



Secrets of Communication and Self Development

The following publications highlight Dr. Dilip Abayasekara's remarkable work in the field of speech consultation. They are provided free as our way of saying, "Thank you for touring our site." Our hope is that they will help you achieve your goals for effective public speaking and self development.

Dilip Abayasekara, Ph.D., Accredited Speaker is a professional speaker, trainer, and speech coach. His focus, through his training company, Speaker Services Unlimited, is to help people discover their own genius and find their path of fulfillment.



Why Should You Compete In Speech Contests?

Has your club found it difficult to interest members into competing in speech contests? Have you wondered what you can gain from competing in speech contests, especially if you know that you will be facing stiff competition?

(The Voice, Spring 1993)

I'd like to share with you some lessons I have learned along the way. Since I joined Toastmasters over seven years ago, I have competed in forty-nine speech contests: in Table Topics, Evaluations, and International Speech. I have competed in every possible level, from the club to the World Championship of Public Speaking. Considering this extensive competition background, you might think that I'm either a glutton for punishment or that I must have discovered something of value, something worth the hard work and dedication of a serious speech contestant. Well, let me set the record straight. Just like you, I find no pleasure in punishment! The reason I have reveled in speech contests is because I discovered four powerful benefits.

- **You accelerate your growth as a speaker**

You've heard how a piece of coal, placed under pressure and heat over hundreds of years, produces a brilliant diamond. Speech contests do the same for speakers...but they don't have to wait hundreds of years! The average Toastmaster is truly a 'diamond in the rough.' When the Toastmaster places him/her self in the heat and pressure of a speech contest, when he or she works with diligence and passion under the deadlines of speech contests to research, write, practice, get feedback, re-write, practice, and finally deliver, that 'diamond in the rough' loses some of its roughness and begins to sparkle in a way that would not have been possible so quickly any other way. If you want to accelerate your growth as a communicator, then complement your manual speeches, table topics, and evaluations by entering speech contests and giving it your all.

- **You obtain a realistic appraisal of your skills**

If we are to reach any destination, you need to know where you are at present and where we need to go. Our journey along the road towards excellence in communication works the same way. As a novice Toastmaster, it was exhilarating for me to win my first district level International Speech contest. But when, at the subsequent Regional speech contest, I did not even place in the top three, I knew that I had a lot of learning and growing to do as a speaker. I have learned more from failure than from success, as long as I have been willing to ask, "What can I learn from the winner?", "How can I improve?", "Who can help me grow?". Charles Spurgeon said, "The door step to the temple of the wisdom is the knowledge of our ignorance." Competing in speech contests will bring us to this door step.

- **You discover the power of the spoken word**

One of the most fulfilling times of my life was when I spoke in front of over twenty-three hundred Toastmasters and guests in Las Vegas at the 1992 World Championship of Public Speaking. I asked the question, "What are the most important things in life?" and went on to answer it in my speech titled, 'Love Makes the Connection'. What was so magical was that I was fully myself, to the depths

of my being, and yet, I felt completely one with the audience. I savored every word rolled out of my mouth, and felt a strong, affirming response from the audience. That is what makes public speaking so fulfilling: to give your best to your audience and to have the audience become one with you at the moment. Speech contests then, are no longer just contests, but opportunities for you to offer the best that is in you to your audience. You will then discover the power of the spoken word, to influence, to inspire, to express for an audience feelings that are buried in them that they have not articulated. You will make this joyous discovery much faster when you compete than when you only give speeches at club meetings.

- **You learn lessons that apply to every phase of your life**

Speech contests can be learning laboratories of life. Through my participation in speech contests, I have learned the value of approaching life as a student; the invaluable role a good mentor can play; how to receive a multitude of evaluations and choose the ones that are consistent with who I am, and the message I want to share; the value of friends who encourage and believe in me; principles for researching, planning, and carrying out any task worth doing; how to be a gracious winner and how to take a broad perspective when my best isn't good enough to win. Most of these insights don't come easily, but they will come the more earnestly you put yourself in the competitive track. Then they will spill over to every sphere of your activities - with family, friends, and associates. These are yours for the learning when you become a speech contestant.

Losing should be the farthest thing from the mind of a speech contestant, because with all the advantages I have cited above, even in defeat, you will gain victory. Theodore Roosevelt's analysis was, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

The Birthright of every Toastmaster is becoming the best that he or she can become. So if you are eligible to compete, I urge you to take hold of the great opportunities in speech contests and give it your all.

Dilip Abayasekara, Ph.D., Accredited Speaker, is a professional speaker, trainer, and speech coach. His focus, through his training company, Speaker Services Unlimited, is to help people discover their own genius and find their path of fulfillment. Dr. Abayasekara is also an adjunct faculty member of Central Pennsylvania College in Oral Communications and is an adjunct faculty member of Eastern University's School of Professional Studies in the area of Managerial and Interpersonal Communications. He is the author of the book, *The Path of the Genie, Your Journey to Your Heart's Desire*. In 2005-2006 he served as President of Toastmasters International, the world's leading organization that helps people improve their communication and leadership skills. "Dr. Dilip," as he is known to most clients, specializes in private speech coaching. Among his clients have been company presidents, business executives, university professors, scientists, engineers, physicians, elected city officials, members of the clergy, leaders of volunteer organization, and speech contestants.

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