

The 3 Rs of Evaluating:

Review, Reward and Respond

By David Hobson, DTM

Another project speech draws to a conclusion and the speaker returns to her seat accompanied by a round of well-deserved applause. In a few minutes you will be introduced, rise and walk to the lectern to present your evaluation of that speech. It is your first-ever evaluation of a project speech and, naturally, you are a little nervous. What will you say and, more important, how will you say it?

Evaluations are the life blood of Toastmasters meetings; they are what keep members coming back for more. New speakers depend on them for information, help and development. Long standing-speakers need them to prevent the onset of mental rust or complacency. The evaluation process separates Toastmasters International from any other organization offering public speaking coaching.

By definition, an evaluation is “the act of considering or examining something in order to judge its value, quality, importance or condition.” It is the job of an evaluator to find value in the speech, to examine the quality of its delivery, to consider its importance to the occasion and the audience, and to reflect upon its condition as part of the speaker’s development progression. Evaluators must also add some value by offering help, support and guidance to the speaker. However, there should be no use of the “C” word – Toastmaster evaluators do not criticize – ever!

Criticism is easy; we hear it all the time in every walk of life. However, criticism is the language of cowards. Criticism is negative. Even a *critique* (a term used by

non-Toastmasters), being a critical analysis, almost sounds like a put-down. Evaluation on the other hand considers the value, the good aspects, and adds value with helpful suggestions for improvement.

For each project speech, the speaker must meet specific objectives and guidelines. The evaluator uses these to formulate a report. The verbal evaluation is a mini speech. In the two-to-three minutes

allotted to you, you must create an opening, a main body and a conclusion. You must consider the objectives of the project and establish whether they have been met. In delivering your comments, you must choose the appropriate language, voice tone, body language and facial expressions. You must find words of praise for the good elements and words of help and encouragement in identifying the areas for improvement. And, finally, you must do this in a non-threatening, supportive way.

Use the three R’s of evaluating: Review, Reward and Respond.

■ **Review.** To give the best review you can, consider the speaker’s personal goals as well as the official Toastmasters evaluation guide. While the guidelines for evaluation are beneficial, the speaker may be more interested in developing skills not listed. Before the presentation, determine with the speaker what her goals are as they relate to the project’s objectives.

In your review you should answer the question, “Did the speaker accomplish what she set out to?” If she did, publicly acknowledge that fact in the evaluation. On the

other hand, if you have doubts on this aspect, you may wish to include your comments in your written evaluation or discuss them privately with the speaker, later.

If the speaker agrees that she did not achieve her purpose, she may elect to repeat the project, though this is not required by Toastmasters. You might also offer to act as a mentor (if the speaker does not already have one) to help her make modifications to her current speech or to prepare her next presentation.

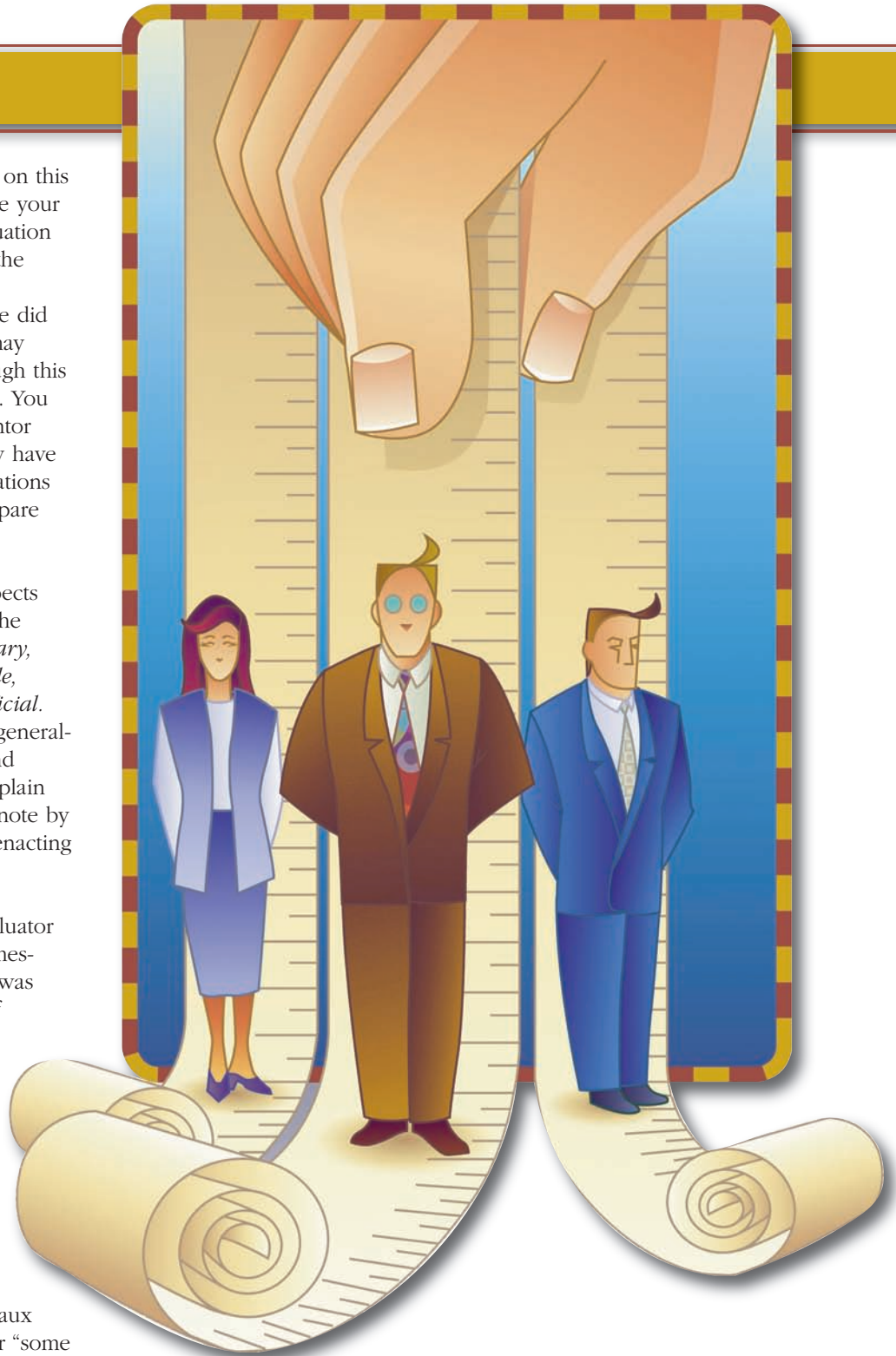
- **Reward.** Richly praise the aspects that were particularly good in the speech. Use words like *exemplary*, *outstanding*, *effective*, *admirable*, *praiseworthy*, *pleasing* or *beneficial*. Try to avoid overuse of vague generalities such as *good*, *very good* and *excellent*. It's a good idea to explain why the aspect was worthy of note by quoting the exact words or re-enacting a gesture.

- **Respond.** Your role as an evaluator is to respond to the speaker's message. Not by challenging what was said, but through an analysis of what you heard, what you saw and what you felt:

- ▶ **What you heard.** What words were used? Was the language descriptive and evocative? Did the speaker use *ums*, *ahs* or other fillers? Were there any grammatical goodies (alliteration or rhyming) or faux pas ("there *was* several..." or "some examples *is*...")?
- ▶ **What you saw.** Did the speaker use effective gestures and appropriate body language? What facial expressions were demonstrated? Was eye contact maintained with the audience? Did the speaker step out from, or hide behind the lectern? Did the speaker go over the allotted time?
- ▶ **What you felt.** What emotions were felt by you as a listener? What images could you see in your mind?

Were you moved to action? Could you empathize with the speaker? Did you experience happiness, sadness, anger or excitement – and did it seem like your reaction was what the speaker intended? Could you feel the speaker's passion?

By far the most important aspect for you as an evaluator is to inform the speaker of the elements which, *in*



your opinion, need to be worked on for the next assignment. You should also offer suggestions and provide examples as to how these changes can be made. At least one third of your speaking time should be devoted to dealing with the points for improvement. Failing to do so effectively negates your evaluation; you will not have met your own evaluating objectives. It is your duty to help

“Don’t forget, the evaluation is your personal opinion.”

and encourage the speaker by not only praising his good points, but also by indicating the aspects that did not work quite so well, *in your opinion*, and offering suggestions for ways to overcome the situation in the future.

Having composed your list of comments, now comes the time to walk to the lectern and deliver your message of support and development. But how will you deliver it? There are two trains of thought on the delivery style: the first-person style and the third-party style.

In the **first person style**, the evaluator addresses the comments directly to the speaker using the speaker’s name and phrases such as, “Your eye contact was direct-

ed to the left...”; “I liked your opening statement...”; “perhaps you could...”; or “I suggest you try to...” Often this approach is accompanied by direct eye contact with the speaker for 90 percent of the evaluating time. While this style may make it easier for the speaker to take note of what is being said by the evaluator (it becomes almost like a one-to-one coaching session), there are three major downsides:

1. Direct feedback in this way, particularly when talking about the points for improvement, can lead to conflict. The speaker may perceive an “I am better than you” threat from a combination of the words used and the direct eye contact, with no chance of a response as would happen in a normal coaching conversation.
2. The larger group may sense a loss of sharing. When a verbal evaluation is heard by the whole audience but is only projected directly to the speaker, everyone else feels left out of the learning element of the evaluating process.
3. The normal speaking courtesies (which are often discussed in an evaluation) are often ignored; eye contact to the whole audience, speaking to each individual, using effective body language. The process becomes a one-way conversation between the standing evaluator and the seated speakers.

What? A Standing Ovation for an Evaluation?

A few months ago, while hiking in Sedona, the red-rock country an hour and a half north of Phoenix, Arizona, I met a woman who was also a Toastmaster. When she found out I was a member of Park Central Toastmasters, she said, “I’ve heard a lot of great things about Park Central, but the one thing I’ve heard most often is, ‘If you want to experience superb evaluation, go to Park Central.’ “I was happy to hear her view because I think well-intentioned, honest, supportive, encouraging feedback accelerates the learning curve and inspires us to reach up and take risks when we speak.

Intelligent, thoughtful evaluations are unique to Toastmasters. Our friends and relatives may listen endlessly as we rehearse our speeches. They may even tolerate our spouting off spontaneously on odd topics at unexpected times. Civic involvement as well as work

Thoughts on giving an exceptional evaluation.

By Judith Tingley, Ph.D., DTM

can encourage us to learn, expand and use our leadership skills. But I know of no other settings where we can receive targeted, objective and constructive feedback on our speeches. And there are no real-life negative consequences even if the evaluation is negative – with the exception of an occasional bruised ego.

Years ago I earned the nickname “boom-boom” in my club because in one of my early evaluations of an experienced speaker, I mentioned that his speech was on a trivial topic and was boring too – a double lowering of the boom. I’ve learned since how to do a better job of

Perceptions are important and should not be overlooked. To avoid the perceived conflict and “shutting out” effect, it is better to use the **third-party style**.

In this style the evaluator addresses the comments to the whole audience and uses phrases such as, “John had a very dramatic opening”; “Jane was able to convey humor”; “I particularly liked her alliteration”; or “Did you notice how his body language helped to convey the message?”

Eye contact with the whole audience is inevitable as the evaluator projects his message to everyone. Opponents of this style may say, “You should not talk about someone while they are still in the room” or “It is impersonal to give an evaluation in such way.” While this may be true, this method works far better for the individual and the group.


By using the third-party style, you are actually singing the praises of the speaker as you address the strengths. This makes most speakers feel good about themselves in front of their peers. You can comment on their points for improvement, and everyone will learn from your suggestions. Additionally, a person being evaluated will not perceive any threat of superiority from the evaluator and will be more receptive to the feedback as she sits and listens comfortably. She won't feel that she's in the hot seat.

In summary, this style has three major advantages:

1. There can be no perception of threat or superiority.
2. The evaluator is able to share the message with the whole audience.
3. Speaking courtesies are observed as the evaluator delivers the message in a natural manner using eye contact, voice modulation, body language and, probably, some gentle humor.

Don't forget, the evaluation is *your personal opinion*. As long as your comments are given in a helpful and supportive manner, the speaker will accept your opinion. Similarly, whether you choose the first-person or third-party style is your personal choice.

Toastmasters develop into effective public speakers through a combination of practice and evaluation.

It is imperative to pass on the correct skills in order for our art to thrive. Using the techniques of reviewing, rewarding and responding will ensure that our speeches continue to improve and that every evaluation adds value. 

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being honest and constructive rather than honest and harsh.

Most Toastmasters have their own strong ideas about how evaluations ought to be conducted, and I'm no exception. My club uses these basics to guide evaluators:

- **Call the speaker before the meeting**, find out the manual she's using, the level and the objectives of the speech as well as the speaker's particular needs related to her development.
- **Check in again the morning of the speech.** You're the coach and you need to know how your speaker is feeling, thinking, being. Be sure you have his manual so he can receive credit for the speech.
- **Be ready to give your total attention to your speaker**, even before she comes to the lectern. Clear your mind of judgments and extraneous thoughts, and tune in. Listen openly and attentively.



- **Make some notes**, but don't attempt to write the evaluation as you listen.
- **Summarize your notes**, using the objectives from the manual, and organize your evaluation as you would a speech: with an introduction, a body and a close.
- **Get ready to give the evaluation.** This is your big moment. Whoops, think again! This is the speaker's big

moment, to hear the thoughts, feelings and suggestions you have about the speech.

- **Stand up in front of your audience** as you would if you were giving a regular speech. It is one – although shorter than the typical five- to seven-minute speech. Address the general evaluator, your audience and particularly the speaker.

Here are some more tips to help you do the most valuable evaluation.

- **Focus on specifics.** “Your enthusiastic opening inspired us from the start.” “Your clear chronological organization helped us understand your speech quickly.”
- **Focus on positives.** “Your opening grabbed the audience. The audience looked mesmerized.”
- **Give concrete suggestions.** “The splashy ending might have worked better as the opening.” “Decrease the details in the stories or the number of stories you told so we could stay on track.”
- **Point out needed areas for improvement.** “This speech would have been even more effective in front of the lectern.”
- **Don’t repeat the speaker’s content.** We’ve heard it.
- **Focus entirely on the speaker,** not on yourself, your similar or different experiences, or your equally stellar qualities.
- **Focus on the speech,** not on the speaker’s personality, values or lifestyle.
- **Focus on the delivery,** not the rightness or wrongness of the content or your agreement or disagreement with the speaker’s perspective.

Two or three years ago, at Park Central Toastmasters, Lee Robert received a standing ovation for her evaluation of Frank Switzer’s contest-winning speech about sex offenders. That was a first in my years of experience as a Toastmaster. What did Lee do that made her evaluation so outstanding? What can we all learn from her success that we can use to improve our own evaluations?

- **Lee focused on the speech, the construction, the organization, the delivery.** She didn’t focus on the challenging content and tell us what Frank had told us. We heard him, loud and clear. She never talked about her opinion about sex offenders, her experience with sex offenders, sex offenders she had known, or about her perception of Frank’s opinion, his values, his personality. She focused on the speech and its delivery. She gave concrete, specific suggestions about how Frank could improve his speech, which she also briefly demonstrated.

- **Lee adapted her evaluation to the speaker.** What does that mean? She introduced her evaluation by saying, “This is an advanced evaluation for an advanced speaker.” We all knew, as did Frank, that a powerful critique was coming down the pike. As Lee said later, “If Frank is going to the regional conference, he certainly needs to be ready to hear more than a whitewash.”

Evaluators need to make an acknowledgement of the level of the speaker’s progress in the Toastmaster manuals. When the evaluator structures his or her evaluation with the manual objectives, not only the speaker, but the whole audience understands exactly what the expectations are.

The evaluation of new speakers needs to be encouraging, but not without constructive thoughts for future improvements. The evaluation of experienced speakers requires more analysis and in-depth evaluation, without whitewashing, so that they, too, are challenged to escalate their skills.

- **If in doubt, ask others.** As part of her evaluation, Lee asked us all as a group, before she stated her opinion, whether we were offended by a certain comment in Frank’s presentation. When a large number of people said they were, she commented, “Drop that part, Frank.” She didn’t give him heat for his comment. e.g. “Frank, that’s really insensitive, bad judgment or poor taste.” She just stated the obvious. “Let it go.”

Another way to do the same thing if you’re not sure about your own reaction, is to ask the people around you what they think. Did they see the organization of the speech clearly, even if you didn’t? Did they get the point early and you didn’t?

Being well and thoroughly evaluated is perhaps the biggest opportunity Toastmasters offers all of us. Most of us can’t find that feedback anyplace else. Everyone wants to improve and wants to help others improve. And I know you’ll agree, one of the very best ways to achieve that goal is to work on perfecting our evaluations.

Do your fellow Toastmasters a favor. Whether you evaluate them on paper or upfront, give each a solid evaluation, adapted to that speaker, focused on the speech, offering objective comments. Make that a goal, fellow Toastmasters, and the quality of your already great club will improve dramatically in the next year as the quality of your evaluations improves. You too, like Lee Robert, may be surprised by a standing ovation! 📌

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