

## Toastmasters: Means to an End series:

### Leading in the Classroom

*If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.*

— John Quincy Adams, Sixth U.S. President “

**Summary:** I have used Toastmasters Successful Club Series on “Creating the Best Club Environment” and the Leadership Series module called “Motivating People” to take my university program to the next level.

**Background:** I have been teaching the UNB Student Investment Fund for close to 20 years. We were the first in Atlantic Canada, with the \$8.5 million students have to invest - number one in undergraduate programs in Canada and with the Charter Financial Analyst Level one as part of the program, one of a kind in the world. I am always trying to take the program to higher levels. There are *3 defining moments* in the SIF. I always keep them in mind and continue to try to improve upon them. I have scoured the Toastmasters literature to see if there are some insights I can use in my program. This is how I use them.

**The Party – March 2005.** The students decided to have a party. I remember it was at a student’s house. I also remember that while I was there, the students suddenly got up on their chairs, one at a time and stated their contribution to the SIF. I was floored. Each one took pride in what they had accomplished over the 2 terms. I realized the importance of the culture I had created. I wanted to create an environment that students were not afraid to make mistakes and realized that no one person could do all the work.

From the first day of class, I try to create the correct learning environment. They are in the TSX Group Boardroom which only they have access too. Taking a page out of toastmasters, we have meetings in the SIF, not classes. Each meeting has an agenda with the students around a board room table. I call myself the guide on the side, not the sage on stage. The opening to the program I congratulate them in getting into the SIF and provide a history behind the program.

I tell them the story my grandpa told me about the Polynesian rite of passage. When the kids become adults, they are taken miles off shore and left there. Initially the kids think their parents will come back but soon realize this is not the case. The strong set off first and you know they will make the island. The complainers whine and will never be seen again. But the majority of the group work together to get to that island. For the SIF students the island is the investment industry. The cruel truth of the matter an MBA or bba from UNB you lose – no one in the investments business knows the university. But if you have taken this program, successfully pass your cfa level 1, become Bloomberg certified and take the financial modeling workshop and have your competent communicator, you now have a chance.

I emphasize that they made it into the program because of their talent. I will provide the opportunities through business partnerships and the support or maintain their confidence as we attempt projects that

can be intimidating. What I ask of them is bring their desire. If they do not have the desire, do not waste my time. Then borrowing from Toastmasters I have each student introduce themselves, their background and what they are responsible for similar to an icebreaker speech. I have found this introduction galvanizes them for the rest of the semester. During the first semester students make three presentations of 20 minutes each and then answer questions on the investment opportunity for the next ten minutes. This is similar to prepared speeches and tabletopics in Toastmasters.

Toastmasters has a module in the Successful Club series called “**Creating the Best Club Climate**”. It focuses on a positive learning environment and member interactions. They emphasize the importance of being a good example for others. They encourage the following traits which I actively try to create in the SIF:

- arrive prepared and on time (I am always in a suit and treat the TSX Boardroom like an office – clean neat)
- offer to help (they know that anytime I see them I will ask them only one question: how is the market is doing and they better know why!!)
- be supportive
- show members that you care – volunteer to serve as a mentor or find one for them
- be considerate (laughing with them not at them)
- recognize achievements
- foster camaraderie.

**Zero Pass Rate for CFA Level 1 – 2004** – I was devastated when I found out that not one student had passed the CFA Level 1 exam. We have had a 50% higher pass rate than the industry average up to that year. As I reviewed each student, I realized that some of the students I could not have predicted what was going to interfere with their success:

- one student gave birth to a child two weeks before the exam. She was not pregnant when she entered the course
- one student's cousin passed away in a nasty car crash and the funeral was on exam day
- one student's driver's license was not valid
- one student did not put his paper down when instructed and he was disqualified
- one student was in a car crash and could not write the exam

I somehow how to motivate the students about the importance of passing the CFA level one exam. I took a course on motivation and it talked about not only external motivation but internal. We have plenty of external motivators in the SIF such as CFA Level 1 scholarships which pay for the students registration, leadership award and the like. What I quickly realized is my students all have one thing in common: they all want a job after they graduate. So I created a teaching methodology called Stairway to Employability. I call myself the anti-trump – my job is to get them hired, not fired.

In the toastmasters “The Leadership Series”, they have a module called **Motivating People**. It highlights *the fact that when a leader understands what inspires individual team members to perform well and rewards them appropriately, team members will be committed to the leaders goals and willing to work hard to achieve them.* It highlights how you should reward only the desired behavior but address undesirable behavior. To lesson the blow of tough feedback, I tell the students not to take themselves seriously but what they do very seriously. I always give examples where I made a mistake showing that anyone can make them. This leads into our third defining moment of the SIF ...

**Disqualification from the Atlantic CFA Society Research competition** – I had my students participate in the Atlantic Canada Chartered Financial Analyst Investment Research Competition in 2012. We were in Toronto touring various investment firms. It dawned on me that the company that we were reviewing was headquartered in Toronto. My boss always told me get away from the computer screen and go kick the companies preverbial tires. So I set up a meeting with the President of the company. I did not realize this was a violation of the rules. The students spent 36 hours straight to meet the deadline. Then I found out to my horror of my mistake. *Instead of trying to hide it, I took full responsibility for the mistake. I believe leaders share successes but take blame for the mistakes. It takes 20 years to create a reputation, 5 minutes to screw it up says Warren Buffett. I could not lose the faith of the students. It was a tough lesson and a bitter pill to swallow.*

***But I believe that is required to lead in the front of the classroom.***