

Reflections on the Toastmasters Experience
By Robyn Hay – Fish Creek Bravehearts Club

So you have been in Toastmasters for how long now? Are you wondering just what you are learning and just where it is really going to help you?

I personally discovered exactly what I had learned during two events. One was a very tough public meeting and the other was at a wedding of a young woman who I had known since infancy.

The public meeting occurred when I had been in Toastmasters about 5 years and really hadn't grasped just what I learned and how it had actually helped me. I was representing my boss, who had Ok'd my presentation to answer a specific question about a very hot public issue. There were 3 speakers and we each had 2 minutes to get our message across. This would be followed by questions from the audience.

I was nervous, very nervous. I realized that I was not nervous about presenting; I was nervous because the audience was testy and hostile and I was just hoping to get out alive. As I sat facing the audience I said to myself 'Thank God for Toastmasters' as it has prepared me to look cool under pressure and allow the 'nervous geese to fly in formation'.

When I spoke, the room was quiet. They all listened. When the next person spoke, he got out only 3 sentences before the audience started to heckle and boo him.

What I learned about Toastmasters that night was simply this....

1. Presence is 9/10 of the law in public speaking and the years of practice in Toastmasters had given me that presence to command an audience at a critical time.
2. Whether the audience liked the message or not was not the point. I presented it on behalf of my boss ... and I got her message out.

The other speaker did not have the presence, did not get his message out and had to drop his plans for his development.

The second occasion was more recent. I was asked to give the toast to the Bride for 'the kid next door'. I was most honoured and I was sure I could come up with something special because of my Toastmaster experience. In fact that was one of the reasons she asked me.

You just never know when you are going to be asked to rise to the occasion and use those skills from Toastmasters!