

On Evaluations

by Janine Burke (www.janineburkela.com)

Imagine you have timidly walked into Toastmasters for the first time – **terrified** – you hear a speaker that seems amazing to you. Look at that courage, that confident smile! How are they doing it? A little while later the evaluator steps up and gives them a list a mile long of improvements to make. What? **TERROR** turns to **PANIC**. What on earth would they say to me, thinks our terrified guest? **EXIT STAGE RIGHT**, their fear of public speaking has hit a new time high.

Evaluations are important for us all – the evaluator, the members, the guests and of course, the speaker. We need to keep in mind that as an evaluator our job is to inspire, encourage and motivate while giving a **FEW** – (meaning two or three) **MANAGEABLE NEXT STEPS** – for the speaker to take with them.

It is our job as evaluators to know who we are evaluating – what they want us to look for in particular, and what the speech requirements are. We reach out to our speaker, especially if they are new and not in the groove yet. Look in your manual beforehand and refresh your memory on the requirements of the speech. Note: icebreakers are our most precious members – they are still terrified/petrified/dry mouth/cold sweats – think back friends. Icebreakers need us to **LOVE** and **ENCOURAGE** them into a comfort zone – those voices of fear do not go away quickly and the tremendous courage it takes to stand up before a crowd of 50 strangers is a **HUGE** and **ADMIRABLE FEAT** and cannot be acknowledged enough.

We must remember only evaluate to the point the speaker has progressed – speech 3 is not required to use props, vocal variety – it is demoralizing to comment on things the speaker has yet to learn. We cannot run before we walk – nor use professional vocal variety if we have just managed to stop shaking after speech 3.

As much as it is natural to want to address just the speaker – let's not make the other 49 people feel like they are eavesdropping on a private conversation. Try keeping the audience in the loop also – i.e. "Mary's goal was to use vocal variety in her speech. The laughter in the audience when she clucked like a chicken and barked like a dog told me she accomplished the requirements of the speech beautifully. Did you all notice how she raised and lowered her voice to a whisper for added effect?"

It is not our task to retell the speech – the audience just heard it! Our goal is highlight **HOW** it was told – did it resonate with the crowd, was it an appropriate

choice of material for the goals of the speech? It is so helpful to give the speaker specific examples of what they did or said extremely well. "When you said, 'My father was so big he blocked the sun,' I immediately got a sense of a massive man. Mary is a beautiful writer and her personal anecdotes added to the story so well."

The conclusion of the evaluation should always be a recap of the highlights of the speaker's strengths to end on a **positive and supportive note**.

Personally, I cringe when I hear "I look forward to your next speech." Hey, let's try to be a little more original, and show a little more sincerity by personalizing our conclusion. How about: "I congratulate you on your inspiring/humorous/interesting speech."

As evaluators we learn to truly listen, to inspire, to encourage and to frame things in a positive light. These are rare and precious gifts that can be used in every area of our lives. Take the many opportunities our clubs offer to refine this art.