

Speech: The Greatest Thief

***Winner, Toastmasters Region VIII Contest, Charlotte, NC (semifinal #8).
This speech propelled me to be one of the nine global WCPS finalists that
year. The subject is one I care deeply about. Obviously, the judges
agreed...***

A speech by Brian Woolf (June 21, 2003)

I'M KNOW YOU'RE NOT ONE. [pointing]
You don't look like one. [pointing]
I'm certain you're not one. [pointing] -
And I'm not a thief either -
OR ARE WE?
Are we all thieves?
For - as once hinted by George Bernard Shaw
The greatest thief is he who withholds deserved praise.

MADAME TOASTMASTER AND FRIENDS:
I never truly understood those words
Until I was about 25.
Roy took me aside.
He asked:
"Brian, do you remember that complimentary note
You sent my assistant, Ina Smith, several years ago?
She's lost it - and is very upset.
Do you think you could write her another?"
Of course, I quickly found another opportunity to do so -
But what amazed me
Was that an employee was upset about losing

A two-year old, two-paragraph note
That simply complimented her
On the way she laid out a meat case!

SHORTLY AFTER THAT EXPERIENCE,
I read of a fascinating study.
Management in a Western Electric plant
In Hawthorne, Illinois
Was concerned about productivity.
So they brought in a team of psychologists.
They started in one department
By throwing out the old workbenches
And installing sleek new ones -
And production went up!!!
They increased the lighting -
Production went up again.
They went into the cafeteria
Replaced all the furniture -
And production kept going up.
To validate their findings
They reversed the procedures.
They put back the old cafeteria furniture -
Production went up!
They dimmed the lights
And put back the worn workbenches -
Production kept going up!
They were absolutely amazed -
So they brought the workers together and asked:
"Why is it that when we reduce your conditions
Production keeps going up? -
The answer was stunningly simple -
"Somebody is interested in us."

Friends, ONE OF THE GREATEST ARTICLES I'VE EVER READ
was in the late 1980's.
In Morgan County, Kentucky,
A country doctor had been called to the home
Of a woman who was dying.

She was the wife of a gruff Appalachian coal miner
The mother of two grown sons.
She had been fading for ten months,
Languishing at home
While her men folk worked the mines.
After two months of visitations,
The doctor arrived early one evening
To find her but twenty-four hours from death.
He took the husband aside.
Gently told him the sad news.
The burly coalminer groaned.
He staggered - stumbled - dropped down by his wife's bed.
Grabbing her hands, he cried:
"Oh, Edith, Edith, don't go - I need you."

And - an amazing thing happened.
A slight faint flush of life started to creep across her face.
And, from that moment, Edith started to recover.
A few years later, in a medical journal,
The doctor recounted a subsequent conversation with Edith.
He said
"Edith, to what do you attribute your remarkable recovery?" -
She paused - and softly said - "I never knew he cared."

NOW, LET ME ASK YOU TWO QUESTIONS.
If I was to take a photograph of everyone here tonight
Blow it up
And put it on that wall [point]
Who would be the first person each of us would look for
In that photograph? -
You see -
We really aren't any different from Edith or Ina
Or those Western Electric workers, are we? -
We, too, hunger for recognition.
Second question.

Hands up all of you who
During the past week
Have received too much praise? -
Seems as though we'd all like a little bit more, doesn't it?

WHICH LEADS ME TO WONDER:

When was the last time
You truly thanked or praised your spouse?
Gentlemen, the last time you bought flowers -
Just to say "thank you for sharing your life with me"?
Or ladies - when was the last time you prepared a special dinner -
Just to say "thank you for adding so much to my life?"
But let's go beyond the family.
Think of the school teacher who had the greatest impact on you.
Imagine her emotion
If she were to receive from you a simple letter
Expressing your appreciation for the influence
She had upon on your life.
Such a letter from the heart takes but five minutes to write -
But it will be treasured for a lifetime.

MY FRIENDS, MY MESSAGE TONIGHT IS VERY SIMPLE:

Let us stop stealing from those we love.
Let us stop withholding praise from those who deserve it.
Let's be generous in giving our praise.
For it should never be said of us
That we were counted -
Among life's greatest thieves.

733 words

Copyright © 2003-2020 Brian Woolf

And there's more where this came from...

Visit Brian Woolf on the web for his complete collection of
articles, speeches, insights and practical advice, at

www.brianwoolf.com

Email: brian@brianwoolf.com

Tel: +1 864 458-8277

BRIANWOOLF.COM