

September 2002 Bulletin

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Excitement fills the air this fall as Toastmasters in District 65 eagerly prepare for the Evaluation and Humorous Speech Contests! Participating in speech contests either as a contestant, in filling some contest role, or as a member of the audience, provides us a wealth of experience for expanding our vision as Toastmasters. Besides these benefits, speech contests are a great way to have fun and to meet interesting people from other clubs! As an added bonus, these contests can be excellent public relations opportunities.

Starting at the club level, we can make contests special events! One of the first steps in doing this, of course, is by promoting contests among our own club's membership. Quite often, urging our fellow club members to participate can be one of the most difficult tasks in organizing a contest. Sometimes personal testimonials from those who have previously competed will motivate participation. To inspire confidence and generate ideas, we might also remind members of their past humorous speeches and great evaluations they have given. By getting involved ourselves, and encouraging others to participate, we increase the likelihood that a genuine contest will take place. If we plan to advertise it to the public, this is important. Guests who attend a contest expecting to see a real competition will be surely disappointed if it consists of one lonely contestant!

Once we have the contestants and contest program planned, however, we can make a list of guests we'd like to invite. Often the first guests we think of inviting are those closest to us. Friends or acquaintances that might be hesitant about attending a regular meeting may jump at the chance to see a Humorous Speech Contest. Who, after all, doesn't enjoy a good laugh? And when they see that Toastmasters can be so much fun, they may even decide to join for themselves! After witnessing Evaluation Contests in which helpful yet compassionate evaluations are given, fellow coworkers we invite might decide Toastmasters could help them in their careers, too. We can further broaden our guest list by publicizing our contests in the local papers. There are many people who consider visiting Toastmasters but just need an invitation. Shy guests may especially welcome the chance to "blend into" the audience with others at a contest. More than mere spectators of the contest, though, these visitors will also take careful notice of how meetings are conducted, the friendliness of the members, and the club's atmosphere.

In addition, speech contests give us the chance to build team spirit and to practice good public relations within our organization. We feel a part of the success of these contests as our clubs provide target speakers and help to fill other important contest roles at the Area, Division, and District. Furthermore, our very presence at contests demonstrates our support not only of the contest, but also for our own club's contestants.

Remember, though, contestants must be members in good standing in Clubs of good standing. So we need to make sure our dues are paid and the semi-annual paperwork is sent to TI on time. With that in order, let's use our fall contests to learn, to reach out for

new members, and most of all, to have fun! Together we can make this one of our best contest seasons yet!