

## BEYOND THE CLUB – JACKIE RAINFORTH

When my children were small, they would play for hours with their LEGO, trying to build the most incredible towers. I watched them painstakingly persevere as the towers would topple over in a heap, leaving them frustrated and drowning in defeat. Perplexed, they kept going step by step until they discovered the law of physics; a strong base was needed before they could build a tower that was strong and mighty. Once discovered, their excitement and joy was as uncontainable as their creativity. They were able to let their imaginations run free as they built the most incredible towers. The towers were beyond their imagination. TOASTMASTERS was to me, the base I required before I stepped out into the world on my path to professional speaking.



My dear friend Matt Fox invited me to my first TOASTMASTERS meeting saying, “come and see what it is all about”. As a record-breaking, award-winning sales expert my attention and career focus was on helping salespeople and organizations elevate to higher levels of sales success through my proven sales training programs. I walked into my first meeting expecting to sit back and watch. To have fun and possibly refine my skillset, maybe learn a thing or two on how to refine my speaking skills when presenting my sales training programs to clients.

Imagine my horror when Matt *volunteered* me to stand up on stage and willy-nilly come up with a two-minute speech for the Table Topics! The thoughts in my head were spinning so fast I thought I was going to pass out. Walking up to the stage all I could think about was, what a disaster this was going to be and what a colossal fool I was going to make of myself.



Yet something exciting and transformational happened that day! The pounding heart turned from fear and overwhelming anxiety to excitement and thrill. The spinning thoughts seemed to magically organize themselves into cohesive thought processes that left my mouth as a fluid conversation. Picture evoking vocabulary became top-of-mind. I was hooked! Yes, who knew that in that moment my life was going to change forever?!



From that moment on I loved attending my weekly TOASTMASTERS meeting. I soaked up the learning like sponge. I looked forward to the most critical and minute pieces of feedback to improve and refine my skill. I was beyond hooked. It was a mental adrenalin rush. Each week it was like mentally skydiving out of an airplane. I couldn't get enough! Toastmasters would prove to be the ideal foundation that launched me into building a wonderful new career and life journey. I wanted to build a strong and mighty tower.

Within no time, the doors were opening catapulting me down a new and extraordinarily exciting road. I was speaking at events, women's groups, and sales seminars. And I even wrote a book; *THE BADASS GUIDE TO SUPERSTAR SELLING*.

I still get that little pang of fear before I walk out on stage, but I carry the pieces of wisdom I learned from Toastmasters. I take them with me, reminding myself every time I do a speech:

1. **You do not have to memorize the entire speech word for word.** Write it out in full, read it, but you only need to remember the introduction, the conclusion and the first sentence of each paragraph. The rest just happens.
2. **Watch those *uhms* and *ahs* and *so's*.** They really do distract from the message you are trying to convey, yet unfortunately they can accidentally slip in. I cringe inside when it happens.
3. **Slow down your speech, do not be afraid to pause.** Pauses give people the time to think and add impact to your speech, while allowing you to eliminate those filler words. I do this regularly now. It slows me down, maximizing my control and calm.
4. **Timing:** This is still my biggest challenge! I cannot tell you how devastating it feels to have gone on too long in a speech only to have to rush through to the end. I missed giving a third of the speech compromising its value and effect. Not fun!
5. **Repeat:** Do the same speech over and over. You will rewrite, refine and rehearse creating many different versions, each time improving.

The thing I loved most about TOASTMASTERS and the biggest lesson I received from the Club, is that it is a safe place to practise and fall. At first, I used to beat myself up, but now I remind myself that I am human, and my best is good enough. Each step of the journey is one of discovery and joy. But it is the confidence of a solid foundation makes all the difference. Thank you TOASTMASTERS, for helping me build my strong and mighty tower, beyond my imagination and beyond the Club.

