

Touchstone Story #91 Lions Want to Have Fun

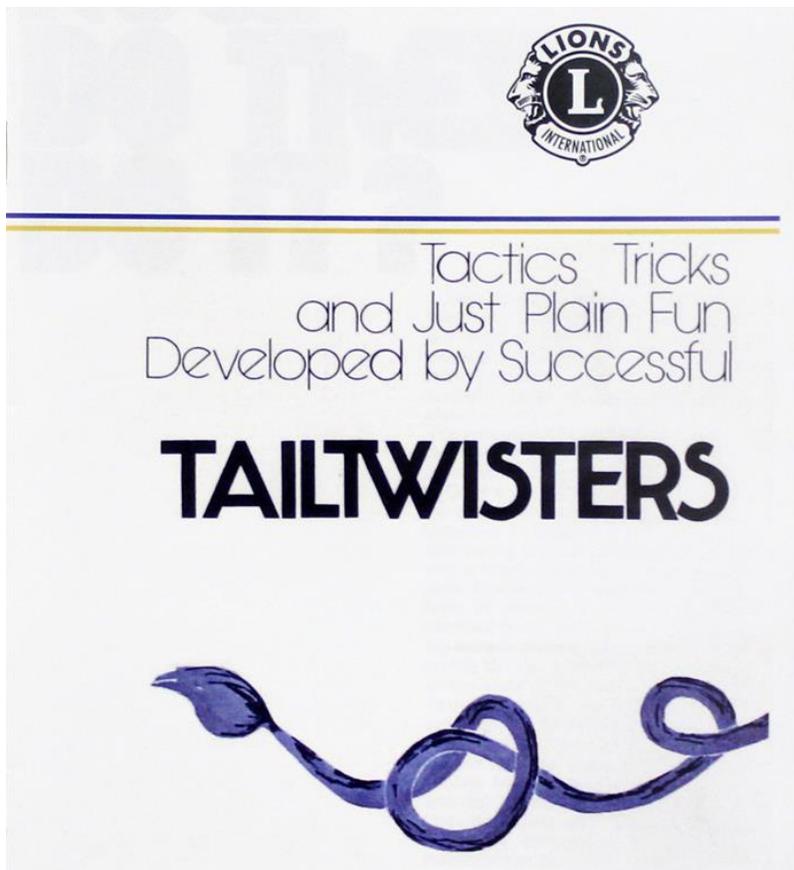


Photo Caption: Tail Twisters have added elements of fun and surprise to Lions club meetings since the 1920s.

Having fun while doing good has been a Lions specialty from the beginning.

In the early 1920s, many U.S. clubs had pep committees charged with enlivening routine club meetings. Lions soon entrusted the merrymaking function to a single energetic and enthusiastic officer, known as the Tail Twister.

Students of Tail-Twisting lore will find rich veins of anecdote and remembrance among longtime Lions and also in Lions publications.



How did the name Tail Twister come about? *The World's Biggest Doers*, a 1949 history of the Lions, described this origin story, as recounted by Lions founder Melvin Jones:

“One Sunday afternoon three or four of us were discussing this matter of putting pep into the meetings. One fellow who had been born on a farm said we needed to do what used to be done on the farm. When a cow refused to go through the gate, someone would grab her by the tail and twist. We all laughed, but one of the boys said, ‘Why isn’t that a good name—tail twister?’”

The fact that lions—*real* lions—also have tails gave the name another amusing twist.

Now optional for all Lions clubs, the role of Tail Twister had been an established office under charter bylaws for decades. But as a 1941 article in *LION Magazine* made clear: “Of all the officers in the club, he [the Tail Twister] has no rigid code, no well-defined plan of action. He must be a Lion of originality.”

Indeed, Tail Twisters have been remarkably creative in promoting fun and fellowship and boosting club treasuries by “twisting” small fines from members for minor breaches of club rules, such as not wearing a nametag or talking during a guest speaker’s presentation.

The fines system is both autocratic and democratic. No member can appeal a Tail Twister’s levy, and no member is above paying it.

“President Westfall Fined on Southern Trip,” ran a banner headline over a full-page story in the April 1927 issue of *LION Magazine*. While visiting the Columbia Lions Club in South Carolina, USA, International President William Westfall forgot his Lions pin when changing “from his train clothes to his speaking clothes.” An alert Tail Twister named Goldschmidt spotted Westfall’s bare lapels and fined him 10 cents, the going rate for such infractions in the 1920s.



Contests, quizzes, brainteasers, jokes, lighthearted songs and poems are time-tested tools of the tail-twisting trade. Today's practitioners can find and share fresh material on several club websites and on a Tail Twister page on Facebook.

Concepts of humor do not always transfer across different cultures and times, and that has led to a gradual decline in the tail-twisting tradition as Lions have expanded around the world. But every day in countless other ways—from pancake breakfasts to picnics with needy kids to big parades at convention time—Lions still know how to have fun.