Just remember, you get out what you put in. You'll get the most by delving into the projects as you would have done with a paper manual.

The pandemic has made decisions as solid as the level upon which they are based. Even the latest slight movement has seen some clubs go back online, contests beyond the club go online, flights harder to get, venues harder to find and it reminds me of a word often used by one of last year's Division Directors. Marina Taylor's favourite phrase of "pivoting" has been in vogue. Despite the fact it was decided yesterday, today may need a rethink and a change of direction. It's hard, it really is, but it's what makes us better leaders. If it was easy, we'd get nothing out of it. If you are struggling with the uncertainty, it's ok. I have a good team of people to lean on so don't feel you need to always go it alone.

Perhaps the area of greatest uncertainty this year is the budget. Last year's spend-down of part of the reserves prior to Toastmasters International taking them has seen some expectations having to come down to earth. The revenue for this year is not only without reserves to dip into but forecast at 18% lower than normal. Add to that new minimums and maximums in the various categories and we were left wondering how to make ends meet. Going online has meant a rethink as we were unlikely to be able to afford venue hires, printing and catering for all Area and Division Contests and events due to these limitations i.e. Speech Contests at 5% of revenue maximum. Next year, if we're back to in-person events we will need to rethink District alignment, probably resulting in larger Areas and Divisions with fewer of them, thus fewer events.

However, we are online, so there is more money to go around. Divisions are being asked to think of ways to get people back meeting each other and creating opportunities outside the clubs to develop skills that will see quality within clubs rise and members develop skills that we are proud to demonstrate to the Community. If you have any innovative ideas, please reach out to pass those on.

District 72 has always battled with whether or not to raise funds through clubs. Some Divisions relied on District financial support and others on door charges or a combination of both. We have wanted consistency and stability, and the District Service Charge seemed the way to go. However, with recent events, we are reviewing this charge and whether the consistency ought to be user-pays. Whatever is decided, please support it; we have your best interests at heart.

Managing District is complex so we have sought to make it easier to manage by rationalising what is provided and ensuring we could justify the expenditure incurred. As a consequence, we have closed, or are in the process of closing, District Supplies, Club Finder, the 0800 number, Survey Monkey, Death2Spam filter, Open Meeting boosting and will sell our last physical asset on the books: a Surface Pro 3. We sincerely thank the District Supplies work of Alison McKone and those who have gone before her including Maria Gear and Kath Cherrie and Mike Diggins for his work on web-related activities. The website will be upgraded in the coming months.

Another approach we are implementing is Show Don't Tell! Each year we compile a lot of text about what we do at Toastmasters. How about we move away from telling people about to showing people what we can do and what we know? What opportunities can we take and create to show what we can do or show what others can do when it comes to speaking and leading? Few care about an Organisation but they do care about speaking at weddings, creating podcasts, structuring speeches, and leading in various situations. What content can you create and what platforms could you put it on?

The Facebook Members Group, the TMNZ Facebook Page and the TMNZ website would like quality content and it's great for your club pages and websites too. But we also want to get out into the Community, face-to-face with decision-makers and the public, to give value. There will be Show Don't Tell events being organised – levels permitting – in the coming months.

This year we are listening to what you want and need. Each year, Districts struggle to know what form support can take but, thanks to reviewing all last year's Club Visit Reports, reading every report this year and a questionnaire sent to outgoing District and Club Officers at the commencement of the TM year, we have some excellent information to help guide us. We are member-led so please be heard. Your ideas may be the ones that make a difference in building new clubs or us supporting all clubs in achieving excellence.

Accountability and Ownership. We will be accountable this year and own our decisions, celebrate successes and accept mistakes. There are always reasons why we get things wrong in life but there are no excuses and there don't need to be. Toastmasters is not about blame; it is about learning and we can't learn from a mistake if we do not admit it occurred. We are not perfect speakers and we are not perfect leaders so I encourage us all to seek feedback and feed-forward so we make our best efforts and we learn after we have done so. As part of being accountable and taking ownership, we have rewritten our report templates and will continue to review these. We want to say what we have done, are doing, will do, and then report on whether we did it and how it went.

Lastly, last week I voted on behalf of 78 clubs at the Annual Business Meeting at the online International Convention. It was an honour and it made me think that, whatever our title, whatever our role, someone somewhere has entrusted us with a job to do. That's humbling. Each of us can also know that those people are there to support us. When we are busy and tired and there are many other things to do away from Toastmasters, so long as we are doing our best, we can be proud. Whether delivering a speech, making a decision or lending a hand on a project you are supported and everyone's hoping you do well.

Until the District Council Meeting on 27 September, thank you for what you do and keep up the good work!

D72 District Director 2020-2021

Rob Woolley