TOASTMASTER SPEECH

FOR

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Hello ladies and gentlemen. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with all of you about a simple yet powerful revelation I recently had, and it involves a simple rope! What is more basic than this? (**Show the plain rope**) It is not much in its simplest form, but yet it is still an essential component as a “building block of life.” It’s a vital element used in construction, when tossed to a drowning person, it can serve as a lifeline, and when necessary, it can function to tie almost anything together. Inspired by this simple object, as we live our lives, we notice that there is a common thread, or to be a bit more obvious, a common **rope** that joins event to event, point to point, each serving to create our unique paths in life. Major incidents and crises form knots in that rope, and we can tend to regard those knots as stopping points, or we can consider them as reinforcements-think of those twists and turns in life, and yes, those knots strengthen that rope and provide the supportive lessons we need to learn in order to lead a sustainable and worthwhile existence. It has been said, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade!” I say, “When life hands you a rope, make some knots and build a lifeline!” (**Show the rope triumphantly and encourage applause**).

We start out as children with a more delicate version of this rope. It may be softer and more supple, like a cotton laundry line, but as we mature, the rope becomes stronger and more able to endure tests of strength and endurance. Some may look at the challenges we face as obstacles. I choose to look at them as **opportunities**. (**Loosely demonstrate making your first knot**) With each test, a knot forms on my “Rope of Life,” and each twist provides new perspective, (**Twist the rope and show the knot at different angles**) new insights, and new ways of dealing with “**knotty problems**.” I’m sure each one of you can think of several crises you’ve faced. Let me see a show of hands. How many of you have had problems? Great! That’s unanimous! Now that I can see we all understand this concept, I’d like to give you some examples to illustrate my point.

When I was younger, I had a fairly bad memory, but I will never forget the first knot that was formed in my rope of life when I was nine years old. I presented my primary school final examinations results to my father, and he just fell down to the chair-yes, thank goodness the chair was well positioned!! His knees were not weakened from happiness. On the contrary, he was stunned by my low marks in history and geography. As the knots formed in my stomach from anxiety, it also made the first bend in my rope. I knew then that I would either have to work on sharpening my comprehension and memory skills or risk losing many opportunities as I became an adult. I chose to learn. (**Tie the first knot**)

I studied harder than ever. I got vastly improved scores of 98.5 and 100 … yes, it’s true! I went on to attend computer science university. I realized that the first knot I “earned” originally presented itself as adversity, but it taught me an essential life lesson.

At university, I met a wonderful girl who I thought was the love of my life. We had an amazing relationship and got engaged. We were together for three years, but apparently if something is **NOT** meant to be.. It ends. I thought we would “**tie the knot**,” but apparently I wasn’t specific enough when I visualized that action and our life together. It was a devastating time in my life; its calling card was the next knot in my rope. (**Tie the next knot**)

I knew I had to change my focus and start fresh. Although I managed to fill my time and cure my depression while working in Egypt, and I was very comfortable in my career at the time, I knew that true growth is found outside the comfort zone. I accepted a job in Qatar, and for 5 years my life was challenging and amazing, all at the same time. And then…. (**Stomp your foot really loud**) as if a clap of thunder invaded my life, a former employee from that company returned as my manager. How can I describe the living hell I faced under his direction? I know! It was a **LIVING HELL**. No more creativity. No more opportunity to share thoughts. It was his way or the highway and although my friends encouraged me to leave, I had just received a promotion and was determined to make the best out of the situation. I wanted to learn the lesson life had presented to me. I know there is an expression that goes, “Give someone enough **rope** and he will hang himself.” At this point you can appreciate my affinity for this metaphor, but with regard to my Hellish work situation, I chose to keep my rope, (**tie the next knot**) observe my newest knot, and thank the universe for another valuable life lesson. I stayed for one year but I knew there was no room for growth, so I resigned and made my way to a new corner of the world.

Yes. That’s how I got to Slovakia, and believe me, it’s my pleasure to be here. I love it!! I love the country, the people, the cold weather, and even the snow-as long as I am not driving!! I love the Slovak language as well, but remember that first knot? Well, my questionable memory comes back to haunt me as I push myself to learn this great language! I wind up buying things I don’t need and eating food I don’t recognize because I can’t get too far with “Yes,” “Sure,” and “Of course!!” (**say this with enthusiasm**) Time to **“UZOL**” in the **“LANO!!!”** (**uzol means tie a knot and lano means rope according to what I just looked up. If it’s wrong, it will be even funnier**) (**Wait for the laugh while tying the next knot)**

Ladies and gentlemen, throughout my speech I spoke of the knottiness of life, but the real lesson I’ve learned is one of perspective and perception. As I recalled those awkward or painful incidents, I realized I had a choice. I could either be a victim of the rope, or I could learn to work with the knots. I chose to be positive (**Reveal the ladder**). I’ve earned that it’s the crises in life that offer us the most support. My poor performance in school taught me to work harder. That led to my achievement at University and meeting my ex-fiancée. That failed relationship propelled me to a successful and global career. Working with my miserable manager taught me diplomacy in the workplace, and all of my trials brought me to this wonderful place. I no longer have a simple rope. I have a ladder to support me and lift me through all of the adventures that come my way through life. “**KNOT”** bad, eh? (**Wait for the laugh**).

Thank you all!!! (**if you want to say “thank you” in Slovak and you don’t know the phrase, I think it is ďakujem**).