

Evaluations that Enlighten

Finding the right balance to help every member achieve their full potential

**by Don Shapiro
Confident Speakers Club 4199**

Evaluations are the heart of the Toastmaster experience. They help you to improve so you get the full value of being a member. They anchor the foundation of the Toastmaster experience that produces good meetings. A club meeting can be no better than its evaluations. Our growth depends on the feedback we receive.

Yet, we approach evaluations with great trepidation. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Why should we care about doing evaluations that enlighten?

Benefits

Speakers, members and club

Effective evaluations help speakers to keep improving and stay motivated.

They insure every member grows and receives value from their Toastmasters membership.

They help a club be the best it can be so every meeting is one members felt was worth their time.

Evaluators

They help us become more aware of all the things that affect a speech so we can improve our own speeches.

Evaluators learn how to become effective listeners and pay attention to the verbal, visual and subtext of human communications.

Evaluators learn how they can share effective feedback at home, at work and in the community.

Start with the right attitude.

Why are you evaluating this speaker? Are you giving an evaluation only because someone needs to give the speech evaluation or because you really care about helping this speaker grow? Your attitude is everything in giving effective evaluations that lift the speaker up while helping them to achieve their full potential. Let your attitude guide you and the rest will naturally fall into place.

- ❖ You care about the speaker and are interested in the speech

You want to support, help and encourage the speaker. You want the speaker to keep growing and improving as a communicator.

- ❖ Make your evaluation personal. Focus on how the speaker affected you personally, not how you think others would react to the speaker.

When you evaluate, you are simply giving your own reaction to the person's speaking efforts. An evaluation is an opinion, nothing more. This opinion should mention the effect on you, what the speaker did well and specific recommendations for improvement.

Here are some of the ways you might phrase things:

"I believe

"My reaction was

"I suggest that

"I felt that

Avoid phrases like:

"You failed to

"You were wrong to

"You didn't

Here is where your personal thoughts about the speech come from:

What you felt

What you heard

What you observed

- ❖ Show empathy for what the speaker may be going through. We've all been there.
- ❖ Clear your mind so you can put all your energy into observing the speaker.

When the speaker is being introduced, take some deep breaths and relax. Prepare yourself to focus completely on the speaker and their speech.

Be clear about the speech and speakers objectives

Objectives come from the manual project they are giving and their own thoughts about what they want to improve at. Talk to the speaker before the meeting as well as read their manual objectives.

Even if there isn't a manual, you need to decide where the speaker is at in their development cycle and what would help them the most at this time.

Are they a beginning speaker, a speaker who has completed several projects or an advanced speaker?

What do you already know about them based on the previous speeches they've given and why they're in Toastmasters?

Their level of development guides you about what you focus on and what you don't.

Share helpful insights

Key ways to find and use valuable insights

- ❖ Avoid just talking about the topic of the speech itself

An evaluation is not a discussion inspired by the speech's topic. It is a look at what the speaker did well in preparing and delivering the speech and where they can improve.

- ❖ Be specific when referring to what they did well or where they could improve. Give an example from the speech to illustrate your point.

Don't just say the speech used great stories or some things were unclear to you. Refer to specific examples.

- ❖ Where did your attention go, what held it, what distracted it?

A speaker has to hold the audience's attention so their message is heard. Pay attention to "your attention" and that will help you discover insights that can help the speaker right now. Was this related to delivery, preparation or speech construction?

- ❖ Observe the speaker's energy

Look for the speaker's level of sincerity, passion, conviction, belief and knowledge of their message. This is more important than their delivery methods.

- ❖ How clear was the theme, structure and overall message?

How well was the speech written and constructed? Think about its opening, its theme, do the main points flow from the theme, are the main points clear and brought to life, and how is all this pulled together to close the speech. This is the foundation of every speech.

How to organize your insights

1. Start by emphasizing the speaker's strength so they can build on them.

They need to hear something to help them improve while hearing as much or more about what they did well and their strengths.

You become a great speaker by building on strengths more than trying to correct all your shortcomings.

How did the speech make you feel?

2. Focus on two or three key areas where they can improve with suggestions.

Pick the biggest items to improve on. Don't cover everything you noticed. Select that which will help them the most.

Eye contact, gestures and body movement may improve a speech but are not always the most important things that should be focused on. It depends on the speaker's level of development and what you feel are the most important areas of improvement this speaker needs to address right now. Sometimes delivery needs to be mentioned and sometimes it doesn't.

How could the overall impact of the speech be improved?

Where there are issues, don't just describe the symptom. That's what you observed. Look for what might have caused it so you can offer suggestions to address what's behind what you observed. How could they have done this better that would have improved the speech's impact?

Offer areas for improvement as your suggestions with the right attitude.

3. Always end on a positive note about something you felt the speaker did especially well and encourage them to keep speaking.

Get them excited about giving their next speech!