

Toastmaster Profile

Lisa Loverde: Discovering Talent Through Toastmasters

When I tell people that Toastmasters has changed the course of my career, this bold statement of fact unwittingly draws attention. My audience is quizzical, but they want to know more. “How is that?” they ask, wondering how manual speech-giving led me to a professional speaking career. I respond, “I got involved, *really* involved... with the Toastmasters program, its members, leaders, mentors, contests, conferences, Speakers Bureau and, and, and... the list goes on.” In the past two years I have delivered 125 presentations to over 2,500 individuals, and I am just getting started!

My first Toastmasters experience came at the urging of my dear friend, Patti Berner. Patti said, “Lisa, you are the only person I know who can talk to anyone, at any time, about anything. Come and see what it’s all about. You *won’t* be disappointed.” Ironically, I was reluctant to attend because deep down, I feared opening the door of opportunity.

At that time I was a successful marketing professional and e-business owner with a master’s degree in marketing and communications. I loved to talk about advertising concepts and marketing strategy, and was able to attract new business with ease. I liked meeting clients and getting new business, but when it came time to do the work, a gnawing feeling crept into the pit of my stomach. I knew the work was something I was capable of doing, but not something I truly wanted to do. I wrestled with the fact that commanding high fees, satisfying clients and earning industry recognition did little to fulfill and challenge me. I questioned leaving the field, but if I did, what would I do next?

While I grappled with this question, I joined Extreme Toastmasters, a club that meets weekly in downtown Chicago. I found myself riveted by the club’s positive energy and impressive members. They were authors, professors, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and business professionals, each seeking to develop communication and leadership skills through the Toastmasters program.

The prospect of creating content and delivering speeches to educate, inform, inspire or entertain an audience intrigued me. So when I learned my best friend Patti had completed ten speeches in ten weeks, I followed suit.

For me, it felt natural to be in front of an audience and rewarding to see people entertained by what I had to say. After six speeches, I entered and won my first International contest at the club level. A few weeks later, I delivered my speech at the Area contest and was overwhelmed when an audience member approached me to request my coaching services. Moved by my presentation, she assumed I was a pro. Before I knew it, I was editing content and offering advice on speaking to high-level executives at a national conference. Within the week, I was on a plane to Scottsdale, Arizona, staying in a four-star hotel, and preparing to deliver a homegrown motivational speech at the end of my client’s program. The program resonated with the executives, and the experience led me to seriously consider a career in public speaking.

I returned to Chicago knowing that to be a professional speaker, I had to polish my skills on the platform. I decided I would speak as often as possible, and quickly began giving speeches once a week, if not more. I contacted local clubs and went on my own “Toastmasters Tour” where I spoke to unfamiliar audiences in unfamiliar places. Energized by this experience, I jumped at the chance to deliver an educational program at the District 30 Toastmasters Leadership Institute (TLI). I enjoyed developing a full hour of material, and I even hired a videographer to record this special event.

Around this time, the co-founders of Extreme Toastmasters, Patti Berner and Rocky Romero, challenged me to offer my own, all-day communications seminar. Their confidence in me and genuine interest in my success, prompted me to set a date, book a venue, develop print ads and launch a website to promote this event. They believed I was ready for prime time, and I was ready to put my skills to the test.

My seminar generated interest and soon attracted attendees. The 6-hour program proved to be a valuable yet tiring experience, and I learned that my energy as a sole presenter could not be sustained that length of time. I knew educating audiences expanded my skill set, so I continued to develop workshops but shortened the length of my programs to one hour.

I began marketing myself to corporations and associations, and presenting at special events. I followed the Golden Rule of successful speakers to never say no to an event, because you never know where that event may lead. I spoke at my high school, St. Ignatius College Prep, and was thrilled to deliver a motivational speech, titled “Celebrate Your Gifts!” which included personal stories, humor, singing... and stressed the importance of seeking our true purpose in life. I remember at the end of the program an individual asked if she could contact my staff to confirm my availability for a future event. As a sole proprietor and one-woman show, it was humbling to think that this early in my speaking career, someone would think so highly of my work that they assumed I had a staff working for me, and that my calendar was booked! Amazing.

I joined Toastmasters Speakers Bureau and attended networking events to promote the communication and presentation skills seminars I had developed; I also marketed myself by publishing articles on speaking, leadership and communication skills. I agreed to host and emcee events for the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO), the American Business Women’s Association (ABWA) and Business Marketing Association (BMA), and was proud to add Fortune 100’s Abbott Labs to my client list. I avoided defining my “niche” because I knew that for me, I had to experience the speaking field long enough to grasp how I might best apply my interests and talents.

I invested time in Extreme Toastmasters, giving a speech a week to earn my ATM-G/CL in less than 18 months. And I haven’t stopped yet: Over the last two years, I’ve won eight club-, area-, and division-level awards in the Humorous, Evaluation and International contests; given a keynote at a Toastmasters Leadership Institute; served as club President, Webmaster and Chief Information Officer, as well as Ambassador to First Lady, Sharon

Abayaseykara, during a District 30 Presidential Visit; and helped Extreme Toastmasters become the first out of 160 clubs in Chicagoland to achieve President's Distinguished status for 2006. All of this time and effort has helped me learn and grow as a speaker and a leader.

My commitment and involvement in Toastmasters has led me down a path to self-discovery. I learned that speaking is my passion, and that I must embrace every opportunity to share my gift with others. I enjoy using personal experience, humor and insight to engage and uplift audiences. Above all else, I want to use my talent to touch people's lives. I am grateful to Toastmasters for helping me discover where my talents lie, and for being such an extraordinary vehicle for personal and professional growth.

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Bio:

Lisa Loverde is a motivational speaker living in downtown Chicago. For more information, visit: www.lisaloverde.com or contact her at: info@lisaloverde.com