

WHEN CLUBS MEAN BUSINESS

Clubs at business schools give students an entrepreneurial edge.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

The Cass Toastmasters club means business. The members—students enrolled at Cass Business School, City University London—plan to become successful entrepreneurs and working professionals. They joined the club to improve their confidence and business-communication skills.

School of Management in West Lafayette, Indiana, was founded “with immense excitement from the faculty, staff and the student body,” says club member Debdeep Roy. “Our mission was to integrate business communication with public speaking, as well as with leadership-skill development, in a safer environment.”

augment the curricular and extra-curricular options designed to strengthen students’ speaking and leadership skills. And there’s a very good reason: Research shows that communication and leadership skills are at the top of employers’ lists across the globe.

“You may have ever-so wonderful ideas, but if you cannot sell them to others, you will not succeed.”

Mark Zupan, dean of the University of Rochester’s Simon Graduate School of Business in New York

Cass Toastmasters was formed for this very reason—for the business students to hone their public speaking and leadership skills. “Toastmasters’ supportive environment allows members to test and experiment with their speaking and leadership styles at no or minimal cost, which helps us to avoid paying for our mistakes in the competitive business world,” says club member Louise Luo, CC, CL.

Cass Toastmasters is not alone. The Krannert Graduate Toastmasters club, at Purdue University’s Krannert

Examples of other business school-affiliated clubs include the Toastmasters @ MIT club at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Sloan School of Management; Odette School of Business Toastmasters at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada; and RSB Toastmasters at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

These and other business schools are benefiting by having Toastmasters clubs on campus to

What Businesses Seek

Communication and leadership skills ranked at the top of employers’ list of attributes desired in new hires, in both the 2011 and 2012 Corporate Recruiters Survey. The survey examines the worldwide job and recruiting trends for recent graduate business school students, as well as employers’ focus areas.

The survey report is produced by the Graduate Management Admission Council, a global organization of graduate business schools, in partnership with the European Foundation for Management Development and the MBA Career Services Council.

In 2011, more than 1,500 recruiters participated in the survey, representing 905 firms in 51 countries. The employers were provided with 19 skill sets from which to

University
of Michigan
Ross School
of Business



Students at Cass Business School, City University London, joined the Cass Toastmasters club to experiment with their speaking and leadership styles.

Purdue
University
Krannert
School of
Management





Clockwise, from left: Cass Business School, City University London; members of the Toastmasters @ MIT club at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management; members of the Odette School of Business Toastmasters club at the University of Windsor; and MIT's Sloan School of Management.

choose their top five. Communication skills ranked number one not only overall, but also across all three delineated regions—the United States, Europe and Asia Pacific.

In 2012, almost 1,100 recruiters from more than 800 companies in 40 countries participated. Leadership skills topped the list, with recruiters focused on “employees who are able to lead and inspire.”

Mark Zupan, dean of the University of Rochester's Simon Graduate School of Business in Rochester, New York, says communication skills are key to students' long-term professional success. “Our advisory boards and recruiters tell us that the most important skills our students could further develop are their writing and speaking skills,” he says. “This feedback is consistent across every other leading business school of which I have been aware.”

The Simon Toastmasters club helps students at the Simon Graduate School improve those skills. As Zupan explains, “You may have ever-so wonderful ideas, but if you cannot sell them to others, you will not succeed.”

Preparation for the Business World

In addition to the regular attention on honing public speaking and leadership skills, business-focused clubs emphasize other aspects important in the corporate world. Some clubs have their speech topics focus solely on business issues.

They also place a greater importance on the possible networking opportunities through and beyond the club. As Odette School of Business Toastmasters member Kevin Kapustiak, ACB, CL, notes, “Toastmasters are fantastic! I've met so many interesting people I otherwise would never have had the chance to talk to if it weren't for this organization.”

Some clubs emphasize Table Topics as a means to help with a range of business situations, including job interviews and sales meetings. Clubs using Table Topics sessions as interview preparation drill students with questions and prime them for even the toughest corporate interrogations. Table Topics and evaluations also help

prepare students for business meetings where they have to speak and assess products or ideas on the spot. “The business world is extremely fast-paced,” says Kapustiak. “Knowing how to quickly and efficiently evaluate an initiative saves hours of rework.”

The University of Michigan's RSB club uses Table Topics to hone analytical skills. “We try to incorporate up-to-date Table Topics questions on real business problems to analyze a situation, defend a point of view and convince the audience,” explains club member Christian Jarjouhi, CC, ALB. “This helps our members develop critical thinking while pushing them to stay current with the latest business topics.”

Benefits also result from the leadership aspect of the Toastmasters program, as business clubs are mindful of how these leadership opportunities relate to members' careers. Cass Toastmasters member Luo says, “What I enjoy most about Toastmasters is that it provides me with the stage to lead and empower our members.”

Managing diverse teams, demonstrating vision and guiding groups toward a common goal are just a few of the opportunities members have to foster their leadership skills. As Roy, a member of the Krannert Graduate club, notes, “The feedback loop and abundant opportunities to take on leadership roles in club activities have shaped the future of the Krannert graduate MBAs, vis-à-vis business leaders.”

Business Skills Beyond Business Schools

Although the Krannert club was established for MBA students, the Krannert School of Management found that scope too narrow; there was too much of a demand from beyond the business school. “Over the years, significant amount of interest from the Purdue University community has made it imperative that we open the club for the greater good,” Roy says. “Even then, the primary focus of the club’s activities revolves around business topics and networking opportunities.”

It’s not surprising that other clubs have also seen this expansion of membership. The Toastmasters program is an ideal fit with the mission of higher education institutions. And improved skills and increased confidence are results that everyone seeks and supports.

As Luo notes, “Strong public speaking and leadership skills are essential tools of successful individuals in business and life.” And that’s good business sense. **T**

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is the founder of Georgetown Toastmasters in Washington, D.C. She is a career consultant and writer with more than 14 years of experience in university career services and seven years in public affairs.

Tips for Starting a New Job

By Eugene Yiga, CC

Starting a new job can be tough. In addition to navigating relationships and expectations, you have to figure out the little quirks of that office copier. But with these five simple ideas, you can achieve success:

- ▶ **Define your role.** If you didn’t do so during your interview or when finalizing your contract, now is the time to meet with your boss and define your role. Ask what the company’s top priorities are and what is expected of you. Then ask to have regular feedback sessions to evaluate your progress based on these objectives.
- ▶ **Avoid office politics.** Every office has its sensitive topics, and it can be very easy for “the new guy” to quickly get sucked into taking sides. Don’t waste your time with this. If you have to listen to the conversations, do so silently. And if you really must voice an opinion, make sure whatever you say behind someone’s back is something you would gladly say to his or her face. Dissension and disrespect will tear any team apart.
- ▶ **Ask questions.** As you learn how things work, you’ll probably see processes that don’t make sense and could be better if done differently. But before making suggestions to revolutionize the company, ask questions so you understand why the processes are that way in the first place.
- ▶ **Develop your skills.** Different companies want different skills, so find out which ones your employer is looking for. Improve your knowledge by subscribing to industry-specific blogs so you can gain deeper insight into the competitive environment and bring relevant ideas to the table.
- ▶ **Raise your game.** Be a leader by taking on additional challenges. Find useful things to do in your spare time instead of waiting to be assigned work. During your feedback sessions with your boss, ask if there are projects you can volunteer for and other ways you can contribute more. Even if it’s not part of your job, taking the initiative will set you apart.

Eugene Yiga, CC, is vice president education of The Grove club in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a writer, consultant and coach, and his website is eugeneyiga.com.