

Common Evaluation Mistakes, by John Spaith

“Common Mistake: No Suggestions for Improvement

“John, your speech was so good, Cicero would bow down before you. Perfection! There was nothing wrong with it!”

“A wise Toastmaster once said that if you give a speech without getting an evaluation, you might as well have given it to your car. Getting a bad evaluation can be even worse.

“[G]etting an evaluation with no ways to improve is worse than giving a speech to your car. Your car won’t tell you that you’re Cicero, will it? Someone once told me when you see a speech you think was perfect, imagine you just paid \$10,000 to hear it. I guarantee you’ll find something to improve.

“Common Mistake: Regurgitation Evaluation

“John, in your speech today you had three points which I’m going to repeat. Then you told a joke that I’m going to repeat and a story I’m going to repeat. I’m not going to do anything more than repeat what you’ve said. Thank you.”

“How many times do you get an evaluator who really does no analysis of a speech, but gives it back in book-report form? Unless the speaker got hit in the head during the break and is suffering amnesia, they don’t need this. Say why and how a speech was and wasn’t effective.

“In particular, new evaluators tend to regurgitate. I’m guessing because they’re not confident yet. Just because you’re new doesn’t mean you can’t have an opinion. I’ve given the speech that inspired this article six times to five different clubs. The best feedback I received was from someone who was at his second meeting and wasn’t a member yet.

“Less Common Mistake: Brady Bunch Evaluation

“John, your speech about your trip to Hawaii reminded me of the Brady Bunch episode where they went to Hawaii. Remember how Peter found the haunted Tiki and Alice hurt her back on the surfboard and... [Three minutes pass.] Anyway that was a great episode, wasn’t it?”

“Making this mistake means you are not evaluating the speech at all, but instead talking about yourself or the Brady Bunch or anything but the speaker. I’ve never seen a full three-minute digression, but I have seen it take half an evaluation.

“While this is a less common mistake, it’s more obnoxious than the two above. Being too nice and the regurgitation mistakes are motivated by the understandable fear of hurting the speaker’s feelings. The Brady Bunch Evaluation is motivated by wanting to talk about yourself. Your job is to help the speaker. If you have an ego to satisfy, give a speech of your own. If your ego is boundless, name an evaluation scheme after yourself and publish it in the Toastmaster magazine.

“Worst Mistake: Too Harsh

“Though it may not be as common, the worst mistake by far is being too harsh in an evaluation.

“As the saying goes: When in doubt, omit. Avoid mentioning anything outside the speaker’s control. When evaluating newer speakers, don’t forget the sheer terror you probably felt when you were in their shoes.”

Source: Spaith, John. *Assessing Your Evaluations: Maximize the help, and minimize the hurt.*

<http://www.toastmasters.org/ToastmastersMagazine/ToastmasterArchive/2007/November/Articles/Evaluations.aspx> (July 2010).

Step one to giving effective speech evaluations: Know the speech project, purpose statement, and title. Review the evaluation resource ahead of time, if you're able to, or at least prior to the speaker's introduction. The speaker should provide the evaluation resource for you.

Step two: Ask the speaker if there is anything specific they'd like you to watch/listen for in addition to speech project objectives and make a note of those items.

Step three: An effective evaluation starts with good note-taking technique. Keep your note taking technique simple. During the speech, watch and listen carefully, paying attention to both content (topic, word choice, organization, etc) and delivery (gestures, vocal variety, body movement, etc). Take note on what the speaker did well and what could be improved.

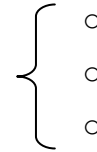
What the speaker did well:

How the speaker could improve:

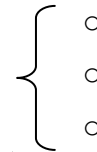
Step four: After the speech, organize your notes for your evaluation according to the "sandwich method" of positive affirmations, challenges for improvement, concluding with either additional positive affirmations or a summary (or both, if you still have time). Take your notes from the left column and organize them below for your verbal evaluation.

The Sandwich Method for Speech Evaluations:

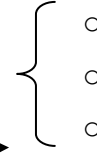
- **What you did well (achieved speech purpose?):**



- **1-3 suggestions for improvement:**



- **Other things you did really well:**



- **Brief summary of above, if time permits.**

Step five: Complete the official Evaluation Resource.

Other things to be aware of:

Use language that indicates recommendations are your opinions and not a matter of fact or right and wrong by using "I" language ("I thought..." or "In my opinion..." or "I noticed..." etc).

Remember that the evaluation is for the benefit of the speaker, not just an opportunity for you to speak – limit your comments just to those that will benefit the speaker.

Your verbal evaluation should not simply be a reading of your written evaluation. Limit overlap of the content in your written evaluation and your verbal evaluation, but don't forget to mention whether the speaker achieved the speech purpose or not in *at least* the verbal evaluation.

