

## Acing Evaluations – September 2023

Plug ‘Acing Toastmasters Evaluations’ into You Tube and you’ll find a host of useful resources on this topic, but assuming you have neither the time nor the inclination, today I’m going to give you my personal boiled-down recipe. The simplest, easiest way to evaluate your peers, which can be scary, is to use the traditional sandwich method. 3 layers: bread, meat, bread, in 3-5 minutes. LAYER 1: Blast through what you liked, give the speaker legs to stand on before you kick them out from under them in Layer 2. No, seriously, your role as an evaluator is in the word: E-VALUE-ate. LAYER 2 is about adding value, remembering that criticism can feel harsh, like a personal attack to a speaker, whereas feedback usually feels kind because it’s given impartially, with excellent intentions. And LAYER 3 is an explicit summary that brings us back to the main point and concludes. Nothing wrong with that. But here are 4 tips that can turbo-charge your sandwich and take it out of the ordinary.

**Golden Tip no. 1: Make it a Club Sandwich.** No-one’s interested in a sliver of cheese between two slices of white bread. Sure, help the speaker grow but give your audience value too. Remember, as you rise the Toastmasters ranks, you’ll pit yourself against other skilled evaluators and one day you’ll contest. So see every evaluation as a contest, as a performance. See the audience as judges, and try to wow them. How? Here are 3 sub-tips.

**A. Involve the Audience.** Make them work, keep them on their toes. Don’t say: ‘Laura’s speech was great.’ Say, ‘Did you notice how Laura used 3 languages in her speech?’

**B. Go Deeper. Say it better.** Find what’s *really* of value. Don’t say: ‘Well done for having a message.’ Say, ‘Catherine’s touching message aligned so well with her speech about emotional intelligence.’ Stand out. In contests, evaluators will all have similar points. Yours must be memorable. If a catchy phrase presents itself: ‘Reduce the breath to increase the depth’ use it!

**C. Give examples.** It’s a perfect opportunity to perform! Demonstrations are far more useful than instructions so show the speaker what they could have done. Compare: ‘You could have used body language’, to ‘We might have seen your fists clench, your nostrils flare, the anger welling up inside you.’ And be specific with problems. ‘You went off point’ is less useful than, ‘You were telling a sad story but smiling throughout.’ Which brings me to:

**Golden Tip no. 2. A Club Sandwich, not a Fruit Cocktail.** One of the dangers of evaluating is the temptation to comment on every single point in the speech, Trust me, it’s an audience-killer. Keep it simple by listening carefully and making notes in 2 columns: ‘Great!’ and ‘Could be Better!’ Remember, there’s no space for all these in the final evaluation. So, pick 2 or 3 ‘greats’; things that exceed expectation, and move quickly on to the tough love. Work hard to help the speaker take it to the next level by going deeper into the 1 or 2 things they could ramp or lose. Start positive and encourage with all the tools you as a Toastmaster already have: body language, vocal variety, speech organization. Make it flow, use eye contact, plug the emotion. It’s still a performance.

**Golden Tip no. 3. Use the Recipe.** How many of us have, usually under time pressure, dispensed with the recipe and wished we hadn’t? It’s the same with evaluations. Read the recipe, know the ground rules innately. You have limited time. Use it wisely. Don’t start your recommendations on green; you should be concluding by then. Adverbs weaken, they don’t

strengthen. 'He ran!' is stronger than: 'He ran very quickly.' Superlatives annoy: 'Silvia's speech was the best speech I've heard in my life.' Yeah, right. Look sharp. Stand confidently. Speak with authority. Don't say, 'I suggest maybe next time you might perhaps consider....' Nonetheless, remember you're not bound to the recipe. If, in your evaluation, you end up giving us a deconstructed sandwich, no problem. Most audiences will know how to put it back together, if you've supplied the ingredients. Which brings me finally to:

**Golden Tip no. 4 – Don't Forget the Sauce.** Certain things add an irresistible flavour to your evaluation that finish it off perfectly. If, in your genuine desire to help the speaker you can make your audience laugh, or put in a pause that's so well-timed it disarms them, or you can sneak in a prop without making it seem forced, do it. Wow us. Remember that in final analysis an evaluation is a speech. And we care about the speaker. We want to learn something from them, but more than that we want to stand in their shoes for five minutes, and see the Toastmasters world through their eyes; the good, the bad and all the in between.