

Conclusion

The Will to Win with Ethics and Respect

It's no accident that I've written this book largely in the third-person. My primary goal wasn't to infuse the text with my personal opinions. Rather, my intent was to present useful information compiled from many sources and learned from many people.

Allow me, then, to depart briefly from this objectivity and to use this space for some personal thoughts. Firstly, I want to discuss what it means to have the will to win at the sport of debate. Secondly, I hope to get across the vital role that honesty and respect play in debate. Finally, I want to talk about the vital role that debate plays in making the world 'tick'.

THE QUEST FOR VICTORY

Debate tournaments can be very competitive. They place intelligent, well-spoken people who believe passionately that they're right in direct opposition to one another. Don't view this competition as a barrier. Instead, you should thrive on healthy rivalry and allow it to motivate you to excel. Never get discouraged if you don't always place as well as you had hoped. Never give up. If you believe in yourself and persist in achieving your personal best, you'll improve your performance and reach the medal podium.

This competitive environment extends well beyond tournaments. Any 'real world' debate involves, by its very nature, some level of rivalry. Everyone wants to win the argument, both to achieve their objectives and to feel personal satisfaction. Unfortunately, you'll rarely get everything you want, so be prepared to work with others. The will to win may involve sacrificing what's least important to you but valued by others, so that you can achieve what's most important to you and nonessential to your peers. In many cases, having the will to win

means helping the *team* win, rather than aiming for a *personal* victory at the expense of others participants.

THE ETHICS OF ENGAGEMENT

It's critically important that you maintain your ethics in any competitive debate environment. Never make up evidence or misrepresent yourself, even if you may get away with it a few times. Not only will you be cheating yourself, but you'll eventually get a reputation for playing against the rules. Although you're welcome to be assertive, make sure that you're courteous to your opponents. Respect the judges, coaches, parents, and volunteers who help run debate workshops and tournaments. The experience of competition should be enjoyable. Don't allow it to become tense and disrespectful.

Similar principles apply when you debate in daily situations. If you're ethical and respectful, your arguments will have much more impact. Other people will want to listen to what you have to say. The skills of debating should help you become more influential when decisions are made, but they shouldn't be used to insult or diminish the contributions made by other participants.

DEBATE AS A DRIVER OF DECISIONS

It's my conviction that debate is a vital part of the world around us. I believe that the best ideas emerge from vigorous debate. The best ideas emerge in the classroom when students speak freely and confidently about what they're learning. The best ideas emerge in companies when team members debate the decisions they face thoroughly and intelligently. The best ideas emerge in society when there's lively debate within government, in the media, and among the citizenry.

Debate can and should play a central role in how you contribute to society. More than ever before, 'thought leaders' have come to the forefront of how the world operates. You can use the power of persuasion to contribute to the democratic life of your country, or to contribute to the advancement of a worthy cause. It's up to you how you use the skills of debate, but know that you possess the ability to use it to improve the world around you.

AND NOW, IT'S UP TO YOU!

I hope that this book has provided you with a solid base of information about the art of speech and debate. Now, it's up to you to put this information into action. It will take time and effort, and you will get frustrated. But if you have the will to excel, you will do so. I have benefited a great deal from speech and debate, and it's become part of everything I do. I hope that *Talk the Talk* will play at least a small role in helping you do the same.

As you embark on your own road to victory, you're welcome and encouraged to write to me with your questions, observations, criticisms, suggestions, or anything else that's on your mind. Whether you're a competitive debater, a debate coach, or even a parent who wants either to thank or scold me for helping turn your dinner table into a debate forum, I look forward to reading (and responding to) what you have to say.

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