

## Adapt Pathways for You

Steve Piet, pietsteven@hotmail.com

This handout aims to encourage you to adapt Toastmasters Pathways to your needs and to give you some ideas on how to do so. The purpose of being in Toastmasters, and therefore the Pathways Toastmaster education program, is to help you gain, strengthen, and practice the skills that you want for your purposes at your pace in the order that you need them.

Let me share with you some of what I've learned from completing 68% of the 59 projects and 4 of the 11 paths. I'll ask four questions, why, what, which, and when.

### 1. **Why did you pick the path(s) you are on; do you need to adapt them?**

- **Paths** get you from **current you** to **improved you**.
- You can't exchange a path once you complete projects. Get information and the path's project descriptions from other Toastmasters before you pick a path to increase the chance it will be suitable for you for the next year or two, the time it will take you to finish the path. (As noted below, some paths are more flexible than others.)
- Maybe your needs match one of the 11 paths. Great!
- Maybe your needs change – either your **improved you** (goals) or **current you** (where you are) change. If so, adapt your path.
- Maybe you have a **personal improvement campaign**, e.g., storytelling, learn how to pick the right approach to prepare for talks, improve a critical talk from multiple perspectives– then adapt the path.
- If you can't adequately adapt your path, pay \$20 and start a new path.

### 2. **What are the projects along your path and how might you adapt them?**

- **Projects** are steps along the **path**; they provide new info, practice, and feedback. Each has a communication and/or leadership objective.
- One adaptation idea is to recognize that you can have objectives beyond the official project objective, e.g.,
  - Practice for some talk you'll give outside Toastmasters, or a newspaper column.
  - Teach a concept to your club.
  - Refresh and expand a fundamental skill, e.g., descriptive language, body language, vocal variety.
- Each path requires a minimum of 14 projects and at least half are easily adaptable. Let's first consider the 10 (of 14) required projects.
  - Adapt the 5 (of 14) required common to all paths (3 at Level 1, 1 Level 2, 1 Level 5) to what you want to talk about and what skills you want to practice in so doing. The topic of these projects is fairly open; just tell your evaluator what you want from your evaluation.
  - Consider the 5 (of 14) required specific to that path (2 at Level 2, 1 Level 3, 1 Level 4, 1 Level 5). Some paths are more adaptable than others.

- You can easily adapt the 3 paths focusing on communication (Presentation Mastery, Visionary Communication, Engaging Humor). Pick speech topics that let you work on your objectives.
- It can be difficult to adapt the 4 paths that focus on leading a team (Dynamic Leadership, Strategic Relationships, Team Collaboration, Motivational Strategies) because you must complete a time period with that team.
- It is more difficult to adapt the 4 paths that focus on an outcome, result, or event (Effective Coaching, Innovative Planning, Persuasive Influence, Leadership Development) because you must complete some outcome or result.

### 3. Which projects should you select among electives?

- Adapt the 4 (of 14) elective projects (2 at Level 3, 1 Level 4, 1 Level 5) to your needs on content or skills.
  - *Most of the level-3 electives can be used for a wide range of topics, esp. Connect with Storytelling, Connect with your Audience, Descriptive Language, Body Language, Vocal Variety, Focus on the Positive, Inspire Your Audience.*
  - *Some the level-4 electives are adaptable, esp. Managing a Difficult Audience, Communicate Change, Question and Answer Session.*
  - *Adapting level-5 electives requires more thinking, e.g., Moderating a Panel Discussion, Prepare to Speak Professionally.*
- You can do more than the required number of electives as your need dictate – work in specific skills, practice talks, or “stockpile” projects for future paths.
- Keep a spreadsheet of projects you’ve done for all paths. Although the Pathways software will keep track for an individual path, you can’t get it to show you what you’ve done at a glance across all the paths.

### 4. When you should you do them?

- The levels increase in sophistication: (1) Mastering Fundamentals, (2) Learning Your Style, (3) Increasing Knowledge, (4) Building Skills, (5) Demonstrating Expertise.
- Keep a list of coming projects and coming topics you want to work on, mix and match, start preparing as far in advance as need be. The further in a path (higher levels) the more preparation you need to maximize what you get from the project.
- You can jump around, but if in doubt, go sequential.
  - **Skip** and come back if you don’t have time for the requirements of a time-consuming project, it doesn’t fit your mood, or you have a mental block on an appropriate topic.
  - **Stockpile** ahead of time – for your current path(s) or future paths.
- You can be on as many as 11 paths at once, one of each type, whether you are in 1 or 100 clubs.
- You can re-do a path but this erases all the records in Pathways of previous completion.

The Toastmasters education program exists to help you. Ask your mentor and those further on the paths you are on how you might adapt it to your needs and use them more efficiently.