



How a Houston Teacher Won the Toastmasters International Award for Best Speaker



Want to hear a success story of how a 31-year-old public high school teacher outlasted 30,000+ other speakers from around the world to win the International Toastmasters Award for Best Speaker?

Meet Ramona Smith from Houston. Her winning speech, “Still Standing” explored how she found strength in adversity and overcoming challenges.

Business Insider interviewed Ramona and lucky for us, we get an insider’s view of the public speaking techniques she used to edge out the competition and win the International Toastmasters Championship – plus see her video.



Ramona Smith's 5 Public Speaking Tips to Win the Toastmasters International Award

1. **Think creatively when crafting your message.** In Ramona's speech, she put us in the boxing ring and talked about her life, getting knocked down and getting right back up again. She gave specific examples too – like dropping out of college, getting divorced – even speaking gigs that went wrong. Her common thread was that we've all had experiences when life has knocked us down. This put everyone on an equal playing field.
2. **Risk looking stupid to make your point.** Smith's performance was high energy. She was animated, a bit dramatic and used body language like a fighter with punches, jabs and hooks. As a speaker, she might not have done that when she was younger for fear of looking stupid, but acting classes taught her there's no holding back. It also showed the audience her human side.
3. **Ask the audience questions.** A key technique in public speaking is asking questions. "Can you think of a time that life tried to knock you down?" was one of them. When Ramona stopped purposely and looked into the crowd, it was a storytelling telling at its best. It made her relatable. And, her pauses were well timed, as if she was waiting to hear the audience's answers. She understood how to move an audience.
4. **Learn from the best speakers in the world.** Practice makes perfect, but so does studying great public speakers, from both Toastmasters and in the professional world. Ramona made it a practice to admire others who she could learn from. One technique that carried through her speech was opening the palms of her hands to convey an openness with the audience and show them she was vulnerable, speaking from the heart.
5. **Be bold in your own way.** Above all, every speaker has to be themselves. Find a way to be authentic in who you are, not just copying the masters. Take their techniques and make them your own. Every time you're on stage – or in front of a room – you have an opportunity to change up your message, even if it's in a small way. See what works and what reactions you get from the audience.

Just be you.



(Click here to watch Ramona's inspiring video)

About PR and Brand Expert Robin Samora

Small business marketing and PR expert Robin Samora teaches small business owners how their brands can command attention in a noisy, crowded marketplace. Through her speaking, consulting and coaching, she helps clients find their ideal prospects, form valuable relationships and turn followers into loyal customers and raving fans.



Robin's mission is to help clients increase branding and visibility online and offline by cutting through the clutter so they can get noticed and sell more products and services. She uses social media, email marketing, speaking and free publicity strategies to enhance credibility, reputation and leadership position – even without a PR budget. Robin also shares marketing tools, tricks and articles on her weekly tip sheet, ["Robin's Rainmakers."](#)

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