

Beyond Whitewash: Frequently Asked Questions about Evaluation

Evaluation is the toughest role in a Toastmasters club. The evaluator must listen critically, quickly form opinions about the speaker's strengths and weaknesses, and then present an organized, extemporaneous speech that is sincere, positive, and helpful. Poor evaluations, either overly critical or sugarcoated, drive members away.

Evaluate to Motivate (cat. no. 292), *The Art of Effective Evaluation* (cat. no. 251), or *Effective Evaluation* (cat. no. 4008-V) should be presented at least once a year to refresh every club member's evaluation techniques. Being a good evaluator requires practice to improve. Try some of these ideas for common evaluation difficulties.

Too many of the evaluations in my club don't provide suggestions for improvement.

Sometimes we don't want to hurt people's feelings and err on the side of being too cautious, but a whitewash evaluation is not helpful, either. It's proper to begin and conclude your evaluation with praise, but don't overload the speaker with tribute only. Your evaluation should not be a review ("you said this and then you said that, and I agree with you.") Make at least one specific suggestion for improvement. It may be something she is already doing, but could do more of.

I am intimidated by the prospect of evaluating someone with more experience.

An evaluator is not a judge or a person with all the answers. Evaluations are based on how you saw and heard the speaker. Your opinion is just as valuable as anyone else's. Newer members often provide fresh perspectives, seeing things that long-time members have gotten used to. Consult the speaker in advance to review his special needs and goals. The manuals are written to guide your thinking – by following the evaluation guide, you will invariably provide useful feedback. This is a major reason why every speech should be a manual speech.

How can I avoid giving harsh evaluations?

Don't comment on the content of the speech even if you disagree with what was said. Focus on how effectively the speaker delivered the talk. Avoid dogmatic statements such as "You must.." or "You failed to..." Point out problems using personal statements such as "The way it struck me was..." or "What I felt when you said that was..." Every comment about a weakness should have a suggestion for improving that weakness. Your Mentor and the meeting's General Evaluator can give you helpful feedback.

What should I do when the speaker is terrible and I can't think of anything positive to say?

There is no such thing as a perfect speech, and there is no such thing as a completely awful speech. There is always something to praise, even if it's simply having the nerve to get in front of an audience. Avoid giving the speaker a laundry list of things to improve. People can only concentrate on changing one or two behaviors at a time. Pick something you think the speaker can quickly remedy and focus your evaluation on that.

What should I do if the speech doesn't meet the objectives of the manual assignment?

More than likely, the speaker misunderstood the assignment. Unless the speaker habitually disregards the manual objectives, the VPE should give him credit for trying. As an evaluator, gently suggest that the speaker redo the project, after pointing out a couple of things to change.

How do I evaluate a speaker who gives a non-manual speech?

Your club should have an extra *Competent Communication* manual (cat.no 225) on hand that evaluators can use as a guide when speakers forget their manuals. This demonstrates to all the club members that the manuals not only help speakers focus on fundamentals, but especially help the evaluators organize their thoughts. Another idea is to attend an Evaluation Contest to see how the best speakers from other clubs evaluate speeches without specific guidelines. In general, the VPE should not give credit for non-manual speeches. Clubs should expect members to deliver manual speeches.

Carefully observe and emulate the better evaluators in your club and you, too, will soon be an evaluator everyone admires.

Written by Norm Cook, PDG Founder's District, on behalf of Lauren Kelly's Campaign Team, 2006-2008

Vision • Values • Vitality

Lauren Kelly, DTM, Candidate for **International Director** from Region II, 2006-2008

lauren.kelly@earthlink.net laurenkelly4id.org