

A Toastmasters Evaluation of the Inaugural Speech: Eloquently Creating a Moment in History

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Standing before one of the largest audiences ever for any speaker, President Barack Obama seized the moment with oratorical mastery not seen in a U.S. President since John F. Kennedy. He delivered his message with clear poise, purpose and a memorable rhetorical style.

Since his keynote speech four years ago at the Democratic National Convention, Barack Obama has proven that he is a "masterful orator who demonstrates how communication and leadership are inextricably linked," says Toastmasters International President Jana Barnhill. "His inaugural speech was compelling and inspiring. He spoke candidly about the country's many serious challenges, yet struck a hopeful chord, using controlled pacing and vocal variety to build emotional momentum that reverberated across cultures, generations and faiths."

Lance Miller, former Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking, agrees: "President Obama's speaking basics were impeccable: eye contact, vocal variety and use of volume. He accentuated important points with pacing and pauses. His gestures and body movement, while constrained by the speaking platform, were smooth and natural and in concert with the message he conveyed."

From his opening remarks, Obama emphasized the transition to a time of equality and inclusion. Toastmasters Board Member Mohammed Murad says, "Mentioning President Bush right at the beginning and so briefly, indicated that he is mindful of the fact that an era is over and he is now in charge and there is a need to move on."

Like all good speakers, Obama effectively used metaphors for dramatic effect. ("...the rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace"). Barnhill praised his use of poetic language. "President Obama took a worldwide audience on a visual journey describing the path America has traveled and the road that lies ahead."

Many people quake at the idea of addressing a dozen people in a small room. Most of us will never have the talents of President Obama, but he demonstrates what speaking skills can accomplish. As Miller notes, "When we speak, we affect the direction, ideas and motives of those who hear us."

Toastmasters International has spent the last 85 years helping people all over the world become more confident in front of audiences large and small. Headquartered in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, the non-profit educational association has 226,000 members in 92 countries. For more information and meeting locations, visit www.toastmasters.org.

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