

Lance Miller Speech Breakdown

Speech Transcript:

The Ultimate Question!

That question that has plagued man since the dawn of time. And that question, that each and every one of **us** must ask at some point in **our** life: **do you validate?** [Q]

Mr. Chairman, **fellow Toastmasters** and **friends**.

I was **26 years old**. I was living in a **small town** in Indiana. **I had a job I didn't like. I hadn't had a date in 3 years. And I had a couple of roommates named Mom and Dad.**

I felt like **my** life was going nowhere. So, I took control. I left **my** home and **my** family and I headed to Los Angeles to start over.

6 months later I had a job I didn't like. I was dating a girl, who was trying to make **me** better by pointing out all of **my** faults. And I had a couple of roommates that made Dumb and Dumber look like **Einstein and Oppenheimer.** [R3][CB]

I had changed everything in **my** life, but nothing had changed. **I still felt like I was going nowhere.**

And then one day after a business meeting all I wanted to do was get **my** parking validated. And I walked over to the receptionist and said, "Excuse me, **do you validate?**"

And she looked up and said, "Well yes I do. **You have a lovely smile.**"

Showing her the ticket, "No, I was just in a meeting with your boss, **do you validate?**" And she said, "Well let me compliment you on what a **fine choice of business associates you have.**"

Catching on I said, “You have such a keen sense of humor, I’m gonna go tell your boss how lucky he is to have you out here.” And she goes, “**Give me that ticket!**”

She took her little machine and she went “**Cha-chink.**” And then as she handed it back, she looked at me and said, “there’s something special about you.”

I took the ticket and headed for the elevator. But I stopped. And I turned around and just said, “Thank you.”

I don’t know how long it had been since I’d felt validated. Her words stayed with me all the way home. And as I was looking at my life, I started to wonder how long it had been since I’d validated somebody else.

I wanted to do that! I wanted to make people feel good! But I felt that I needed to be important. I needed to be successful, so that when I said something to somebody it meant something to ‘em.

But that receptionist had just made my day. Heck, **she made my month.** With one little “**Cha-Chink,**” she stamped my ticket. And I thought, I can do that. [ST]

So, **I went home to see Dumb and Dumber.** [CB]

These guys were constantly bringing people back to the apartment. It was driving me nuts.

But I went in and I said, “You make friends faster than anybody I’ve ever seen, and that is a gift.” To see their faces, **I swear they got smarter right before my eyes.** “**Cha-Chink.**” [ST]

I went to see my girlfriend and I thanked her for caring enough about me that she wanted to see me be as good as I could be. **You know what? She got nicer.** “**Cha-Chink.**” [FP][ST]

I went to work and I thanked my boss for hiring me. He’d done me a favor. And I started to enjoy my work a lot more. “**Cha-Chink.**” [R3][ST]

I used to think I had to be important before I could validate other people. I used to look at people as obstacles to my success. But what I discovered was I became important when I validated other people.

I became important to that person. And that person. People were the pathway to my success. I started trying to find something I could stamp on everybody I met.

That little piece of goodness, that little piece of rightness, just a little **“Cha-Chink.”**

I started to feel like a superhero. Underneath this mild-mannered exterior was a blue and red spandex suit **with a giant V on the chest**. Yes, **I was the “Validator!”**

When things would get tense, they’d tighten up, I’d come in and **“Cha-Chink” “Cha-Chink” “Cha-Chink!” I had plenty of ink.**

I’d hear people say, “Who was that man?” “I don’t know but I heard this **“Cha-Chink”** and **suddenly I feel so much better now.**”

And then I figured it out! **You know what’s wrong with the world? You know what’s wrong with me? Do you know what’s wrong with you? [R3]**

WHO CARES!

The question is, **what is right with the world? What is right with me? What is right with you? [R3]**

The common denominator of all humanity is the fact that **we** are human. **We** are by nature imperfect. **It takes no special talent to find an imperfection in another person.**

But every person goes through life wanting to be right, wanting to be valuable. Find that! Bring it out in them.

I started to discover in **my** life that I got what I validated. I found out that I brought out the goodness, the value in others by valu..., by validating that.

We have a lot of problems in this world. But I’ve learned that there’s not a problem that exists, between a parent and a child, between a husband and a wife, between a worker and his employer, or between **rac**es, **cu**ltures, or **na**tions, that does not stem directly from an inability or an unwillingness to validate the **ri**ghtness, the **va**lue, and the **go**odness in another. **[CB]**

This is **The Ultimate Question: Do you validate?**

But this is not what’s important. What’s important is, **can you Cha-Chink? Can you Cha-Chink? Can you Cha-Chink? [R3]**

You’ve been a great audience.

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 951

Speech Length: 7:18

Title: The Ultimate Question

Click [here](#) to watch the speech

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 18**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **2.1 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute).

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 13**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: “**Cha-Chink**”

This was an interesting one. Usually the Foundational Phrase is a phrase ranging from three words (Darren Tay’s, *Outsmart and Outlast*) to as many as twelve words (Dananjaya Hettiarachchi’s, *I see something in you, but I don’t know what it is*).

This one wasn’t even a real word. It was a sound effect spelled out. But there is some serious genius in it. Let’s examine...

Not only is it short, which allowed him to say it a whopping thirteen times throughout the speech, but he coupled it with a visual hand gesture each time he said it.

So, each time the audience *heard* it, they also SAW it. To top that off, he involved the audience at the end and had THEM say it (part of it, anyway).

The audience heard it, saw it, and said it. That’s an effective Foundational Phrase.

There’s more...

Now, I don’t know if this last part was intentional or not, but he created at least two anchors and linked them to his Foundational Phrase, thus increasing the odds of it being remembered.

The first anchor is another phrase from the speech, which arguably could have been considered a Foundational Phrase of this speech, albeit a lesser option. Or more specifically, it’s a *question* that he used to open the speech, used twice during his primary story, and once more just before the final portion of the speech: “*Do you validate?*”

It fully encompasses the meaning of “Cha-Chink” since it’s the sound of a valet ticket being stamped.

And then there are the first three words out of his mouth that started this entire thing: “*The Ultimate Question!*” He said it again just before closing the speech and, oh yeah, it just so happened to be the TITLE OF THE SPEECH! Is that not also an anchor that latches itself to both “*Do you validate?*” and “*Cha-Chink?*”?

One could argue that all three serve as mental triggers that link you back to the foundational story about the receptionist who was ultimately the guru that taught him to validate others, which was the entire point of the speech!! I’m going to stop here before my brain explodes.

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 17**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal).

- **“Ladies and Gentlemen” or “My Friends” [MF] - x 2**

He used “*Fellow Toastmasters*” and “*Friends*”

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 1**

Physical descriptions of people and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene. Physical in this case is what was heard, what was smelled, and what was seen. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

The words “small town” from “*I was living in a small town in Indiana*” was about the only attempt at this. The purpose was to set up where he was at in life before his transformation. Not a very strong example, but it does just enough to conjure up the place he left behind.

The use of “Dumb and Dumber” didn’t qualify. I don’t think he meant that the roommates looked like Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels, so it was difficult to get a picture of them in my head. And “dumb” is too subjective.

I intentionally left out the geographical locations of Indiana and Los Angeles because they’re too broad. If he said something like “*the party lit up like the Las Vegas strip*” then we’d be onto something!

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 21**

Humorous and other. Most of the humorous moments were callbacks to SOMETHING or SOMEONE from the speech journey. Foundational phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well—I included them in the total. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases, there were 9 callbacks.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 8**

In this case, the [rule of three](#) was all inclusive. Whether used to make a joke or not.

A prime example is how he referenced a job, girlfriend, and roommates. In fact, he referenced those three things a total of...wait for it...THREE separate times throughout the speech. I did not include their *combined* usage as a Rule of Three although I certainly could have. As long as you're aware, I've done my job.

- **Questions [Q] - x 12**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not). I did not include questions from in-character or speaker's internal dialogue.

There was one question that didn't fall in the category of dialogue which I debated excluding from this total: *"You know what? She got nicer"*

The intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. But as I thought about excluding this one, it occurred to me that questions do more than make the audience think. They also build connection to the speaker and the audience, just as addressing the audience as "My Friends" or "Ladies and Gentlemen" does.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 3**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view.

- **"I" or "Me" or "My" or "Myself" - x 94**

It's not that a speaker shouldn't use these words (likely impossible), but it may serve as a good statistic to compare with the amount of times the speaker says "you" or audience focused words. **In-story character dialogue excluded.

- **Stories [ST] - x 4**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may not be entirely true, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else's. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales (the Superhero bit for example) or things like "Imagine you are..."

In this speech there was the foundational story and three subsequent shorter stories. The foundational story started from the time he left his home in Indiana to the part where he said *"Thank You"* to the receptionist. The three short stories were him encountering his roommates, his girlfriend, and his boss.

One last thing about stories: You notice how he started his speech? There was no qualifying phrase like “I wanna tell you a story.” He just jumped right into it.

***Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.

Observations:

- **Technical Showmanship:** He used a variation of the politician’s handshake when shaking the [hand](#) of the contest chair. It’s intended to show warmth and sincerity to the one you’re shaking hands with, but I’d say it’s more of a play to the audience than anything else. The audience sees the handshake on the big screen and thinks “Awe, what a nice fellow! I like him.” Or *something* like that. Don’t just take my word for it, though, the [2003](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), [2016](#) and [2017](#) champions did this as well.
- **Theme:** Dananjaya Hettiarachchi’s 2014 winning speech shared a similar underlying theme as this one. They were both lost in life and felt like they were going nowhere.

Heck, while I’m at it, there’s another similarity that Dananjaya may have “borrowed” from Lance’s speech. It’s when the receptionist (guru) tells Lance, *“there’s something special about you.”* Characters (gurus) from Dananjaya’s speech said a similar thing, *“I see something in you, but I don’t know what it is.”* Coincidence? Put your tinfoil hat on and decide for yourself!

- **Props:** Used a prop (valet ticket). Pulled it out more than once. Also, the “Cha-Chink” and the motion of him stamping a ticket work in the same way as a physical prop.
- **Facial Expressions/Non-verbal Communication:** Just like the 2003 champ, Jim Key, he does a lot of facial expressions that work well. When the receptionist first says, *“Why yes, you have a lovely smile,”* the line was funny on its own, but his “what the heck?” facial expression made it even funnier.

Another example is after he said, *“It takes no special talent to find an imperfection in another person.”* Immediately after the line there was some low-key laughter, but then he started squinting around the room as if to indicate he was searching the audience for faults. That ignited a burst of laughter from the audience.

- **Character Dialogue:** The dialogue between him and the receptionist was a work of art. Very subtle changes going back and forth between characters. She was at a desk; he was standing. When he would deliver dialogue from her point of view, he would look up in the same direction to where he’d have been standing at the time. Staying consistent, he’d look down to her in the same direction to where she’d have been sitting. There was no unnecessary stage movement indicate a

character change. Well done.

- **Powerful Sentences:**
 - “I had changed everything in my life, but nothing had changed.”
 - “It takes no special talent to find an imperfection in another person.”
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** The Receptionist. She was the lone guru in this speech.
 - **Side Characters:** Mom & Dad, Roommates, Girlfriend, Receptionist’s Boss were all side characters. Side characters are part of the stories but don’t directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn’t a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story.
 - A Guru is someone or something in the speech that teaches the speaker (and ultimately the audience) something meaningful. As a speaker, you don’t want to be the wise Guru. You want to be the dolt who learns from the guru(s), and that’s who end up teaching the audience as well. **Tip:** Self-deprecation can be an important element in allowing the guru to shine.
- **Grammar:** He used colloquial terms like “*and she goes*” instead of saying “*and she said.*” There was also a use of “*em*” instead of “*them.*” This is just an observation and I had zero problem with it. I discuss this topic and a few other ways to avoid sounding too robotic [here](#).
- **Building Rapport:** A good way to build rapport is to let the audience “off the hook.” Another way of saying, “I’m human just like you!” or “I made mistakes in my life just like you. I’m not perfect.”

An example from the speech is when he asks “*You know what’s wrong with the world? You know what’s wrong with me? Do you know what’s wrong with you? WHO CARES!*” Instead of calling them out or preaching to them which could result in making them uncomfortable, he lets them off the hook. Wouldn’t you relate to someone better for bringing themselves down in order to elevate you?

- **Perfection:** Lance stumbled on one of his words (6:57 in video) and looks like he may have lost his place for second at the beginning of the same sentence: “*I found out.....that I brought out the goodness, the value in others by valu..., by validating that*”

The importance of this is it shows that to win the championship, you don’t have to be PERFECT!!!

SHAMELESS PLUG ALERT: I wrote a book called [The Perfectionist’s Guide to Public Speaking](#) and a big part of the book’s theme is that it’s okay to make mistakes when speaking.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Technical note:** Lance started quickly. After the handshake he walked to center stage and less than a second after his feet came to a stop, he began speaking. His body movement never really stopped if you count his arm swinging back down to his side.

However, there was plenty of silence from the handshake to the time he finished walking to where he began speaking—I guess that's *something*.

- **Hand Gestures:** I counted at least 5 times that he rested his right arm at a 90-degree angle instead of letting it hang naturally by his side when it wasn't in use. It looked a bit unnatural and almost as if there were a brace locking it in place. At the very least it captured my attention, but maybe because I'm looking for things like a bear at a campsite.
- **Superhero Part:** I may just be judging the past through a contemporary lens, but some of the superhero part came off to me as cheesy. I'll say this, though, it worked, so I'll just shut my mouth.
- **Cueing the Audience:** When he has the audience finish the "Cha-Chink" sound at the end, his hand gesture and him saying "Cha-" didn't seem fluid and the audience stumbled a bit with timing.

He had the audience complete it for him three times. The first time he does the entire gesture before the audience says anything. The second time the audience syncs up a little better. The third time the audience gets louder, but this time they say it a little early.

His hand gesture during the speech when he does it alone is the same as what he used to cue the audience; however, I might have changed the "Cha-Chink" gesture slightly in order to better cue the audience.

Earlier in the speech when he does it alone, he pushes his hand forward as he says "Cha" and then says "Chink" as he pulls the hand back. For the audience it might have been better to say "Cha" by moving hand forward, and then do the same motion again for the audience's cue to say "Chink."