

NOTES FROM THE SAITSAYERS EVALUATION CONTEST BRIEFING, FEB 25, 2004

By Keith Lee

On February 25, 2004, our club VP Education, Anthony Chim, DTM, presented a briefing about the upcoming International Speech and Evaluation Contests. In this article I will relate what information and advice Anthony offered during the session.

During the year, Toastmasters holds four speech contests: Humorous Speech and Table Topics contests in the fall and International Speech and Evaluation contests in the spring. The International Speech contest is thus named because a person can conceivably go straight to the World Championships – all they need to do is win at the club, area, division, district and regional levels. So easy!

Anthony passed out copies of the judging forms that are used for the International Speech and Evaluation contests and pointed out what criteria are used by the judges for assessing the success of each contestant. Contestants are assigned points for speech development, speech value, and vocal variety, among other things.

In order to compete in the International Speech competition, a Toastmaster must have completed at least 6 speeches. District officers (such as Area Governors) cannot compete.

Anthony offered three tips for succeeding at the International Speech competition:

1. *Make the audience cry!* It seemed like the winners at the District level always seem to talk about deep subjects, some focusing on tragedies or crises. These dramatic presentations can have quite an impact on an audience.
2. *Make the audience laugh!* Not funny ha-ha but more funny insightful.
3. *Be yourself and have fun!* 'nuff said!

He concluded his section on the International Speech competition by reminding us that the key is to participate and strive for your best; if you don't win, there is always next time!

Anthony then moved on to explain more about the Evaluation contest. For this competition, a test speaker would present a 5 to 7 minute speech on a general topic. The evaluation contest competitors would be allowed to take notes during the presentation. Once the speaker was finished, the contestants would be led out of the room and given five minutes to prepare their notes. After the five minutes was up, the first contestant would be led into the room to take the contest stage to present a two to three minute evaluation of the test speaker's presentation.

As with normal meetings, in the contest setting, timing is extremely important; the green flag would go up at 2 minutes, yellow at 2:30 and red at 3:00. The evaluator would need to complete their evaluation before 3:30 or else face disqualification!

On the judging sheet for the Evaluation contest, competitors are assessed based on the quality of their analysis, recommendations for improvements and techniques used. Anthony pointed out that the trusty Sandwich method might not be the most creative

route to take for a contest evaluation and recommended trying other methods, such as acronyms, stars & wishes or C.O.D. (see Anthony's Nov 2003 writeup on Effective Evaluations for more details).

The three key elements that Anthony emphasized as being important for a successful evaluation in this (or any other) context were that the evaluation be:

- ❖ Sympathetic to the speaker,
- ❖ Sensitive, and
- ❖ Motivational

Also, he reiterated the importance of personalizing the evaluation: never use “you must” or “you should” in your evaluation; instead, speak your own mind, using “I felt”, “I thought” and other language that specifies that you are providing a recommendation based upon your own experience and interpretation of the presentation.

Anthony also stressed the value of having a strong summation. He suggested that once you see the yellow flag it might be better to start wrapping up so you have a tight conclusion.

As practice, Anthony invited Robert, one of our newer members, to provide a Table Topic speech that we could use as a “test speech”. Robert chose to speak on the subject of “Travel”, and told the audience about his trip to Greece, including his visit to two specific islands. He included some wonderful imagery and ended with a recommendation about how best to enjoy a trip to that part of the world.

After the speech concluded, Anthony invited the room to brainstorm about specific approaches that could be used to evaluate Robert's speech. One member suggested using the acronym method (based on the word TRAVEL, for instance) where each letter would represent different areas to commend or challenge the speaker. I offered that I would focus on one particular aspect of the speech (such as the use of imagery and word pictures); another member suggested the virtues of the good old sandwich method.

Anthony reiterated that the key is to be sympathetic, sensitive and motivational in your evaluation; many different methods could be used to achieve this. He suggested that one method that may be very effective in the context of evaluating a speech on travel would be using the metaphor of travel – “Thank you for letting us travel with you... your speech was like a journey, it had a beginning, middle and end!” Several of the most successful evaluators he had observed were able to provide amazing evaluations loaded with an incredible amount of creativity, enthusiasm and imagination, all conceived and realized very quickly!

It was also pointed out that the evaluators are not given any information about the background of the speaker or the objectives of the speech. The evaluator must figure out what the speaker is trying to accomplish based on the presentation!

Anthony concluded his session with three specific recommendations:

1. Specify the exact number of points that you intend to make (for instance, let the audience know that you will be identifying three strengths and offering two recommendations for improvement)

2. Avoid using extreme superlatives such as “Excellent”, “Great” and “Wonderful” in the context of offering an area for improvement. Be creative and develop what Nandini referred to as an “evaluator’s vocabulary” – a stock of words and imagery that can take your message beyond what audiences may be accustomed to hearing.
3. Have fun! Don’t get stressed out over the contest – it is just another opportunity to practice, refine and demonstrate your skills!

Overall I think that Anthony presented a very effective session and offered a lot of concrete examples of ways in which we could prepare not only for the contests but also improve our regular meeting evaluations. We are lucky to have the benefit of his experience in our club!

(Feb 25, 2004)