



Do you ever get distracted by signs?

I'm talking about really cute signs ...



or really clever signs ...



or signs that seem a bit confused?



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I'll admit it; I've been known to get distracted by boring ones, too.





Mr. Toastmaster, fellow members, and guests,

I passed this sign while I was walking in midtown. It was promoting a virtual graveyard of demolished buildings.

Instantly, I was transported back twenty years, riding the bus every day past the Mexican restaurant that used to stand there.



I ate lunch there once. The food wasn't memorable. The decor wasn't memorable. And don't even ask me to remember the name of the place. No, the only thing worth remembering was that for years after it was abandoned, it wore my favorite graffiti sign.

A yellow sticky note with a dark grey border. The text on the note is written in a casual, handwritten style in black ink. The text reads: "What would you do if you couldn't fail?"

What would  
you do if you  
couldn't fail?

What would you do if you couldn't fail?

At first, I thought of the ridiculous

- play the slots, right?
- give a concert in Carnegie Hall.

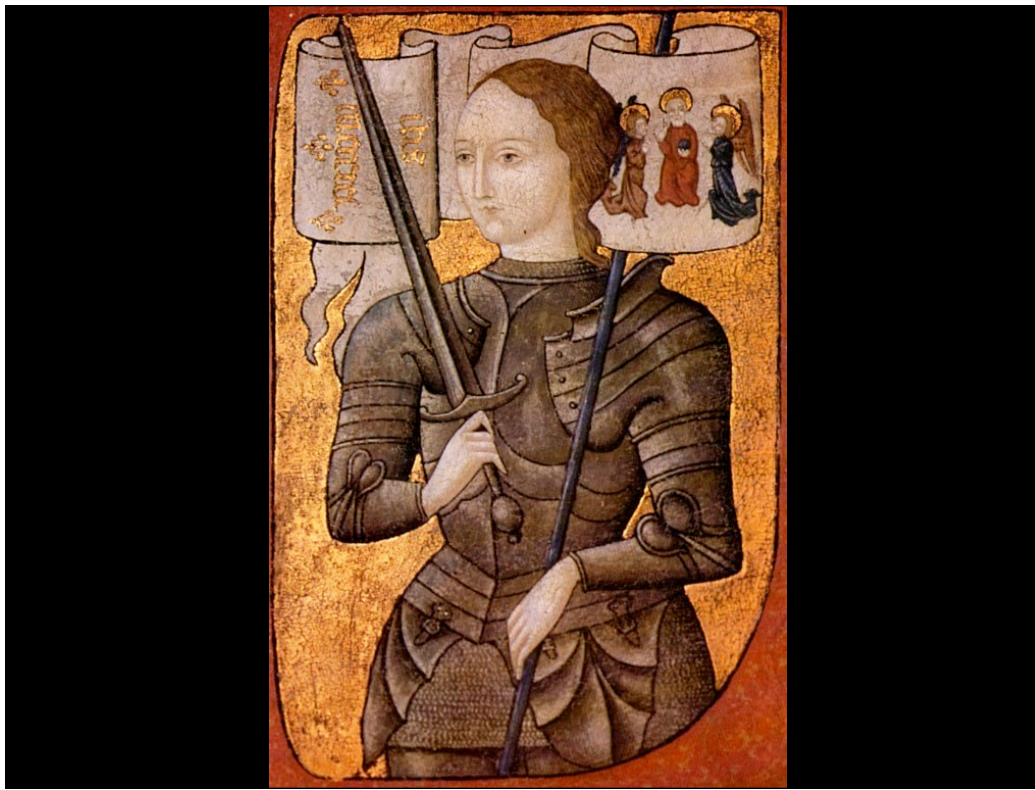
But we kept driving past that challenge.

I started thinking of successes that never should've been.



In 1429, the French army hadn't won a major victory in over a generation. Most of northern and southwest France had been conquered, including Paris and Reims. The last important city, Orleans, was under siege by the English, who were poised to take over the rest of the country.





Rewind 5 years. Joan of Arc had her first vision. St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret told her that she would drive out the English. She had a private meeting with Charles VII and asked him for a knight's equipment and to lead the army. So was the guy desperate or what? He agreed to an illiterate, 17-year-old, farm girl whose only explanation was that God had told her to take charge of the French army and lead it to victory. And she did it; she saved France.

There's absolutely no way she should have succeeded. She had no prestige or power. She had no military experience. She wasn't a nobleman. She wasn't a man. But she knew she couldn't fail because she believed what God told her.



A little Less well-known than St. Joan was Hattie May Wiatt.

In 1886, Pastor Russell Conwell found her crying outside his church one Sunday morning. It was too crowded for her and some other children to get into the building for Sunday School. Pastor Conwell carried her through the packed hall as she clung to him happily. He saw her again the next morning walking to school, and just to have something to say, he told her that when they got enough money, they'd build a school large enough to let all of the children in. Later that year, Hattie May died of diphtheria. Her parents gave the pastor a small bag with 57 pennies. Hattie had saved them to pay for the temple's new school. Thus, the Hattie Wiatt Mite society was formed to grow the original 57¢ into a fund large enough to build a school. They succeeded, and that school that eventually became Temple University ... with a current enrollment of 39,000 students.

Little Hattie May didn't know she wasn't rich or important enough to start a school. She acted with faith that she couldn't fail, and it inspired others to complete her challenge.



As Toastmasters, I claim that you're also on the *can't fail* list. Literally, you can't fail because your speeches are just practice. You can totally freeze, and it doesn't count against you. The same thing for our leadership roles; this is just a laboratory.

But look beyond this organization. Toastmasters makes us better speakers, better leaders, better listeners, and better thinkers. You can't fail with that combination. But what good is it without a meaningful application? You have to take the lessons you learn, the confidence you acquire, and the skills that you develop and polish, and apply them where it counts: your family, your work, and, your community.



M Osterberg/C Hinkle

Fellow members and guests, let me tell you what used to be here. I used to be a bit ... timid. My boss told my manager “you’ll never believe who I found out is in Toastmasters.” I decided to be a club secretary, but that’d be enough.

Somehow, I think my plans are made to be changed. I held every club office, I started five clubs, rescued two other clubs. I was the registrar and a teacher for Toastmaster University; I was the 1st District Database Administrator; I was a Division Governor. You’d better believe plans change! I changed. Now I’ve led seminars for more than 1500 people. I teach Bible classes and teach chess in the schools. I even led a successful homeowners’ association revolt. All because I demolished what used to be here and replaced it with a confidence that I couldn’t fail.

Listen. I don’t know what **you** used to be, but I know what you’re becoming. I’ve seen it in your predecessors; I’ve seen it in me. My advice is to complete your practicing, demolish what you were, and conquer the challenge that’s on your sign.



