

Make that toast awesome

By Kellie Sites

Every month I think about what to write. Sometimes I think I may have already covered a certain topic, so please forgive me if I've covered this ground before.

Since there is always a reason to give a toast, I wanted to help us out with some helpful hints on how to give a toast... not just any old toast, but an awesome toast. I started thinking about how meaningful it is and decided to check the internet for some advice. The following article is so good that I decided to just use it! Whether you use the advice in full or not, I think that there's something you could use. Giving toasts is one of my favorite things to do – they help make life grand. Cheers! Kellie

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How to Give an Awesome Toast

Someone's getting married. Someone has a big birthday. Someone got a promotion. ...and you've been asked to give a toast. I want to teach you how to give an awesome toast.

Please don't blow it.

I'm at that wonderful time in a person's life where wedding invitations roll in on a weekly basis, friends land awesome new jobs and baby bumps are announced regularly. This means I sit through a lot of toasts...

Toasts that are too long.

Toasts that are horribly inappropriate.

Toasts that fall flat.

And occasionally, very rarely, like as often as I floss (2x per year right before the dentist), I hear a toast that BLOWS ME AWAY.

A great toast is an event game-changer. People perk up in their seats, guests put away their phones, jovial back slapping and glass clinking increases three-fold. Oh ya, and the toaster? They become a celebrity. If you ever want 15 minutes of fame, set yourself up to give an awesome toast.

Here's what will happen: You will put down the microphone and *everyone*, especially Grandma Dee, will want to talk to you. Uncles and college roommates alike generously will offer to buy you a drink at the all-inclusive bar. The videographer will grant you an exclusive interview and follow you around for a good portion of the evening until you tell

them that you want to eat your surf and turf in private. The waiters will wink at you, the bartender will give you an extra cherry and the guest of honor (whoever you toasted) will gush and cry and thank you profusely for making them look good.

Bottom Line: Giving a great toast is a gift.

Your amazing toast is a gift to the person you love. It's a gift to the audience desperate for some entertainment and, sure, it's pretty fun to be a rock star for the evening.

After listening to literally hundreds of toasts, I have identified the patterns that differentiate the suck-worthy from the award-winning.

Before diving in, be sure to:

- Bookmark this page for future use. <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/how-to-give-an-awesome-toast/>
- Send it to your friend who has a toast coming up.
- Share it on Facebook to increase the chances of someone in your life giving you an awesome toast.

The Perfect Toast

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The best toasts follow the same basic structure. When you pull out a blank piece of paper to jot down some ideas, do it in the following format:

The Hook:

People decide if they like your toast within the first seven seconds. If you don't hook your audience immediately, you will lose them.

The biggest mistake toasters make is: Starting with "I," "me" or "my."

- I have known ____ for 5 years...
- My name is ____.
- Me and ____ met back in college.

I'm going to be frank: No one cares about you, your history or your relationship to the guest of honor—at least not yet. Everyone is gathered for the toastee (the person you are toasting) and that is who they want to hear about. They want to hear embarrassing stories, secrets and funny tidbits. So, give them what they want. And do it quickly.

Think of your audience like a hungry, hungry toddler. They are starving and you have to give them a little bit to nibble on before you put on their bib and strap them into their high chair. When toasting, you do this with your hook.

The hook is a one to three line description of the toastee. It should be juicy, funny or mysterious. This is the first line of your speech. Let's say the person you are toasting is named Spencer. Fill in the blank:

- Spencer is ____.
- Tonight you will learn why Spencer ____.
- The best story I have about Spencer starts with ____.

Examples:

- Spencer is the person you call when you have locked yourself out of your dorm bathroom without clothes. Not only will she bring you a towel and a spare key, she also will keep your secret until you spill it at her wedding.
- Tonight you will learn why Spencer always was called Mini-Mom. She carries snacks in her purse, has a first aid kit on hand at all times and is extremely good at letting you know when you broke a rule.
- The best story I have about Spencer starts with an outdoor toilet. I knew we would be best friends when she was the only person waiting in line at the concert Porta Potties who would give me some of her extra toilet paper. THAT is the definition of true sharing—Mrs. Jones you taught her well.
This hook warms the audience up to you and gives them a promise of salacious and amusing stories ahead.

The Background:

Once you have hooked the audience, you do have to give them some background on *why* you're giving a toast in the first place. By now, they are moderately intrigued and want some context. **HOWEVER**, there is a right and wrong way to give background.

Don't:

- Don't waste the opportunity for a good joke.
- Don't skim over the delicious details.
- Don't make it sound like everyone else's.

Do:

- Punch up the context.
- Keep it short.
- Cue up a story to come later.

For example, you often hear people say, "I met the groom as a freshman in college and we were roommates for three years." Or, "I'm the maid of honor and the bride's little sister." **BORING!** Try this instead:

- The groom was the first friendly face I saw during freshman orientation at Emory University. Little did we know that we would end up rooming together for the next three years.
- I am Spencer's little sister, maid of honor, part-time slave and chocolate cookie sharer.
- Spencer and I have worked together for the last five years and, as you will learn, she is also the sole reason I was kicked off the office softball team. But first, let me tell you a less embarrassing story...

1-2-3 Punch:

After your hook and a brief background you are ready for 1, 2 or 3 stories depending on how much time you have been allotted. Rule of thumb:

- Under 2 minutes: Hook, Background, 1 Story, Clink

- 2-5 minutes: Hook, Background, 2 Stories, Clink

- Over 5 minutes: Hook, Background, 3 Stories, Clink

The stories you pick are key to giving a killer toast. The perfect story has the following elements:

- Someone is a little embarrassed. It can be you, the toastee or a mutual friend. But you want the audience to cringe just a little.
- Strong sensory elements. A smelly frat house, a drippy burrito, a sticky car seat—the more your audience can picture (and smell and taste) your story, the more they will be captivated.
- Reference audience members. As much as possible reference and call out people in the audience. This can be people who were in your story—George, I’m talking about you! Or a warning to concerned parties—Mom, you better close your ears! It will get you easy laughs and keep people engaged.
- A punch line. This is the hardest one. Sometimes there are great stories for conversation, but not great stories for the stage. Your story has to end on a funny line, a shocking tidbit or an ahh-shucks gush. You want the audience to be either laughing, shaking their heads and saying ‘oh no,’ or moaning, ‘awwwww.’
- A tie-in. Once you have gotten the big laugh, the ‘oh no’ or the ‘aww,’ it’s time to bring it ‘round to them. They want to feel included in your closeness. The best stories end with *the audience*. The easiest way to do this is to either warn them to look out for a behavior during the event (If you see Spencer run up to the buffet, you’ll know why!) or tell the audience that you will make sure a behavior from the story does/doesn’t happen again. (I’ll make sure Spencer is not late to the altar tomorrow!)

Only OK Story: Spencer and I used to party hard in college. One night, we were getting ready to go to a toga party and Spencer forgot to wear something under her toga! We get to the frat party and as she is dancing. Then her toga gets caught on something and rips off. She was so red and so embarrassed and tried to play it off like it happened on purpose, but we all know what really happened. Anyway, she went off to the bathroom and got it all fixed. But it was a crazy night.

Awesome Story: Some of you might know that Spencer is a total party animal. And by party animal I mean goes to bed by 10 p.m. every night, prefers Coke without the rum and actually volunteers to be the designated driver. So, we should have known better than to convince her to go to a toga party at the local fraternity.—Don’t worry Dad, there were teacher chaperones there (wink, wink, nudge, nudge)—Spencer, being a toga party novice, did not get the memo to wear a ‘just in case’ outfit underneath her toga, assuming that the

billowing white sheet and four safety pins would cover her aplenty. Fast forward to the middle of the dance floor, Spencer is about to bust into one of her crazy dance moves. (I'm sure she learned that from you, older brother Robert). Anyone who went to college with Spencer—I see the Tri Delta table in the back—knows the Spencer dance move I am talking about. It involves a little shimmy here and a little bouncy there. So, in the middle of this crazy dance move, Spencer's toga gets stuck on the corner of the beer pong table and rips off of her in one big swoosh. Of course, Spencer pretends this was a purposeful move and ties it into her grand finale, sashaying off the dance floor into the bathroom. Don't worry everyone, I have made sure her wedding dress is secured with more than just safety pins for dancing later.

The Clink:

After your final story and your last audience tie-in, it's time for the clink. This is the part of the speech where you can get sappy. It's your opportunity to offer well wishes, thanks and gratitude toward the toastee and anyone else in the room. Specifically:

- Thank the hosts.
- Offer good wishes or congratulations.
- Bring in the audience to make those thanks and wishes with you.

The best clinks actually allow the audience to join in with your gratitude and make everyone in the room feel that *you speak on their behalf*.

Only OK Clink: Lift your glasses in a toast to the bride and groom and their family.

Awesome Clink: Please lift your glasses as we thank Mr. and Mrs. Jones for hosting this lovely evening. To the beautiful bride and groom, may you have a long, healthy life with just as beautiful children. We love you and are so excited for you. Cheers!

Toast Felonies:

I talked about the Toast Do's, now it's time to take a few minutes to go over the dreaded Toast Don'ts. I call these Toast Felonies because they absolutely kill your stage presence and charisma.

Full disclosure: These are harsh... and super common. If you want a great toast, you have to throw away the easy stuff, make some cuts and dig deep. If you have committed one of these toast felonies in the past, it's okay, I forgive you, but do better next time. When preparing your toast — pretty, pretty please, for all that is holy — never ever ever do the following:

#1: Scripts Kill

This is a really hard one. Do NOT write out your speech. Do NOT type it up word for word. Do NOT read. The moment you read your toast, your charisma dies a slow, painful, embarrassing death.

Scripting is lazy. Yeah, I said it. Scripting your speech is not a gift. It's a gift card. It's not as good, not as personal and makes your audience do the work.

I have never ever heard an awesome toast that was read. Have you? But, have you really?

- Next time someone reads a toast or a speech, look around the room. After about 20 seconds, people's eyes glaze over, they start pulling out their phones and they sit back in their chairs.
- Our brains CANNOT pay attention to the tone of voice we use when we read. It's impossible to engage your audience fully as you read—no matter how vocally expressive you are.
- You get NO credit for being funny. When you read out jokes or funny quips from a page, people don't laugh as much. They might chuckle, but they will not feel the humor with you.
- You get NO credit for being authentic. When you read out how much you love the toastee, it doesn't feel as genuine—even if it is. Speak from the heart, don't read from the heart.

There is an answer. It's the savior, the angel: bullet points. The beauty of centering your toast around stories is that you know how to tell your stories. In fact, the more fluid and off the cuff you can be, the better. Bullet out each area of your speech and then practice, practice, practice. Remember, this is your gift. This is your friend, family member or loved one. They are worth it.

#2: Stop Superlatives

A superlative is a word that signifies the most of a trait. For example, here are the superlatives that are used the most often in toasts:

- Sweetest
- Nicest
- Prettiest
- Funniest
- Greatest
- Kindest
- Smartest

These words are like cotton candy—they sound pretty, but they have no nutritional value. When you say, "The bride is the prettiest, funniest, bestest girl in the whole world!" you might as well be saying, "The bride is the blah-diest, most blah-diest, blah, blah, blah!" Superlatives are boring AND everyone else will be saying them. If you don't want your toast to sound like everyone else's, then cut them. ALL OF THEM. Here's how:

- Every time you want to use a superlative, think of a story or example you can give instead. For example, instead of saying, "Spencer is the kindest person in the world." Say, "Spencer is my go-to on-call therapist—except she is cheaper. She is always there in a crisis. She is always there when you need someone to binge eat chunky monkey ice cream with after a break-up. She is always there when you get fired from your job and you need someone to help you graffiti the bathroom—just kidding, she was just the lookout."
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#3: No Qualifications

You know a toast will go badly when someone takes the mic and starts with a litany of apologies and qualifiers. They sound like this: “I’m sorry I’m not a great speaker.” “I don’t know ____ that well, but...” “I’m sorry I had to use note cards.” “I’m sorry I’m drunk”. Starting a toast with a qualifier is like admitting defeat before the race. Interestingly, qualifiers tend to have the opposite effect of what was intended. Instead of offering an excuse or apology, qualifiers actually call attention to whatever you are worried about and irritate the audience. So, STOP it! You have three choices:

- Get over it.
- Fix it.
- Own it.

#4: Ditché the Cliché

We get it:

- Your friend has a shoulder to cry on.
- You see them once in a blue moon.
- Your relationship means the world to you.
- You are partners in crime.

Clichés are vapid terms that encourage communication slothfulness. You can’t have an awesome toast while being verbally lazy. And guess what? You can kill clichés with a shockingly simple word weapon. It’s called a thesaurus. Use one, Google one and ruthlessly cut banal platitudes.

#5: Don’t Forget Nonverbal

When practicing your speech, don’t forget about your body language in addition to your verbal language. Here are a few nonverbal tips for you:

- Claim the stage. Confident body language is about taking up space. Plant both feet (don’t stand like you have to go pee), roll your shoulders back (don’t look like a turtle) and keep your torso un-blocked. (See the next point—you should be using your hands, not hiding them!)
- Can you embellish your stories with hand gestures, reenactments or voices? The audience loves this. There is no such thing as too corny in a toast.
- When you make a joke, laugh with the audience. When you get on stage or say sweet things about the toastee, smile. It will warm you up and help with nerves.

Toast Quick Tips

I have a few more quick tips for toasts that you should keep in mind:

- When in doubt, ask permission: If you are worried a joke is too embarrassing or inappropriate, then ask a friend or ask the toastee. Better safe than sorry.

- Never curse. Ever. There will be kids. There will be a conservative grandmother. Just don't.
- Bring a glass. At the end of your toast, you will want to make a toast. Don't forget to bring up a glass (and practice holding one while you deliver).
Most importantly, remember that your toast is an act of love. I'm being serious here! The greatest gift you can give another human being is sharing your love for them in public. It honors them, it honors your relationship and shows others you are proud to have them in your life. So, don't just have an okay toast, have an awesome one.