

**Focusing on structure,
content and delivery makes
evaluations as easy as 1, 2, 3.**

The Ease of Evaluations

I love doing evaluations! But I haven't always. And I've noticed that some fellow Toastmasters seem to worry about giving good evaluations. You probably fall into – or have been included in – that category, if:

- You've ever sat down after giving your evaluation and suddenly remembered an important point that you wished you'd said.
- You've been so caught up in scribbling notes before and after a speaker's presentation that you missed half of the speech and the meeting.
- You've felt as if you were clutching at any comments that came to mind randomly, but were not quite getting the whole picture.

I've come up with a technique that takes the stress out of giving evaluations and helps me feel I'm providing the most rounded and helpful feedback I'm capable of. And it allows me to enjoy the remainder of the meeting.

My system: a simple skeleton to hang my comments on, in a logical and concise order. It works for me; I need simplicity. If you're interested, read on!

First, I focus on three generic aspects of a speech that I consider important: structure, content and delivery. I create a "skeleton" before the speech begins. On a sheet of paper, I draw three boxes equidistant from each other and title them Structure, Content and Delivery (see diagrams). These form the evaluation's backbone.

As the speech is given, I focus on its quality, based on those three aspects. As soon as a comment occurs to me, I jot it down in the appropriate box – fleshing out the skeleton. It helps to divide each box into two sections, with one area for commendable aspects and one area for aspects to work on.

By the end of the speech, I have a logical list of comments that are easy to read and help me to instantly prioritize the key issues.

So, how does this system work in practice? Let's consider one box at a time:

STRUCTURE

Say the speech has shown excellent structure in terms of a clear beginning, middle and end. Write down something like "Beg, Mid, End" as a point in the commendable side of the box.

If, however, the middle section was confused, with a meandering story that was hard to follow, write something like "Mid – confused" in the suggestion side.

When it comes to delivering your evaluation later, you need only a couple of key words to jog your memory. Your page's layout will help remind you what you are aiming to get across, so that with a quick glance you've got it.

CONTENT

The same principle works for the other boxes. For example, if the speaker's topic was about how to control nerves when giving a speech, write "Relevant to audience" in the commendable side of the content box.

If, on the other hand, you felt that the speech didn't go into enough detail about dealing with butterflies in the stomach, write "More on butterflies" on the suggestion side. That's it!

Remember, the positioning on either side of the box will remind you whether the issue was done well or needs improvement; you don't need to write a whole sentence and lose valuable listening or scribbling time.

DELIVERY

If the speaker used a wide range of voice volume, from whispering to shouting, write: "vocal variety" in the commendable side of the Delivery box.

If the speaker stood stone-still throughout the entire speech, a comment like "body gestures" under the

improvement side of the box will do. As you're presenting your evaluation, flesh out your note, explaining that the vocal variety was excellent, showing an interesting range of volume that kept the audience interested and involved. You can mention that using more body gestures, such as flapping the arms when discussing the "butterflies," would have enhanced the speech.

You can work outside the box as well. Think about these additional ways you might strengthen your evaluation:

- Quotes are a useful way of illustrating points to a speaker, so draw a line outward from a specific entry in a box and write down the gist of the quote there.
- Write – in another box or out to the side – any particular objectives that the Toastmaster mentioned as the speaker was introduced. Keep an ear to determine whether the speaker fulfilled – or didn't fulfill – these objec-

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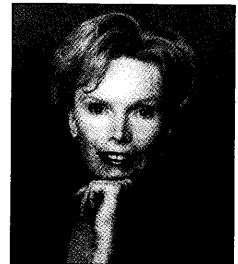
tives and jot a brief reminder down in this category.

- A handy mnemonic I learned from a club in New Zealand was: "Commend, Recommend, Commend." Try to cover the most positive aspects at the beginning of your evaluation, discuss suggestions in the middle and end with more praise, leaving the speaker on a high.
- At the top and bottom of your sheet of paper, write a word or two for your introductory and ending sentence. Just as in a speech, beginnings and endings greatly enhance delivery. It's always a good idea to prepare these before you give your evaluation.
- One more thing – don't forget how valuable it is to go up to speakers after a meeting and give personal feedback – whether or not you were an evaluator. **1**

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