



Interview with the District 51 International Speech Contest Champion, Palaniappa Subramaniam

Bulletin 51: What inspired you to come out with your winning speech – “How Hard is Your Coconut”?

Pala: Well, honestly, I wouldn't say it's an inspiration. It was more of a desperation when I was competing at my club level. I am the VPE for my club and we had to have enough contestants for the club level contest, so I volunteered. But, I never had the time to prepare my speech and ended up at the club level contest without a speech. At that moment of desperation, I asked a fellow club member for suggestions. She asked me what I would like to talk about. I told her I wanted to talk about something regarding “overcoming your ego”, and she suggested the title “Coconuts”. That's how I ended up delivering an impromptu speech on that fateful day!

Bulletin 51: What was the one thing you think you did well that helped you win the district contest?

Pala: For the first time in my Toastmasters journey, I wrote and rehearsed my speech before going on stage. As absurd as this may sound, it is a fact that I have always been the kind of person who drafts only the main points and delivers the actual speech in an impromptu manner. But this time, when I actually wrote it down, only did I realize how much time I had to choose the right words, right emotions, right body language and the right coconuts to make an impact. I am now a new advocate of the idea that a properly planned and crafted speech is the key to victory.

Bulletin 51: What is your advice for those members who are aspiring to be a district champion like you?

Pala: Every time we compete, we ask ourselves just before going on stage, “Why do I put myself through this?” But we still see many people doing it again and again. I don't have any advice, but I do have some key pointers for your consideration:

- It remains a fact that you must become an adrenalin junkie and enjoy your time on stage to be a Champion.
- Think of it this way, sometimes at club meetings, you are lucky if you can have more than 20 members watching you. But as you progress towards the district contest, you have a 400-odd audience. It is your chance to share your message and make a difference in someone else's life. Think of how your speech can make a difference to people's life, instead of just winning the trophy. Your sincerity will show and you will be able to connect with the audience.
- Losing is a part of the learning process, enjoy it as well. Do not get dejected, and more importantly, do not hate the judges 😊. Thank the judges for the lessons learned. If you know who they are, ask them, “What could I have done better?”

Bulletin 51: What comes into your mind now that you have won at the district level and will be representing our district at the international level?

- Pala:** (a) What message do I want to share with the 2000-odd people?
b) How would it feel to be the next World Champion (visualization)?
c) Disneyland – Hey, even if I do not win, at least I got to go to Disneyland 😊



Palaniappa Subramaniam, fourth from left, smiling happily with his winner's trophy.