

Fellow Toastmasters:

I am sharing with my fellow Toastmasters in D-65 some of the discussions currently going on the subject of **"What is the most over-used phrase in speech evaluations?"** These are opinions of individual Toastmasters in what they see as most repeated and overused phrases used by evaluators.

The bottom-line is that as an evaluator, your job is to support the speaker, encourage the speaker, give positive feedback, and provide the speaker with useful suggestions for improvements, etc., etc. which are all important and necessary aspects of evaluation.

What other Toastmasters (from across the country and around the world - SEE BELOW THE COMMENTS) are suggesting is to avoid clichés or overuse of words and phrases thereby losing its original intent or effect. Selectively and/or sparingly use the adjectives for praises such as "great" or "outstanding" or "perfect" or "excellent" or "awesome" etc., etc. Over a period of time they lose meaning and become inconsequential and may even sound phony! Evaluate from your heart. Try to come across genuine and sincere. In Toastmasters, making the speaker feel good is comfortable, important and supportive, but at the same time remember that it is your responsibility as an evaluator to ensure that he or she delivers a better and/or improved speech next time, based on the your comments and constructive suggestions.

"Without further ado" is a cliché. Avoid using it. (Ban it from your club!). When a new member gives his or her first, second or third speeches from the CC manual and the respective evaluators use all the possible cliché (i.e., marvelous, wonderful, spectacular, amazing, fantastic, etc., etc.) wrapped into one evaluation, in order to support and encourage the new speaker etc., it may become counter-productive. What do you expect this new TM to do for rest of his or her time in the club?

When a newer Toastmaster is asked to evaluate an experienced speaker, generally one hear comments like "I cannot think of anything to improve" or "to evaluate Mr./Ms. XYZ is always difficult because of his/her experience" or "what can I possible say about evaluating XYZ" etc. This too is a form of cliché. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and evaluate the speaker as you would evaluate any other speaker! Stop being intimidated!

I see some evaluators using the phrase "*I am nitpicking.*" Essentially what it means is that I couldn't find anything wrong in your speech but am forcing myself to come up with a "small" and "insignificant" suggestion – "just for the record!" (In other words, the speaker was so good and the speech was so perfect, etc.!). This too is a form of cliché. Please avoid using this phrase!

I hope after reading this, fellow Toastmasters will look at the generous use standard admiration praises, a little differently or use them more selectively.

Thank you for listening and best regards,

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COMMENTS FROM TOASTMASTERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND WORLD: (This are actual comments/quotes).

"I loved your speech and can't wait to hear your next speech!"

"Overall a Very good speech."

"I look forward to hearing your next speech". (It especially sounds odd to hear this in a contest where the evaluators don't know the speaker and are thus unlikely to ever hear him/her again.)

"I can't think of anything for you to improve"

"Get out behind the lectern"

"You used great vocal variety"

"We are all here to get better"

"You told us..." and its equivalents, because it's usually followed by a rehash of the speech instead of an evaluation. Happens WAY too often!

"It was a perfect speech"

"There is nothing you can do better"

"I look forward to another presentation"

"You could change your position more often"

"Use the full time for your speech instead of completing on the green card"

"I have done the same mistake".

"Great speech" (Even when everyone in the room, including the speaker, knows that it was not!)

"Another thing I really liked" (I notice I personally use the sentence a lot in evaluations)

"You always do such a good job..." and "I had a hard time finding anything to suggest for improvement..."

Some of the standards are: "good vocal variety"; "clear voice" and "good eye contact." (I tend not to use "good/great speech.")

"Well done" (These 2 words seem to follow every sentence and inevitably conclude the evaluation.)

"I had a very tough time finding a single thing to criticize in your speech. But without further ado, here are about 17 of them... "

"It was an excellent speech, and I look forward to hearing your next one and searching even harder to find more things to criticize."

"I think its a general tendency of people using compliment sandwiches, which can cloud constructive feedback. You obviously don't want the speaker to leave the lectern crushed either. When someone says to me that they haven't found anything I can do better, I'd probably become rather suspicious."

A phrase I find overused by both evaluators and Toastmasters is "...that having been said, I will now...." (Yuck!)

I get tired of Evaluators who say "You did this" or "You should have done that". I think it's far more constructive if an evaluation is delivered in the third person, and directed at the whole audience as a learning experience, rather than directly at the poor speaker in a finger pointing exercise. Its great if you have no recommendations, but Toastmasters is about learning or improving. I think an Evaluator who can't find any suggestions for improvement, is copping out! Even the best speakers deserve some constructive feedback, delivered in the third person so that everyone in the meeting can benefit.

Some catch phrases I don't mind when they feel genuine... but I've grown weary of the "you did too good to find fault" sort of comment... I mean, give me **some**thing, make it up if you like; I'll weigh it against any other comments I get, anyway ... and we have a couple who use the word "awesome" way too much...

My vote goes for "great speech" and its variants. That said a lot of folks at my club are really new to TM - the joys of the turnover in a Corporate club in this day and age.

My personal non-favorite is " I cannot think of anything to improve" - generally directed at me as one of the very few long time TMs in the club. Mainly because I know (hope?) it is an evasion to cover the "I'm new, you're more experienced so I don't dare think my ideas could be correct". Maybe I should think about doing an evaluation of my own speech - to point out the things I know I could have improved on :-)

"That was fantastic...". (its true, she said if she had a dollar for every time she heard "fantastic" in an evaluation, she'd be a very rich person. From then on... I kept hearing "Fantastic" in just about every evaluation, and then some would use it over and over in the same evaluation.) Her point... is to choose from a myriad of alternative words.

I hear the phrase, "WOW! What a great speech, mostly, but the biggest problem I have with evaluations is the re-telling of the speech. That is not an evaluation. We are all here to learn how to be better speaker, so when someone says that was a perfect speech, then why should I come back, I have reached the pinnacle.

A pet peeve of mine is when evaluators read each question/statement from the evaluation form in the manual! This happens most frequently with newer members but I've also heard some seasoned TMs do the same thing!