

Speech Coaching

One of the requirements for the Advanced Communicator Gold award (and thus for the Distinguished Toastmaster award) is that you have coached someone through their first three speeches. Since you are serving as a mentor, this is the perfect time to go ahead and get that speech coaching requirement done. It will benefit both you and your protégé.

A key with speech coaching is not to tell your protégé what to do, but to offer suggestions and options.

The Basics

When a new Toastmaster is assigned to present their Ice Breaker speech, there are generally a few things that are frequently forgotten, usually because no one has told them about these things. Please be sure to mention the following specific items.

- **Read the speech project:** Occasionally you'll witness a speech presentation that just does not seem to achieve the project goals. In such cases, the likely culprit is a Toastmaster who looked at the project name and made assumptions about the details of the assignment. Toastmasters International has spent 85 years developing its educational program, refining and improving the content of its speech manuals along the way. Encourage your protégé to take advantage of the decades of experience and read all of what the manual has to say about each project.
- **Title:** Many Ice Breaker speeches are given that don't have titles. Suggest your protégé come up with a title for each of their speeches and include that title somewhere in the Toastmaster's introduction when appropriate.
- **Evaluator:** Encourage your protégé to contact their speech evaluator prior to giving their speech to share their speech project, title, objectives, main topic, and what specific things they'd like their evaluator to watch or listen for.
- **Introduction:** Many first time speakers forget to – or more likely, don't know they're supposed to – prepare an introduction for the Toastmaster to read.
- **Lectern:** Point out to your protégé that they do not need to speak at/behind the lectern if they don't want to, even right off the bat. They may choose to have the lectern repositioned or removed completely. Encourage them to mention their preference to the Toastmaster prior to the start of the meeting.
- **Props:** Mention to your protégé that whenever they use props, they can either set it in place before the meeting even starts, during the one minute of timed silence before they are introduced, or ask the Toastmaster to set it up for

them. They may choose any of these options over pausing to grab and set up their props after they are already introduced so that they may jump right into their speech.

- **Manual:** Remind your protégé not to forget to bring their speech manual with them the night they are speaking, and remind them to fill in the chart in the back of the manual and have the VPE sign off on the project.
- **Speech projects:** It is strongly suggested that your protégé present the speech projects in order so they may build on each skill being emphasized. However, if your protégé is preparing their third speech and is just itching to share their research on climate change with the club, it would probably be more appropriate to apply this speech toward project #7. Or perhaps a work-related PowerPoint presentation is coming up soon and they'd like to practice it in the club before presenting it to the clients or boss, your protégé may absolutely apply the speech to project #8. Going in project order is preferred, but not required.
- **Timing:** At least in our club where our meetings are run with a high degree of efficiency and professionalism, speech timing follows the parameters set for each speech project as defined in the manual. If your protégé has a lot to say on their topic and wants additional time to say it, they should have that change in timing approved in advance by the VPE. Following timing requirements is an underappreciated discipline outside the Toastmasters club environment. However, encourage your protégé to learn this discipline early and it will be appreciated not only by fellow club members, but also bosses, clients, coworkers, and more in a variety of situations and venues.
- **Avoid:** Apologizing (for using notes, for being nervous, for your accent, for fillers you expect to use, etc.) and thanking the audience for listening (simply signal the end of your speech by acknowledging the Toastmaster.

Speech #1: The Ice Breaker

Different individuals have an interesting range of responses to the Ice Breaker speech. Some find it the easiest speech since they are experts on the subject, others find it difficult talking about themselves. Providing your protégé with some guidance on preparing for the Ice Breaker speech could very well help them get off to a great start in their speech manual.

Objectives

- **Introduce yourself to the club.** Members tend to love Ice Breaker speeches because it is often the only time we really get to know the new speaker. Encourage your protégé to focus on creating a clear beginning and ending and a body with a few main points. You might suggest they memorize the opening and conclusion, even if they feel the need to refer to notes during the body.
- **“To begin speaking before an audience.”**²¹ Acknowledging the fact that some people will have a really difficult time just getting up and speaking in front of others, the Ice Breaker project is designed to help the Toastmaster feel successful after just the first speech. It may help your protégé to understand

that their basic goal for this speech is to just get through it, and that everyone in the audience will be rooting for them to succeed.

- **“To discover speaking skills you already have and skills that need some attention.”**²¹ The beauty of this objective is that it is appropriate for your protégé regardless of their background and it will help them chart a course for improvement over the next several speeches. As Andrew Dlugan phrases it, “Some new members have no public speaking experience, while others have years of presentations behind them. No matter where you fit in this spectrum, your goal is to improve from your starting point. This first speech helps club members gauge your current strengths so that they can make specific recommendations to help you improve.”²²

Tips

Encourage your protégé to:

- **Ask for help.** Make yourself available to sit down ahead of time with your protégé to go over their speech – either on paper or if they choose to actually “perform” it for you. Listen critically as though you were going to give the evaluation for the evening.
- **Practice.** Practicing will definitely help alleviate nervousness. This is especially important if your protégé is not a native English speaker to help them avoid stumbling over certain words. Also encourage them to time themselves giving their speech. There’s not much more discouraging for a speaker to be only half way through a speech while looking at a red light, or completing a speech even before the green light illuminates.
- **Be realistic.** If your protégé needs to use the lectern and/or notes, that is fine. If they choose to give their speech without notes and stumble in their speech, that is also fine. Encourage your protégé not to get too upset if the speech contains a lot of fillers or is not performed with perfection, but they should also resist the urge to preface their speech with something like “This is my first speech so I’m very nervous,” or apologizing for fillers or a lack of a polished presentation.

Outlines to Suggest

- **“Chronological:** For many people, a series of chronological snapshots of their life is the easiest to write and deliver.
- **“Topical:** Discuss a series of elements of your life to provide a “sampling” of your life.
- **“Common Thread:** Select a common thread that runs through your life, and share brief stories where this common element appears.
- **“One Key Event:** Focus on one critical event which took your life in a completely different direction.
- **“How I Got Here:** A combination of the Chronological and One Key Event, explain the series of decisions or events that brought you “here,” where “here” might be the place you currently live, the job you currently have, the life you lead, or the decision to join Toastmasters.”²²

Speech #2: Organize Your Speech

The ability to organize a speech effectively is a skill that your protégé will need for the rest of their Toastmasters experience and far beyond.

Objectives

- **“Select an appropriate outline which allows listeners to easily follow and understand your speech.”**²³ Andrew Dlugan summarizes the point of the second speech beautifully, asserting that in order ensure the audience really *gets* your message, “you need to organize your ideas to promote understanding.”²⁴
- **“Make your message clear, with supporting material directly contributing to that message.”**²³ A good suggestion for your protégé is a simple outline containing three clear points. It is hard to go wrong with a basic three point outline. The *Competent Communication* manual contains a great sample outline on page 15.
- **“Use appropriate transitions when moving from one idea to another.”**²³ As an experienced Toastmaster, you can probably offer your protégé some great tips on transitions. A few suggestions you can pass on are pauses, changes in position, key phrases (the next point is, secondly, etc) or a phrase that is repeated throughout the speech at transition points (which may or may not be the speech title). The *Competent Communication* manual has a variety of suggestions to offer on page 16.
- **“Create a strong opening and conclusion.”**²³ Strong openings include a “hook” that will grab the audience’s attention from the very beginning. Hooks can include a shocking statement, statistic, or declaration, music or singing, movement (a demonstration, dance, or gesture), silence, joke, rhetorical question, anecdote, quote, among other things. Encourage your protégé to be creative. Strong conclusions tie back to the introduction and leave the audience with something to think about, do, or remember.

Outlines to Suggest

Probably the most basic outline you can mention to your protégé is the standard “Tell them what you’re going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.” Some basic outlines you can suggest are:

- **“The Classic ‘Three Supporting Points’:** Begin by stating a premise... support it with three reasons or three supporting points... then summarize.
- **“Chronological:** Describe a sequence of events... or a step-by-step technique.
- **“Geographical:** A convenient method to organize a speech about travels, or... contrasting your topic across many locations.”²⁴

Speech #3: Get to the Point

The skills learned in Speech #3 will help your protégé keep all of their future speeches focused. It helps the speaker stay on track and avoid going off on tangents, and can help weed out less important information to remain within the defined timing requirements.

The General Purpose: A Common Misunderstanding

Many Toastmasters assume that the general purpose of a speech refers to the broad, simplified topic. If you read the lesson for the speech project, you'll notice that is not correct. There are only four different types of general purposes and knowing exactly which one your protégé's speech is will help them focus the speech content better.

Here are the four different general purposes:

- **To inform:** Educate the audience about something
- **To persuade:** Convince the audience to consider or accept a different point of view or take action on something
- **To inspire:** Motivate the audience to achieve a higher level of
- **To entertain:** Get the audience to feel something

Objectives:

- **“Select a speech topic and determine its general and specific purposes.”**²⁵
After your protégé decides the topic they are going to talk about in their third speech, the general purpose should be easier to choose. The specific purpose should be simple and precise. A good way to think about the specific purpose is as the thesis statement of a research paper. Your protégé should be able to describe the specific purpose in a single sentence.
- **“Organize the speech in a manner that best achieves those purposes.”**²⁵
Some outlines will be more appropriate to a specific purpose than others. Your protégé might keep in mind that the last point a speaker makes tends to be the one the audience remembers the best, while the least remembered information is in the middle of the speech. Therefore, the most important, intriguing, or convincing information should be saved for the end of the speech body, with the weakest or least important information in the middle of the speech, and whatever falls in between those two extremes should be toward the beginning.
- **“Ensure the beginning, body and conclusion reinforce the purposes.”**²⁵
One of the biggest challenges a speaker has is to stay focused. If you have a chance to review and comment upon your protégé's speech draft prior to them giving the speech at the club, watch to make sure every point, sub-point, and example reinforces the specific purpose. If something is said that doesn't support the thesis of the speech, point that out to your protégé. If they are too attached to that particular thought, you can point out that they can save it for the next speech.

-
- **“Project sincerity and conviction and control any nervousness you may feel.”**²⁵ It might help your protégé to develop a reasonable expectation of their upcoming experiences by pointing out that nervousness may not necessarily be eliminated, but instead controlled. We often say experience helps us teach the butterflies to “fly in formation,” rather than getting rid of the butterflies all together. Remind your protégé about breathing techniques, using pauses to avoid speaking too quickly, proper preparation, and other nerve-controlling techniques you use yourself.
 - **“Strive not to use notes.”**²⁵ The *Competent Communication* manual suggests memorizing the introduction and conclusion, which is definitely a great suggestion. Pass on to your protégé the techniques you use to get through a speech with minimal use of notes, such as note cards, a simple outline, speech landmarks, visual aids, and other techniques.

Tips

- Steps to meeting project objectives:
 - “Determine your **general purpose**.
 - “Focus in on your **specific purpose**.
 - “Ensure that the entire speech **maintains focus** on your objective.”²⁶
- Narrow the topic.
- Delete anything that does not reinforce your general and specific purposes.

“Fight or Flight” – When Your Protégé is Ready to Flee

Occasionally you will run into new speakers who have specific challenges to overcome. Extremely shy or introverted speakers may often feel the overpowering “flight” urge over the resolute “fight” urge when presenting a speech. This is why it is important for you as the mentor to be present for your protégé’s speeches. If your protégé appears to panic and perhaps ready to flee, it is okay to take some action.

For example, go ahead and talk to your protégé – even if it is in the middle of their speech. Suggest they talk directly to you as though they are simply having a conversation with you. If necessary, go ahead and join them at the lectern and encourage them to finish their speech by just chatting with you up there. Suggest deep breaths. Use a soft, calm voice to provide words of encouragement.

Another situation in which your protégé might struggle is if they are overly attached to their words. Really creative writers might want their speeches worded just right and getting lost in their speech (whether it is because they tried unsuccessfully to memorize every word, or they simply lost their place in their notes) can become a traumatic experience.

Regardless of the reason, if your protégé should leave the room in the middle of a speech or just after, follow them and provide comfort and encouragement. Take initiative if it looks like your protégé is getting ready to break down or flee.

