

Education Module: Evaluate to Motivate  
As presented by Ellen Arnestad, February 2005

Wanna know a secret? As toastmasters we are by definition highly motivated people. A common trait of highly motivated people is that no one can criticize them like they can criticize themselves. This is the truth, we'll beat ourselves up after each and every speech about all of the things that we did wrong or could have done better or habits that we've still not been able to break ourselves of. We've also assessed all of the evaluation that we've already received from the body language of our audience. So the job of evaluator is definitely not judge, believe me when I say that that part has already been well taken care of by the time the evaluator gets up to say their piece.

This doesn't mean that the job of evaluator is redundant or unnecessary; in fact it makes the job doubly important. The speaker is usually able to pick out all of the things that went wrong and never once stop to think about what went right. And without positive feedback, why would they ever stand up here again and keep subjecting themselves to the negative abuse that they put themselves through afterwards. What they do need is to know that their speech actually made an impression on others, that the audience actually got something out of what the speaker saw as less than perfect. To hear how others actually took what he said makes a great impact, but if all we do is tell the speaker how good they were, then they can dismiss it and not see any value in it; there needs to be some ideas for improvement – so how do we find the balance.

I'd like to tell you how I've found that balance with some points to keep in mind and then some specific feedback criteria and finally how to put it together.

The first point that I always remind myself of is that my main objective is to help the speaker. We are all here to help each other to reach some goals and without you here, I would have no help to reach mine, so I have a responsibility to help you reach yours. What helps me to learn how I can change my speeches is how the speech makes people feel (because I like to be emotionally moved by a speech), are they hearing what I wanted to say? – is it interesting or meaningful to them (because one of the criteria for a

speech should be that it is interesting to the audience – know your audience), and how am I coming across – are the words I am saying supported by my body language (am I showing the passion, strength or persuasion that the words are trying to convey). If I know how my speech affected you I can figure out if that was how I wanted to come across and hopefully amend it from there. So your feedback is not necessarily to change the speakers behavior, but for the speaker to decide if he wants to change it to get a different reaction from his/her audience. Remembering these things helps me to know my purpose in evaluating.

But how do I do these things? I look for specific criteria and make sure that the speaker knows that these things are only my personal reactions and not absolute truths. We should all know that there are no rights or wrongs in speaking, only results. It's the results that they need to hear. I do that by the tried and true method of what I saw, what I heard and what I felt. The next trick is a thesaurus. We all know how it feels when someone says – “that was really good!”. It doesn't matter how much enthusiasm they say it with, it really doesn't tell you anything. Was it good because it motivated you, it persuaded you, it inspired you. What did you feel! Interested, intrigued, impressed, angry.

What did you hear? Did it flow, did they have supporting evidence, could you follow it or were you confused. Were they clear, did they elaborate, did they use appropriate language (for the topic, for the audience).

Finally what did you see? Did the body language match the message? Did they have distracting mannerisms or did their eyes flash with passion, did they make it obvious that they wanted everyone in the audience to get the message.