

13 steps

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, DTM, PDG, Accredited Speaker

The night was dark, raining, and the wind was howling. 13 steps, in a darkened outside entrance from the dimly lit parking lot, down into the basement meeting room. How did I know? I counted them as I went down, went back up, and, then, *screwed up* my courage and went back down again.

I descended slowly, hesitantly for the second time, reached out and nervously placed my hand on the door knob. My heart was pumping (fast ☺), my legs were shaky, and my breathing was short and labored. Was I making the right decision? What would I find on the other side of the door? Maybe I should just turn around and go home? How would I react? Would they like me, help me, or reject me? *"Ok, Hooey, go for it!"*

I put a *forced* smile on my face, turned the knob, and opened the door. I stood for a minute, took a deep breath, and stepped into **Toastmasters of Today! That first step that has taken me around the world sharing my message of hope and encouragement.** That one step made an amazing difference in my life, my leadership, and my career.

I remember my first visit that Tuesday night in April 1991. I was *nervous* and shy. Now, anyone who knows me will find that hard to believe. But, this was a scary moment for me. Frankly, I didn't feel very confident in myself or my abilities. Think back to your first visit to your Toastmasters club. Perhaps, like me, you felt a little nervous or intimidated by members who could get up and seemingly speak without notes or nervousness. I was there, reviving a dream of becoming a professional speaker and someday being able to travel the world, and inspiring and investing in the lives of those in the audience.

What I found at the bottom of those 13 steps was a supportive, friendly group of people who befriended me and became my champions, coaches, and cheerleaders; some of whom still play that role today.

- Perhaps you have had a similar experience as you began something?
- Perhaps you are feeling a bit shaky about starting down this path to being a better speaker or a more effective leader?
- Perhaps you have played a similar role in the growth of a Toastmaster member or business friend?

In 1998, I had the *distinct* privilege of walking across a Palm Desert, California stage to be inducted into the Toastmasters International Hall of Fame as the 48th professional level Accredited Speaker in our history.

In 2008, I had the *rare* privilege of keynoting the leadership luncheon at the Toastmasters International convention. As part of my introduction they played the video of me walking across that Palm Desert stage. My first words were, ***"I may have walked across that stage by myself... but I did not get there by myself!"***

- It took those first 13 steps, ***plus*** the loving, supportive investment of thousands of fellow Toastmasters and speaking colleagues over many years, to help move me successfully toward that goal.
- It took those first 13 steps to start me on the path to living my dream of travelling the world sharing ideas and challenging people to reach out and build foundations of success under their dreams. *I have now been a professional speaker for over 17 years and have been to 39 countries on 4 continents, so far.*

When I received **The Spirit of CAPS** award (the highest award in our Canadian speaking industry) at our 2011 Canadian Association of Professional Speakers convention in Toronto, I shared it with those in attendance. I emphasized that all the nice things our CAPS President mentioned in his introduction were not accomplished, "*by myself*". I simply asked for help, a lot, and got it. So can you!

Your dream may not be to become a professional speaker. But, if you have a desire to become a better, more confident speaker, or a more effective leader, Toastmasters is a great place to learn.

What is your next step?

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