



Speech Contest Coaching Policy

effective May 1, 2013

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Policy Preface:

Before I can publish a speech contest coaching policy, I should probably answer a couple of questions that you may have. The two questions that come immediately to mind are:

1. What qualifies me to coach someone in a speech contest?
2. Why do I feel the need to have this “policy” at all?

My qualifications?

1. I have entered 21 speech contests, and I won all but two of them. In those two, I was the 1st Runner-up in the World Championships of Public Speaking, in 2001 and 2002. Thereafter, I became the Champion in 2003. (To quote my Dad, “It ain’t braggin’ if you’ve done it...”)
2. More importantly, I was a good student who had great mentors. I feel a responsibility to my mentors and to Toastmasters International to teach others what I have been taught.

What necessitates this policy?

World Champions of Public Speaking face a dilemma that most do not. In the time since I became a World Champion, I have been flooded with scores of requests for personal coaching. In that first year, I tried to accept all of them, and I simply stretched myself too thinly.

I love the Toastmasters organization, and I sincerely want to give back to the organization in a teaching/coaching capacity, but I must limit my commitments in order to do that effectively on a long-term basis. To help me maintain that healthy, balanced life which will, in turn, allow me to be the most long-term value to the organization, I developed this policy.

Policy Points:

Who can receive pro bono personalized coaching

Those to whom I am able to extend this type of coaching (they must request it) are:

1. Any current District 50 International Speech Champion. This is my home Toastmasters district, and they will always get my support 😊,
2. Those with whom I have a pre-existing personal connection or relationship (personal friendship, past competitors, coached before, etc.), and
3. The current contest season's International Speech Champions from a District which has had me in to speak at one of their conferences or training events in the prior two years. A list of those within that two-year window is posted at <http://www.jimkey.com/presentations/DistrictsServed.html>.

If your District is not within that window, but you would like for it to be, one way to change that is to ask your District's leaders about having me speak at a conference or training event. 😊

Due to the large number (upwards of 90 each year), I cannot offer coaching to each semi-finalist. I am available to do last minute tuning with any Finalist (though it is not the best point at which to *start* a coaching relationship), but I will likely not be suggesting any massive overhauls to a Finals speech with that little time preceding the contest.

Anyone wishing to avail themselves of my expertise outside of these above-detailed parameters may do so either through the resources available on my website (<http://www.jimkey.com>) or by engaging me under the terms of my “general coaching”, listed on my website, under the “Coaching” link.)

What I offer speech contestants

For those I coach, I'm willing to serve as a resource in two capacities:

1. I can answer general questions about the contest, the speeches at that level, the convention environment, etc., and
2. I can become specifically involved in coaching you in the writing process (writing which **you** do; it is not my place to write **your** speech), and/or your performance/delivery.

Result guaranties

Absolutely none! Are you kidding me? If anyone guarantees you that after their coaching you will win your next speech contest, **run** from that person. **Run** now, and **run** fast!! 😊

Cost for personally coaching speech contestants

My coaching is free to those who match the criteria stated in the “who can receive pro bono personalized coaching” section above (hence the “pro bono” part of that), but make no mistake about it; it costs. It is free – in that I do not charge a fee to personally coach contestants in the World Championships of Public Speaking. There is a cost/catch, however, to having me coach you: you **must** be willing to give back. This means that if you accept my assistance and you progress to become the Champion, you must be willing to teach others who seek to follow in that path thereafter. **I am only willing to assist those who will make this commitment to assist others. (I guarantee that I absolutely WILL ask whether or not you are willing to make this commitment.)**

Exclusive coaching

At this point, I am not entering into exclusive coaching arrangements with any particular contestant, but I am telling you that up front, so that there will be no surprises.

If another qualified contestant asks for my specific assistance regarding a contest speech, I reserve the right to give him/her suggestions about it. Under no circumstances, however, will I discuss any aspect of one contestant (their speech, experience, speaking style, etc.) with any other contestant, and you will never get anything less than my absolute best advice and insights.

Selection with speech topics

I can help with the selection of your contest speech topic, but only to a **very** limited degree. I will render an opinion on how well I think a topic is suited for the “big stage”, based on my experience. Ultimately, **your** topic selection isn’t for **me** to do. You should speak on something about which you are knowledgeable and/or passionate.

I do, however, offer some questions which are designed to spur your thought processes. They are:

1. What significant lessons have you learned through life experiences which could be beneficial to others?
2. What interesting stories do you have? What possible truths, insights could be drawn from them (and developed into a fuller, significant message)?
3. Is there a particular message that you have a burning desire to communicate?
4. About what are you passionate?
5. If your speech was the last message that you could leave for your loved ones, what would you tell them?

I reserve the right to change any part of this policy at any time, without prior notice.

General advice for those considering seeking coaching

- ✚ Congratulations on realizing that you don't have to "go it alone", and for not being too proud to ask for help. Those who reach their highest level of performance in any endeavor know that their chances of doing that improve when they call upon others for assistance.
- ✚ Have respect for a coach's time. That is the attitude I took in dealing with previous Champions while I was still competing. Not everyone does this, which makes someone who does stand out, and a pleasure to work with.
- ✚ Be coachable. This doesn't mean that you are going to be a "yes man" or "yes woman". It simply means that you will be open to the advice a coach gives you. You will evaluate that advice and determine what fits.
- ✚ Develop a "thick skin". A good coach will consider how to deliver his/her advice with respect to maintaining your healthy self-esteem, but you may hear some things about yourself or your presentation style during the coaching process that you might be unaccustomed to hearing. Be prepared for that, in advance.

This doesn't mean that a coach will or should be mean or rude to you, but the purpose of a coach is **not** to stroke your ego and convince you that you are perfect. The purpose of a coach **is** to assist you in becoming better, and better, and better, and better...

- ✚ Learn to "evaluate your evaluations". If you are a finalist in the World Championships of Public Speaking (or even if you are still progressing towards that goal), you will receive all sorts of advice. Some will be good, but all will have the very best of intentions, even though some of it might not fit you or your style. In the end, this is your speech to present, and nobody else's.

It makes no difference what initials follow a person's name, be it WCPS, DTM, etc. Don't be afraid to pass on the advice that doesn't resonate with you. Accept the advice that does, along with the responsibility for that decision.

Side note: My primary mentor, David Brooks (1990 World Champion) did not write or "give" me my championship speech. Instead, he did what good mentors and coaches do: he helped me to find it within myself. There were occasions when I chose to not accept a suggestion he gave me. Out of respect for David, I felt obligated to explain to him why it didn't fit me or my style. That process made me think my decisions through much more thoroughly. As a result, I became a much better writer.

- ✚ While you should accept feedback from many people (at the places where you practice), you should only accept specific coaching from a limited number of people. They should be people whose abilities and strengths (whether in writing, delivery, etc.) you respect.
- ✚ Lastly, by journeying through the speech contests, you have already earned your rightful place in Toastmasters contest history. Ultimately, however, your time on the "big stage" (and every speaking opportunity) is not about you. It is about doing something valuable for your audience. Serve them well, and you will be successful, regardless of the contest results/standings.

If you have decided to enter a speech contest, I wish you all the best, and hope to see you on the "big stage" at the World Championships of Public Speaking, very soon.

Make it an AWESOME today, for a BETTER tomorrow!!!



Jim Key
2003 World Champion of Public Speaking

<http://www.jimkey.com>