



## Lessons from the Past District Governor

District Resource Guide – 6

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A past District Governor's (PDG) "20/20" hindsight is a source of valuable "lessons learned" for incoming district officers who have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of their predecessors. Many past District Governors were asked:

*What lessons did you learn too late to make use of during your term of office, but which you feel would be of value to incoming District Governors?*

The summaries of the responses to this question are listed below. It is hoped that these responses will help incoming Governors learn from some of the successes and challenges that their predecessor encountered.

### Lessons Learned

1. **Help clubs focus on goals.** Several top DGs sent a monthly letter from DG to club presidents to highlight what's important each month, such as educational accomplishments, membership growth, semi-annual reports, etc.
2. **Don't put off making the difficult decisions.** For example, a few governors delayed making the difficult decision of replacing ineffective area governors until it was too late in the year to be worth while. The net result was a considerable weakening of the clubs in those areas, and a poorer service to the members.
3. **Identify weak clubs early.** There are usually a number of early warning signs that a club is weakening. These can often be detected before the club becomes too weak to help. Watch for signs such as falling membership, untrained officers, fewer educational completions, so that you can help the club while it is still easy to do so. This should be part of the hand-over from the outgoing DG as it usually takes year or two for a club to fold.
4. **Delegate responsibility.** You can't hope to do everything yourself. Delegate freely, but when you do, don't stifle the creativity of the person that you have entrusted with the task. Tell them what is wanted, and then let them do it their way.
5. **Have assistants for all District officers.** Division and area governors are usually encouraged to have assistants. This PDG recommends that the senior officers also have assistants to whom routine tasks can be delegated, so that the District Governor and Lieutenant-Governors can focus on key tasks.
6. **Involve the past District Governors.** The PDGs have already been everywhere that you are going. They have encountered the problems and understand the pressures. Use their experiences to help make your year easier than theirs.
7. **Ensure that everybody buys into the same goals.** Often officers set their own goals for the year (e.g. area or division goals) that may be in conflict with district goals. Make sure that everybody understands, accepts, and works towards achieving, a single set of district goals.

*"Helping others helps ourselves grow and succeed!"*

8. **Try and get extra training on problem solving.** This PDG felt that the training provided in problem solving was inadequate for the types of problem she was called on to solve during her year. She recommends that incoming Governors search for ways to augment their training in this area.
9. **Understand that there will be disappointments.** One PDG talked about the effect that disappointments during the year had on him--a tendency to dwell on them, instead of refocusing on the next task. He asks incoming Governors to understand that no matter how successful their year is, they will have failures. They should accept this fact up front so that they are prepared for it, and hence minimize the emotional effect it has on them when it happens. Ask yourself, how much success is necessary. Is ninety per cent good enough? A good result is nearly as good as a great result.
10. **Explain benefits and rewards.** Whenever asking someone to take on an office or project, always explain the benefits of the task to the district and the officer, plus the rewards for completing the project successfully. Promote the benefits of goal accomplishment to members.
11. **Make the clubs part of the goal setting process.** Recognize that district goals are only a summation of the goals of every club in the district. To be successful, be sure that every club sets goals, and that these, when added together, will allow the district to meet its goals. Area goals should be a summation of club goals, division goals should be a summation of area goals, and the district goals should be a summation of division goals. This process will also ensure that the clubs buy into the club, area, division and district goals. Use goal cards to tie district recognition program to goals to provide incentives.
12. **Continually evaluate status at all levels.** This PDG advises that the Governor has a policy of continual evaluation of everything that happens in the district. Don't allow failures to creep up on you because you weren't keeping yourself aware of progress or status.
13. **Emphasize strong clubs and social interaction.** The PDG advises that strong and successful districts are built only from strong clubs, and that social interaction is an essential ingredient of a strong club. Promote the social side of Toastmasters to the full at both the district and club level.
14. **Be aware that everyone is a volunteer.** People have their own priorities. You have to help them fit their Toastmaster's activities into those priorities, not try to override them.
15. Find ways to increase the percentage of club officers attending training.
16. **Call your officers.** Call all district officers, including area governors, regularly to ask them how things are going; they may not call you if things are going wrong. Be sure to keep in touch between meetings, and then there will be no surprises.
17. **Emphasize educational accomplishments.** Always introduce people by their TM certification. Get a sticker, "Stamp out non-manual speeches." Have a "CC countdown" or "Hyde Park" at district conferences where members can give manual speeches.
18. **Promote distinguished clubs.** Talk in terms of club goals, not Distinguished District.

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