

Evaluation for Performances and Projects in the SCA

By Lady Catalin Zoldszem, OCK, OPF

My name is Catalin Zoldszem. Mundanely, I go by the name Vivian Elder. As Vivian, I have been in Toastmasters for about fifteen years. What is Toastmasters, you say? Toastmasters is an international group that teaches public speaking and leadership skills. I have participated at the club and district levels as an officer and participated in bi-annual contests. In the spring is the evaluation contest, where six evaluators evaluate the same speech; and then are judged by how unique they can be in their evaluating.

Evaluation is an important part of Toastmasters. It is the way we help each other improve our skills. I believe this process could benefit those in the SCA as well. Before we get into the 'hows' of evaluation, can anybody tell me why we would use the term 'evaluation' and not 'critique', 'criticize' or even 'constructive criticism'?

All those 'c' words have negative connotations. Their language is more direct and sometimes harsh. Even 'constructive criticism' doesn't sound pleasant, does it? Evaluation, on the other hand, is more positive. It is working together to improve, whether the project is performance based (a song, a story, a dance) or craft based (sewing, wood, clay, anything). A critic simply identifies strengths and weaknesses, but an evaluator must concentrate on specific methods of improvement.

Let's talk about the benefits of effective evaluation.

For the Performer or Crafter:

- It is a timely and powerful learning aid – Evaluation provides direct feedback, especially valuable when it immediately follows an activity.
- Paves the way to better skills – It gives the Performer or Crafter specific methods for improving.
- Creates a positive climate for motivation – It encourages the person to work even harder and improve even more.
- Builds and maintains healthy self esteem – Positive and supportive comments make the person feel good about him or herself.

For the Evaluator:

- Provides opportunities to help others – Helping someone develop valuable personal skills can be highly satisfying.

- Develops an attitude of helpful interest – Relating to others in a positive way is a key leadership skill. It also builds self-understanding.
- Builds positive interpersonal relationships – Providing sincere, supportive help to other people creates mutually beneficial personal bonds.
- Develops listening and observation skills – Effective evaluation requires active, careful listening and observation skills, important components of good communication.

Why do we want to learn to perform or craft?

- Gain knowledge and skill – We all want to improve and expand ourselves.
- Meet a specific need – Maybe there is a story that needs to be told, maybe you need a shirt and pants, maybe you just need to be doing something with your mind and/or hands.
- Gain material rewards – Maybe you are receiving payment, maybe you'd like to get an award. Don't get me wrong here, I'm not advocating doing these things just to get an award, but sometimes that is how people measure their skills.
- Earn recognition – This goes hand in hand with material rewards and word fame can go a long way.
- Build self-esteem – It feels good to accomplish things, a well done performance or a great craft project gives quite a rush.
- Build self confidence – The more you perform or craft, and get feedback, the more confident (hopefully) you will feel about expanding your horizons.

How we improve as Performers or Crafters:

How do we build our performance and crafting skills? We begin with an act or behavior, a physical project or a story. We then receive feedback that lets us know how our behavior appears to others. That is evaluation. This feedback also gives us ideas for future behavior. We then test the behavior again and receive additional feedback, and so on. This process continues as long as we participate in our learning program.

Three important facts about self improvement and evaluation:

- Improvement requires behavioral change – For us to become better Performers and Crafters, we must change our behavior, do things differently than we are doing them now. It does not even have to be a major change, even the little things add up.
- Evaluation is a source of information – The function of feedback or evaluation is to provide us with information we can use in changing our behaviors. It is a tool.
- The ultimate responsibility lies with the Performer or Crafter – Only that person can actually make the changes in their behavior that bring about improvement. When we are evaluated, we must decide whether the feedback is valid. And we must decide if we will act on it. It is very important to remember evaluation is only one person’s opinion. If you have multiple evaluators, you will have multiple opinions, and often they will conflict. The Performer or Crafter must decide what changes he or she wants or needs to make.

Let’s look at responsibility from the Evaluator’s point of view. When you evaluate, you cannot make the person change behavior and become better. Let me repeat, you cannot make them do anything. It is up to them to follow your advice or not. Your function is to provide the person with information he or she can use as a basis for improvement.

The roles of the Evaluator:

- Motivator – All of us want to feel better about the things we do. It takes strong motivation for someone to put forth the effort needed for building better skills. This motivation needs fuel to keep it burning. Human motivation must come from within, but as an Evaluator, you can help create a climate for motivation by recognizing improvement and reinforcing desire.
- Facilitator – Performers and Crafters need to know how to improve. You facilitate learning by providing methods of improvement (recommendations).
- Counselor – This role is not used very often, but it is still important. Sometimes people are simply afraid to get out there again. It is your job to encourage them, show them it will be just fine. Not all performances or projects can be great.

Evaluation is important in the growth process. To be effective in helping people grow, evaluation must do two things. It must point us toward personal growth by showing us where and how we can improve. Also, it must build our self-esteem, making us feel good about what we have accomplished and motivating us to grow even more.

Here are six guidelines for building and maintaining self-esteem when you evaluate:

1. Be genuine – To be effective, your feedback must be honest (not harsh) and sincere. It should reflect your genuine desire to help the person improve.
2. Recognize strengths – We all like to be encouraged and recognized for what we are already doing well.
3. Recognize their improvement – If it is a person you have evaluated before, emphasize the areas they have improved on since the last time. Let them know they have accomplished something worthwhile.
4. Create a climate for motivation – Help the person realize he or she can improve even more. Even if a performance or project seems ‘perfect’, there is always some way to improve. If you start telling a person their performances or projects are perfect all the time, they end up feeling as if you are not being sincere.
5. Avoid value judgments – To be effective, feedback must concentrate on the behavior or product, not on the person. This is especially important when evaluating someone who is new or lacks confidence.
6. Provide positive direction – Show the person how he or she can improve more. Recommendations are the most important part of evaluating.

There are ten key behaviors of an effective evaluator.

1. Show that you care – All along we have been talking about being sincere and honest in your evaluations. Being sincere also means avoiding a well-intentioned “whitewash”, an evaluation that lacks constructive recommendations for improvement.
2. Suit your evaluation to the person – People perform or craft at different levels. If you know the level of the person, tailor your evaluation to that level. You are likely to be easier on beginners, because they may not know any better. This gives you greater potential for recommendations. Try not to overwhelm them with recommendations, give them one or two major things to work on for next time. You are likely to be harder on more advanced people, because you expect more from them. There is less potential for recommendations, but remember, there is always something to improve upon. There is also greater potential for details. Where you do not want to overwhelm the beginner with recommendations, the advanced person may want to hear all the gory details.
3. If possible, learn the performer or crafter’s objectives – In the SCA this is not always possible, do the best you can. If you get the opportunity, learning their objectives will help you tailor your evaluation even more.

4. Listen/Look Actively – For performances, active listening is paying total attention to the performance. Ignore distractions. Listen carefully. Do not let your mind wander. Take notes. For projects, active looking is paying total attention to the project. Pay attention to the detail and the documentation (if there is any). Ask questions if you have the opportunity.
5. Personalize your language – When you evaluate a performance or project, you are describing its effects on you. Use personalized phrases such as...”My reaction was...”, “It appeared to me...” or “I felt that...” Try to avoid blanket statements like...”You should have...”, “You failed to...” or “Your opening (construction) was...” When offering recommendations for improvement, personalize them by saying...”I suggest...”, “I think your next performance (project) will have a stronger impact on me if you...”, “A technique I have found useful is...” Avoid impersonal statements such as...”You should...”, “You must...”, “Try to...” or “Good performers (crafters) do it by...” OUCH! Be careful about using the word ‘but’ as well. You can wipe out a really good compliment by using ‘but’ immediately after it.
6. Give positive reinforcement – People working hard to improve themselves need to know their efforts are worthwhile. They need to know that they are making progress toward their goals. They also need recognition for their accomplishments. To effectively meet these universal human needs, your praise must be deserved. Hollow flattery can backfire and not help the performer or crafter. Find something praiseworthy and recognize it sincerely.
7. Help the performer or crafter become motivated – A big reason people never attain their potential is that they fail to recognize it. Consequently, they don’t make efforts toward reaching it. As an evaluator, you can help a person become motivated by reminding the person that their goals are both worthwhile and attainable, and encouraging the person to work hard toward improving their skills.
8. Evaluate the behavior, not the person – When you evaluate, your words have the capacity to produce an emotional response. To help others, you cannot impose your value system on them. Your purpose is not to evaluate the quality of a Performer or Crafter’s ideas; it is to help that person learn to communicate ideas more effectively. Your evaluation should focus on a person’s behavior. It should never threaten to attempt to judge the performer or crafter as a person.
9. Nourish self-esteem – End your evaluation on a positive note. Strive to have the performer or crafter leave the room feeling better. Strive to have that individual feel accomplished, rewarded, accepted, and motivated to improve more.
10. Show the performer or crafter how to improve – Although this is the last behavior listed, it is probably the single most important part of evaluation. While it is vital to recognize a performer or crafter’s strengths and the improvement made, a

“whitewash” evaluation can be as counterproductive as overly harsh criticism. Your central purpose is to help the person improve. There are three things you can do to fulfill this purpose:

- First, focus on what you feel the performer or crafter should be doing, not on what they should not be doing. This reflects the difference between evaluation and criticism.
- Also, keep your recommendations to a manageable minimum. Select the one or two areas in which you feel the person can make the greatest degree of improvement for the next performance or project.
- Finally, present your recommendations in a positive way, giving specific suggestions and examples.

Sample Evaluation Forms:

For both performances and projects -

Good	Needs Improvement

Recommendations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For performances:

Title: _____ Time: _____

Open:

Body:

Close:

Eyes:

Gestures:

Movement:

Voice:

Grammar:

Focus Pullers:

Recommendations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For projects:

Type of Project: _____ Title: _____

Scope:

Documentation:

Method and Materials:

Skill:

Creativity:

Recommendations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you have questions about this class or the notes, please contact me at catcheen@verizon.net . These notes will be posted on our website at <http://atomicvole.org/class> .

Thank you!

Cat