

A REFLECTION ON THE HERITAGE GO-GETTERS' EFFECTIVE EVALUATION EVENT, DECEMBER 2003

By Keith Lee

In early December 2003, I had the privilege of attending a special Effective Evaluation Christmas event held by the Heritage Go-Getters club. The highlights of this event were the exhibition of a video of the 2003 District 42 Evaluation contest and a talk by the winner, David Benjatschek. In this article I would like to share some of my observations from this session.

The contest video was shown first. After the test speaker gave a very amusing 5-7 minute speech about her experiences as a "baseball mom", nine evaluators "stepped up to the plate" to offer an evaluation of her speech. Each of these evaluations was very *personal, observant, specific* and *vivid*.

PERSONAL: All of the evaluators spoke directly to the test speaker in a confident and sincere manner, often addressing the speaker by name and looking at her during their evaluation to establish a strong and honest connection while they offered their thoughts about her story. Also, they made clear that they were offering their own opinion (i.e. "The part that I really liked was...") and did not make blanket statements.

OBSERVANT: The evaluators had to not only watch the speaker very carefully, assessing nonverbal aspects of the presentation (such as facial expressions, energy, arm gestures, etc.), but they also had to listen attentively the speech to catch the subtleties of the organization, flow of the content, overall style and impact of presentation.

SPECIFIC: All nine evaluators were very precise about what aspects of the test speaker's speech they felt were strong or offered a potential area for improvement. To consolidate their points, many were able to recall and re-enact specific things that the speaker did well or not-so-well. Many commented about things like:

- ❖ working the stage (stage presence and movement)
- ❖ engaging the audience
- ❖ using pauses
- ❖ rhythm of the speech
- ❖ ways to strengthen the organization of the speech
- ❖ literary techniques observed (such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc)
- ❖ adding more vocal power
- ❖ when to use a prop

VIVID: Besides using an extensive vocabulary in their evaluations, many of the evaluators incorporated metaphors and imagery into their presentations, often using a baseball theme. Phrases like "stepping up the plate", "going, going, gone", and other colorful language helped to complement the events of the speaker's story. The contest

winner, David Benjatschek, carried this metaphor the farthest by incorporating several vivid baseball word-pictures to bring his point home, saying things like "the click of the cleats and the smack of the glove", "keep swinging" and "you were the ball" to great effect.

After the video, Mr. Benjatschek shared his very philosophical approach to the discipline of evaluation. He pointed out that while it is good to be "mindful" of things that happen during a speech -- organization, diction, eye contact, vocal variety, etc -- going "that extra mile" can really make the difference in terms of having an impact on the speaker and the rest of the audience. He encouraged evaluators to consider things from the perspective of the person being evaluated: what was on their "to-do list" when they were preparing and delivering the speech? He pointed out that an effective evaluation should address the emotional motivations of the speaker and help plant "seeds of encouragement" to encourage the speaker to grow. In order to do this, the evaluator needs to be aware of not only the speaker's emotions and motivations but also his own...

Overall, I felt that the meeting was very successful and offered me an opportunity to learn more about what skills one must master in order to become a more credible and effective evaluator. The humanistic and compassionate approach that Mr. Benjatschek described was very appealing, and proved that the best evaluations not only win contests, but also offer the speaker a clearer perspective on themselves and help them overcome their fears and other barriers to success.

February 15, 2004