

Toastmasters International Celebrates 25 Years of Women Leaders

Communication and leadership tips for women in business from five women who served as International President of the 260,000-plus member organization

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, Calif., Sept. 20 [PRNewswire/](#) -- Twenty-five years ago Helen Blanchard broke through the glass ceiling of [Toastmasters International](#) to become its first female International President. Since then, five women have been elected International President, and more than half of the organization's 260,000 members are female. This mirrors findings by the U.S. Department of Labor, which reported that women shared a record 49.96 percent of the labor force in October 2009 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2010). As women gain ground in the job market and assume leadership roles, who better to provide advice than the women who have led an international organization dedicated to teaching communication and leadership skills? Here are some time-tested tips from current and past female Toastmasters International Presidents to help all women in business:

- **Accept the challenges.** "I accepted challenges that made me reach far beyond my comfort zone, time and again," said Helen Blanchard in her memoir, *Breaking the Ice*. By going the extra mile and taking the time to prepare for challenges, Blanchard said you will earn the confidence of supervisors and likely land that promotion you've been looking for. Blanchard joined Toastmasters International in 1970, before the organization officially accepted women. She joined Toastmasters under the assumed name "Homer" and ultimately rose to lead the organization as its first female International President. - **1985-86 International President, Helen Blanchard**
- **Work with change.** "No matter how well we perform, regardless of our experience levels, we can continue to improve," said Pauline Shirley. "Dramatic changes are taking place throughout the world. These changes are all-encompassing and happen at a more rapid pace than ever. It is essential that we constantly adjust to these changes." Shirley's advice: "In everything you do, strive to make a change for the better!" - **1994-95 International President, Pauline Shirley**
- **Be a team player.** Other people's strengths will balance your weaknesses. Good communication is crucial. "Too often we work apart rather than together," said Jo Anna McWilliams. "A team can work more effectively and accomplish something much bigger than a group of the same individuals working on their own. Effectiveness comes from the diversity of skills and individual personalities of others." - **2000-01 International President, Jo Anna McWilliams**
- **Face your fears and find courage.** "As women, we are easily overlooked. As a result, it is imperative we be proactive in doing all we can to equip ourselves with the necessary tools to stand up and stand out from those around us. One of the most essential tools is courage," said Jana Barnhill. "We, as women, are just as intelligent, just as capable, just as worthy as men to be successful in business. We just have to fight a little harder. In order to do that, we must have the courage, and the skill, to speak up. Don't let a lack of confidence keep you from your dreams!" - **2008-09 International President, Jana Barnhill**
- **Be an active listener.** "To achieve your own personal brand of greatness and become an effective leader, you must listen, using your whole body. We need to listen to what someone says, and then we need to engage our brain to actually think about our response before speaking." - **2010-11 International President, Pat Johnson**

About Toastmasters [Toastmasters International](#) is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. The organization currently has more than 260,000 members in over 12,500 clubs in 113 countries. Since its founding in October 1924, the organization has helped more than 4 million men and women give presentations with poise and confidence. For information about local Toastmasters clubs, please visit www.toastmasters.org. Available Topic Expert(s): For information on the listed expert(s), click appropriate link. Pat Johnson <https://profnnet.prnewswire.com/Subscriber/ExpertProfile.aspx?ei=96857> SOURCE Toastmasters International

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