

## **My Icebreaker**

*By Patti Baumgartner*

I am quite familiar with speaking in front of an audience. I earn most of my living by traveling all over the United States teaching at seminars for Health Care Professionals. I have lectured to as many as 200 technologists at a time! Public Speaking is not a terrifying experience for me.

That is until I joined Toastmasters. As my “Ice-Breaker speech approached I suddenly realized I had no idea how to approach giving any kind of speech that was not technically oriented. It was samples and handouts that were important, presentation skills were secondary, maybe not even necessary.

In Toastmasters I had to watch my “Ahs” and “You knows”. My fellow Toastmasters were going to evaluate me on my vocal variety and speed of speaking. I can no longer just hide behind the podium in a darkened room and point at slides. I have to stand up in front of my audience and FACE THEM! I was terrified.

I thought about dropping out. After all it was only a few dollars invested in dues. I had only attended a four or five meetings, maybe I wouldn’t be missed. I felt sure that I could find something else to do for an hour on Tuesdays. But, alas pride made me “go for it”. So with fear and trepidation in my heart, and a full complement of butterflies in my stomach, I did my “Ice-Breaker” speech.

When it was over no one threw anything at me or booed; I didn’t faint or forget too many points. I had survived the ordeal. After I sat down, my heart started to beat again and I could breath. Then came the evaluations. My heart pounded and my hands started to shake. I need not have worried. My club members were kind and fair in their evaluations. They pointed out good points and offered ways to improve.

I have reached speech number 7 in the Competent Communicator book, and have done several “table topic” speeches. Once I even entered a speech contest! I still get butterflies, but now they fly in formation. .