

# *Building a Better Speaker* **The Art of Evaluation**

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## PART ONE. BEFORE THE EVALUATION

1. **Contact the speaker.** Just like the relationship between a coach and a player, the evaluator and the speaker work together towards a mutual goal. In Toastmasters, that goal is to improve the speaker. Begin by preparing to evaluate *before* the meeting. Contact the speaker a few days in advance to get some important information:
  - What manual are you presenting from?
  - Which project?
  - What are the project requirements?
  - Who evaluated your last speech?
  - What tips for improvement did they share with you?
  - How will you implement those improvements in this speech?
  - What do you want the audience to take away from your speech?
  - Besides the manual requirements, are there any specific things you want me to keep an eye (or ear) on?
    - Repetitive gestures
    - Distracting gestures
    - Distracting verbal filler
    - Does the audience laugh at appropriate points, etc.
2. **Read the speech project.** Every project has specific tips for both the evaluator and the speaker. If you read them before the meeting, you can relax and enjoy the meeting, rather than “cramming” immediately before the speech like you did in college. In this day of faxes, photocopies, scanners, and email, it should be easy for you to get a copy of the project before the meeting. If not, meet with the speaker before the meeting begins and review the project. (If the speech is not a manual speech, I recommend using the International Speech Contest judge’s form.)
3. **Look and listen.** Too many times we get caught up writing notes during the evaluation and miss the speaker’s message. You’ll want to take the occasional note, but if you’ve done your preparation in advance, you will know what you should look for during the speech.

## PART TWO. ELEMENTS OF YOUR EVALUATION

1. **Watch the language.** Your evaluation doesn’t represent the entire club’s view of the speech. Your evaluation represents only one viewpoint – *your* view. The language you use should reflect that:

**INSTEAD OF**

“Good speakers don’t...”

“You shouldn’t...”

“To do it right, you must...”

**TRY**

“I suggest that...”

“I believe...”

“My reaction was...”

**2. Different Aspects of the Speech to Evaluate.**

<b><u>VOICE</u></b>	<b><u>BODY LANGUAGE</u></b>	<b><u>CONTENT</u></b>
Volume	Posture	Word choice
Pitch	Gestures	Topic selection
Quality	Body movements	Speech preparation
Articulation	Facial expressions	Appropriate for audience
Timing/rate of delivery	Eye contact	Appropriate for project
Vocal variety	Appearance/dress	
Voice vitality		
Vocal tone		

**PART THREE. WHAT TO EVALUATE**

Speaking is an art form. But just as there is no “best” way to paint a portrait, there is no “best” way to deliver a speech. Can you say that a Van Gogh is “better” than a Renoir? However, you recognize that both of them are *great* painters. Just as the great masters stand out from the pack, *great* speeches stand out from *good* speeches. Your task as an evaluator is to help the speaker improve from *good* to *great*.

To help them improve, you must first be able to recognize the elements of a great speech. Have you ever seen a great speech? How about a great moment in a speech? Think about what made it memorable. Was it the language? The delivery? The body language? If you can help the speaker re-create a single moment of excellence, you can help them create a powerful speech.

I recommend that you hone your evaluation skills by evaluating the best speakers in the world – the World Championships of Speaking. This annual event is available on videotape or DVD from Bill Stephens Productions (Visit [www.billspro.com/ts/ts03.html](http://www.billspro.com/ts/ts03.html)). Another great resource is David Brooks’s *Magic Moments* DVDs. David, who is the 1990 World Champion of Public Speaking, has taken the best moments from over a decade’s worth of World Championship speeches and compiled them to two DVD’s. (Visit [www.davidbrookstexas.com](http://www.davidbrookstexas.com))

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As you watch the speeches, keep a copy of the International Speech guidelines nearby to track the elements the judges looked for. These are some of the elements you'll want to look for as you evaluate your speaker.

Here are some of the elements I look for in a great speech. If you can recognize and help develop these elements in a speech, your evaluation skills will become unrivaled.

- ❖ **Customization.** Did the speaker personalize the speech for the audience? A great speech is tailored to the audience. If the speaker is directing their speech towards a particular group, they should use analogies, stories, and references that reflect that group's individuality. Does the speaker make reference to the group's heroes (CEO's, founders, top producers, etc.)?
- ❖ **The Rule of Three.** Audiences remember a point more easily if the speaker uses three examples, three stories, or three illustrations to highlight it. There is a certain musical quality to the words or speech when the Rule of Three is followed. "Friends, Romans" doesn't capture the ear as well as "Friends, Romans, Countrymen." Neither does "Friends, Romans, Soldiers, Countrymen." Listen for opportunities when the speaker can incorporate the Rule of Three. If they only use two illustrations, think of a third they could add. If they use four illustrations, ask which one could be discarded.
- ❖ **Stage placement and movement.** Does the speaker make effective use of the stage? Pay attention to what is right for *this* speech and *this* speaker. The speaker doesn't have to run around the stage or step out from behind the lectern to create a powerful speech. I've seen Zig Ziglar hold thousands in rapture. He moved from one side of the stage to another, bowed down on one knee to make a point, and used all of his body to emphasize a different point. *It was the best speech I'd ever heard.* I've also seen Jim Rohn captivate an audience of thousands. He used minimal body language, relied upon his notes, and rarely ventured out from behind the lectern. *It was the best speech I'd ever heard.* How could both be true? Both speakers were true to their own style and true to their message. Don't expect the speaker to mimic Zig Ziglar's style, Jim Rohn's, or yours. If the speaker can make more effective use of the stage or movement to emphasize a point, let them know, but never force your own style upon the speaker. Your job as an evaluator is to help the speaker become the best speaker *they* can be, not the best speaker *you* can be.
- ❖ **Avoid involuntary messages.** Is the speaker telling the audience that he'd rather be somewhere else? Evaluate the speaker's body language. Does it complement the speaker's message? If not, why not? Audiences watch everything a speaker does. If the speaker checks his watch, the audience will check their watch, too, and begin to feel time pressures. (Hint: when you speak, spin your watch around so the face is on the bottom of your wrist. You'll be able to sneak a peek at the time without tipping off the audience that you're concerned about the time).
- ❖ **Pause.** A speaker has true presence onstage when they can pause. . . . .

..... and hold it.

A pause lets us think. It helps us absorb an idea. A pause lets us laugh. Many humorous moments in speeches are lost because the speaker steps on the laugh line. It may take more than a second for the audience to catch the punch line. I presented one speech where the audience didn't laugh for the first two to three seconds of silence following the laugh line, then burst into laughter. Two to three seconds isn't a long time. . . unless you're on stage in front of hundreds. Great speakers know how to hold the pause, letting the audience think, feel or laugh. Look for moments where the speaker can hold the pause longer. Ask how many seconds (or heartbeats) they should pause. A four second pause is an eternity for the speaker, but only a moment for the audience.

- ❖ **Active voice vs. passive language.** Does the speaker tell stories in the past tense? Great storytellers tell their stories in the active voice, so the audience gets the impression that the event is happening *right now*. Listen to the speaker's choice of language and determine what tense they're using. Are there opportunities for the speaker to use the active voice?
- ❖ **Eye contact.** Does the speaker connect with the audience? Strong eye contact is essential to a great speech. Every member in the audience should feel as if the speaker is talking directly to them. That doesn't mean the speaker needs to make eye contact with every single audience member. When speaking to a large group, I recommend that the speaker works the corners of the room. If the speaker makes eye contact with someone in the front left quadrant of the room, the people surrounding that person will feel as if the speaker is talking *directly to them*. Then the speaker picks a different person in a different quadrant of the room, and speaks directly to them for a little while. I recommend working the corners of the room, to ensure that the speaker makes eye contact with the majority of audience members. When evaluating the speaker, draw a little diagram of the room, divided into quadrants. Let the speaker know if they favor one side of the room over the other.
- ❖ **Don't offend your audience.** Does the speaker know what topics are taboo? Some groups have a light sense of humor and don't mind when you poke fun. Others are incapable of laughing at themselves. The same speech may need very different language depending on what audience you're addressing. Gauge the audience's response to the speaker. If the audience seemed offended, determine what portions of the speech were offensive and help the speaker avoid repeating the problem.
- ❖ **Powerful language.** Does the speaker use language that is over the head of the audience? The speaker should be tuned into the audience. You would expect different language in an address to a national neurologist's convention than you would to a national sales conference. Does the speaker use language that the

audience relates to? Does the speaker use industry specific terms? Does the speaker use jargon that the audience may not understand? Help the speaker speak in terms the audience easily understands.

- ❖ **Rhetorical questions.** Used properly, rhetorical questions can be powerful tools for persuasion. Does the speaker ask any questions that force the audience to think? Does the speaker pause long enough to let the audience think about their answers? Many speakers use a variation of the rhetorical question to help the audience feel smart. They will pretend to have lost a fact, and let the audience fill in the gap. For example: “What was the name of that actor... Clint... Clint...” The audience responds, “Eastwood!” “Right, Clint Eastwood. Well anyway...” When the speaker lets the audience fill in the answer, the audience feels smart. Did the speaker do anything to let the audience feel smart?
- ❖ **Connections.** Did the speaker connect with the audience? Did you feel like he was talking to *you*? This is a very subjective portion of the evaluation, but very important to the speaker. Did the speaker’s body language act as a barrier or bridge to communication? Did the speaker start on common ground with the audience? For example, in a speech where the speaker discusses their success story, not everyone can relate to the success portion of the story. If the speaker starts by saying, “I made a million dollars by the time I was 30,” most people in the audience can’t relate. They have no comparable life experience. However, if that same speaker starts on common ground, such as how they were broke and barely making ends meet, the entire audience can relate to that experience. A good recommendation for the speaker: start in the hurt before you move to the success. Help the speaker start on common ground before moving to the aspirational part of the story.
- ❖ **Attention step.** Did the speaker grab your attention at the beginning? You can tell immediately when you’re listening to a great speech. Great speakers can grab you from the very first word. If the speaker starts with comments like, “I’m sorry, I didn’t expect to be asked to speak tonight,” “Thank you for inviting me to speak,” or “It’s always a pleasure to speak to the [fill in name of group],” they are losing a great opportunity to start with a bang. Ask yourself if there is a better way to start the speech. Many times, you can recommend that the speaker discard the first 30 to 90 seconds of their speech. They spend their introductory comments talking about how happy they are to be there, then segue into a story. Would it be better to just start with the story? Help the speaker craft a dynamic start to their speech.
- ❖ **Stories.** If the speaker uses stories to illustrate points (an excellent idea), what type of stories do they use? Have you heard the story before? There are hundreds of wonderful canned stories. The grandfather throws starfish back into the ocean and says, “It made a difference to that one.” Footprints in the sand, “When you were most tired, I carried you.” Laborers working with different attitudes: one lays bricks, one is building a wall, and the last is building a cathedral. The violin is

touched by the master's hand. The professor asks if the jar is filled yet, and reminds the class that the biggest rocks must go in first. You probably recognize most of these stories, even though I only mentioned one or two phrases from them. They're all great stories. The problem is that they aren't original. Audiences have already heard them or read them. The stories they haven't heard before are the speaker's personal stories. David Brooks said that with a great speech, "the audience learns a little about the speaker, a little about the world, and a little about themselves." Personal stories are one of the best vehicles for accomplishing that goal. If you hear the speaker use a canned story, ask if they have a personal story they could substitute. Also, evaluate how much of the story the audience needs to hear. Alfred Hitchcock said, "Movies are like life with all of the dull parts left out." Great stories heed that advice.

- ❖ **Vocal variety.** Vocal variety doesn't mean shouting every few minutes. Many times, whispering is more effective than shouting. When the speaker drops their voice, the audience tends to lean in to listen. They think to themselves, "This is really important, I don't want to miss it." As with any highlighting method, used to excess, it becomes annoying. You will sense the audience saying to themselves, "Speak up! I can't hear!" When evaluating, ask if there were opportunities for the speaker to drop their voice and draw in the audience. Also be mindful for opportunities to change voices, accents, or pitch to represent different characters.
- ❖ **End.** Did you know when the speech was over, or did the speaker have to tell you? Great speeches end. They don't peter out, trail away, or fade into the sunset. As an audience member, you can feel the end coming. Changes in voice, tone, or body language tell you that the speaker is going to wrap up the speech. Before they hit the final word, the audience is clearing off their laps so they can rise for a standing ovation. Did the speaker prepare you for the speech finale? If so, how? If not, how can you help the speaker develop a stronger ending for the speech?

## PART FOUR. DIFFERENT TYPES OF EVALUATIONS

1. **Tell and Sell.** This is what we typically think of when we think of an evaluation. One evaluator is assigned to the speaker. The evaluation happens shortly after the speaker concludes.
2. **The Panel Evaluation.** Each evaluator listens to every speaker. Evaluator #1 gives an evaluation, then Evaluator #2 adds additional comments, not repeating any comments made by Evaluator #1. This continues until all evaluators have given their input.
3. **The Expert Panel.** Again, several evaluators are used. Each evaluator is assigned to analyze a different area. For example, Evaluator #1 might make note of the vocal

aspects of the speech, Evaluator #2 might examine the non-verbal aspects, and Evaluator #3 comments on the content of the speech.

4. **The Club Evaluation.** Similar to a panel evaluation, but *everyone* in the club comments on the speech. Particularly helpful when a speaker is preparing for advanced levels of the International Speech contest.

5. **The Written Evaluation.** The speaker prepares written evaluation forms, indicating particular areas where he or she wants feedback from the audience. Can be used in conjunction with a standard evaluation.

6. **The Video Review.** The speech is videotaped (as all of your speeches should be!) then replayed during the evaluation, with comments by the evaluator attuned to specific portions of the presentation. Especially helpful when pointing out distracting or dynamic non-verbal aspects of the speech.

7. **Tell and Sell with Speaker Response.** This gives the speaker the opportunity to respond to the evaluation, with a follow-up by the evaluator.

8. **Interactive.** This can be done with either an individual evaluator or a panel evaluation. The evaluator(s) question the speaker as to why he or she used a certain gesture, phrase, etc., and are able to tailor the evaluation accordingly. The speaker can also ask the evaluators if certain aspects of the speech were effective ("Was the portion of the speech where I mentioned my Aunt Nellie effective at underscoring the importance of acting with integrity?")

9. **Stop the Speaker.** Evaluators interrupt the speaker during the speech and offer comments.

I hope these tips help you develop your evaluation skills. If you ever want any assistance with a speaking project or need a speaker for your group, association, or business, please don't hesitate to call or email.

Best wishes,



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