

10 Key Behaviors of an Effective Evaluator

1. Show That You Care

Above all, your evaluation must be sincere and genuine. You can't fake this-you must honestly want to help the other person. If your main objective as an evaluator is to show off your wit, wisdom or impromptu speaking skills, your evaluation will fail. Being sincere also means avoiding a well-intentioned "whitewash" - an evaluation that lacks constructive recommendation for improvement.

2. Suit Your Evaluation to the Speaker

How you evaluate depends upon whom you evaluate! It's essential that you adapt your evaluation to the needs, goals, sensitivities and experience level of the speaker. If you don't know what they are, you should try to learn them before hearing the speech.

Pay special attention to the speaker's self-improvement goals. Being aware of them will help you compare where the speaker is now with where he or she wants to be, and to suggest ways he or she can reach those goals.

You should also recognize symptoms of fear or insecurity so you can deal with them in a helpful, tactful way.

3. Learn the Speaker's Objectives

To evaluate effectively, you need to prepare in advance. Here's how:

- ❖ Contact the speaker in advance
- ❖ Ask what the speaker feels are his/her speaking strengths and weaknesses.
- ❖ Review the manual objectives and evaluation guidelines, and discuss them with the speaker.
- ❖ Ask if there are other considerations you should pay attention to.

4. Listen Actively

Keeping in mind the manual objectives and the speaker's own self-development goals, you need to pay close attention throughout the speech. Here are some keys for active listening:

- ❖ *Be physically and mentally alert.* Sit erect. Mentally affirm your desire and intention to listen carefully. Ignore distractions.
- ❖ *Empathize with the speaker.* Try to consider the speech situation from speaker's point of view.
- ❖ *Find areas of interest.* Let yourself become curious about the topic and how the speaker develops it.
- ❖ *Summarize.* Don't try to recall every detail. Instead, pick out the main ideas and conclusions, and make your own mental outline or summary.
- ❖ *Listen with your eyes as well as your ears.* Determine the speaker's overall impact by matching content with delivery. Decide how well they worked together in communicating the message.
- ❖ *Take notes.* Jot down a few of the most important ideas and examples that occur to you during the speech. Use a separate sheet of paper- not the speaker's manual.

5. Personalize Your Language

When you evaluate a speech, you are describing its effects on you. You aren't a judge -- merely a potential valuable source of feedback and assistance. To be effective, your language should reflect this.

Examples:

- ❖ When describing your reactions to a speech, use personalized phrases such as . . .
 - "My reaction was..."
 - "It appeared to me..."
 - "I felt that you. . ."
- ❖ Avoid blanket statements like...
 - "You should have. . ."
 - "You failed to. . ."
 - "Your opening was. . ."
- ❖ When offering recommendations for improvement, personalize them by saying. . .
 - "I suggest. . ."
 - "I think your next speech will have a stronger impact on me if you..."
 - "A technique I have found useful is..."
- ❖ Avoid impersonal statements such as...
 - "You should..."
 - "You must. . ."
 - "Try to..."
 - "Good speakers do it by..."

6. Give Positive Reinforcement

People working hard to improve themselves need to know their efforts are worthwhile. They need to know that the program is working - that they are making progress toward their goals. They also need recognition for their accomplishments. These things are considered vital to work situations where people get paid for what they do. Think how important they are in an organization like Toastmasters.

To effectively meet these universal human needs, your praise must be deserved. Hollow flattery can backfire and not help the speaker. But you should find something praiseworthy and recognize it sincerely.

7. Help the Speaker Become Motivated

A big reason most people never attain their potential is that they fail to recognize it. Consequently, they don't make efforts toward reaching it. As an evaluator, you can help a speaker become motivated by...

- ❖ Reminding the speaker that his/her goals are both worthwhile and attainable
- ❖ Encourage the speaker to work hard toward improving his/her speaking skills.

8. Evaluate the Behavior - Not the Person

When you evaluate, your words have the capacity to produce an emotional response. To help others, you can't impose your value system on them. Your purpose is not to evaluate the quality of a speaker's ideas - rather, it's to help that person learn to communicate his or her ideas more effectively. Your evaluation should focus on the speaker's behaviour. It should never threaten or attempt to judge what he or she is as a person. Remember... Evaluate what the speaker does - not what the speaker is!

9. Nourish Self-Esteem

When you evaluate, you're entering into a special relationship with another person. This relationship has the potential to build self-esteem and help that person grow.

End your evaluation on a positive note. Strive to have the speaker leave the room feeling better about himself/herself than before the meeting. Strive to have that individual feel accomplished... rewarded... accepted... and motivated to improve even more!

10. Show the Speaker How To Improve

While it's vital for you to recognize a speaker's strengths and the improvement he or she has made, a "whitewash" evaluation can be as counterproductive as overly harsh criticism. Your central purpose, remember, is to help the speaker improve.

Here are three tips for achieving this purpose:

- ❖ Focus on what you feel the speaker should be doing- not on what they should **not** be doing. This reflects the difference between evaluation and criticism.
- ❖ Keep your recommendations to a manageable minimum. Select the one or two areas in which you feel the speaker can make the greatest degree of improvement in their **next speech**.
- ❖ Present your recommendations in a positive way, giving specific suggestions and examples. Show the speaker **how** to improve - not just what to improve.