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AN EXPERIENCE SHARED

*Text of a speech given by Peter W.T. Bogacki
in June 2022 at a meeting of a public speaking club.*

As some of you are aware I've been a member of this club for over four years. And throughout this time I've been using it as a vehicle for personal growth.

Recently however, I've been feeling stuck and not enjoying the experience. Essentially speaking I'm stuck in two areas, table topics and evaluations. And to clarify linguistically what the problem is I'm going to share with you now precisely what's going on with me.

After giving my entire Toastmasters experience a lot of thought I've noticed that generally I'm OK with delivering material that I've first prepared and practised saying. Now, that's simply not possible with either table topics or evaluations.

With topics no one gets advance notice of their specific topic – indeed that's the whole point of the exercise. And with evaluations, no one gets an advance hearing of the specific speech to be evaluated – it's all new content at time of delivery.

To get a sense of why I'm stuck I need to tell you a short story about the course of my life. Back when I was six I lost total trust in my ability to make sense of my experience through use of language. So, from that moment on I couldn't trust anything expressed in language – what I said, what I heard, what I read. And in that instant my mind introverted and began a process of analysing every word, phrase and sentence in my experience in a search to get to meanings that I could trust.

The paradox was however that this was simply a Catch-22. Every result of the analysis process was expressed in language so, I couldn't trust that either. In short, my mind was trapped in cycle of continuous linguistic failure.

That cycle lasted 18 years until at the age of 24 I participated in an effective consciousness training. By that time every word, phrase, and sentence in my experience had already been transformed into a form of nonsensical confusion. Put simply, at 24 I was a complete mess.

Then suddenly on the last day of the training I created trust in an essential core of language that makes sense and works for me and in that instant my mind began a process of synthesising my experience linguistically. In other words, re-creating my entire experience through use of language and making sense of it until all of it worked for me. Completion of that process took me another 42 years. So, finally at the age of 66 I had transformed my entire experience linguistically and created trust in every word, phrase, and sentence I'd ever used. Finally, my life had begun to work freely for me.

The effect of being, from age 6 onwards, isolated linguistically from my fellow human beings was incredibly damaging. By my early teens for me the act of speaking had become synonymous with failure. And with zero trust in expressing myself came zero self-confidence. Contact with another person was simply an invitation to and a reminder of more failure, and I began a process of doing whatever I could to avoid speaking, to avoid company and to avoid social activity.

From the age of 24 until 66 the process of re-creating my entire experience linguistically was agonizingly slow and incremental. And it was only after its completion that finally I had a ground of being of certainty and trust that what I was saying was what I was communicating and that finally I was free to play with language and have fun.

So what has all this got to do with my ability to deal with table topics and evaluations?

Well put simply...for most of that 42 years my mind was focussed internally on clarifying my confusion and seeking the underlying meaning of every communication by filtering out surrounding verbiage. As a consequence of this most of my memories have no connection to everyday topics in a topics session and my imagination simply doesn't relate to them.

So when I'm asked to speak on a topic usually one of two things happen: either I make a connection fairly quickly and can say something about it. Or more often than not I make no connection and have nothing to say. Then as I make eye contact with listeners I'm reminded of the experience of being totally ashamed of my failure and of feeling that everyone sees that I'm still an outsider and that I don't belong in company anywhere.

Also...for every speech that I evaluate my ability to recall verbiage surrounding the core message is still extremely poor. Hence my evaluations tend to be brief and light on descriptive content. And after listening with amazement at the way

some speakers can recall, analyse, and deal with this same verbiage once again I'm reminded of the experience of being totally ashamed of my failure and of feeling that everyone sees that I'm still an outsider and that I don't belong in company anywhere.

In short, at the age of 68 bearing in mind the snail's pace of my personal growth I may well run out of lifetime before any of you here see any possible noticeable growth in my ability to deal with topics and evaluations.

That said, I'm happy to have shared my experience of them here with you to my satisfaction, and I'm relieved. Avoiding truth in my experience never did work for me.