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THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

EINSTEIN WROTE A LETTER ABOUT THE ATOMIC BOMB

If you invented a formula ($E = mc^2$) to calculate the energy produced by splitting an atom, you'd be familiar with the scale of power that nuclear energy could create. You might even fear weaponizing that energy. Einstein did, and that led him to write a letter he would, later, deeply regret.

Here's the real story behind Einstein's famous letter to U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and the facts that people most often misremember.

Einstein didn't invent atomic energy.

While Einstein's formula can calculate atomic energy, he never helped build a nuclear energy plant or an atomic bomb. The scientist repeatedly reminded people, "I do not consider myself the father of the release of atomic energy. My part in it was quite indirect."

In fact, as an outspoken pacifist, Einstein was against weaponizing atomic energy. However, five years into Hitler's regime, three scientists in Berlin discovered that nuclear energy could be used to create a bomb — although some technical problems needed to be overcome. When Einstein heard of this, it was deeply distressing for the German-born Jewish physicist.

If the Nazi party had nuclear weapons, what would become of the United States if they didn't act quickly?

So, with the help of fellow physicist Leo Szilard, Einstein sent his famous letter to President Roosevelt in August 1939. He told the

president that Germany could be creating atomic bombs and advised him to stockpile uranium ore, suggesting that the U.S. military should begin creating its own atomic weapons. The president followed his advice.

Einstein was a security risk.

While Einstein might seem like a natural choice for the Manhattan Project, the U.S. Intelligence office denied Einstein a security clearance. Hundreds of scientists on the project were forbidden from consulting Einstein on account of his politics and activism. As a top-secret project, they couldn't take any risks of exposure.

In an interview with Newsweek, Einstein shared his regret in writing his letter, saying, "Had I known that the Germans would not succeed in developing an atomic bomb, I would have done nothing."

Yet, even as a new American citizen, Einstein's worry and sense of duty to the country led him to write one of the most historic letters in our nation's history.



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END YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING STRUGGLES WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM TOASTMASTERS

Several years ago, I was called in to investigate a large two-story church. Patrons there had been complaining about odors. Before long, I discovered the building's new carpeting had been attached with the wrong glue. The glue reacted badly to the carpet and caused a foul smell!

I explained all of this in a meeting with the building manager and owner. When I finished talking, the building owner — who is responsible for several buildings around Houston and has made millions in real estate — leaned toward me.

"Travis, if this was your building, what would you do?"

My first thought was "Oh, my gosh — I don't have multimillions. Why is he asking me?!" But then I took a deep breath and thought, hard. Finally, I said, "I would contact the contractor and tell him that he didn't install the right products. He's responsible for making people sick, so he's also responsible for pulling all of the carpet out of here and replacing it."

The building owner nodded in approval. That's exactly what he did! Looking back, I owe my success with his "test" to a phone call I made in 1989, the year I started my business.

Back then, I quickly realized I had an Achilles' heel: I was scared to talk to realtors! I wasn't an eloquent speaker. What if I couldn't get my message across? Of course, I couldn't just avoid speaking to realtors for the next 30

years. So, I called the Houston Association of Realtors and asked for their help.

The person who answered that day changed my life: They pointed me to Toastmasters. Even though I had no idea what Toastmasters was, I agreed to go to a meeting. Within minutes of walking through the door, I was enrolled in a 10-speech program that promised to make me a polished speaker.

Each of the speeches focused on a different aspect of public speaking. The first one, "The Icebreaker," was a 5-7 minute talk sharing my name, background, family, and business. There's nothing easier than talking about yourself, but my heart was still beating like a bird's wings when I did it!

After that, each successive speech added another skill to my arsenal. The second one focused on organization and forced me to describe a process step-by-step. The third speech taught me to insert gestures into my presentation and interact with the audience. After that, I tackled vocal variety — and the list goes on.

I've spent 30 years with Toastmasters now, learning everything I can about public speaking. Each meeting has three sections: the prepared speeches, the "Table Topics" (spontaneous speaking where members are chosen at random to speak unprepared on specific topics), and the evaluations (member-to-member feedback on that day's speeches).

At first, Table Topics seemed terrifying. But once I got comfortable, it became my favorite section! I still get a kick out of it today because it forces me to think on my feet. There's nothing like the thrill of hearing my name called and walking to the front of the room, all while formulating what I should say so I can (hopefully) talk for a minute and a half without sounding foolish. Usually, I succeed at Table Topics. Sometimes I don't! But I always learn.

Without Toastmasters and the Table Topics exercise, I'm certain I wouldn't have had an answer for the building owner in the church that day. I would have looked like a fool and perhaps lost a great customer because of it!

If you're uncomfortable with public speaking or have an important presentation coming up, consider joining Toastmasters (Toastmasters.org). It just might change your life.



THE WACKY WORLD OF IAQ

HOW TRAVIS SAVED A BALLROOM FULL OF LIVES

A few years ago, I was called in to help a local hotel with the aftermath of a water leak. That may sound like a routine job on the surface, but it proved otherwise. During my time in the building, I discovered a problem so massive it could have been deadly!

Before I get to that, though, let's rewind a bit. This crazy water loss story revolves around a 25-story hotel, and it all started with a leaky toilet. Imagine an empty room on the 18th floor of a quiet hotel. Everything is silent, and then — drip, drip, drip.

The valve at the back of the toilet tank breaks and water begins to spread across the floor. It floods a total of 15 guest rooms before it's discovered 8–10 hours later! Worse, it begins to seep down the walls before it infiltrates the lower floors.

That's exactly the situation my client was in. As soon as the hotel found the leak, they called in a water restoration company to identify the extent of the damage. The company found evidence of water trickling down from the 18th floor all the way to the 7th! So, they tore out all of the wet components and started drying the build. They also called me to double-check their work, and it's a good thing they did.

I arrived on the scene with my thermal imaging camera in hand to look for any water that might have been missed. I confirmed there was indeed water damage all the way down on the 7th floor, but I didn't stop my investigation there, even though I'd only found one room with damage. I asked the building manager for keys and investigated the lower floors as well.

I didn't find any damage on the 6th floor, but I still soldiered on to the 5th. Again, there were no signs of damage. But on the 4th floor, my thermal imaging camera revealed multiple rooms with wet walls! Apparently, the flow of water had narrowed down to the 7th floor, then somehow found a way to sneak past the 6th and 5th floors without a trace before reappearing on the 4th. The water remediation company could hardly believe it.



At that point, I wasn't leaving anything to chance, especially because the 4th-floor room I stood in was located directly above the hotel's three-story grand ballroom. I took the elevator down to ground level and walked into the massive space. It was dazzling! Beautiful chandeliers swung 20 feet overhead. I looked around for a moment in awe. Then, I pointed my camera upward ... and zeroed in on an area 60 feet in diameter. It was so saturated with water that it was about to fall on my head!

No one from the remediation company had considered that the grand ballroom might be at risk. Within days, the ceiling would have caved in, burying the attendees of any event happening inside! I'm not the brightest bulb in the box — I just happened to have a thermal imaging camera and the determination to not give up.

The remediation company used a moisture meter to spot water, but my thermal imaging camera found things they had missed. We learned an important lesson that day: Moisture meters are helpful for areas you already assume are wet. Thermal imaging cameras save your bacon by finding the sneaky spots!

Just a few weeks ago, I was reminded of this when my thermal imaging camera led me from a leak on the 5th floor of a federal building all the way to the basement. There was an entire pond down there. If your building is at risk of a leak, make sure you either have a thermal imaging camera of your own or have me on speed dial.

Travis West

ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES BURNT OUT?

HERE'S HOW TO KEEP THEM ENGAGED!

In 2021, a study by Indeed found that 52% of employees reported experiencing burnout. This is a considerable spike from the 43% who said they had the same feeling before the COVID-19 pandemic. With hours at work becoming more prolonged due to staff shortages, many workers feel tired, overwhelmed, and stressed. Luckily, you can implement a few strategies to reduce the amount of burnout your employees feel.

Improve company culture.

Do your employees feel like they can trust their managers and colleagues to help them when they are struggling? Are they afraid to ask for help or voice their concerns and frustrations?

These factors play a huge role within work culture and help predict worker satisfaction. If your employees dread going to work because of the treatment and culture of the company, they may not be motivated to do their best and focus on their work. Your staff needs to feel valued, supported, and heard by their colleagues and managers. Take time to truly understand and listen to your workers' concerns and let them know their voices are heard. If employees feel like their uppers acknowledge them and improve the company culture, their overall satisfaction at work will increase.

Reward top performances.

It can be challenging for employees to come to work every day if there is no long-term future for them at your company. This is where promotional opportunities come into play. If you have employees who go above and beyond each time and exceed expectations, offer them a promotion. This will make them feel valued and appreciated. You can even give quarterly bonuses that are based on performance. This will inspire workers and motivate them to do high-quality work every day. Even a simple shoutout



or acknowledgment of their hard work can help. Praises boost confidence and make them feel like they are an essential part of the team.

Monitor workloads and scheduling.

One of the fastest ways for your employees to feel burnout is if they are overworked. While tasks may vary and spike on certain days, it's crucial that you monitor your employees' workload to make sure they aren't working overtime frequently. Allow them to have free time by providing adequate vacation and sick time. Your employees must have time to enjoy their lives, exercise, positively interact with friends and family, and have a chance to practice self-care. If they are well-rested and have time to do things for themselves, they will be more productive and happy at work. You could even offer flexible schedules that accommodate their personal lives. By showing that you care about them, this will boost employee morale.

Fighting burnout can be tough. But with forethought and consideration, you can help reduce this feeling and increase your employees' satisfaction at work for years to come. With happier and more motivated employees, the productivity of your business will exponentially increase.

TAKE A BREAK

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7	8	5	1	3	2	9	6	4
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3	6	8	1	5	4	7	2	9
8	5	7	2	4	6	1	3	9
6	2	1	7	8	4	5	9	3
9	3	8	5	2	1	7	4	6
5	7	4	9	6	3	2	1	8

RESTAURANT-STYLE CHICKEN MARSALA

Inspired by FoodNetwork.com



INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup flour, for dredging
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, pounded to 1/4-inch thick
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 oz prosciutto, thinly sliced
- 8 oz mushrooms
- 1/2 cup Marsala wine
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 2 tbsp butter

DIRECTIONS

1. In a bowl, mix flour, salt, and pepper until evenly distributed.
2. Add chicken to flour mixture and coat all sides. Shake off any excess.
3. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add olive oil. Once hot, add chicken to the skillet. Work in batches if pieces don't all fit in the pan. Cook each side for 5 minutes until golden brown.
4. Remove chicken to a platter.
5. Lower heat to medium. Add prosciutto to pan and sauté for 1 minute. Add mushrooms and sauté until browned, about 5 minutes.
6. Add Marsala to skillet. Let it come to a boil, then add the chicken stock and simmer for 1 minute.
7. Stir in the butter and add chicken back into the skillet. Let simmer gently for an additional minute, then serve.