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Challenging the Advanced Speaker

TOASTMASTER®

February 2007



Special Evaluation Issue:

Keeping Your Evaluations on Target

If Only I'd Said...
Mastering the Art of Self-Evaluation

Do You Dread Receiving an Evaluation?

Learning to (Almost) Like Criticism

Team Commandments:
Ten ways to help your club succeed

VIEWPOINT

When 1+1=3



Synergy! That word means that the combined action of two or more people produces results greater than the sum of their individual capabilities. Synergy allows us to produce three from adding two ones.

For example, if two people start separate businesses with a thousand dollars each, they could perhaps earn $100 each over a period of time. But if they pooled their money and became partners, their combined earnings and efforts would allow them to cut costs, increase productivity and increase margins, perhaps earning $300 over the same time period.

In our clubs, we can also add two ones and come up with three. The key to synergism is teamwork. I like to compare each club to a hand, with the members being the fingers of that hand. The fingers are not of the same length, size or strength, and yet, every finger is an integral part of the hand. How would you look if your small finger wouldn't bend as you made a fist? Even the thumb would be useless without the other fingers to work with. Every finger must function properly in order for the hand to be whole, to be fully productive.

Many years ago, District 75 decided to think big. The members wanted to do a full production of the musical *The King And I* for its conference fun night. One of the members was an experienced stage actor who had played the role of the king in the past. But alone, he could not produce the play. That's when synergy and teamwork kicked in. Members from different clubs volunteered to join the cast – even their children played a part.

One member knew a voice coach, so the group was able to get professional help; another member who used to dance professionally provided the choreography. Another member used his skills and contacts to set up all the props for the stage. Yet another member volunteered to cook snacks for the cast during practices. The presentation was a huge success. But beyond that, the members developed a strong sense of camaraderie as well as new communication skills: They learned stage acting and singing, not to mention the use of gestures, vocal variety and voice projection.

Those members exhibited the same kind of synergy throughout that year. They worked together to identify club leads, joined hands in conducting demonstration meetings, assisted new clubs, recruited new members and shared their knowledge with each other. One plus one indeed produced three. That year, the district was a President's Distinguished District.

You, too, can get three from adding two ones. Work with your clubs and districts as a team. Remember, TEAM stands for Together, Everyone Achieves More. Everybody has a role to play, and if you play it well, then you'll reap Simply Amazing results for your efforts.



Johnny Uy, DTM
International President

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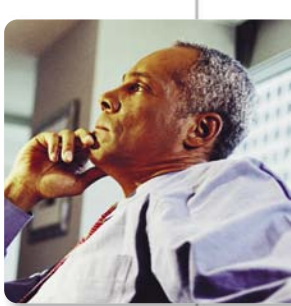
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'If Only I'd Said...': Mastering the Art of Self-Evaluation
Thoughtless self-criticism can be every bit as damaging to a speaker as a poor public evaluation – sometimes even more so.
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Learning to (Almost) Like Criticism
Most of us know that we have faults or could improve, but we just don't want to hear about it.
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The Toastmasters Vision:
Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

The Toastmasters Mission:
Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

An Unforgettable Visit

I recently returned from a visit to Atlanta, Georgia. Before I went, I contacted several Toastmasters clubs in that area to inquire if I might attend their meeting and be a guest speaker and be evaluated. Luckily, the Ben Hill Toastmasters Club promptly responded and evaluated my speech.

What an honor and wonderful experience to attend another Toastmasters club! I was impressed with everyone, learned a lot and enjoyed watching a video of Dwayne G. Smith presenting his winning speech from the 2003 International Speech Contest.

Visiting other clubs offers invaluable knowledge, fosters new friendships and helps us hone our listening, thinking and speaking skills. I will continue to visit various clubs and encourage other Toastmasters to do the same – especially when traveling.

Dr. Patricia Adelekan, ACG • Achievers Club, Crystal Cathedral Anaheim, California

A Real Winner!

Julie Bawden Davis' article on beauty pageants in the December issue struck a chord with me. A few years ago, as "Mrs. Park City," I was a contestant in the Mrs. Utah-America Pageant. Concerned about speaking in front of a sizeable audience, I joined a local Toastmasters club to gain confidence in the months leading up to the event, not sure I would continue afterward. But I got hooked!

I didn't win the title, but I did have the door opened for me to a lifetime of learning. I'm a proud ACB and one project away from becoming a CL. Also, there's no club near my future home in New Hampshire, so I hope to start one. Toastmasters has taught me to undertake worthwhile projects and provided the tools to complete them. Now, that's a winning combination!

Tricia Pimental, ACB • Lyon Speaks Tonight Club • Fernley, Nevada

Able at the Table!

Three cheers for the three separate articles on Table Topics in the December issue. I used the articles and four others from past issues to prepare a handout for my club members. The importance of Table Topics seems to have been lost at many club meetings and omitted completely in some clubs. I sincerely hope we all get back to the basics and use Table Topics at each and every meeting.

Francis Pelletier, CTM • Northshore Toastmasters Club Middleton, Massachusetts

A Dressing Down for Not Dressing Up

The cover photo on the December magazine was a poor choice, in my opinion. The banner under the photo reads, "panel moderating made easy." However, to "make it easy" I dare say one should dress more appropriately than the woman model. She appears prepared to watch a tennis match, not lead the two gentlemen who are dressed in their suit jackets and seated behind her. If the young lady is facing a "challenging leadership role," she can begin by dressing the part. This message is a common theme in our organization and ought to have been presented as such on the cover.

Susan Jata, ATMB
Harpeth View Club
Nashville, Tennessee

Don't stall on the Information Superhighway

The January article by Beth Stinson was excellent and gave club Web masters a lot to think about. I was reminded of my recent virtual tour of all of the Toastmasters district Web sites in the world, during which it became obvious that a district Web site is an expression of district leadership.

When you look at this year's district Web sites, which ones seem to say "It's all about Toastmasters" and which ones seem to say "It's all about me and my theme for the year"?

Which ones have a unified theme and which ones seem like a disorganized speech – lots of little subjects but no overall message? Which promote the Toastmasters logo, and which have so many different logos that it's hard to tell what the Toastmasters logo is? Which ones post unofficial colorized logo knock-offs? District Web sites carry messages too. Let's hope those messages are all about Toastmasters.

Susan Ellsworth, DTM • Crown of Laurel Toastmasters Club Adelphi, Maryland



"I'm inviting you to my seminar on Improving Your Communication Skills. If you'd like to attend, grunt once for yes or twice for no."

Overcoming a Different Kind of Fear

"We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same."
– ANNE FRANK



Diversity and multiculturism are powerful buzz words in the 21st century. We all like to think that we are open-minded about people who are different from us. But are we really? Deep down, are we as accepting of "them" as we are one of "us"?

The honest answer is *No*. We tend to distrust strangers and fear those who are different from us. Suspicion – where does it end? For me it ended at Toastmasters.

I joined Grosvenor Toastmasters in 2003 because of a New Year's resolution I was determined to keep. My immediate goals were:

- To stop feeling nauseous every time I had to speak before an audience.
- To eat at least one meal on presentation day.
- To stop popping Tylenol like candy.

Three years later, I rarely feel more than a flutter in my stomach (the butterflies are flying in formation). I can eat before a speech (and no one ever finds out what it is), and my local pharmacist no longer greets me by name. Over the years I became comfortable with public speaking, but to my great relief, I also became comfortable with something else – people from diverse cultures. I learned to respect and encourage them on their journey, the way my mentors and peers had encouraged me. A person's appearance, religion, language or nationality no longer carried much weight. All that mattered was that I paid attention to everyone's speeches and gave suggestions for improvements while lauding them for their efforts.

When I listened to speeches, especially the Ice Breakers, I did not see a person from a different country or religion. I saw *myself* from three years ago: The quavering voice, the wringing hands, the darting eyes and the shiny forehead were all too familiar. I felt their anguish! I was moved to tears by some speeches and shared laughter at the wit and humor in others.

Everyone, from beginning to experienced Toastmasters, shared their fears, hopes and dreams with each other. We became members of a family that met twice a month and looked to each other for support toward achieving our similar goals.

Some of the key things I learned at Toastmasters relate clearly to living a full life:

- I learned that each person is different and yet the same. We struggle with the same problems in life, regardless of our background.

- To gain respect, we have to give respect. This is evident in every meeting where many roles are filled by new members who tend to make mistakes. These errors are gently pointed out and the member is praised for his or her participation.

- I have been constantly inspired and challenged by my fellow members. Some have struggled hard to overcome personal problems and others have labored hard simply to immigrate to Canada for a better life. Listening to them has alternately helped me appreciate how far I still have to go or how lucky I am.

- When we meet guests at the club, our first thought is to welcome them and find out more about them. How different that is from meeting a stranger on a train and being wary of disclosing even our name. It is liberating to speak naturally, letting friendship rather than suspicion guide a conversation.

"To gain respect, we have to give respect."

Toastmasters encourages us to leave negativity at the door and work on our common goal of becoming better public speakers. Certainly, I've improved my communication and leadership skills, but more important, I've learned to appreciate and value diversity. We are all one family in Toastmasters.

We Toastmasters live by the words of John F. Kennedy….

If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.

Mahtab Narsimhan, CTM, is a member of Grosvenor Toastmasters Club 1651 in Toronto, Canada.

By Julie Bawden Davis

How a tongue-tied writer turned to Toastmasters for help in handling talk shows.

Finding His Voice


Neil Chethik, CTM

If not for Toastmasters, Neil Chethik is sure he'd spend most days in a small, dimly lit room hunched over a computer. Instead the successful book author regularly speaks to large audiences throughout the United States, often appearing on TV and radio.

"Toastmasters has opened more doors in my career than I can count," says Chethik, whose most recent book, *VoiceMale: What Men Really Think About Their Marriages,* was released by Simon & Schuster last year. "I belong to many organizations, but I can say for sure that this group has had the biggest impact on my career."

Every time Chethik considers how far he's come as a speaker, he hardly recognizes his former self. "I was a voice-a-phobe," he says. "I couldn't stand in front of an audience without shaking, quaking and worrying about my mind going blank."

Chethik attributes his anxiety to an unfortunate experience as a child. "I appeared in a class play when I was in fifth or sixth grade, and I blanked out on my lines, which was very traumatic at the time," he says. "After that, in middle school and high school, I became quiet and withdrawn."

When it came time to choose a career, Chethik decided on writing because it meant spending his time alone behind a computer screen. He eventually found that he couldn't run from speaking forever. In the 1990s, after 12 years in the newspaper business, he left to pursue a career as a book author and soon found it necessary to break his silence.

"I decided to stop reporting in order to focus on some particular topics and write in depth about them," says Chethik, who started writing about men's psychology and their personal lives, including a syndicated column on the subject. When he began working on his first book, *FatherLoss: How Men Deal With the Deaths of Their Dads* (Hyperion, 2001), he decided to overcome his fear of public speaking.

"Unless I learned to speak in public, I would have never had a successful career as an author," he says. "You can write a great book, but if you can't market it, speak about it, and publicize it, it will fail."

Chethik went to his first Toastmasters meeting in 1998 at the Downtown Lunch Bunch club in Lexington, Kentucky, where he has earned a CTM and is still a member. Although he remembers feeling overwhelming anxiety on his first visits, he kept attending and gradually became more comfortable. Two years after joining, he had the eye-opening experience of serving as club president.

"I was required to be spontaneous every week, welcoming members and new visitors and making announcements. As a result, I became very comfortable in front of groups and found that I actually enjoyed speaking," he says.

During those first few years, Chethik practiced Table Topics frequently. "I would flip through the telephone book and talk about whatever was at the top of the page for a minute at a time," he says. "I found practicing Table Topics invaluable because it taught me to focus on one subject and perhaps even more importantly, to trust myself."

Today when he speaks, Chethik has found that audiences enjoy his question-and-answer period immensely. "In my presentations, I strive to help people understand their lives and relationships, and they always tell me that my interplay is natural and spontaneous," he says. "Thanks to my Table Topics training, I'm not afraid to take a shot at an answer."

Fellow club member Jerry Young agrees that Chethik's skill at Table Topics has served him well as a speaker. "Neil has made phenomenal progress, becoming an accomplished, smooth speaker over the years," says Young, who has been a Toastmaster for 40 years and is a past governor for District 40.

"Although his content has always been good, in the beginning he stuttered and got very nervous. He's improved greatly at fielding questions, and I attribute a great deal of that to Toastmasters. Neil can handle whatever is thrown at him quickly and efficiently, remaining unflustered and talking eloquently off the cuff. These are valuable skills when you appear on radio and TV."

In 2001 after he'd been a Toastmaster for four years, Chethik's first book came out and it was time to start talking.

"The first time I spoke it was about men and grief at a church in San Diego," says Chethik, who was nervous initially, but soon felt at ease. "All of my Toastmasters training and practice came into play, and I felt very confident."

Since that first speech, Chethik has spoken throughout the United States at churches and organizations such as social worker associations and grief support groups, elaborating on subjects such as grief, fathers raising sons and how men feel about their marriages. He has also appeared on many radio shows, including NPR (National Public Radio) and television programs such as ABC's *Good Morning America*, where his four-minute interview with Charles Gibson resulted in overnight hardcover sales of about 5,000 copies of his second book, *Voice Male*.

Before his appearance on *Good Morning America*, Chethik was understandably nervous, but says he felt calm the morning of the show. About 20 minutes before he appeared on air, however, he had an urge to drink water. "I was relaxed on the outside, but internally sweating, and I probably downed about 50 ounces before going on the air," he remembers. "Right before the show started, I asked Charles Gibson what his first question would be and knowing that helped me feel prepared and focused. The show went really well."

Since his *Good Morning America* appearance last year, Chethik has spoken to a variety of large audiences, some with 1,000 listeners. Every month he appears on a television segment for a local CBS station where he talks about men and their relationships. He also does radio interviews several times a week and has conducted marriage workshops with his wife of 13 years, Kelly Flood, who is a minister.

"My wife spent many years in front of audiences and is very comfortable speaking, so working with her has also taught me a lot," says Chethik, whose 13-year-old son, Evan, is performing as a child actor in local productions.

Though over the years Chethik has occasionally considered ending his Toastmasters membership, he always decides against doing so and continues to attend meetings regularly.

"Speaking is a lot like playing an instrument," he says. "It's important to continually practice so you don't get rusty, and Toastmasters is the best place to do that." In the last few years Chethik has also enjoyed mentoring a variety of new members.

"It's hard to believe that I am someone that people want to emulate, considering how nervous I was for so long, but mentoring is an incredibly gratifying experience," he says. "I can relate to the fear and anxiety people have coming in, and I enjoy seeing them progress."

Those Chethik has mentored have found his advice especially helpful. "Neil is not only a great speaker, he gives excellent feedback," says Rob Ferguson, who was a member of the Lunch Bunch before he moved out of the area to North Carolina. "In 1999 I was a contest winner in the national championships, and it was Neil's assistance that helped me achieve that goal."

"Unless I learned to speak in public, I would have never had a successful career as an author."

Attending Toastmasters still opens up Chethik's horizons. "I get a lot of new ideas for my writing from the questions people ask me when I'm speaking," says Chethik.

"It's incredible to me that I get paid to speak, when I was afraid to open my mouth for so long," he says. "I credit Toastmasters for helping me make my career shift and realize my potential."

For more information, visit **www.neilchethik.com**.

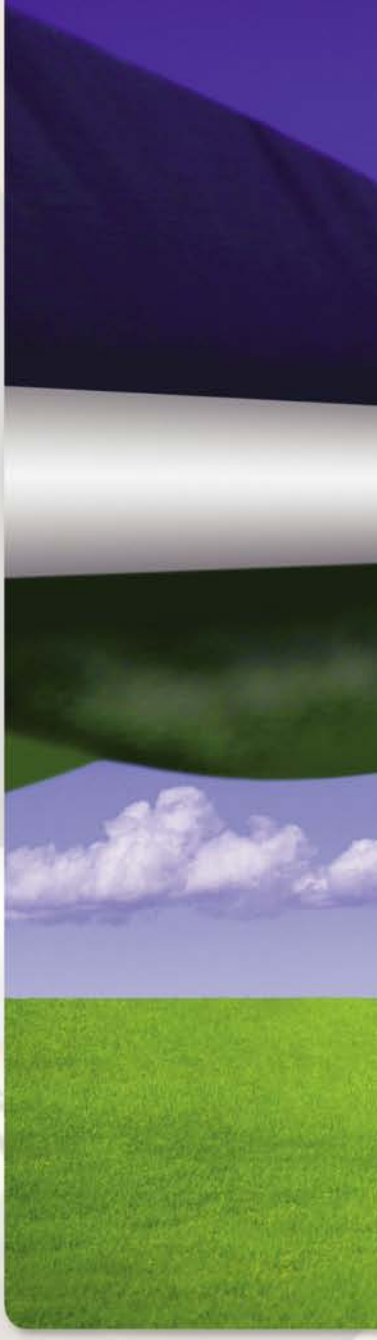
Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California. Reach her at **Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com**.

Editor's Note: Do you have an inspiring story of how the Toastmasters program has helped you? Tell us at **letters@toastmasters.org.**

In Toastmasters, the three noble gatekeepers have evolved.

By Shelia Spencer, DTM

3 Points to Keep Your Evaluation on Target



> *"The words of the tongue should have three gatekeepers: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"*
> — ARABIAN PROVERB

This proverb can serve as a guide during our everyday conversations. It is capable of enriching almost any exchange we have with others, and it may be especially helpful when we serve as speech evaluators.

Our organization provides several excellent resources that delineate the role and responsibilities of an evaluator. The judging form used in our evaluation contests reflects the criteria of a good evaluation. Points are distributed among three primary categories: **Analysis, Recommendation** and **Encouragement**. These are the three strengths we must bring to the job of speech evaluation, and each can be related to one of the three "gatekeepers" in the quote above.

ANALYSIS: Is it true? Are we accurate and honest in our response to what we heard and saw during the presentation?

"Kathy" took almost three years to get to her ninth manual speech. She struggled with self-consciousness but steadily improved over time. Meanwhile, she served as club secretary and vice president membership, bringing enormous dedication to her work. However, except for officer training sessions, Kathy did not attend any Toastmasters events outside her club.

We nearly lost this valued club member after she volunteered to be the "test speaker" at another club's evaluation contest. When she stammered through her material and forgot to shake the hand of the contest chairman, two of the three evaluation contestants assumed she was a new member giving one of her first presentations. Because they did not know her personally, they incorrectly interpreted her nervousness and assured



her that she would improve "after you've been here awhile." Even though their feedback was meant to be reassuring, she was deeply embarrassed and discouraged by their comments.

When serving as an evaluator, we must use all powers of observation to absorb the entirety of the speaker's communication. It is important to distinguish between objective observation and subjective interpretation of what we see and hear. Jumping to conclusions does not serve the speaker or contribute to the learning experience for the rest of the audience.

Our subjectivity becomes apparent whenever we find ourselves thinking, *He's talking about golf. I think that's a boring topic, so I'm sure it will be a boring speech,* or, *She's very nervous, so she must be new to public speaking.* Both of these thought progressions have allowed a personal assumption to color what we are actually seeing and hearing from the speaker. Our feedback will be distorted by our assumptions, and our response will not be true to the speech that was given.

"It is important to distinguish between objective observation and subjective interpretation of what we see and hear."

Active listeners also use their ears to follow how the topic is being approached and developed by the speaker. They seek to absorb and understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings, even if the topic itself is of no special interest to them. They take special care to suspend personal judgment if they find the topic to be unappealing, so they can focus on the speaker's perspective and purpose, along with his or her choice of content, words and vocal tone. Active listeners also use their eyes as a secondary resource, for observing the effectiveness of gestures, facial expressions and visuals.

When we strive to develop our skills as active listeners, we learn to use our ears and eyes objectively. Then, we

can focus our analysis on our objective observations, and we can create a "true" picture of the speech in our minds. This allows us to avoid making personal assumptions, and respond to the presentation with honesty and accuracy.

RECOMMENDATION: Is it necessary? Will our suggestions be of practical help to the speaker and the audience who are hoping to learn from our comments?

"Ira" was an experienced Toastmaster in a nearby club. When I served as a guest evaluator for his project from the advanced manual, *Humorously Speaking,* I was impressed by his self-assurance, polished delivery and clarity of expression. However, Ira's speech did not contain anything that roused the audience to laughter. Rather than entertain us, he attempted to give an educational speech about the history of humor. He included many interesting facts, but delivered them in a straightforward manner.

My attention went back and forth between Ira's presentation and the manual feedback form. Clearly, he was not meeting the guidelines provided! I struggled to create an evaluation that would be both truthful and practical in its response to Ira's difficulties in fulfilling this assignment. I did not want to be a brutally harsh critic nor an ineffectual "whitewasher."

At times like this, it helps to compare the role of speech evaluator to that of an athletic coach, and our meetings to practice sessions. No matter how much effort and anxiety goes into preparing a Toastmasters manual speech, it is just a practice session. The *big game* may be an upcoming speech contest, a formal business presentation, or an important job interview, but what we do in our regular Toastmasters meetings boils down to… practice. The evaluator is merely a coach whose purpose is to observe that day's practice session and provide specific recommendations for making the next session (and the next *real game*) more successful.

Recommendation should not focus on "what went wrong" but on "what might work better." It looks forward, rather than backward. Recommendation needs to be practical and concrete: Take time to be specific and provide examples that you believe to be within the capacity of the speaker, so that your suggestions may be applied directly to his or her future speeches.

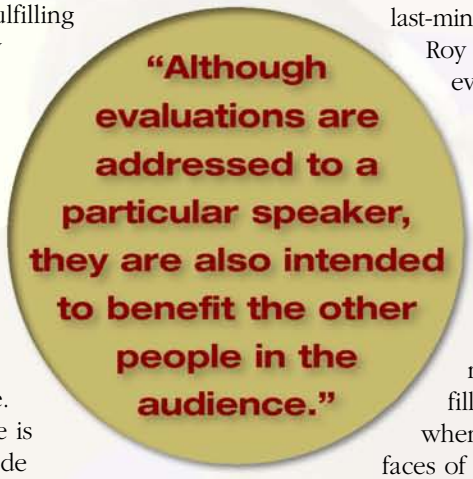
When I stepped to the lectern, I smiled encouragingly at Ira. I acknowledged the strengths he had shown in his powerful speaking presence. Rather than say that this particular presentation had failed, I admitted that humor had been one of my biggest challenges in Toastmasters and asked whether he had felt the same pressure in preparing this speech. He nodded.

Before Ira could develop skill as a humorous speaker, it was necessary for him to consider and experiment with different strategies. He needed recommendations that would help him find ways to incorporate comedy into his speaking style. To help Ira, and others in the audience, I focused my feedback on describing various techniques for humor that I'd tried, and which ones eventually worked for me.

I was thrilled when, at the end of the meeting, Ira rushed up and shook my hand enthusiastically. He said that I had given him exactly the recommendations he needed to go home and write his next humorous speech!

ENCOURAGEMENT: Is it kind? Do we provide support that allows the speaker to feel good about his or her effort and encouraged to present again?

"Roy" was another dedicated member who struggled with a specific challenge: his high energy often caused him to speak quickly and rely on a favorite filler word. He worked very hard on this problem and was making progress from month to month. One day, we had several new guests at our meeting and needed a last-minute replacement speaker. Roy volunteered and I agreed to evaluate him.



Despite a serious lack of preparation, his speech was full of humor and delightful, spontaneous observations. The adrenaline pumping through his system added to the vitality of the speech, as well as to his speaking rate and repeated use of that filler word – I lost count somewhere around 64! I glanced at the faces of our guests, and realized they were laughing at Roy's jokes but having trouble understanding his quickly-voiced words. If I were to be *truthful* in my evaluation, and cover all of the necessary areas for improvement, what could I say about his most obvious speaking challenges?

The manual's feedback form was very helpful in this situation, because it reminded me of several specific objectives that were to be met in this assignment. In organizing my comments, I began by addressing the areas where Roy was most successful. First, I congratulated him on achieving his goal: he entertained us all. Next, I shared my awareness that Roy had done an excellent job of preparing his material – considering that he volunteered to speak on very short notice. I described the techniques he had used to fulfill most of the criteria in the manual assignment. Where I had

suggestions for improvement, I included the phrase, "when you have more time to prepare, you might try…" as a way of providing practical feedback that could be put to use in future presentations.

Although evaluations are addressed to a particular speaker, they are also intended to benefit the other people in the audience, which may include experienced members, novices and guests. Our guests were surely expecting me to comment on Roy's speaking rate and use of that filler word. I chose to use this as an opportunity to demonstrate how a Toastmasters evaluator may provide additional feedback that addresses specific challenges the speaker is working on.

Because I was familiar with Roy's struggles, I could be tactful in mentioning that I noticed his rapid speech and several uses of his filler word. (It was not necessary for me to state the actual number of times I heard him use the word!) I congratulated him on his continued effort and improvement over the past months. I then explained to the audience that whenever we are under stress, it is likely that our habitual speaking patterns will become more pronounced. Knowing this, we need to take a moment to remind ourselves to look out for any specific bad habits we are hoping to break.

Honest and practical feedback about Roy's speech was a result of analyzing his presentation and providing specific recommendations. However, it was also important to publicly encourage a member who had given us all the gift of his delightful humor. The *kindness* of encouragement allowed Roy to feel good about his contribution to the meeting, while assuring the audience that he was applying effort and receiving support in addressing his specific challenges.

Speech evaluation is one of the most precious gifts we can offer our fellow Toastmasters members. We use our eyes and ears to analyze content and delivery and to determine what is true; we use our minds to formulate recommendations that address what is necessary. Most importantly, we use our hearts to provide encouragement and sustain the kind and supportive environment that nurtures us all. The ultimate success of an evaluation can be measured by how fully it encourages the speaker to present more – and better – speeches in the future. T

Shelia Spencer, DTM, is a member of the Leadership Roundtable Toastmasters club and a freelance writer. She can be reached at **bocki@attglobal.net**.

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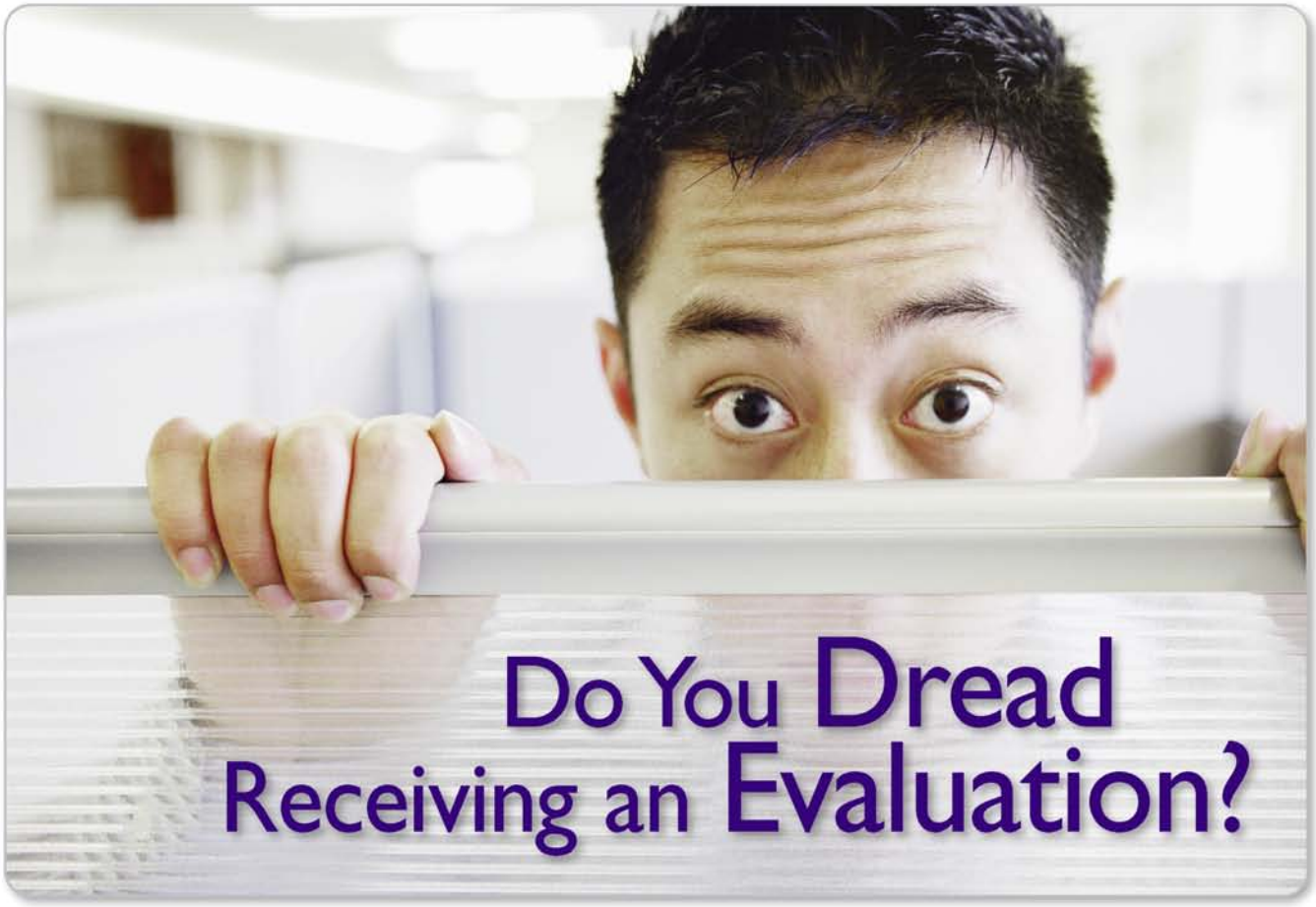
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Do You Dread Receiving an Evaluation?

By James Clark, DTM

Don't be offended. It's only an opinion!

Why do prospective members hesitate to join a Toastmaster club, and why do some new members drop out early? My guess is that it is often because they worry about how their communication skills are received by other club members.

After all, individuals usually join with the hope of making a good impression and building friendships, as well as gaining professional development. Those who become discouraged in the early stages may not have been adequately prepared to receive feedback. New members are generally the most sensitive to constructive comments and the least familiar with the kind of feedback to expect.

As a result, new members should be told that Toastmasters clubs are comprised of the most empathetic listeners possible. Contrary to a popular misconception, people rarely join because they *like* speaking before an audience; they join because they are among those who *least* like public speaking but see the benefits and will work to overcome their fears. Many of us continue to stick around after public speaking has become fun, but we don't forget the initial difficulties.

If given in accordance with Toastmasters guidelines, receiving an evaluation is generally a pleasant experience. Ideally the evaluator should consider the speaker's sensitivity level and provide feedback that praises strengths and offers suggestions for improvement. A properly delivered evaluation should leave the speaker feeling

encouraged and aware of their assets as a communicator.

- New members should be aware that Toastmasters evaluators *always* offer suggestions for improvement. In other words, they should give up any expectations of receiving nothing but praise during an evaluation. The Toastmaster philosophy is, "No speech is perfect." With so many key issues involved in the art of public speaking, no speaker is expected to master them all at once.

- New members should know that evaluators are, at best, offering their own opinion. Experienced evaluators will typically offer similar suggestions. Even so, evaluators will often disagree in their reactions to a speaker and should remember to preface suggestion with phrases such as, "In my view," to remind the speaker that his or her comments are subjective.

Members likely will benefit by carefully considering feedback, but none of us, no matter how experienced, is correct in presenting ourselves as an authority who speaks for the rest of the group. In my view, the more an evaluator forgets this rule, the more listeners may want to take his or her suggestions with a grain of salt.

- New members should know that giving an effective evaluation is probably the most challenging job facing a Toastmaster at a regular meeting. Remember, an evaluation should be positive and acknowledge the speaker's assets while at the same time tactfully suggest improvements. So demanding is this task that new members are generally not asked to attempt an evaluation until after they have completed a number of their own manual speeches and have heard numerous evaluations.

Ideally, new members are evaluated by senior members who know how to be appropriately sensitive. Because no system is perfect, and because delivering a good, considerate evaluation is so tricky – even for experienced members – the goals of an ideal evaluation are rarely met. Maybe the evaluator finds it difficult to observe anything significant and resorts to nit-picking. Perhaps the evaluator is actually trying to be witty; the joke falls flat, and the speaker misinterprets a comment as ridicule.

"A properly delivered evaluation should leave the speaker feeling encouraged and aware of their assets as a communicator."

For whatever reason, all of us from time to time can expect to feel some sting from feedback. Such is life. But in enduring even that, we benefit by developing a thicker skin, which is part of what we should be seeking anyway. T

James Clark, DTM, has been a Toastmaster for 22 years. A former division governor, he is a member of Switch-On Toastmasters and Ordnance Orators in San Jose, California.

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Team Commandments

10 ways to help your club suceed.

By Don Seaton, ACG

Several years ago, a long-time friend sent me an e-mail titled "The Team Commandments." To my surprise, it was a refreshing look at team construction and outlook. Since early 2001, I have had these 10 items in the forefront of my mind, whether building teams at work or in Toastmasters.

For the purpose of this article, I'd like to share my interpretation of the Team Commandments as it relates to Toastmasters:

1 Help each other to be right, not wrong. How often have you seen a new member make a mistake during a meeting, followed by someone immediately saying "point of order" and correcting the person on the spot? This is an obviously embarrassing situation, especially for a first-time Toastmaster of the Day. Instead we need to take new Toastmasters aside after a meeting and give them the boost they need to keep growing.

I normally pull new members aside and say, "I realize you got off track a little and Toastmaster Jones corrected you, but here is how you can try it next time." Education and motivation will not only help build the next generation of advanced Toastmasters, it will help them be 'right' in future situations.

2 Look for ways to make new ideas work, not for reasons they won't. New members bring fresh new

ideas that merit consideration. Too often we dismiss ideas and say, "We have been doing it this way for years and it has always carved us Distinguished Club status." But wait a second; you just told this new member that his input does not count. It is unlikely this member will suggest another idea for club betterment. Obviously, not every idea is the nugget of gold you are looking for. But you can give it a try and if it doesn't pan out, at least you showed that everyone's voice is important and heard.

3 Speak positively about each other and about your organization at every opportunity. I love to brag about my home club and its members. After each meeting we send out a positive meeting recap and a preview of our next meeting. We take opportunities during the meeting to praise accomplishments and continue to stress where we are on our road toward Distinguished Club status. Some may see this as crazy, but it is far from that...it is contagious. If your members see the leaders of the club bragging and talking up individual and team accomplishments, it is human nature to join in.

"Make each goal toward DCP a celebration; make each advancement a reason to brag on the individual."

Make each goal toward DCP a celebration; make each advancement a reason to brag on the individual. Sooner, not later, you will have created a culture of Toastmasters recruiters who truly want to share the excitement with others.

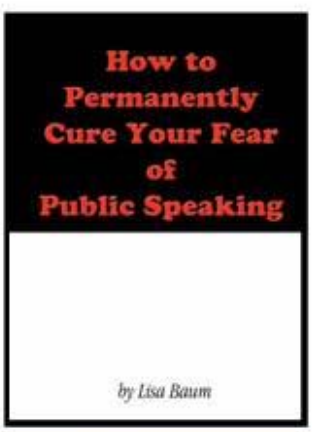
4 Help each other win, and take pride in each others' victories. Everyone in the club needs to help each other excel. Everyone has joined for personal growth, so be proud of each others' successes. Remember, if you have already achieved you personal goal for the year, maybe you need to take a step back and help some of the other members to move forward toward their goals. In the end, no one wins, unless everyone wins.

5 Compliment often. Praise goes an incredibly long way toward building confidence in communication and leadership. From my early days in Toastmasters I learned that every compliment contributes to a more cohesive and confident team. When I have the honor of serving as Toastmaster of the Day, I try to compliment every single person who comes to the lectern through a positive and motivational introduction.

6 Recognize that the customer is not an interruption to your work, but reason for it. For the purpose of this discussion I consider the customer to be every guest who walks into a club meeting and every new member in need of a mentor. Don't look at these new members as an interruption; look at them as your reason for being in Toastmasters – to help people grow. Find ways to bring the new members both into the club and into the speaking schedule so they can immediately start realizing the benefits.

When I serve as a mentor, I try to sit down and plan out the new member's entire list of manual assignments during our first discussion. We merely review each project and jot down ideas that come to mind for each speech. Believe it or not, this builds the member's

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As a Toastmaster I share my struggle with public speaking fears and anxieties and what I have learned about myself as I faced my fears through Toastmasters and learned how to overcome.

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confidence in his or her ability to complete all the speeches.

7 Realize that "being right" is irrelevant to good service; the customer's perception is what counts. How do you welcome new members and guests? Guests are golden and should be treated as such. Make every meeting a sales pitch and full of excitement. If your meetings are boring, why would a guest want to return? The guest must leave with a perception that Toastmasters is the place he/she needs to be and realize there is a substantial benefit to joining the club.

8 Maintain a positive mental outlook. Do everything with enthusiasm and good humor; your attitude is contagious. I look at a Toastmasters meeting as a chance to celebrate the joys of improving my communication and leadership ability. Every chance I get to speak, no matter what the role, I am enthusiastic. Even when I serve as the timer, I introduce the position with zeal and explain the duties with a bit of humor. Keep your attitude positive and watch you membership grow.

9 Sacrifice for the good of the team. Sometimes you need to slow down your pace toward a goal so another member can succeed and move on. Give as many speeches as you can, but always put others to the forefront.

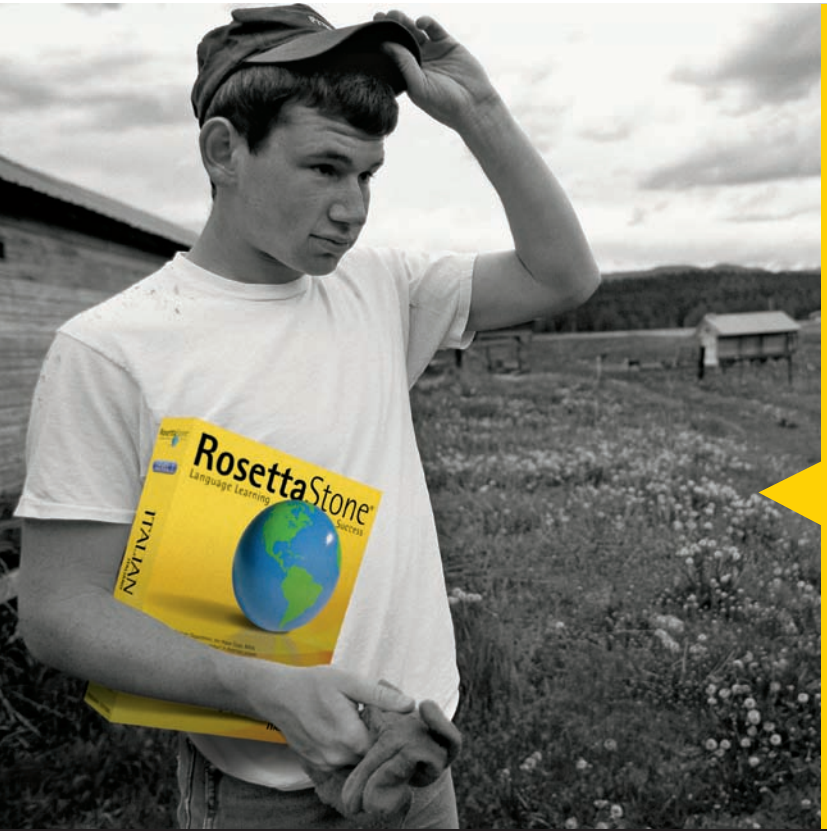
Additionally, make sure everyone in your club knows what the goals are for Distinguished Club status. Come up with plans for reaching your goals and publicize them. Let your members know that you may need to schedule others to speak more often for a short period of time to meet goals, but you will get everyone back in the fold quickly. Bottom line: build a culture where everyone accepts the team's goals and are willing to play their part to make them a reality.

10 Have fun. One of my club members was gone on a two-week vacation. Upon returning he said, "I missed these meetings and I'm happy to finally be back." Toastmasters is a springboard to better communication and leadership, but it must be built on a foundation of fun. Too many people are afraid of public speaking, but if they perceive it as fun and non-threatening, they are more likely to jump right in and get involved. Also, if the atmosphere is fun and members can joke back and forth, those public speaking errors will give members a chance to laugh *with*, not *at* the other members.

These 10 items have served me well for many years, both at work and in my local clubs. I hope you can use some of the ideas in your club. Maybe by simply looking at things a little differently, you can draw in new members or retain some that are on the fence of staying or going. Remember, everyone joined the club to become better speakers and leaders. It is your job as the leader of the club to help them realize this goal, so make it positive experience for the individual and the team. T

Don Seaton, ACG is an area governor and member of At Eze Toastmasters on Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi. A member since November 2001, he is Chief Master Sergeant in the United States Air Force.





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What to Do After You Receive Your DTM

By Cara Seitchek, DTM

Fresh ways to keep working on your speaking and leadershp skills.



You've done it. You're now a DTM. You've checked off every educational and leadership goal in all the Toastmasters checklists. Now what?

Don't pack up your Toastmasters gear and ride off into the sunset. You can find new goals to achieve, more checklists to cross off, fresh ways to work on your public speaking and leadership skills. As you move into your post-DTM life with Toastmasters, here are just a few ideas of the challenges and opportunities that await you:

- **Complete all the *Advanced Communication Series* manuals.** You finished six advanced manuals for your DTM, but the nine additional manuals provide 45 new opportunities to learn a variety of speaking styles. Every speech gives you more practice in public speaking, and you can try out new speech formats. Lead a discussion group, learn how to deliver a humorous speech or build your technical presentation skills. And, when you finish the nine advanced manuals, you are well on your way to fulfilling the requirements of a second DTM.

- **Complete the new *Competent Leadership* manual.** For many Toastmasters, this manual didn't exist when we worked on our first CL. Use the new checklists to focus on becoming a better grammarian, timer or Ah-Counter. This manual will not only improve your leadership skills, but it will also strengthen your club's meetings as less-experienced members observe and emulate your advanced abilities.

- **Train the next generation of Toastmasters leaders.** Act as dean of your district's Toastmasters Leadership Institute or offer to teach one (or more) of the training classes. You acquired valuable skills as you completed your DTM, so pass this knowledge to newer leaders –

they'll appreciate the tips and tricks you share with them. Perhaps, as vice president education, you created a special spreadsheet to track the educational accomplishments of your club. Distribute copies of this tool to your fellow VPEs. When you acted as vice president membership, did you create a recruiting program that brought in the required eight members for distinguished club status? Tell new VPMs how they, too, can accomplish this feat.

- **Work on a new CC (formerly called a CTM), and make it a fresh challenge.** We all embark on our first CC as someone brand new to the world of public speaking. Approach a second CC with more arduous focus. For example, did you write out and memorize all your early speeches? Challenge yourself to give impromptu speeches or speeches from outlines. Did many of your early speeches use the first-person point of view? Challenge yourself to give third-person point of view speeches the second time around.

- **Focus on one aspect of being a Toastmaster and try to master it.** Work on your evaluations by giving an evaluation at every meeting. Strive to deliver the perfect evaluation. Or, focus on Table Topics. See if you can improve your Table Topics skills every time you present one. By focusing on these skills, you'll be even better prepared for the fall and spring contests.

- **Apply for the Accredited Speaker Program.** This Toastmasters program provides strict requirements to be qualified as an accredited speaker. When you complete the program, this qualification can help you earn extra income as a public speaker. Sign up at your local speakers bureau and you'll be matched with events that need an accomplished public speaker.

- **Present all modules from *The Better Speaker Series*, *The Successful Club Series*, *Success/Leadership* and *Success/Communication* modules to your club.** Don't limit yourself to the modules required for your DTM. Your club will benefit from listening to every module. Take each module and make it your own, adding your personal examples to those in the script.

- **Join or form an advanced club.** Stretch your speaking skills by meeting with other DTMs in a DTM-only club. As a group, you can set new challenges and stricter goals for your collective advanced speaking skills. Tap into the accumulated knowledge of other DTMs by organizing mock conference panels or workshops in which everyone can participate.

- **Teach a class on public speaking or speech writing.** With your DTM, you can share with others the skills and abilities you have gained through your Toastmasters experience. Call your community college, recreation department or high school. Offer to teach an introductory class or conduct a *Speechcraft* seminar, and make sure to bring information on Toastmasters.

- **Volunteer to help your district, division and area.** Every leader needs a team to help achieve district and personal goals. Volunteer to mentor club or district officers, or assist with planning the district conference. Use the time you had devoted to thinking of new speech topics, writing and practicing speeches, and preparing for meetings. By acting as a resource for others, you are following in the footsteps of Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, using your skills to help others grow and develop. What a great way to enjoy the results of all the work it took to earn your DTM! T

"Call your community college, recreation department or high school. Offer to teach an introductory class or conduct a *Speechcraft* seminar."

Cara Seitchek, DTM, is a freelance writer and member of the Smithsonian Institution Club in Washington, D.C. She is an instructor with the Writer's Center in Bethesda, Maryland and UCLA Extension.



Thoughtless self-criticism can be every bit as damaging to a speaker as a poor public evaluation – sometimes even more so.

'If Only I'd Said...

Mastering the Art of Self-Evaluation



By Caren Neile, Ph.D., CL

I recently gave a Toastmaster in my club the most heartless, hurtful evaluation you can imagine. I've known her quite a while and have a good idea of how sensitive she is. Nevertheless, immediately after an important speech of hers, I said, "You call yourself prepared? Why didn't you choose another direction for that speech? The audience hated it; didn't you notice the man in the corner looking at his watch, and the woman who frowned the whole time? What about those slips of the tongue? And you call yourself a professional? How can you ever think of speaking again? Obviously a speaking career is not for you."

As I look back, I don't believe I made a single positive comment. And I didn't stop. For days afterward, I kept haranguing her, making her feel positively miserable.

Several recent conversations have shown me that I'm not the only Toastmaster who treats members so shabbily. What is going on in our organization? Have we abandoned one of our greatest strengths: the effective, supportive and caring evaluation?

Yes – and no. The Toastmaster I evaluated was *myself*. When evaluating others, most of us are as thoughtful and helpful as we have been trained to be. Yet, when it comes to self-evaluation, we can be brutal. For some reason, we forget our excellent training.

What's so bad about bad self-talk?

The problem is, thoughtless self-criticism can be every bit as damaging to a speaker as a poor public evaluation, sometimes even more so. A poorly executed evaluation in a club, as painful as it may be, lasts at most three minutes, with thirty seconds to wrap up. Afterward, other club members generally rush to the speaker's side to assuage the harm.

But self-criticism can go on and on. After all, unless we share every negative thought with others, we have no one to refute them. What's more, many of us tend to view our negative opinions of ourselves as more "objective" than those of outsiders, who are "just trying to be nice."

Negative self-evaluation isn't only hurtful because it can play on a feedback loop in our heads, or because we might take it more seriously than we do the more appreciative words of others. According to Barbara Hoberman Levine, author of *Your Body Believes Every Word You Say*, any negative self-talk can have a punishing effect on the mind, body and spirit. We tell ourselves that we are incapable of speaking, and we might just develop laryngitis or a stutter. We tell ourselves that we are hopeless and, sure enough, we lose hope.



Sadly, people at all levels of accomplishment engage in such harmful self-talk. At the last Toastmasters International Convention, I spoke to a workshop leader who was extremely distressed at her "wooden" and "stilted" presentation. Also, a contestant in the International Speech Contest (one of the top 10 speakers in the world!) confided to me with some dismay that he had forgotten to make several important statements during the competition.

Here then, for those of us who tend to be our own toughest critics, are some points to remember when engaging in self-evaluation:

- **Don't agonize if you forgot to say something.** Only you know what you failed to say. So what if you forget a line, or a story, or a joke? Most of the time, the audience will never notice it. As long as you are listening to yourself, and making a logical and coherent argument, no one will be the wiser. Besides, your subconscious often knows what you need to do far better than your conscious mind. Maybe there was a good reason you didn't make the joke you'd planned, even if you don't know what it was!

My husband once coached me on an early manual speech. He suggested I use a military chart, a pointer, and his leather army jacket as props; I was outlining tactics of some kind. I told him that I felt uncomfortable with the plan, but he assured me that it would be effective. He even drew a beautiful map for me to point to. After my speech was over, I realized that I had never referred to the chart, never pointed to the map. At first I was furious at myself, but then I realized I hadn't been

"Perhaps the reason we forget parts of a speech is because we were never meant to say them in the first place."

able to see myself doing that part of the speech, and, sure enough, I didn't do it!

Author Joyce Carol Oates once wrote that writer's block usually means that the thing that is being written is not authentic, that it does not reveal the writer's true self. Perhaps the reason we forget parts of a speech is because we were never meant to say them in the first place.

▪ **How did the audience react?** Making a speech is, after all, communication. And communication is a two-way street. If the audience appreciated your speech, who are you to judge whether or not it was a true success?

▪ **Everyone has something to cheer about – even you.** It happens to every Toastmaster. You are called upon to evaluate a speaker whose strengths may not be all that apparent. Yet you know that there is something positive to say about anybody. Somehow we forget that fact when we evaluate ourselves, however.

Next time you feel you didn't do your best, ask yourself, What would I tell myself if I were someone else? Would I say that I looked professional? That my posture and bearing were authoritative? That my voice was pleasing? When we are down on ourselves, we tend to magnify our weaknesses and forget the very strengths that others recognize in us.

"Even the most objective judges are only human, and humans use emotion, memory and a thousand other factors to make decisions."

On the other hand, maybe the audience didn't react as you'd planned. Maybe you misjudged what would work for them. Does that make you a failure? Hardly. The speech might have been a stunning success with another crowd.

▪ **Next time you feel you've "bombed," ask yourself: "What can I learn from this experience?"** It's a cliche, perhaps, but everything we do really is an opportunity for learning. There will be times when the most important thing is not the prize, or the acclaim, or even the job, but the lesson. Perhaps the time you forgot your speech was one of those. Really good life lessons do not come cheaply. What's more, we need to repeat them until we know them inside out.

▪ **There can be only one winner.** The most maddening thing about competition is one's competitors. Case in point: When the movie *Gone With the Wind* earned the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1939, there were some sensational films that fell by the wayside. In any other year, *The Wizard of Oz, Stagecoach, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Goodbye Mr. Chips, Dark Victory* and *Wuthering Heights* – every one of them a classic according to film buffs – might very well have been winners.

Judging is an inexact science, even, as we know, in beauty contests and Olympic events. As the Romans said, *De gustibus non est disputandum*. ("There is no disputing matters of taste.") Even the most objective judges are only human, and humans use emotion, memory and a thousand other factors to make decisions. That doesn't make them wrong. That just means other judges might have come up with other winners.

Remember, stressing the positive in someone's performance is emphatically not a whitewash job. By emphasizing a speaker's strengths, we are imbuing her with confidence and reminding her that she has much to give. That is what makes a speaker lose the less appealing qualities and focus even more on those positives. That is what makes a good speaker great.

▪ **Who's 100 percent, 100 percent of the time?** We can work on a speech for a month, know it cold, and have a poor night's sleep. Or, we can be distracted by the light in the room, the temperature or an itchy collar. Sure, we're supposed to aim for professionalism, but these things happen. The perfect speaker has simply not been created yet. So, let's give ourselves a break! To be human is to be a work in progress.

Above all, let's try to remember that the most important thing about any evaluation – of yourself or others – is that it inspires the speaker to go back and try again. You may think that you have let everyone down by not doing your best. But if your self-talk doesn't accomplish the goal of getting you to try again, then you really have let everyone down. You have deprived the world of your continuing growth and achievement. And that, after all, is what life and Toastmasters are all about. T

Caren S. Neile, Ph.D., is an ATMS/CL from West Boca Toastmasters. She is founding director of the South Florida Storytelling Project at Florida Atlantic University. Dr. Neile was a luncheon speaker at the 2006 Toastmasters International Convention and has been featured as an expert on storytelling on National Public Radio and in *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

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Learning to (Almost)

By Brian Thoma, CL

Practically everybody will admit to being interested in improving themselves or their business or personal relationships. There are even some, like Toastmasters members, who have actually taken steps to do so. But unfortunately, many people miss out on valuable opportunities for improvement and growth because of their inability to take



Like Criticism

> "Most of us know that we have faults or could improve, but we just don't want to hear about it."

advice and criticism from others. Do you make use of suggestions offered by your peers? Do you seek out the advice and feedback of others to your advantage? It makes sense, but it's not as easy as it sounds.

I am the owner of a small business. Several years ago the managers of my company met to formally establish non-financial, people-oriented goals. Examples of those goals included providing a safe work environment, offering adequate training and improving teamwork between departments. We then sent a description of the goals and a survey to all employees so they could rate our level of achievement of those goals. Employees could respond anonymously. This was to be done annually.

I almost didn't make it past the first survey. Most employees responded, but not in that supportive, kind Toastmasters way. They just told me exactly how they felt by using the survey rating system and adding their own comments. Although I got what I asked for, I must admit I was very upset because the ratings were, in some cases, insultingly low and several comments were nasty, blaming me directly for certain problems.

It didn't seem like the employees were trying to help me. Indeed it seemed they were trying to hurt me, because that's how I felt. I experienced the defensive, prideful reaction many people feel when being criticized. Criticism is universally disliked. Franklin P. Jones, an author most known for humorous quotations, wrote "Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance or a stranger." It is just plain hard to take advice or criticism. Even positive, well-worded evaluations give at least a hint that we are inadequate in some way. Most of us know that we have faults or could improve, but we just don't want to hear about it.

My immediate reaction to the survey results was defensive, but after time and thoughtful consideration I realized that there was a consensus in the results. That is, many employees expressed similar comments and ratings. I began to recognize the value of their perspectives. So, with pain and difficulty, I decided to "own" the problems and the criticisms. I sent a memo to all employees thanking them for their participation, summarizing the survey results and comments (without displaying any of the nasty ones) and showing my

> "Sometimes there are difficulties in getting valuable comments from others. But the biggest challenge is in making use of the feedback."

recognition that I, as president of the company, was a major part of the problem. Then we took action in response to the feedback and, over time, changes and improvements came about. The surveys continue today after five years and the company has greatly benefited.

I put in place a method for the company by which I could measure certain non-financial goals, identify problems and then make improvements accordingly. I also began to rely on a process for using advice and criticism to my advantage:

- **Recognize that you can get unique and valuable perspectives from others.** Be aware of opportunities to get feedback.

- **Find people who are capable** of providing you with perspectives of interest and value to you.

- **Request feedback** in a way that will increase the chances that your evaluators will be open and honest. This can be a challenge. Most people understand human pride and many will simply be polite without offering any critical feedback. Sometimes anonymity is required. With anonymity, however, some insensitive people may criticize with absolutely no regard for your feelings: Be prepared for that, keeping in mind that some people are not well-trained in the manner of offering advice, but still may have some valuable ideas.

- **Read or listen to the feedback** that is offered.

- **Experience your feelings.** Expect the possibility of defensive reaction. You will know that you are having a prideful reaction if you find yourself judging your critics. It's human nature. Go with it. But try to maintain control of your outward expressions for the sake of others.

- **Be gracious, regardless of your feelings.** Thank the evaluators for their comments so that they feel welcome to offer you more open and honest feedback in the future.

- **Let time go by,** allowing your negative feelings to diminish.

- **Honestly evaluate the feedback.** This is the most difficult step. Your pride may block your ability to do this effectively, but try hard to find the value in the comments you received. If you just can't find any value in the comments, then try to evaluate your feelings. If you feel at least a little bothered by the comment, then there is a good chance that your pride is obstructing your ability to make use of some valuable feedback. If you can follow this process by going to the next step instead of reacting with your feelings, then you may be able to benefit from the advice.

- **Seek consensus.** If you identify similar comments from multiple critics then the signal is getting louder and the value of the feedback is increasing. But avoid the mistake of seeking consensus about your feelings, that is, seeking sympathy. You can make yourself feel better by doing that, but you will miss a growth opportunity.

- **Own it.** Acknowledge it. Take responsibility. Take control. If you acknowledge the criticism as useful and valid, but then follow up with excuses and blaming, then you have not taken ownership, responsibility or control. Without ownership you won't be ready for the next step.

- **Take action.** Make directed improvements in accordance with the feedback that you have received. You may be forced to take small steps at first, but continue with them until they add up to greater advances.

- **Repeat the process.**

I have used this process in an informal way in business, at home and with Toastmasters. It can be used for continual evaluation, growth and improvement. Much of a person's life involves interactions and relationships with other people. Public speaking, for example, involves a relationship between a speaker and an audience. To evaluate your own performance as part of a relationship, it makes sense to seek out the perspectives of others who are involved in or knowledgeable about the relationship. Sometimes there are difficulties in getting valuable comments from others, but the biggest challenge is in making use of the feedback.

To take advantage of critical feedback you must work past your discomfort and defensive feelings. Apply the "no pain, no gain" principle, and you'll soon enjoy all the benefits of an improved life. T

Brian Thoma, CTM, CL, is president of His Toastmaster's Voice 6280-38 in Moorestown, New Jersey, and owner of Thoma, Inc., a company representing manufacturers of laboratory furniture and school casework.



Don't be afraid. You know more than you think!

By Heike Vogt

Challenging the Advanced Speaker

As a Toastmaster you might find it daunting to evaluate speakers whom you consider far more accomplished than you. There they are, delivering their bravura performances while you are struggling to jot down one or two recommendations.

"I just couldn't find anything!" a relatively new Toastmaster-evaluator told me the other night about what she termed a "star speech." It's true that most of us need some time to get used to the fact that in Toastmasters it really is okay to challenge one another. Many of us still equate 'recommendation' with 'criticism' and criticism is bad. But it is equally true that all who speak at Toastmasters deserve to go home with at least one good challenge. And as an evaluator, it is your job to deliver it.

You might feel that your knowledge of public speaking is still too limited to pick out a few pieces of chaff from all that wheat. However, chances are you know more than you think. You have been listening to professional speakers for most of your adult life. Business leaders, politicians on TV, your local vicar, car salesmen or campaigners all speak to live. Therefore, you already have a good feeling for what works.

Why not take your evaluation cues from there and shape your perceptions into a well-structured tool kit of knowledge? I suggest you begin by considering a list of speech components. What makes or breaks a speech? Start with your own observations and enhance them with what you find in various Toastmasters manuals. Be sure to read the manual, *Effective Speech*



Evaluation, that was included in your New Member Kit. Also, be sure to check the speaker's manual for a project evaluation guide.

Next, practice the art of evaluation by listening to a professional speech and evaluating it privately. Note how well a single component was handled. If you pay attention, you will be able to identify whether a speaker could have achieved her objectives better. You will be able to name the stumbling blocks that exist for even the most competent and confident speakers.

The fact that you have to look that little bit harder should not deter you. Yes, accomplished speakers display confidence, great rapport with the audience and a dazzling stage presence. Still, a truly fantastic speech, one that works on all levels and underlines the speaker's unique personality, consists of much more than that.

To get you started, I picked four examples of areas that I have seen otherwise great speakers battle. Have confidence in your own perceptions and work on extending the list. Before long, you will pose valuable challenges to your fellow Toastmasters – even to the brilliant ones.

"You will be amazed at how often great form covers up inferior content."

1 Sloppy speechwriting. A well-known European Union Commissioner with a few thousand speeches under his belt visited my workplace and had the audience distractedly fiddling with their pens five minutes into the speech. His mistake? Hiring a bad speechwriter. He started his speech by outlining for a whole 10 minutes and in great detail all the administrative steps our work entailed. The problem was, we knew this already. This was a great speaking opportunity that started with a whimper rather than a bang.

Sloppy speechwriting will bring down even world-class speakers. Learn to listen analytically. Start with that politician on TV, for example. Make sure to look beyond the impressive exterior. Does her or his speech have structure? Can you follow it easily? Does it achieve its declared objective? Is it appropriate to the audience? The delivery is perfect, but do you feel blinded with science? You will be amazed at how often great form covers up inferior content.

2 Slipping into the "speaker persona." The "speaker persona" is the personality some take on as soon as they perform center-stage. It is usually the guise they believe the majority of the audience likes. However, while your fellow Toastmaster star speaker might come across as decently rational and mildly intellectual by using a canned speech and picture-book hand gestures, you the evaluator wonder where she has left her outstanding passion, her razor-sharp wit and her sometimes erratic but original body language.

Therefore, when you evaluate, ask yourself whether the perfection in front of you has come at a price. You will find that advanced speakers in particular need to be jolted out of their polished routines. Could they show us a bit more of who they really are? Could they experiment with body language? Could they use more of their inspired humor and less of their ambitious-businessman spiel? Could they actually give up wanting to be liked?

3 Unsatisfactory voice projection. Depending on the venue, voice projection is not easy to master. If your club, like mine, happens to meet above a bar or in close vicinity to another public place with some levels of noise, this can be particularly tricky. Ideally, all members of the audience understand the speech perfectly well, without those in the first row flinching or

those in the back row cupping their ears. Superior speakers use perfect diction and project their voices evenly without the aid of electronic equipment.

If you habitually sit anywhere close to the lectern, you cannot really evaluate a speaker's control of his voice. Try sitting at the back of the room, away from the speaker. Also, observe other members of the audience: Are they visibly straining to hear? This should give you a good idea of whether you could suggest some further voice work.

4 **Being let down by props.** A vast number of speeches demand the use of props, whether it be objects, devices or electronic equipment. It is astounding how often even those who should know better fail to foolproof their prop's appearance in the speech. Bill Gates famously delivered a glitch-plagued presentation in Las Vegas early in 2005 where during the show a remote PC at Microsoft repeatedly crashed and left the audience with blank screens. When this happened (as it does to all of us), he did not have a backup plan and was immediately upstaged by his comedian co-host who jumped at the opportunity to make a few prickly asides about Microsoft.

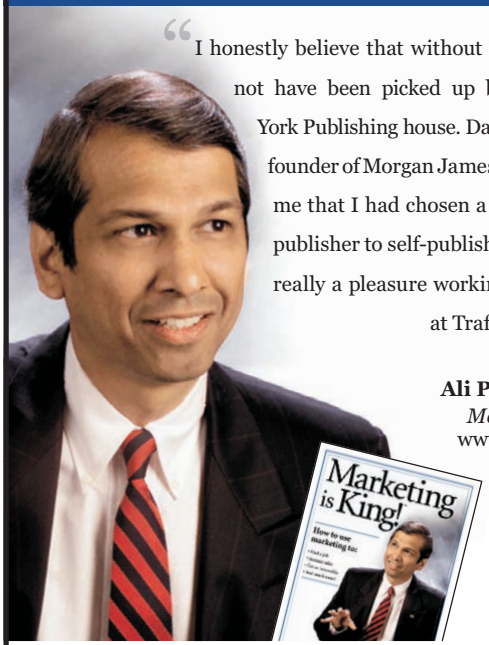
While the stakes are not quite that high at Toastmasters, glitches can still slam the brakes on an otherwise great speech. Watch out for how props are used: Do they force the speaker to turn his back to the audience? Are they too small to be seen by all? Do they take too much attention away from the speech? Could the speaker have enlisted some help in anticipation of trouble?

Evaluating the advanced can be a challenge. It requires you to speak up and actively help those around you to progress, no matter what your current stage of development. Therefore, work toward constantly extending your knowledge. It will help you gain the confidence necessary for having a well-founded opinion. If you hone your perceptions by studying and analyzing professional speeches, you will soon be able to help even the most superior orator to improve. And you will learn much more about public speaking than you ever thought possible. T

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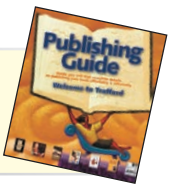


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Sally C. Wood 3739-36, Washington, District of Columbia
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Teresa Carolan 3835-60, Owen Sound, Canada
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Martha A. Moore 4380-62, Allendale, Michigan
Graham G. Hiscock 5470-62, Flint, Michigan
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Madison 1 173-35, Madison, Wisconsin
Greater North Stockton 64-39, Stockton, California

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Lewiston - Auburn 1741-45, Auburn, Maine
St Petersburg 2284-47, St Petersburg, Florida
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Mason-Dixon 2186-77, Huntsville, Alabama
ALFA Econchati 2313-77, Montgomery, Alabama

45 YEAR

Los Gallos De La Bahia 3400-04, Sunnyvale, California
Downers Grove 2745-30, Downers Grove, Illinois
Keynoters 3390-35, Madison, Wisconsin

35 YEAR

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Goddard 3496-36, Greenbelt, Maryland
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Whangarei 1666-72, Whangarei Northland, New Zealand

30 YEAR

Figures of Speech 2565-F, Brea, California
I-5 Toastmasters 3091-07, Vancouver, Washington
Torchlighters 2942-16, Tulsa, Oklahoma
Toast O'Town 2094-19, Sergeant Bluff, Iowa
Tiffany Springs 3355-22, Kansas City, Missouri
Farmers Insurance Group 1445-26, Colorado Springs, Colorado
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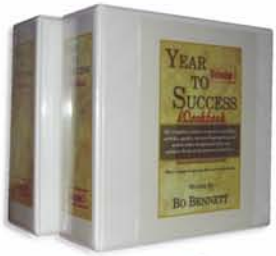
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