

Rob Nickel Says He Is Going To Win World Championship Public Speaking Contest

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The next time you see Rob Nickel's name in print it will be announcing that he has won a world championship public speaking contest. The 35-year-old Clyde resident will give his winning speech later this month in Reno, Nevada competing against eight other champion Toastmasters from around the globe.

How is it possible to foretell the outcome? Because Rob says he is going to win, period. Is it just positive thinking? Is he psychic perhaps? No, just supremely confident without a modicum of doubt that the trophy will be his. After all, his public speaking prowess has grown by leaps and bounds since he joined the Grand River Chapter of Toastmasters only a year ago. His success at area, division, district and region competitions have brought him to the most challenging of all, the world championship. Americans usually win the title but Rob aims to change all that. Not since 1960 has a Canadian triumphed and Rob sees no reason why he will not be the newest Canadian public speaking 'king of the hill'.



WILL COMPETE IN WORLD TOASTMASTER COMPETITION – Rob Nickel of Clyde, poses with a few of the trophies he has accumulated since joining the Grand River Chapter of Toastmasters a year ago. Rob will compete against eight other toastmasters from around the globe in Reno, Nevada later this month.

Toastmasters International was founded in the early 1920s by an American who wanted to help people feel comfortable speaking in public. Since then it has grown to include thousands of members in 80 countries from American Samoa to Zimbabwe. Individuals who want to overcome their fear of being in front of an audience of any size are given the tools to become supremely confident doing just that. A large number of companies send employees to Toastmasters training to enhance their abilities in the workplace and improve their communications skills.

In the 20 years that the Grand River Chapter has been in existence no one has made it past the division level so "everybody at the club is pretty pumped," says Rob. They know that when he commits to something he does it "100 per cent" and no one will be surprised when he wins in Nevada. Rob has left no room for doubt, or doubting Thomases!

Part of the process is crafting your own speech with judges looking for originality and presentation. They will watch his inflection and note his pauses. They will listen to the content and judge his delivery. Does he bring just the right amount of enthusiasm, passion and humour or is it lacking depth and essence?

You can be taught the mechanics of public speaking but a champion brings something more to the table - an almost indefinable plus that sets him apart from the rest.

Rob has a vivid and colourful imagination - he looks at ordinary objects and circumstances from his own unique perspective, then inspiration and creativity begin to flow. Whether reaching back into his childhood or looking at a tree, Rob manages to find something wondrous worth talking about, to captivate an audience in approximately seven minutes.

If there is an enemy it is the time clock and honing the speech can be a tricky undertaking. Perhaps an audience will laugh in an unexpected place, or their laughter will not wane when Rob expects it to. He has to be ready for those eventualities. While focusing on his text he will also be aware of a green light going on when he has been speaking for five minutes, a yellow light at six and a red light at the seven-minute mark. Speaking under four-and-a-half or over seven-and-a-half minutes means immediate disqualification.

His timing will be affected by the size of the audience - the bigger the crowd, the longer the laughter. And in Reno there will be as many as three thousand people listening to him speak! Intimidating? Not when you're ready, and Rob is. As a matter of fact, he

can't wait. He much prefers speaking to large crowds and if anyone quakes at the thought, Toastmasters is the group that can help you get over it!

A novice Toastmaster has access to a variety of manuals from which to learn, from icebreaker speeches to TV interviews. There are various levels to aspire to and honours to attain. Whether you choose the speaking track or the leadership track, participants find exactly what they want and need to help attain their goals.

It is literally and figuratively, an education. "The way you word things really impacts an audience," Rob notes. "Every word counts and it's all in the way you set up a story." In Rob's presentation his audience can visualize what he is talking about and typically become emotionally involved in the content. "I write a neat speech," he says enthusiastically. As his audience pays attention to his talk the judges will officially be noting attitude, grammar, body language, delivery, voice inflection and importance and originality of the message.

Rob sees his performance as "a dialogue, not a monologue." He adds that "knowing that you're giving the audience a gift will take away your nervousness."

You can't be too ready for a competition of this calibre so Rob asked to be critiqued by 18 area Toastmasters clubs in preparation for the big day. He also listens intently to the opinions of his wife of 12 years. Rob says Kim is a very good judge, he values her evaluation and adds, "she's the coolest!" Daughters Georgia, 5 and Veda, 8, are also enthusiastic about their father's commitment to the goal he has set.

Discipline plays a key role in attaining the prize and Rob finds that jogging before a competition clears his mind and quells any qualms. It helps that one of his favourite pastimes is training for and competing in triathlons - running, biking and swimming!

When he has time Rob listens to all types of music and reads books on personal development. Family is paramount however and on that Rob has never wavered. He says he was raised with a good set of values and credits his late mother and his father Bob Nickel (also of Clyde) with teaching him life's most important lessons.

Rob was born in Cambridge and attended Glenview Park Secondary School before taking a Law and Security course at Conestoga College. He always wanted to be in police work and after graduating on a Friday became a member of the Ontario Provincial Police the following Monday.

Rob was 20 years old when he joined the OPP and at 23 he was a detective. He had attained the rank of detective-sergeant when he left the force after 14 years. Rob says he "knew it was time. I had some other things I had to do."

Undercover work was Rob's expertise and he loved "catching the bad guys" especially the pedophiles he busted, many from the Internet. When asked why he did not become jaded from dealing with the "disturbing stuff" Rob explained that it was all worth it if he could prevent one child from being abused or exploited. While other officers told Rob they could never do what he did his credo was "look at the good we're doing."

He had confidence in his abilities as a police officer, just as he has in his public speaking skills. He admits there is a fine line between confidence and cockiness but doesn't worry too much about what other people think. "I'm in control of my thoughts."

Rob wishes he had known about goal setting when he was in high school but has educated himself through books, audio aides and workshops. Making a difference may seem a trite phrase but it's what he intends to spend his life doing. Inspirational speakers have meant a lot to him and he hopes in turn to inspire others, showing them that goals are attainable and attitude is everything.

Rob says he still has a lot to learn, like everyone else he has bad days and sometimes he rubs people the wrong way and he knows it.

But life is good. Rob has a family he adores and since leaving the police force a year and a half ago has done consulting work in computer technology and established Nickel Concepts, a successful business in multimedia production and web design.

He says that his definition of success is being happy no matter what you're doing, and adds that doing what you love to do is a big part of it. He never wants to look back and say "I wish I had done that." Risk taking is all a part of the process.

He's taking a big risk by declaring himself the winner even before the competition. But that's who Rob is. By his own definition, already a success.

Winning the world championship of Toastmasters will be icing on the cake.