



PROMISE YOURSELF: To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.

“When I speak in public, I...”.

In the first speech class I taught at Texas Christian University, I asked students to finish the statement “When I speak in public, I...” Since that first class, I have asked every student in every class to write the “cause” statement, “When I speak in public, I...” and to finish it with their “consequence” statement, “I...”

Over my career teaching public speaking courses, I have read hundreds of student replies. Consequences are varied and sometimes heartbreakingly honest. Why do I relish reading the responses? The answer is easy. When I know the student’s consequence statement, I know who I can leave on their own because they love the attention, are anxious to share their personal beliefs, and are just plain confident speakers.”

And, then there are the others.

For some, the consequences read “I get energized” or “I feel powerful”. Others often write “I get nervous” or “I feel intimidated” or “I sweat” or “I lose my breath” or even “I puke”. The excited, energized, and powerful undergraduates, I leave to their own devices and offer simple enhancement ideas in evaluation. Students who write they are nervous, intimidated, or puke (and some do), are the ones I know will require encouragement and support from me and their fellow classmates.

Referring to this Optimist Creed I teach a full hour on each student’s role to be enthusiastic about the success of others as they are about their own. They are challenged to applaud and offer accolades to each other. They are required to write what they saw that was good (negative comments are not allowed) in the student’s speech and give it to them when they return to their seat.

Each speaker knows I care about his or her feelings and stressors. They are aware of support from their peers and me throughout each speech. They feel supported until they build self-confidence and poise. Lives have been changed, and I’m proud of every student.

The final day of a summer class in 2017, I received one reaction which seems to summarize all the words written by panic attack level students. Estella was definitely at that level.

Estella wrote:

When I speak in public I can feel everything and nothing. I can feel my blood vibrating under my skin and my body's system shutting down. My skin somehow grows numb and I can't feel anymore, but still I try to talk as calmly as I can through the shrieking of my vocal chords.

Estella is a brilliant young woman with powerful written words that need to be heard. She chose outstanding topics, wrote moving and thought-provoking speeches, yet the panicked feelings engulfed her. Reading helped, but having the words in front of her did not remove the beast.

Panic continued to affect her delivery...until her final speech. Her title was “Being successful with help from friends.” It was a well thought out, cleverly written, and read, but flawlessly delivered. She received a standing ovation from her classmates.

Her Words from semester class evaluations expressed her view of the class.

Public speaking was difficult, and I wouldn't want to do it again, but this class has been helpful and enjoyable. I am grateful to Professor McIlvain and to my classmates who were enthusiastic about my success.

Consider these “Cause” statements. Give some thought to what your “Action” statement might be

When I see evil, injustice, or oppression in whatever form, I...

When I am asked to give above and beyond, I...

When I stand up for peace, I...

When I stand up for Jesus, I...

In all cases, we can be as enthusiastic about the success of others as we are about our own success.

Peace always.

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