

AREA 10 INTERVIEW SERIES – Cynthia Widlitze, Totally Toastmasters, Covington

*Question 1: What made you seek out Toastmasters International (TI)?*

It was a change in career that prompted me to inquire about TI. I wanted to make sure that I was comfortable and well versed speaking in front of larger groups of people. At first, I looked into Toastmasters and National Speakers' Association. When I met Jeff [Harris, Past District 68 Director] over coffee, I gained tremendous insight into Toastmasters in a short period of time. There was this 'aha' moment of, "You don't know what you don't know."

*Question 2: When did you go to your first meeting?*

My first meeting was in February or March 2016. It was either Totally or Northshore Toastmasters. I had asked Jeff [Harris], "What about a morning group?!" That was how Totally Toastmasters moved their meetings to 7:15 AM the first and third Friday of each month. It is not that I am a morning person by nature; I learned from personal development audios, that our brain works better in the morning. It took a while for me to get into the discipline of making myself get up and get on the treadmill every morning, and I still need an alarm clock.

*Question 3: How did you know Toastmasters was for you?*

First, there is the personal growth aspect; it is not just about public speaking. Before you know it, you are more comfortable [speaking in front of people]. It is about constantly challenging yourself. We make a commitment to be open, honest and direct with each other, since the intention of everyone in the club is to personally grow and develop our communication skills.

*Question 4: Which part of the Toastmasters program is your favorite, and why?*

How we encourage participation in the meetings, both from guests and ourselves – I like that we have the opportunity to stretch ourselves a bit. We are also building personal relationships in the process.

*Question 5: Why did you become an officer? -And which officer role?*

Jeff [Harris] persuaded me to use my sales skills for the Vice President of Public Relations (VPPR) role. This was in July last year, three or four months after I joined the club. Being an officer gives you a different perspective on TI. I don't want to spread myself too thin this year, as I have just started my own consulting business and devote a great deal of time to my work.

The VPPR role is a good way to learn using social media. I always used to mention TI when the Chamber [St Tammany West Chamber of Commerce] had Business-2-Business networking meetings. Through this we [Totally Toastmasters] acquired three new members.

We recently had another member join the club, he had had a break of 16 years from TI. He did a speech called "*Why join Toastmasters again?*" which actually contained good PR material!

*Question 6: Have you tried participating in competitions? If not, do you intend to do so?*

I have not yet competed, although I considered participating in the Area Evaluation Contest. There is no doubt about the benefit. I don't see myself as a very competitive person though – I want to focus on my business; once it is up and running, say, in one year, I may reconsider competing.

*Question 7: What goals have you already achieved with Toastmasters?*

I am much better equipped to prepare a presentation. The manuals for Toastmasters teach us a great deal; how to do your research, how to organize your speech, and how quickly five minutes passes!

*Question 8: How are you going to apply your Toastmasters skills to the launch of your new business?*

Initially, I reached out, on a pro bono basis, to groups such as Professional Women's groups, Rotary clubs and Kiwanas (public speaking AND community service). I was invited, and was the speaker, at a Rotary club already. I can use some of the material from my speeches that I gave in my Club, and other material from sales training from previous work, for these presentations. I have 30+ years of experience in sales and business management, and my business, Adduco Consulting, is sales and business consulting service. My years of experience, and now the new skills I have learned through Toastmasters, allow me to be a tremendous resource to other businesses in helping them create more success.

*Question 9: What is your hardest goal with Toastmasters? Note: Here I mean YOUR goal, not necessarily an achievement from the program (e.g. Speechcraft or Distinguished Toastmaster).*

By end of 2017 I would like to speak in front of business people where I get to prepare a presentation. The presentation should last for approximately 60 minutes, and the audience would have 30-50 people.

*Question 10: If you intend to use your Toastmasters skills in a competitive (and not necessarily supportive) business environment, how do you best prepare for the transition?*

First, it is not about me, it is about my audience. I would do a little bit more than expected, and make a conscious effort to receive any feedback remembering that, "*It is not personal.*"

*Question 11: Which Toastmaster has inspired you the most to date?*

Jeff [Harris] is inspiring in his Jeff way! He continues to be so much for this Club, and for the District. I still don't understand when he finds the time to his J-O-B.