

## **AREA 10 INTERVIEW SERIES – Gant Laborde, Golden Crescent Toastmasters, New Orleans**

*Question 1: What made you seek out Toastmasters International (TI)? When was this?*

*I didn't seek it!* I was invited to see someone speak, and then I got to experience it first-hand. It makes you think. If every speech we give is something we're so proud of, that we will invite others to hear it, then Toastmasters would be overflowing with guests and new members. I'm a fan of the TM Elevator pitch, the cards, the magazines *et al.*, but there's something simple we're all missing, which is every speech is an invitation.

What a great opportunity to make sure you deliver your best work, and that someone interested in what you have to say, also gets a dose of what Toastmasters really is.

Three and a half years ago, I was asked by Bernhard [Frasing] to hear him speak on mobile technology. He invited me to a 1.5 hours' meeting, and he only spoke for 7 minutes. As funny as that sounds, it worked. Today I'm a proud speaker, mentor, and best of all, Toastmaster.

*Question 2: What professional and/or personal goals are you pursuing through TI?*

When I grow up I want to be like Mohamad [Qayoom]! That guy has balanced 100 things on each finger, and still asked for more. I'm not sure where he gets his superpowers from, but it's my pursuit to learn and grow from him and all the successful people of Toastmasters!

*Question 3: Which goals did you already achieve? How have you been able to use/apply your Toastmasters achievements in your professional life?*

The most obvious professional goals are easy for me to display. I've gone from a conference attendee, to a conference speaker. I've gone from senior engineer, to a company leader. The accolades keep piling up, but the thing I don't have a piece of paper for, is that I'm confident, collected, and outgoing now. The past version of me would have recoiled from opportunity. Now, I take it head on.

*Question 4: Do you have an ultimate ("big hairy") goal? There does not have to be any, but perhaps there is a "what if..."?*

I'd like to become a Keynote speaker at conferences. As an invited speaker, I'd be able to bypass the CFP process. This is my goal for 2018. It's going to be tough, but I'm ready! I've applied and been accepted as a speaker throughout 2017, so this is the next step.

*Question 5: What is your weirdest Toastmasters experience?*

I know this one for sure! I was asked to give a 45 minutes' presentation on slides I had never seen before. Though I was familiar with the concepts of the presentation, our presenter was unable to attend, and we needed to figure something out, and fast. I had about 15 minutes familiarize myself with the slides and concepts before I presented to a group of people who were trained Toastmasters. *FORTUNATELY*, it went very well, and I was able to deliver the message clearly and concisely. Toastmasters constantly rewards itself through endurance and progress. Weird? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely.

*Question 6: What was the Toastmasters experience that influences you the most? And why?*

Easy question. Attending the annual conference. I find that the things I hear and see at the conference become part of my rule book for the rest of the year. From concepts, to speeches and even stories, I grow 10x every time. Anyone looking for the best "Get better fast" plan, should attend the annual conference.

*Question 7: Which Toastmaster competition do you like better – International Speech Contest or Humorous Speech Contest? -And why?*

To watch, it is definitely Humorous Speech. There's always a great vibe in the room, and everyone enjoys themselves. But if I'm speaking, I would want International Speech. Reason being, I get to be funny whenever I want and it's a bonus to my speech. The audience isn't looking for the joke, so I get a bigger laugh when I need it, then I can get right back to something of substance.

*Question 8: If you encounter people who are overwhelmed by the empowerment ('overly positive feedback') that potentially comes with enrolling in Toastmasters, what do you tell them?*

Toastmasters is a safe place for you to challenge yourself, and being surrounded by positivity lets you be vulnerable so you can grow. The empowerment to challenge yourself is nourished by positivity. There is a such thing as too much nourishment, though. Just like a runner who is drinking too much water, you need to find a balance positivity intake so it keeps you moving. You control the quantity, and your team controls the quality.

If you're *ONLY* getting positive feedback, you're not getting quality. "Overly positive feedback" means you can't get better. This is where we all learn and grow. Let your fellow Toastmasters

know how and on what you'd like constructive feedback. Remember that evaluation is one of the pillars of Toastmasters, and helping us all become better evaluators is what makes members, clubs, and Toastmasters International grow.

*Question 9: Who or what inspired you to become a Division Director?*

I want to do my part at Toastmasters, and sure enough here I am! Truth be told, I wish I could go to every meeting, every club, and every contest. Classic Toastmaster mentality, right? Being a part of Division leadership means I'm getting the chance to learn and make a bigger difference with the time and energy I have. It's an excellent place for me to see a new level of Toastmasters that I've never seen before, and in that, do as much as I can.

*Question 10: What are you planning/hoping to achieve as the Division C Director 2017-18?*

At the minimum, I want to fully understand the District, Division, and Area levels in a way that will help me serve Toastmasters for years to come. At max, I want to actively make our District the best in the Nation.