

**Ask Bob Opple How to  
"Go for the Gold"**  
by Ray Roman

One highlight of the District 2 Toastmasters 2000 Fall Conference, held in Redmond on November 4, was the keynote speech of Bob Opple, ATM-G. After the showing of a video of his performance at the Toastmasters International 2000 Speech Contest, Bob shared his insights into the speech contest process and gave the audience tips for becoming a winning speaker. Among these hints:

- Practice as much as possible. Use every spare moment. Bob practiced his speech while driving to work on the freeway and while riding his bicycle cross-country.
- Practice the speech in front of as many Toastmasters groups as possible, and solicit members' comments. However, when it gets close to the day of the contest, block out all comments and refine the speech as it is.
- Tell a story rather than give a talk. People are naturally drawn to stories.
- Use all the vocal variety you can muster -- talk slowly, talk fast. Watch TV evangelists for pointers, for they are powerful speakers. It is *how* you say something, not *what* you say, that wins contests.
- Prepare yourself psychologically for the rigors of the competition by visualizing *every* aspect of the contest ahead of time: how the auditorium will look, where the judges will probably sit, where you will enter from, what the applause will sound like, and even how you will accept First Place! Visualizing something can help make it happen.
- Dress just a cut above the crowd you will be performing before. Appearance counts!
- Get as close to the audience as possible, moving to the edge of the stage if necessary.
- Take control of the stage, pausing a moment for the audience to take you in before you begin speaking.
- Make eye contact with everyone you can, especially the judges (hint: they are the ones with clipboards!). If you are uncomfortable making eye contact, look at people's noses.
- If your home club has many powerful speakers, and you need to win your club contest in order to get to the next level, join multiple clubs.
- Move! Use your hands and body to full advantage.
- Never come close to using ethnic or off-color material.
- Keep in mind who the judges are and orient your speech toward their perspectives. Most contest judges at the Internationals tend to be male ATMs and DTMs in their fifties. If your topic has most relevance for people in their thirties, you will lose some judges' understanding.
- Be ready *not* to win.

Follow these suggestions and you'll be sure to learn something as you compete. Who knows - you just might get the gold!