



TIPS FROM TOASTMASTERS

CREATING AN IMPACT ONLINE AND IN PERSON

TIPS FROM TOASTMASTERS IN DISTRICT 56

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ABOUT THIS BOOK



In January 2021, I led a panel discussion among members of [Spaced Out Toastmasters](#), an advanced club in the NASA area of Houston, Texas. We discussed ways to create impact in presentations in both virtual and in-person environments.

In May 2021, I followed up on this panel and hosted an [Online Leadership Elective](#) to share the tips and get additional strategies from other Toastmasters in District 56 in Houston.

This book is a compilation of the strategies and tips from January and May. It is not meant to be a comprehensive guide but instead a place to start when thinking about creating impact in your own presentations.

Let's learn together

First, I should tell you how I define creating impact. To me, it means getting your audience to do something--just to connect with you, or to get a laugh, or maybe you want them to change their minds or take an action, or just feel or react a certain way.

Some of the ways we can do that focus on delivery.

- Deliberate body language
- Intentional eye contact
- Purposeful vocal variety

Second, it's all about content. Now, more than ever, what we say and how we say it has become extremely important. Our audience's attention span is already low – being split between multiple things at any given time. But since going online, we not only competed with what else our audience is thinking about, but also what else they are doing, so our messages better be darn good and darn effective to keep their attention!

And finally, we won't be online forever. Transitioning back to in-person presentations is going to be just as tricky as it was to transition from in-person meetings to online.



DELIVERY



BODY LANGUAGE

Be aware of your space--big or small.

If you are online, frame yourself and gesture within the camera's view.

If you are in person, you can create much larger gestures and different body language.

Be deliberate with your body language. Have a reason for your gesture or movement. There's nothing wrong with standing still with your hands to your side or on your desk while you are presenting.

DELIVERY



BODY LANGUAGE

Stand up when you are speaking. Even in a virtual environment, you can adjust your camera to give yourself space to stand up. Standing not only gives you more space for gestures but also gives you more control of your body and your voice.

But be sure to practice in a test meeting online to make sure your eye contact and body language translate to the viewing audience the way you hope it does. Use this practice to figure out where to stand and how to move to stay in your "speaking area" for best results!

DELIVERY



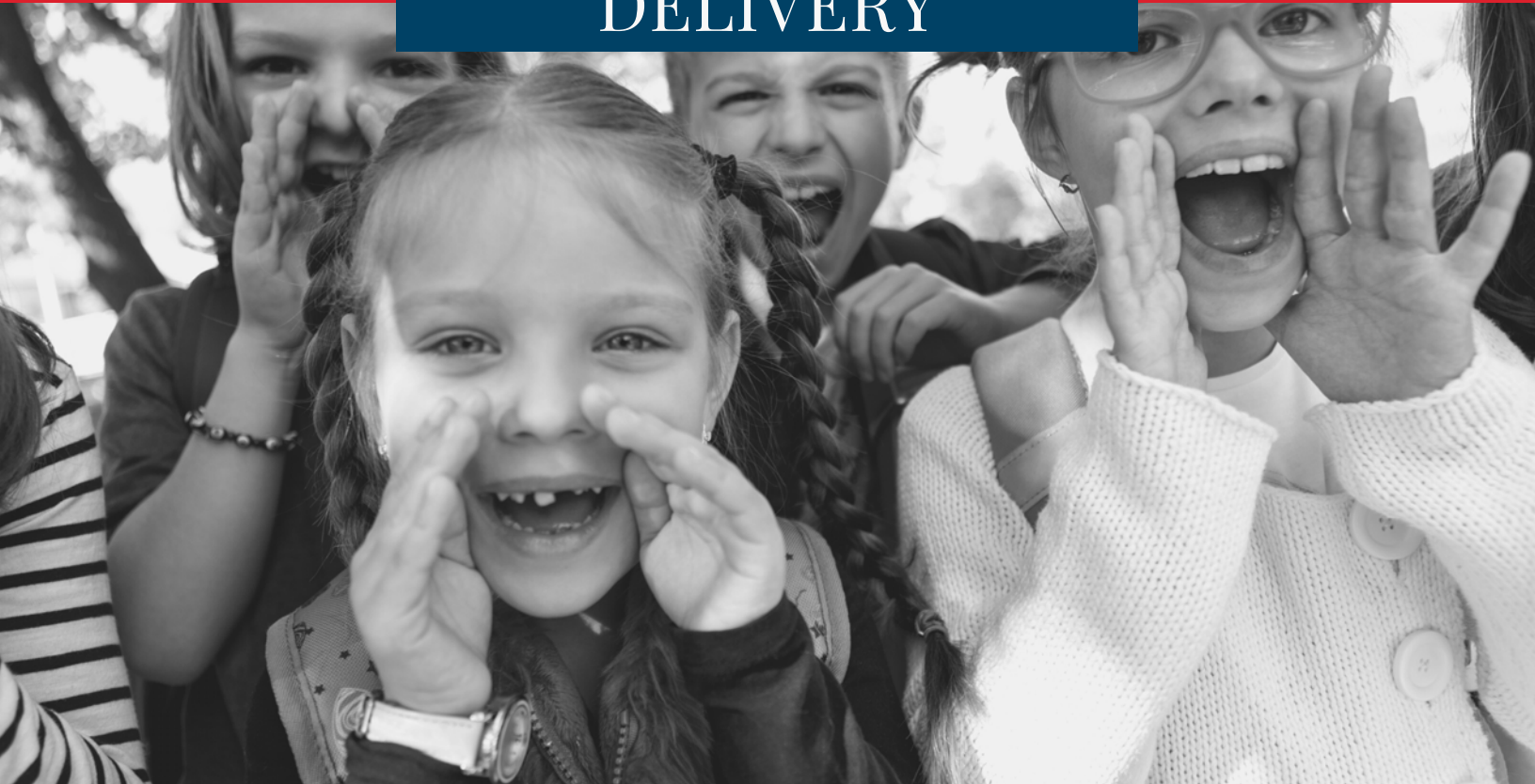
EYE CONTACT

When you are online, you must look at the camera to create eye contact. Looking anywhere else for too long (like the screen with meeting attendees or your notes or slides) will create a noticeable break in eye contact.

When you're in person, shift your gaze around the room. Don't make lengthy eye contact with just one person.

Practice making in-person eye contact across the audience with dolls or stuffed animals around your speaking area.

DELIVERY



VOCAL VARIETY

When you are online, you likely have some sort of headset microphone, camera microphone, or external microphone. In fact, I know you do, otherwise, I couldn't hear you. With that microphone, you can speak at an easy, conversational volume and be heard. Nuanced changes in tone and pitch are easy to discern.

Unless you are mic'd in person, you're going to have to project and make your changes in tone and pitch more obvious for the people in the back.

DELIVERY



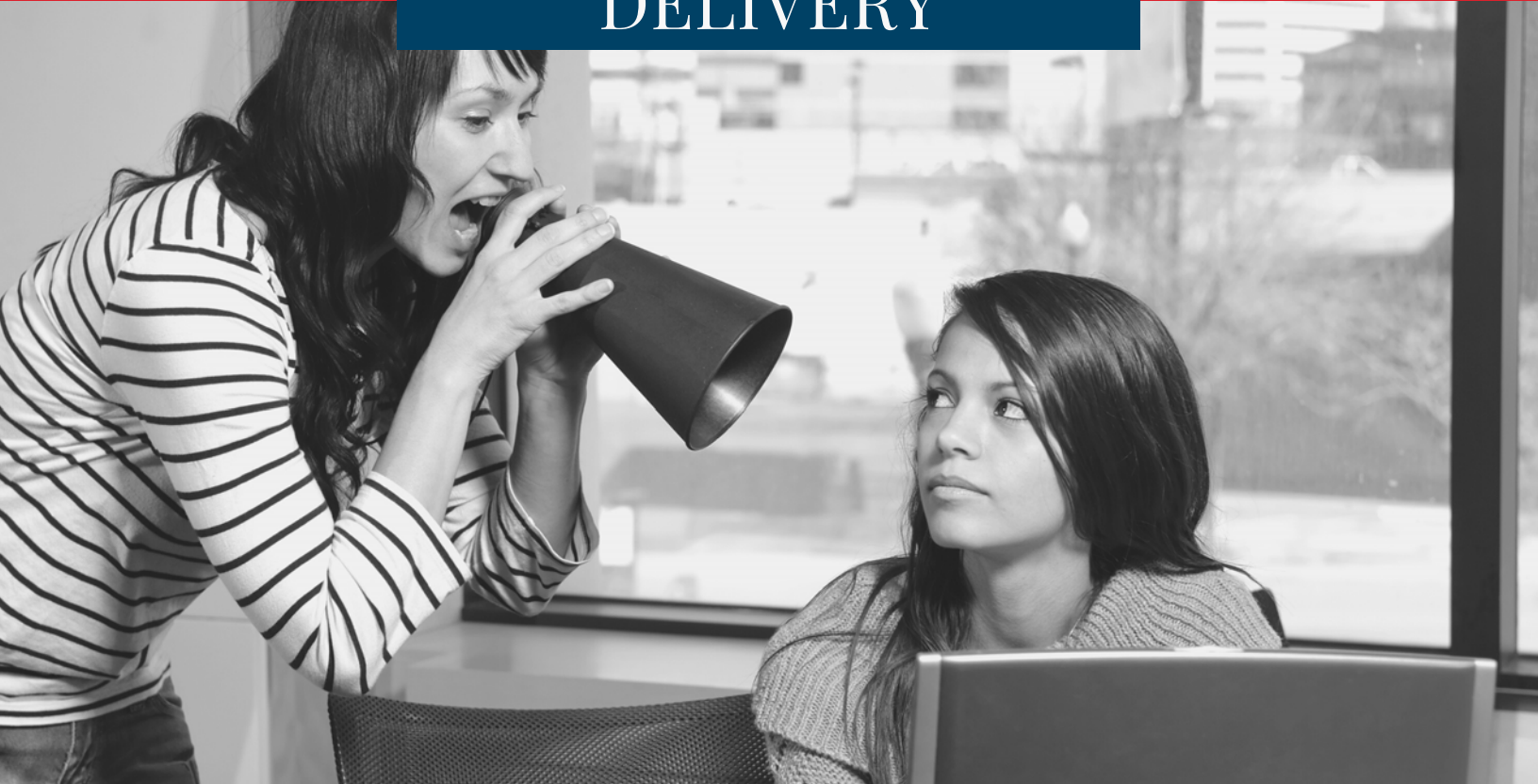
AUDIENCE AWARENESS

If you can see and respond to your audience's reactions, you'll have a better chance of connecting.

In the room, it's easy, you can see expressions and hear laughter or gasps. You can also engage the audience by asking questions and listening to and adjusting based on responses.

But online is a little trickier. Most of the time online you can't see the people on the other side of the screen, or if you can see them, watching the screen instead of the camera causes you to break eye contact. You can still ask questions though. Build time into your speech for audience feedback, either verbal or in chat.

DELIVERY



AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS

In many online meetings, the audience can and will turn on their cameras. What are they doing? Are they respectfully paying attention or are their children, spouses, or pets in the room, getting some or all of their attention?

And what about the speakers? The speaker should be the center of attention, but they should also make sure they are giving 100% to their presentation and not being distracted by people and things around them.

Distractions are more prevalent online, but speakers and audience members should avoid in-person distractions too.



CONTENT

Once Upon A Time...

STRUCTURE, CLARITY AND INTENT

Your presentations must be structured and clear. There are different ways to structure your speech, but the easiest way to get your message across is through a solid, linear approach.

And make sure you know what you are trying to do. Do you want to inspire, inform, stop an action, or make someone see something in a different way?

Even if your goal is to just entertain, keep that in the back (or front) of your mind while you are giving your presentation. Because, if you don't know what you're trying to do, your audience probably won't either!

CONTENT



ENTHUSIASTIC CONNECTION

If you're presenting something that doesn't feel like you believe what you're talking about, or you're not excited to make the presentation, it can be difficult to involve the audience.

I gave a speech about a project I'd managed at work. I didn't enjoy the project or the speech, and it showed. My evaluator said "we wanted to root for you in this project, but it seemed like you weren't rooting for you. Then we just wanted you to finish your speech."

Ouch! Harsh, yes. True, yes. Something I needed to hear, absolutely. If I didn't care, how in the world did I expect my audience to care and stay with me on that journey?

CONTENT



MAKE IT PERSONAL (AND FUNNY)

Try to make your presentation meaningful to you. It's not always easy, especially when it comes to topics dictated by work or other circumstances.

But if you can choose a topic that is personal to you and has meaning or if you can bring personal ideas and experiences into an otherwise dry topic, you have a better chance of making a connection with your audience.

And, consider adding humor or levity into your presentations. Humor makes people smile and feel good. Levity gives an audience some relief from a serious or painful topic.

CONTENT



A NOTE ABOUT HUMOR

Some people are naturally funny, and some people have to work at it, but we all have the potential to add humor to our presentations.

Think about what makes you smile, what makes you laugh. Write notes or ideas when something funny happens to you or around you. Think about how that humorous moment could support a point in your presentation. Practice with your friends and co-workers to see if they laugh, chuckle, or smile when you hoped they would.

And if you don't get a laugh, that's ok too. Think about how to make the joke better next time, or just try something different. You can also review the Engaging Humor educational path available through Toastmasters International for more strategies.

A word cloud graphic with the word 'WORDS' in large white letters on a dark background. Other words include 'CREATIVE', 'COMMUNICATE', 'RESEARCH', 'PROCESS', 'POWER', 'STRENGTH', 'OUT OF THE BOX', 'POSITIVE', 'TALK', 'BRAIN', 'DIA', 'ARCH', 'MUNICATE', 'TALK', 'POSITIVE', 'TALK', 'POSITIVE'. A hand holding a pen is visible in the bottom right corner.

Has this happened to you? Someone if an expert in their field and they used bad grammar or got flustered and used the wrong word. Did you start to doubt the accuracy of what they were saying?

I think he's silly when he says that, and I always double-check when he tries to tell me something new.

CONTENT

What's your story?



BRUSH UP ON YOUR STORYTELLING

Think about a time when someone told you something that you just couldn't relate to? Would a personal story have helped?

Surely they had one. Our lives are full of stories. We just need to think about the stories that will resonate with people in our audience so they can feel something with us.

Our lives are filled with stories, we need to spend time finding those stories that will resonate with people.

Including real, relatable stories can increase our chances of connecting with an audience.

CONTENT



SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

A memorable speech can be structured in three parts—tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them. To create more impact, consider a fourth component as your new first step—have someone else tell them what you're going to tell them!

Have a good introduction. Many people in the audience may not know who you are or why they should listen to you. The introduction creates an interest if you know what the audience wants to hear. It helps you set yourself up to be ready to create an impact and sets up an audience that's eager to hear it



CONTENT

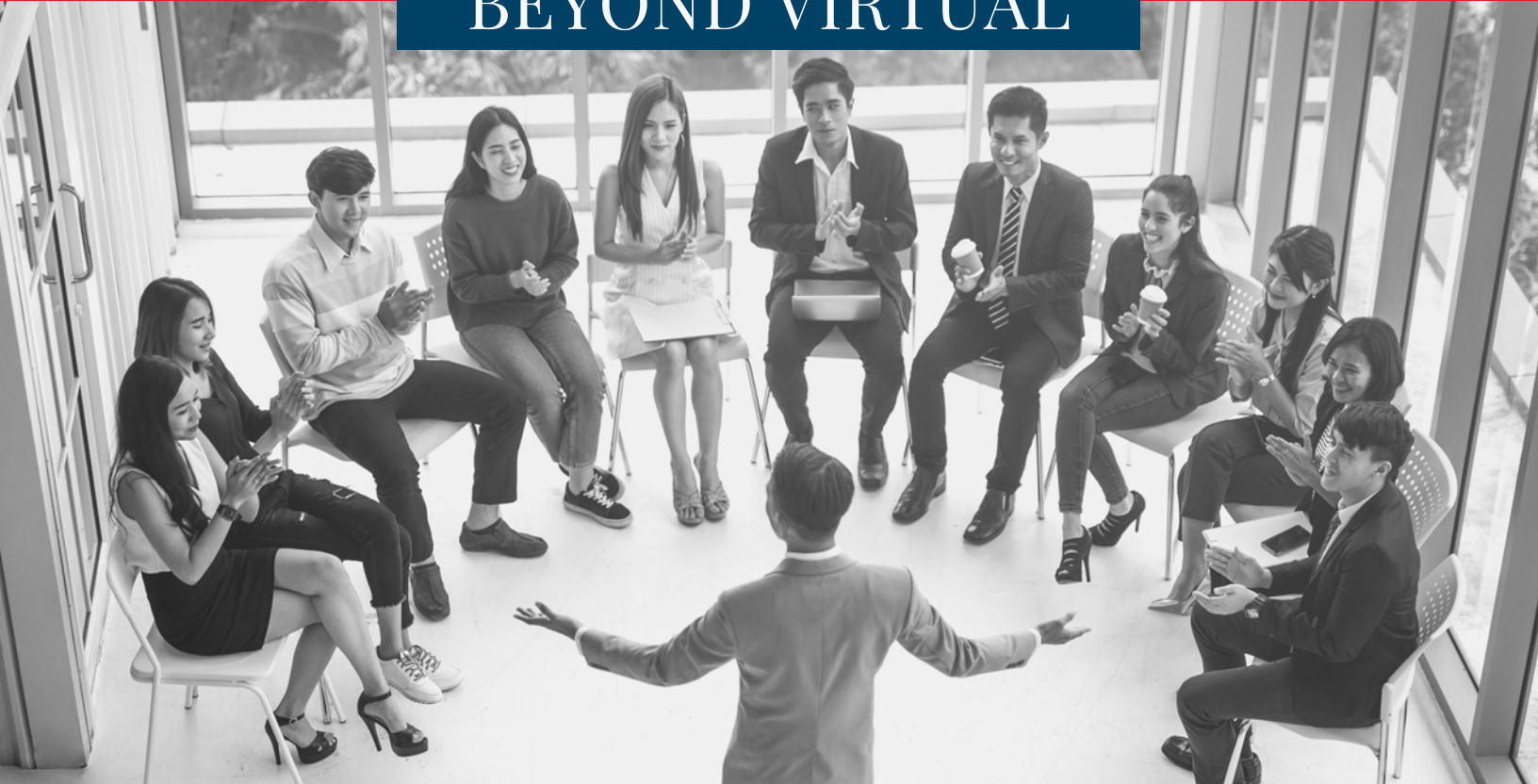
OUTLINE AND PRACTICE

A good speaker writes her speech. A bad speaker reads it*. While there's some value in learning how to deliver an impromptu presentation (there's a whole section of a Toastmasters meeting dedicated to just that), nothing beats a well researched, thought-out, and written speech.

Just be sure to practice and know your content. You've outlined your ideas and crafted the most compelling speech ever written. If you don't know your material, you may find yourself lacking impact. You don't have to memorize your presentation if you know your material, but you should definitely practice ahead of time.

**David Brooks, World Champion of Public Speaking*

BEYOND VIRTUAL



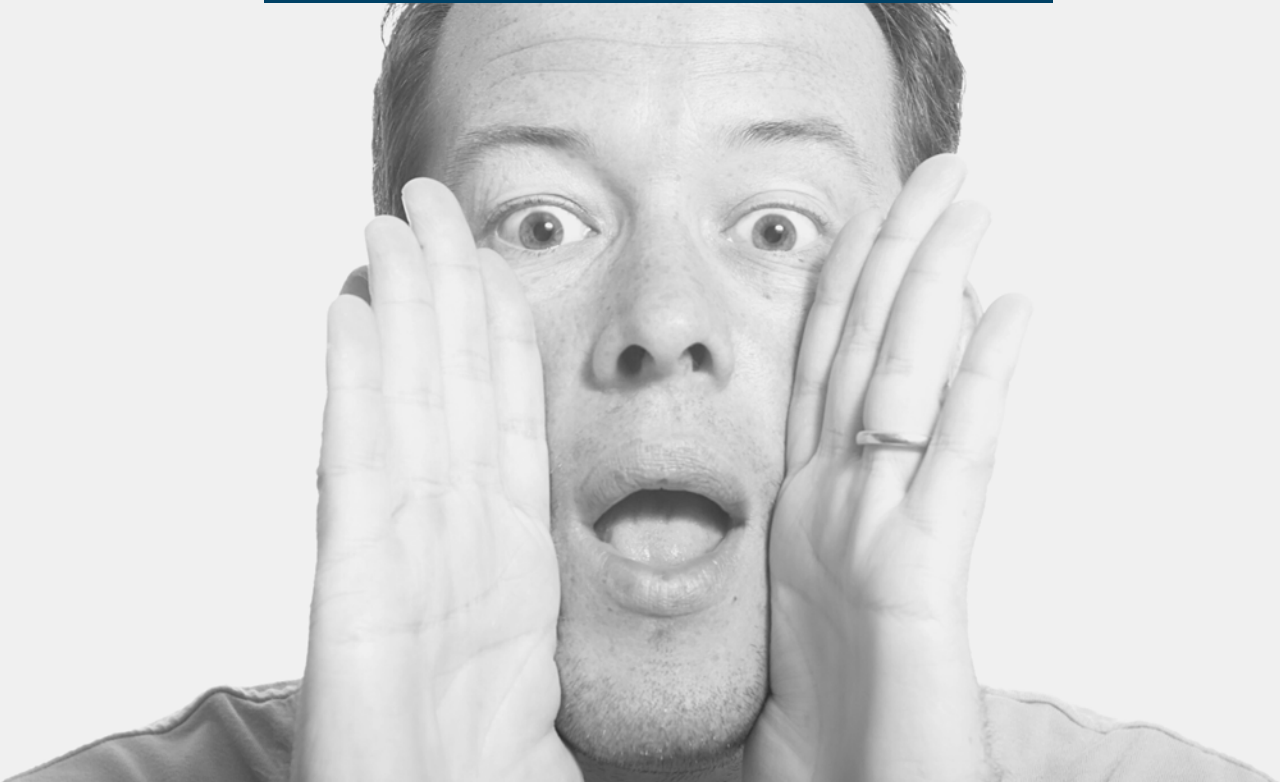
MAKING PHYSICAL ADJUSTMENTS

We've been virtual long enough to create some online habits that we'll have to break when we return to the world.

For a hybrid meeting, if we are in the room, we have to find that balance between gesturing in our actual space and gesturing in the camera's space and making eye contact with the camera and the people in the room.

Give yourself permission to expand your gestures, such as large gestures appropriate for your space and presentation. You'll also have more space to move around, so you'll need to plan ahead for what movements across the speaking area you want to add to your presentations.

BEYOND VIRTUAL

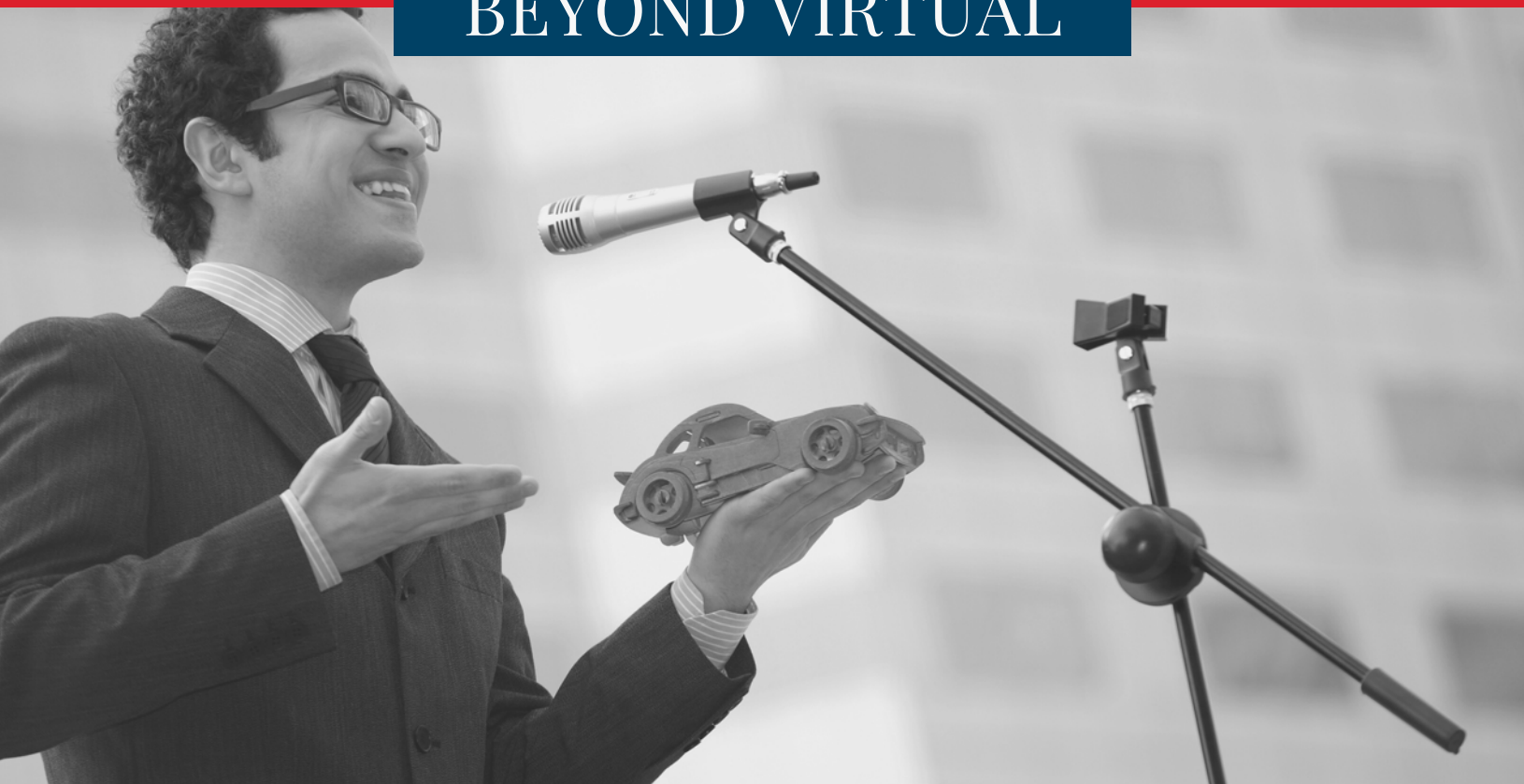


MAKING VOCAL ADJUSTMENTS

We've gotten used to talking into our computer's microphone. But when we return to in-person meetings we're going to be talking to the back of the audience again, and you may have to project your voice more.

You also need to keep a good pace. It's easy to speed up or slow down a lot in the virtual environment, especially if you have audio feedback. But we have to keep trying to speak naturally, to sound genuine, and to create an impact for our audience.

BEYOND VIRTUAL



BE PREPARED

When we're online, we can rely much more heavily on our notes and spend less time in preparation. Notes have their place—they help keep you on track or get you back on track if you lose your place. However, notes are not a replacement for knowing your material and being prepared to present it.

Same with props. Are you going to use them in your presentation? When you're online, you may be able to grab something from your desk to demonstrate your point. When we're in person, you'll need to plan ahead for those props and bring them with you and set them up before the presentation starts.



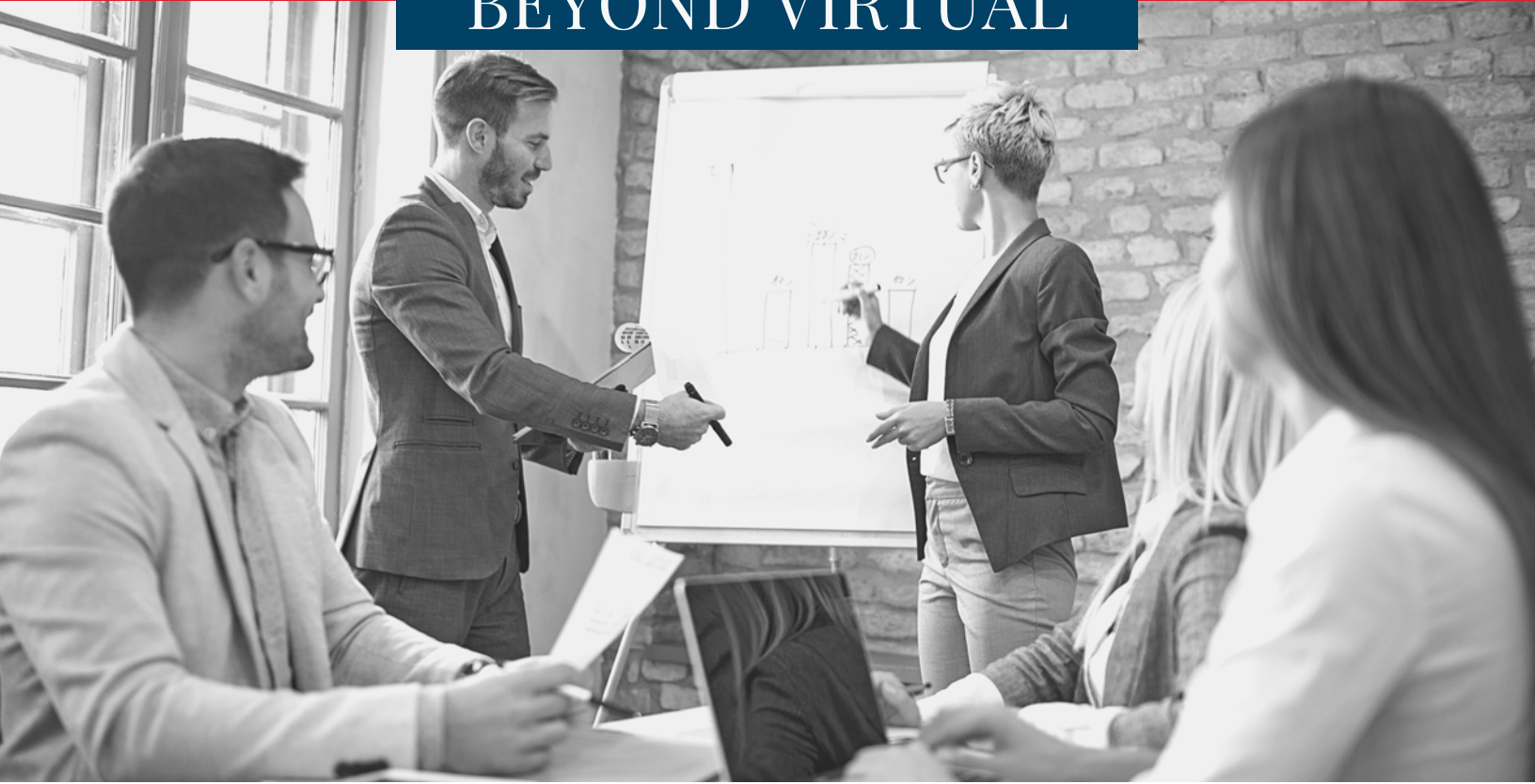
BEYOND VIRTUAL

SAFETY AND COMFORT FIRST

Following the pandemic, we'll need to respect whatever rules the meeting facility has for social distancing and safety protocols. This might mean wearing a mask part of the time when you're not speaking. It might mean sitting a little farther from each other.

And just as clubs or facilities have their standards, so do individuals. It's important that we respect everyone's comfort levels as we transition back to hybrid or completely in-person meetings.

BEYOND VIRTUAL



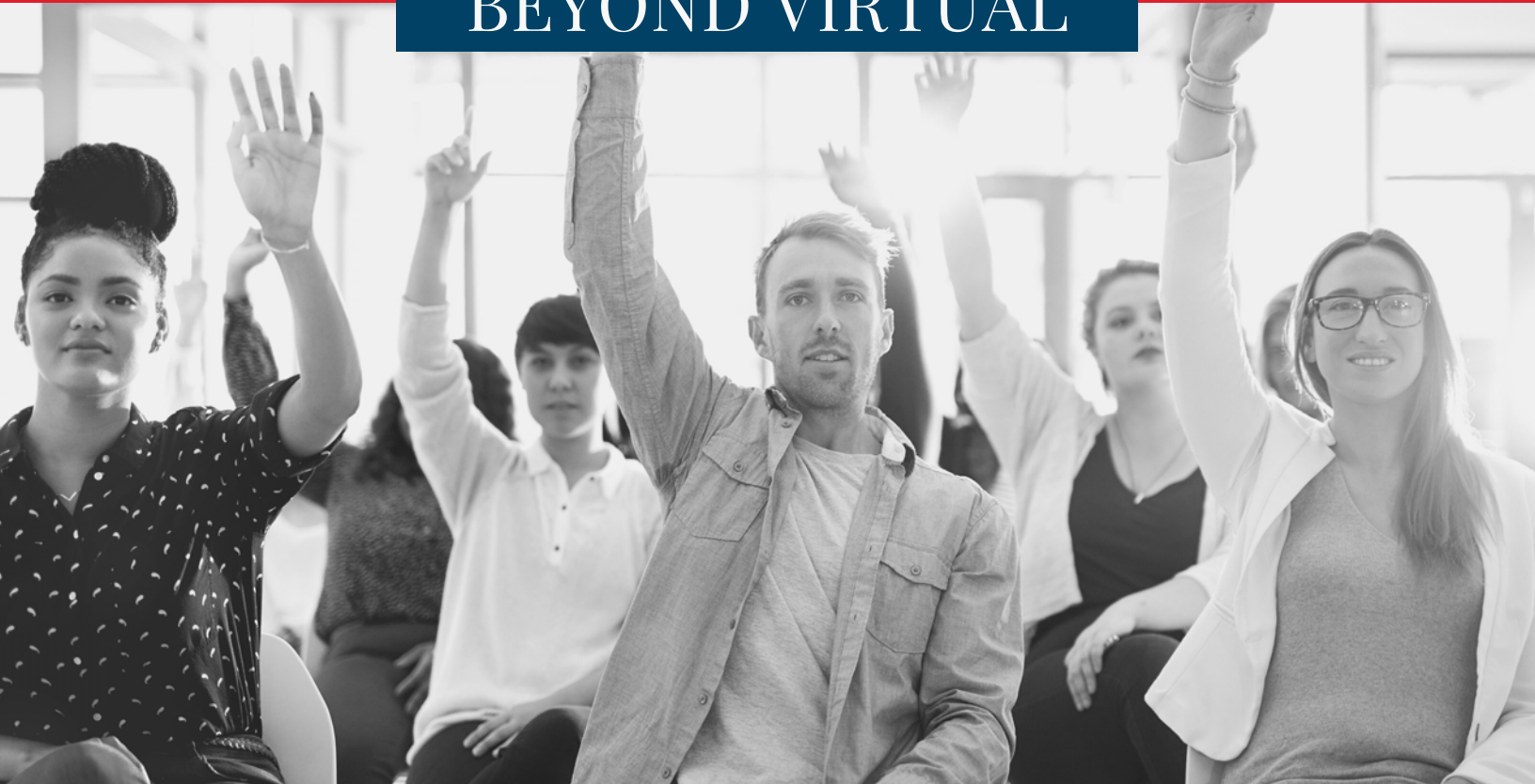
TIPS FOR A HYBRID MEETING

When thinking about a hybrid meeting, there are four things that need to happen for it to be successful:

- The people online need to see and hear the people in the room
- The people in the room need to see and hear the people online
- The people online need to see and hear each other
- The people in the room need to see and hear each other

The last two are easy, just show up or log in. But the first two require planning and equipment. Toastmasters District 56 offers [some helpful resources](#) for planning a hybrid meeting and Rotary International District 5950 offers a [brief demo video](#) for setting up with minimal equipment.

BEYOND VIRTUAL



BONUS CONTENT - ENGAGEMENT

If you engage your audience by asking a question or asking for feedback and you really want to hear from your audience, there are three techniques to help ensure the conversation starts flowing:

- Ask a compelling question that makes your audience want to answer (What do you do to create impact in your presentations?)
- Ask a specific question to get your audience thinking about a specific response (How do you practice vocal variety when getting ready for a speech?)
- Have an audience "plant" to prime the pump (Andrea, what tips can you share for outlining your presentation?)

CLOSING THOUGHTS

"Be yourself, everyone else is already taken."
— Oscar Wilde

THE MOST IMPORTANT TIP

This book explores creating impact with our delivery and considers ways to translate what we're doing online back to in-person meetings. But one of the key things to remember is we must make sure our content is effective for creating that impact. Because if we don't know what we want our audience to do there's a good chance that our presentation is going to fall flat.

And, probably most important things we can remember when trying to create impact are to smile, have fun, and be ourselves. If we are having a good time and are really connecting with our own content because we genuinely believe it, the rest will fall into place.

ABOUT ME



Andrea Tantillo

Communications Expert

I joined Toastmasters in 2016, earned Distinguished Toastmaster recognition in 2018, and am continuing to progress on my Toastmasters path. I'm Vice President of Public Relations for Spaced Out Toastmasters and served as club sponsor for Timmons Talkers Toastmasters.

I earned a Master's Degree in Strategic Communication from Purdue University in 2019 and work as a Senior Communication Coordinator for the Houston-Galveston Area Council.

And, in my spare time, I manage my cat's Instagram account with more than 6,000 followers - @the_eli_chronicles.

Let's learn together

ABOUT TOASTMASTERS



Self Improvement

Leadership and Communications

[Toastmasters International](#) is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. Headquartered in Englewood, Colo., the organization's membership exceeds 364,000 in more than 16,200 clubs in 145 countries. Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people from diverse backgrounds become more confident speakers, communicators, and leaders.

Established in 1957, [Toastmasters District 56](#) in the Houston, Texas region, is home to 194 clubs, 3,593 members, and a balanced blend of corporate and community clubs.

Let's learn together

SPECIAL THANKS

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