

RAMONA J. SMITH

CHAMPIONSHIP SPEECH

BREAKDOWN

Speech Transcript:

Life will sometimes feel like a fight.

The **punches, jabs, hooks** will come in the form of **challenges, obstacles, and failures**. Yet if **you** stay in the ring, and learn from those past fights, at the end of each round, **you'll be still standing**.

Mr. Contest Chair, **fellow fighters...** [H]

Can **you** think of a time when life tried to knock **you** down? Who was **your** toughest opponent? [Q]x2

Most often **our** most challenging opponent is **ourselves**.

Round 1...College. [SM]

I dropped outta college, not one, not two, not three, but four times. **I** told **myself** college isn't for **me** and **I** would never go back.

Round 2...Marriage. [SM]

I married **my** soulmate. The love of **my** life. **My** best friend. **And he was fine, too.** [PD]

We were married for eight **long, beautiful, amazing months**. **You** heard right, months, not years.

It was like immediately after **we** said “I do,” the heavyweight champion came in and delivered an electrifying knockout blow to **our** vowels, BOOM! Divorced.

Round 3...Speaking. [R3] [SM]

In 2015 **I** competed for the first time in the International Speech Contest. **I** won at the club level, **I** won at the Area level, **I** won at the Division level, then the District level was on the way, **I** was on the road, **I** was on fire, **I** was unstoppable...**I** lost.

I was crushed.

After going **3 rounds** and taking hit, after hit, **I** was ready to throw in the towel. **I** was down for the count, **6, 7, 8...**

When was the last time life knocked...**you**...down? Who was that lifeline that **you** reached out to, to help **you** stand back up? Was it **your** family, **your** friends, or did **you** hold onto **your** faith? [R3]x2 [Q]x3 [CB]

Maybe **you've** never been knocked down, but **you've** seen one of **your** family members take a devastating blow? Were **you** the lifeline that they were reaching out to, to help them stand back up? Were **you** the coach in the corner saying, “**Get up! Get up, stand up!**”? [Q]x3 [SM]

As **I** gathered all the strength within **myself**, to pick **myself** back up, stand, instead of looking into a mirror of defeat it became a window of possibilities.

I got back in the ring. [SM]

I went back to college. **I** got **my** degree and **I** graduated Magna Cum Laude. Yeah! After failing four times **I** was **still standing**. [R3] [CB]x2

After **my** loss at the District level, **I'm** speaking to **you** from the World Championship stage. It's a moment. Thank you. Thank you. [CB] [SM]

Even after suffering loss, **I'm still standing**. [CB] [SM]

As for **my** marriage, **I'm** still in training. **I** have not yet found Mr. Right. But this is an international convention, and there are thousands of men from hundreds of different countries. So **single Toastmasters**, call **me**. [H]x4 [CB] [SM]x3

Even after **my** divorce, **I'm still standing.** [CB] [ST]

My challenge to **you** is to stay in the ring. Whether **you're** a fighter, or a coach. If **you're** on the side of the ring, coaching, or if **you're** in that ring, throwin' **those jabs and those hooks**. When that final bell rings, **DING, DING, DING**, the fighters and the coaches will raise their hands in victory singing, "I'm **still standin'**, **yeah, yeah, yeah.**" [CB] [SM]

We're still standing...(audience: "Yeah, yeah, yeah.")...**Very nice.**

Stay in that ring, and even after **you** take a few hits, use what **you** learn from those previous fights and at the end of each round **you'll** remain **still standing.** [CB]

Mr. Contest Chair.

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 563

Speech Length: 7:13

Title: Still Standing

Click [here](#) to watch the speech.

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 11**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **1.52 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **51.2 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

First laugh came at **0:45** of the speech.

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 7**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: **“Still Standing”**

“Still Standing” also happened to be the title of the speech, so the audience heard it 2 times before Ramona said a word.

There were also other *related* phrases in the speech (not counted in the total):

- “...*stand back up?*” – x 2
- “*Get up! Get up! Stand up!*” – x 1
- “...*pick myself back up, stand*” – x 1

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 29**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal). Talking *to* the audience will be more “you/your” focused. This could mean abstract ideas, “imagine this...” hypotheticals, concepts that describe how something works, etc. Those will naturally use more “you/your” words.

- **“I” or “Me” or “My” or “Myself” - x 42**

The original reason for tracking this stat was the thought that it might be useful to compare with the amount of “You” focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

The theory was, if this number was much greater than “You” focused words, it would show that the speaker was more “*me, me, me*” focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I've found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told.

**The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **“Ladies and Gentlemen” or “My Friends” [MF] - x 2**

The speaker used “*Fellow Fighters*” and “*Single Toastmasters*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 1**

Descriptive physical characteristics of people and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene.

Describing complex processes may also be included since they are intended to make it easier for the audience to imagine.

Physical in this case is what was heard, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that “*We were at my house*” is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically as well as anything that felt cliché.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 10**

Humorous and other. It's common for speakers to derive humor from callbacks to *something* or *someone* from the speech journey. Foundational phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well.

The idea of a callback is to move on from “it” (the eventual callback) so the audience is no longer thinking about it, and then later call it back so it's an “A HA!” moment of familiarity. For that reason, only *some* of the Foundational Phrases were included, and some were not. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases that *were* included from the Callback total, there were **5** callbacks.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 12**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for [comedic](#) effect or not.

It's common to see the Rule of Three used all at once in a single sentence such as, “*He was smart, funny, and handsome.*” In this speech Ramona did use it in that manner, but she also used it in a different, more subconscious way as well.

Here are some examples:

- 3 rounds to signify her 3 struggles

- Listing in threes: “*The punches, jabs, hooks will come in the form of challenges, obstacles, and failures.*”
- The bell ring: “*Ding, Ding, Ding!*” and when she was giving herself the boxing count she counted only three times (“6, 7, 8...”)

- **Questions [Q] - x 8**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not).

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. However, even benign questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as “My Friends” or “Ladies and Gentlemen” does.

When she asked questions, she did it in bunches. Early in the speech after greeting the Contest Chair and the audience, she asked two questions back to back. Then, later she asked six straight questions.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 4**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker’s point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker’s life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These help to prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- **Stories [ST] - x 1**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may be slightly exaggerated, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else’s. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales or things like “Imagine you are...”

In this speech there was 1 story (perhaps a “journey” might be a better word).

- **Stage Movement [SM] - x 11**

This section covers how many times the speaker moved to a different place on the stage during the speech. Minor movements for in-story character changes (for dialogue) or for small side steps for illustrating points or addressing different parts of the audience will not be counted. I’ll also keep track of anything else that’s notable about the speaker’s stage movements.

****Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.*

Observations:

- **Customary handshake with Contest Chair:** She didn't shake the hand of the Contest Chair before beginning the speech. Not a huge deal, but in the International Speech Contest, and Toastmasters in general, shaking the hand of the Toastmaster or Contest Chair at the beginning *and* the end of the speech is tradition.
- **Timing Note:** It's important to know that timing of the speech does not begin exclusively with the speaker's first word. As soon as Ramona got to the stage, she began making audible noises (excited laughter) and according to the rules, it's at that moment that timing begins.

Here is what the [Toastmasters rulebook](#) states in regards to timing: *Timing will begin with the contestant's first definite verbal or nonverbal communication with the audience. This usually will be the first word uttered by the contestant, but would include any other communication such as sound effects, a staged act by another person, etc.*

If she didn't enter with laughter, she would have freed up about 9 seconds on her total speech time. Doesn't seem like a ton of time, but 9 seconds added to a few past champions would have been enough to disqualify them.

- **Stage Backdrop Distracting:** This was not related to Ramona or her speech, but boy was the backdrop cheesy and a bit distracting.
- **Props:** She used a white handkerchief (*or* towel) to signify "throwing in the towel." It was relevant to the theme of her speech, but it seemed like it was used merely to check it off the judges' scoresheet.
- **Voice:** Her voice was confident and pleasant to listen to. She had good cadence, good mix of ups and downs, upped the volume when needed, and was overall easy to listen to. One knock was that at times she spoke crawlingly slow, particularly in the beginning. I think that time could have been donated to a story or two (more on that later).
- **Facial Expressions/Non-verbal Communication:** Her impression of getting hit by punches was well done. Other non-verbal things I liked were her facial expressions after the joke about being "still in training" and also her waving, pointing, and use of the "call me" gesture. They felt natural.
- **Structure:** The structure was straightforward and simple. It was easy to follow as she went through her "Rounds" to transition into her main points, and that kept things organized. She linked her theme to boxing/fighting which also made it easy to follow.
- **Order of Resolutions:** The resolutions to each of her Rounds (1, 2, and 3) were not in the same order in which they were presented.

She introduced her struggles in this order: School/Divorce/Public speaking. When she came back to resolve them, she presented them in this order: School/Public Speaking/Marriage.

This is merely an observation and I believe this was the perfect choice. Here's why:

- 1) The resolution to the marriage part ended up being the most humorous part of the entire speech and she saved it for last.
 - 2) It made it funnier because it was unexpected. She set it up with two predictable resolutions and then hit them with the funny misdirection. They were probably expecting something like, "*I met my new husband when I went back to school*" or "*I met my current husband in the Toastmasters Speech Contest*" or something like that...
 - 3) The order of when they happened in her life is likely in the order she introduced them, but since it technically wasn't resolved (she was still single) it makes sense to mention it last.
- **Stage Movement:** Her stage movement was about as basic and fundamental as you can do. She introduced her 3 challenges and she moved to a different part of the stage for each. She also moved on the stage when she told of how she overcame them, not necessarily the same exact position on the stage as when she first introduced them, but that was idea. Simple, basic, predictable, fundamental and I didn't mind one bit. It made it easy to keep track of them.
 - **Foundational Gesture?** She did a gesture when she'd say, "*Still Standing.*" She'd move her right arm down to her side and open her palm after saying "Still," and then her left palm after saying "Standing." It wasn't a very distinct gesture like [Lance Miller](#) or [Manoj Vasudevan](#) did in their speeches, but it was used consistently each time she said her Foundational Phrase.
 - **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** There were no external gurus in the speech. Her failures/challenges that she mentioned were ultimately the teaching moments. The closest she got to referencing what her "learning" experience was, was at the end of the speech when she said this: "*Stay in that ring, and even after you take a few hits, use what you learn from those previous fights and at the end of each round you'll remain still standing.*" No coach helped her, there was no specific moment or person who may have said something to her on her journey that helped her. Based on what we know from the speech, it was all her and/or her ability to learn from mistakes.
 - **Side Characters:** Her ex-husband was the only side character. Side characters are part of the stories but don't directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn't a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story.
 - A Guru is someone or something in the speech that teaches the speaker (and ultimately the audience) something meaningful. As a speaker, you don't want to be the wise Guru. You want to be the dolt who learns from the guru(s), and that's who end up teaching the audience as well. **Tip:** Self-deprecation can be an important element in allowing the guru to shine.
 - **Audience Affinity:** Having something in common with the audience is one way to automatically build rapport. The fact that she was speaking in the Toastmasters contest, which is an organization that most of the audience belongs to, is affinity in and of itself, but that presents an opportunity for all speakers in the contest to make use of. In this speech, Ramona used "speaking" as one of the life struggles she had to overcome. It was relevant and understood by this audience.
 - **Audience Participation:** There were a few ways she got the audience to participate in the speech. There was humor, she received an applause for her accomplishments, and a portion of the

audience sang the 2nd half of the song “*Yeah, Yeah, Yeah.*” I thought the congratulatory applause from the audience was an interesting way to get the audience to participate. Well, perhaps *risky* is a better word for it, but it worked.

- **Surprise Participation?** She seemed half-surprised that the audience finished her song at the end (“*Yeah, yeah, yeah*”). It seems like she did *want* them to do that, but she didn’t seem to fully commit to trying to get them to. It was like a “maybe” gesture to the audience as well as changing the lyrics to be more inclusive (“*We’re*” instead of “*I’m*”). She was prepared to move on without it, which is smart, but she lucked out...or perhaps she brought a lot of supporters from her home Toastmasters club and that was their cue? Who knows!?
- **Letting the Audience Laugh:** After her marriage training joke, she did a great job of letting the audience laugh. Instead of talking over them she did little facial expressions which felt very organic and allowed the audience to continue laughing. That showed a lot of poise and awareness to be able to hold back her next words.
- **Call-to-Action:** Ramona used a direct Call-to-Action when she said, “*My challenge to you is to stay in the ring.*” Though not unheard of, it is rare to see it used in this way, at least not in the championship speeches I’ve delved into. The Call-to-Actions are usually more subtle and stem from the learning moment in the speech.
- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** A common theme I’ve noticed in championship speeches is to open with something and then later close by circling back to it, or to “tie up the loose end.”

In this speech, she opened with this line: “*The punches, jabs, hooks will come in the form of challenges, obstacles, and failures. Yet if you stay in the ring, and learn from those past fights, at the end of each round, you’ll be still standing.*”

She closed on this line: “*Stay in that ring, and even after you take a few hits, use what you learn from those previous fights and at the end of each round you’ll remain still standing.*”

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Theatrical:** There were parts that felt overly theatrical. Her depiction of taking hits was well done but there were other parts, for example, when she knelt over, did some heavy breathing, and then “picked herself back up.” That was a little much. Other examples were when she threw in the towel, the boxing count coupled with hunching over and breathing heavily, and the part where she sang (I’ll cover that below). They seemed forced to me. If she was giving a speech about an actual boxing match where she physically struggled to get back up, perhaps that would make more sense.
- **Singing:** The first thing I’ll mention is that I didn’t know if she was simply singing her Foundational Phrase or if she was singing a famous song. I had to look it up to know that it was a song by Elton John.

Apart from her having a pretty darn good singing voice, I didn't feel there was any reason to add singing to *this* speech. Her story wasn't about her love of music, or wanting to become a singer, or music teacher, etc. In contrast, the 2002 Public Speaking Champ, [Dwayne Smith](#), gave his winning speech that was called *Music In The Key of Life*. He sang in his speech, too, but it absolutely made sense (off topic and a bit self-serving (*hehe*), but Dwayne Smith had some good things to say about my [book](#)).

I'll admit that while I was working on Ramona's breakdown, I did catch myself singing that part aloud. So hey, it helped implant the Foundational Phrase into my head! But I wonder if it was because I watched the speech over 30 times and read the transcript at least that much...

- **Grammar?** There were some potential grammar issues. Sentence example: "...at the end of each round, you'll be still standing." You'll *still be standing* sounds better to me. And the final sentence was odd, too, "Stay in that ring, and even after you take a few hits, use what you learn from those previous fights and at the end of each round you'll remain still standing." Is the word "still" redundant since remain is used before it?
- **Incongruent:** She posed the following question to the audience: "Who was that lifeline that you reached out to, to help you stand back up?"

I found it odd because it had zero relevance to her own speech since she didn't mention that anyone had helped her. On the same note, the notion of coaching another didn't apply to her story, either. It seemed like a late addition to her speech during the contest in order to have a more universal appeal.

- **Me Focused?** There were a couple times that the audience patted her on the back for some of her accomplishments, such as graduating college and making it to the championship stage. Ramona encouraged it as well when she said triumphantly, "Yeah!" and "Thank you, thank you."

This may sound cynical, but I didn't feel like this speech was geared toward giving the audience help or hope; it felt like a showcase of her accomplishments with a thin veneer of usefulness for the audience.

There was an [awkward moment](#) when she said that she graduated college. The audience didn't know whether to keep listening or to applaud in adulation for the accomplishment. A similar [awkwardness](#) occurred when she pointed out that despite losing at the district, she was now at the big stage.

- **Excess:** Even though the speech had an extremely low-word count, the speech still had its excesses. The amount of words in the speech (563) is low compared to previous champions (Dananjaya Hettiarachchi, 2014 and Darren Tay, 2016, both had 878 words), so it's odd that I'm advocating the removal of even more.

In one example, she said the following:

"My challenge to you is to stay in the ring. Whether you're a fighter, or a coach. If you're on the side of the ring, coaching, or if you're in that ring, throwin' those jabs and those hooks. When that final bell rings, DING, DING, DING, the fighters and the coaches will raise their hands in victory singing, "I'm still standin', yeah, yeah, yeah."

She didn't need one or the other of the underlined sentences since they said the same exact thing. Or, perhaps it could have been condensed to this: *"Whether you're on the side of the ring, coaching, or if you're in that ring, throwin' those jabs and those hooks."*

Then, when she asked the audience...

"When was the last time life knocked...you...down? Who was that lifeline that you reached out to, to help you stand back up? Was it your family, your friends, or did you hold onto your faith? Maybe you've never been knocked down, but you've seen one of your family members take a devastating blow? Were you the lifeline that they were reaching out to, to help them stand back up? Were you the coach in the corner saying, "Get up! Get up, stand up!"?"

After asking when the last time the audience was knocked down, her immediate follow-up question was about who had helped them stand back up. I found that to be incongruent to her own story as mentioned in a previous section. In the speech there was no discernable person/figure that helped her stand back up. Not family, not friends, not faith, not *anyone*.

She then floated the alternative that if the audience member wasn't the one who suffered a setback in life, then perhaps someone in their life that did reach out to them for help. Again, this is unrelated to her speech journey since she did not help anyone, nor did anyone help her.

Then, there was this line near the beginning of the speech: *"Most often our most challenging opponent is ourselves."*

There was never any follow up to this line. I can conclude from the examples she provided of how life knocked her down (dropping out of college, divorce, and losing in a speech contest) that they were due to her own doing, but I didn't get that impression after listening to the speech. It seemed like a cliché that made it into the speech.

- **Wimpy Conflict:** I didn't get a sense of a serious conflict or struggle. This is not to say that her ACCOMPLISHMENTS were not a big deal. What I mean is, her roadblocks to achieving them felt non-existent and therefore lacked any real drama.

It had nothing to do with the events (graduating, divorce, and public speaking) since you can make a good conflict out of plenty of lesser things as long as you have the right context. But there was ZERO context for these struggles. For instance, why did she drop out? What changed between the first 4 times she dropped out? What caused the divorce? In a speech contest, you can certainly lose. How is that a struggle, though?

Not to mention it was her very first contest, so if anything, that should be a SUCCESS to get to the District contest. I think her audience likely felt the same because when she said that she lost, much of the audience laughed thinking she was making light humor of it (see [here](#)).

That's exactly what I did the first time joining the speech contest, and funny enough in the same year as her, in 2015. I made it to and lost at the District contest, but I didn't feel bummed or that I was wronged. I was more excited to have made it that far to be honest, and to me, it just meant that to win I would need to improve on many things (I even did a [breakdown of my speech](#)).

Another note about her struggle of losing at the speech contest. It would have been helpful to know when she originally joined Toastmasters and whether the fear of public speaking was an

issue for her even before deciding to enter the contest. If that was her first year joining Toastmasters and she was already in competitive mode, this tells me that overcoming the fear of public speaking was not much of an issue. Without knowing when she joined, however, it only allows for speculation.

- **Stories:** A story can include the wider overall picture that makes up a longer journey, but a good story should consist of at least one “close-up” (magnifying glass on a single moment). Usually this will include another character to provide some sort of interaction or relationship.

When I first went through this speech, my first thought was that there were NO stories at all.

She basically rattled off some footnotes from her life. Dropped out of college. Got a divorce after eight months. Lost in District speech contest. And the closest thing to there being another character was her ex-husband. But then again, he was there but just barely—no physical description apart from “...*he was fine, too.*” There were no specific details about him that humanized him. He felt invisible or imaginary.

Overall, it felt that the entire world she presented in her speech was a ghost town that consisted of only her, and things happened in a vacuum.

I am torn over whether to consider anything a story, but I guess when looking at the speech with a wide-angle lens, all those events ultimately tell *her* story, albeit a single story with blurry details.

One story is perfectly fine, but it should have substance. I won't remember this speech for its stories, and if I'm honest, apart from her stage presence and charisma, and I suppose the fact that I did a breakdown of it, I don't think I'll remember this speech a year from now.