



District Director Report

12 June 2021

I write this report as a year summary.

The goal on 2020-21 was to rethink how District operated, ask questions, don't be afraid to try new things and leave the District in a better position than how we found it. In the main - we made progress. There were many 'rules' we discovered were not rules at all. We learnt not to accept anyone's word for what was or was not allowed but to press on until we had definitive proof. That is hardwork but it taught us persistence and not to get upset when we got frustrated. Toastmasters is complex and I feel it would benefit from being simplified.

While general membership dropped, comparatively speaking we have done 'ok.' Wellington was hit incredibly hard. With a greater focus on corporate clubs, they were the hardest hit by staff working from home and venues becoming unavailable. I really feel for those who lost their clubs or suffered from the upheaval.

As the year went on, I realised that District 72 is a diverse place. Each region has it's own history, culture and way of doing things. That makes leadership hard if seeking to apply a consistent approach. There are an infinite number of approaches to solve issues and sometimes solving the obvious problem in front of you creates different problems elsewhere. I encourage any leader to seek out as much input as possible prior to making decisions. You may still get it wrong but at least you had solid information. I wish I had the opportunity to travel around the District and visit more members and clubs. I would encourage future leaders to do that. In-person Division Conferences being cancelled hindered the Trio getting around the District for sure.

Covid-19 hasn't just affected Toastmasters, it has changed many peoples lives. Many people seem very busy and their time is valuable. Availability for volunteer activities has decreased so we must make it worth their while. Let's hope things settle down in the coming year and more members can meet and learn from more members and we focus on putting on events that deserve the time cost for members.

Dealing with World Headquarters was an "interesting" experience. Some staff are quite exceptional and it was a pleasure dealing with Jesse at "Districts." Unfortunately, some other departments responses were consistently less meaningful. This is why a request from CEO, Dan Rex, to not send follow-up emails did not go down well with some District leaders. I'm sure working from home has caused issues in Denver but, as stated earlier, Toastmasters has become very complex at higher levels and perhaps that has affected the ability of staff to answer questions. I am proud of how our team responded to our members' enquiries and rest assured we tried our best.

Contests were severely disrupted by being online. Anecdotally, it appeared fewer contestants competed and some clubs and areas opted out. Whilst disappointing, I understand why this occurred. Most contests suffered from technical difficulties or other issues which would most likely not have affected an in-person event. The news that next years District Executive can choose the platform – online or in-person – is wonderful news. Online saves money but the advantages of being in-person are numerous. Toastmasters is about putting on a show for the audience and it is a far better spectacle in-person. One consideration that may need to be taken into account is next years Conference. In-person will aid the attractiveness of attending the Conference but does having four contests do so as well or are four contest one or two contest too many for a balanced programme?

We have needed to be flexible this year. Constant change is not conducive to effective implementation of strategic plans. We found ourselves more in "review mode" than "do mode." I realised that having high expectation led to frustration and moving from wanting to "A, B and C" to just "doing your best" was the best approach as time went on. With this experience under my belt, I wish the incoming team a happy and a fun year – because that's as important as anything else - and if you achieve half of what you hope then you've done well.

D72 District Director 2020-2021

Rob Woolley