



Why in the World Would I Enter a Speech Contest?

It is that time again. Speech contest season is upon us. We move into spring with excitement as our members compete in the best competition Toastmasters has to offer. Everyone is fired up. They are fired up aren't they? They all do understand the amazing benefits they will realize by participating in contests don't they? If you are getting resistance from your members about entering our contests, here are 3 perks that are guaranteed to motivate your members:

You get out of your comfort zone

We all joined Toastmasters to improve ourselves in some way. That improvement is typically predicated on doing things that don't come natural to you. This is what people mean when they encourage you to stretch beyond your comfort zone. How can you make progress if you stay within parameters you have already established? If that were the case, you didn't need to join Toastmasters. You came to us looking to do things you have not been able to do. Our supportive meeting environment convinced you that your club was the place to do it. In the same way you joined your club with an eye on growing, committing to the contests as the logical next step in the process.

Get inspired by fellow Toastmasters

We have some amazing speakers in our organization. Whenever you participate in a contest, you have a front row seat that affords you the opportunity to learn from very accomplished people. Don't make the mistake of assuming that only refers to advanced Toastmasters. Every season, we have contestants that are relative newcomers to our clubs that do quite well in our contests. Regardless of their tenure with us, you can pick up so much from your competitors. Things like gestures, speech construction, vocal variety, and audience engagement are just a few of the contributions contestants can and do make to your overall development. You just have to put yourself in the position to receive it.

Renew your desire to grow

Participating in a contest is often described as an exhilarating experience. Knowing that you are being judged can provide clarity to your speech preparation. You want to do well. A strong showing in a contest is like an adrenaline rush. There is no doubt a carryover effect. Just think back to when you gave your Icebreaker speech. No matter how challenging it was you made it through to the other side. You had a sense of accomplishment. Once you have given one speech, you can do it again. The same holds true for contest participation. You made it to the finish line when you delivered your first speech. You will do it again. Remember the feeling of returning the lectern back to the Toastmaster. You made it!

It seems that every year clubs have a difficult time finding members to sign up for contests. I suppose it is natural for members to hesitate. After all, a win at the club level means they will have to compete at the Area level. That can be problematic because that brings a different location and an audience of strangers. Leaving the friendly confines of your home club can be daunting. They have just gotten comfortable with their members. Now you want them to potentially get up in front of another group they don't know? There is a way to overcome this dilemma.

As an officer and leader in your club, you have to invest in your members. The most effective way you demonstrate that is by believing in them before they believe in themselves. They never think they are ready. You know better. I have been guilty of gently nudging members into participating in contests simply on the strength of my belief in them. You will often see their potential before they do. I have never had a member that I encouraged to jump in come back afterward and say they wish they had not done it. The opposite actually occurs. They invariably say they are so glad they took the leap. There is no greater example of leadership than when you help someone grow by believing in them. Who do you believe in?