

SPEECH BREAKDOWN

1ST PLACE: MANOJ VASUDEVAN

Speech Transcript:

I was twenty-four years old. I had a nice job. Nice car. Nice hair. [ST][PD]

Still, my girlfriends didn't stay for long.

Have you ever had problems in your relationships with others? What was wrong with them? [Q] [VV]

Contest Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen... [VV]

When I was twenty-four, I was living in India. I was still waiting for Cupid to shoot his arrow and find me the perfect partner. Guess what, it seems Cupid doesn't live in India.

Soon I went to another angel who had all the answers, my mama. "Mama, I can't find good girls, how will I ever marry?" She said, "No problem, we can fix it." [VV]

My mama offered to introduce me to some good girls. Nice mama. Soon arrangements were made for my meeting with the first prospect, Sindu.

There she was, "wow!" In a beautiful blue dress. She looked like a star, from Bollywood. She looked at me like I was George Clooney. [VV]

Cupid shot his arrow and we fell in love.

Do you remember a time when you got into a new relationship? What were you expecting? [VV]

I imagined spending the rest of **my** life **holding her hand, listening to music, and doing heart yoga.** [VV]

Few weeks later on the 4th of July, we got married. On America's Independence Day, **I lost my independence.**

We sailed through our honeymoon. Then, differences started to emerge. **She liked outdoors, I liked indoors. She loved swimming, I feared drowning. She liked cooking, I liked to tell her how much I missed my mama's cooking.** [VV]

Heyyyy, **I** didn't want to follow her ways and she wasn't willing to change. [VV]

We argued over **big things**, over **small things**, even **for nothing.** [VV]

I used **logic**, **I** used **emotion**, **I** even **showed her a role model.** "Darling, **why can't you just be perfect like meee?"** [VV]

Within six months, we grew apart. Under one roof, we were two people living in solitude. **No holding hands, no music, only silence.** [CB][VV]

Looking for solutions **I** asked **my** friend Jay. He just had his divorce. **He was the expert.** Jay said, "Man, **life is short. Don't suffer, separate!**" [VV]

"No Jay, I just want to fix it."
"Exactly, **my lawyer will fix it.**"

I called my Mama. Next day she spoke to both Sindu and **Me.**

She said, "You will never find a partner who is hundred percent perfect. You fall in love because of **Cupid's** arrow, but what keeps you in love is Cupid's bow. [VV]

You see, the bow and the string have a great partnership. The more the string pulls back, the more the bow bends. Ego is what pulls the string. Still the mighty bow bends, because it cares for the partner. When she pulls, you bend. When you pull, she bends. If you pull too hard your relationship will break. If you want to fix it, both of you need to **pull less and bend more.**" **Pull less and bend more.** [VV]

Have you seen anyone who pulls too hard? Have you pulled too hard? [VV]

Since then during arguments I became more flexible. When Sindu wanted to go out, I'd join her. When she wanted to swim, I'd join her—at the shallow end. [CB] When I became nice, she became nicer. Soon she started cooking better than mama. [CB][VV]

In my search for the perfect partner, I discovered that perfect partners are those who keep perfecting their partnerships by choosing to pull less and bend more. [CB][VV]

You can see problems in any relationship. Within families, between friends, between colleagues, between races, cultures, nations. [VV]

Today it seems like our world is breaking apart, doesn't it? Still when you look at this room, you see people from 142 different nations, sitting together, shoulder to shoulder, and getting along fine. How is that possible? [VV]

Toastmasters, you are proof that no matter what our differences are, by choosing to pull less and bend more, we can stay together. [CB][VV]

Last month my wife and I celebrated our 19th anniversary. Yes, that's the same wife.

Do you think that we still argue? Yes, but now even when we argue, we are still holding hands. [CB] My mama is no more with us, but her words still rings in our ears.

Pull less and bend more. Pull less and... [CB]x2 [VV]

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 705

Speech Length: 7:04

Title: Pull Less, Bend More

Click [here](#) to watch the speech

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 15**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity. One of the laugh lines, “*I liked to tell her how much I missed my mama’s cooking,*” got a combination of laughs and boos (playful ones). He had obviously planned for it with his response, “*Heyyyyyyy.*”

This speech averaged **2.12 LPM** (Laughs Per Minute) and **47 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

I believe some of the humorous lines got less laughter than they should have. And it’s probably because most of the Toastmasters in the audience, which were hardcore enough to pay to travel to the convention, had probably already seen his 3rd place speech from 2015. The speech from 2015 was a version of this speech and some of the best humorous lines carried over into this winning speech.

I’ll give you a few examples below—you decide...

- **Hair Joke:** From [2015](#) – From [2017](#)
- **Cupid in India Joke:** From [2015](#) – From [2017](#)
- **George Clooney Joke:** From [2015](#) – From [2017](#)

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 6**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: “**Pull Less and Bend More**”

He used the Foundational Phrase six times during the speech. The last time he said it, the audience finished the second part (“Bend More”) for him. The title is also the Foundational Phrase which means the Contest Chair said it two additional times when introducing Manoj.

He used a motion of pulling the string and the bow bending when saying it. Not only that, he varied his voice to match the movement of the imaginary bow. It felt seamless.

- **“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**

The speaker used “*Ladies and Gentlemen*” and “*Toastmasters*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 3**

Descriptive physical characteristics 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, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that “*We were at my house*” is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

The most purposeful descriptions were of his future wife, Sindu. He did describe himself referencing his “good hair” which I included, although since it was funny, I’m not sure if he actually had hair or not.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 11**

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 *usually* [callbacks](#) as well—I included them in the total.

In this case, the second time he said the Foundational Phrase was in the very next sentence after the first. So, because of that I didn’t consider it a callback because it was essentially the same thought. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases, there were 6 callbacks.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 7**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for misdirection to make a joke or not.

- **Questions [Q] - x 9**

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

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives.

However, even benign questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as “My Friends” or “Ladies and Gentlemen” does.

There were three separate times throughout the speech that Manoj asked a question and

then immediately asked a follow up question that was related to the first one. Those made up six of the total questions. The other three were more of the rhetorical variety.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 4**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker's life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These can help prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- **"I" or "Me" or "My" or "Myself" - x 39**

I originally chose to record this stat thinking that it might be useful to compare it with the amount of "You" focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

My theory was, if this number was much greater than "You" focused words, it would show that the speaker was more "*me, me, me*" focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I've found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told. That doesn't mean that the content of the stories is great, but personal stories are by no means a bad idea.

**The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **Stories [ST] - x 1**

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 or things like "Imagine you are..."

In this speech there was a single foundational story that journeyed from the conflict to the ultimate resolution. The story was broken up in three strategic places where he inserted questions for the audience to reflect on, and each time the question would be related to where the story left off.

- **Vocal Variety [VV]**

Vocal Variety is a combination of vocal elements. Short of measuring the speaker's voice in decibels, this section will make note of the most apparent changes in the speaker's voice throughout the speech. Varying the voice means that the speaker may get louder, softer, use a higher pitch, lower pitch, use inflection, talk faster, speak with rhythm, slow down to a crawl and even purposefully pause.

**Note that the total amount of changes which make up Vocal Variety are not counted like the rest of the Color Key sections. Instead, this section is intended only to highlight the most salient changes in the voice and to give you successful examples of Vocal Variety.

I condensed them into categories below and provided some examples for each:

Raise Voice [Louder, Higher Pitch, Inflection]

- *"Have you ever had problems in your relationships with others? What was wrong with them?"*
- *"Soon I went to another angel who had all the answers, my mama."*
- *"There she was, "wow!" In a beautiful blue dress. She looked like a star, from Bollywood."*
- *"You can see problems in any relationship. Within families, between friends, between colleagues, between races, cultures, nations."*

Lower Voice [Quieter, Lower Pitch, Softer, Whisper]

- *"Do you remember a time when you got into a new relationship? What were you expecting?"*
- *"We argued over big things, over small things, even for nothing." [He used to voice in a descriptive way in this case. He used a "small" voice to convey small things.]*
- *"If you want to fix it, both of you need to pull less and bend more." Pull less and bend more."*
- *"In my search for the perfect partner, I discovered that perfect partners are those who keep perfecting their partnerships by choosing to pull less and bend more."*

Speed Up [Speak Fast, Quick Burst, Rhythmic]

- *"Mama, I can't find good girls, how will I ever marry?"*
- *"I imagined spending the rest of my life holding her hand, listening to music, and doing heart yoga."*
- *"Then, differences started to emerge. She liked outdoors, I liked indoors. She loved swimming, I feared drowning."*
- *"Since then during arguments I became more flexible. When Sindu wanted to go out, I'd join her. When she wanted to swim, I'd join her—at the shallow end."*

Slow Down [Talk Slow, Slower Rhythm, Pause]

- *"I used logic, I used emotion, I even showed her a role model."*
- *"Within six months, we grew apart. Under one roof, we were two people living in solitude. No holding hands, no music, only silence."*
- *"Have you pulled too hard?"*

***In the Speech Transcript, 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](#), [2005](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), and [2016](#) champions did this as well.
- **Props:** Used a prop (attorney business card). Also, the bow and arrow hand gestures work in the same way as a physical prop.
- **Hand Gestures:** He used "big" gestures to support his words. This means they were slightly exaggerated which is appropriate for such a large audience that would otherwise have difficulty seeing him, were it not for the large screens. And more importantly, they were appropriate for the things he was saying.

In this example: "*We argued over Big things. We argued over small things. Even for nothing.*" For big things he put his hand in the air to indicate something big, and for small things he crouched down slightly and used his hands to indicate something small.

Other examples include the *Heart Yoga* part, he put his arms on his head to show an example, Cupid's arrow piercing his heart, and his bow and arrow gestures. Also, when he said "*I used emotion*" he put his hands up against his chest to *show* it.

His gestures were mapped out to perfection. It makes sense for things like the bow and arrow because they're important to the Foundational Phrase, but all throughout the speech I noticed gestures that were *too* well executed to be what I'd consider "natural." What this means is that if he did an impromptu speech, his gestures would not be as precise and his natural gesturing would take over.

Let there be no confusion, though. I'm not saying that he looked mechanical or robotic. When I say they were mapped out to perfection, that's what I mean. They looked completely natural. He owned this entire speech down to a science.

- **Facial Expressions/Non-verbal Communication:** Just as he used "big" or exaggerated gestures, he did the same for his facial expressions. He'd open his eyes as wide as he could when the moment called for it.

A perfect example is when he said this: "*Heyyyy, I didn't want to follow her ways and she wasn't willing to change.*" His eyes matched the moment to say the least.

- **Powerful Sentences:**
 - "Under one roof, we were two people living in solitude."
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**

- **Gurus:** Mama since she taught us about Cupid’s bow.
 - **Side Characters:** His wife Sindu and friend Jay were 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:** This sentence: “*My mama is no more with us, but her words still rings in our ears.*” The sentence “*My mama is no longer with us” would have sounded better, and the second part should be “her words still ring” instead of “rings.” This is likely due to English being his second language. Despite this, the meaning of his words came through perfectly.*
 - **Perfection:** For this sentence: “*The more the string pulls back, the more the bow bends.*” (4:52 in video), it sounds like he was going to say “The Bow” but caught himself beforehand. Also, when he said, “*She loved swimming*” it sounded like he mispronounced the word and instead ended up saying an elongated version of the word “loud.”

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Originality:** My initial feeling when I watched this speech was that it was what I’ve heard referred to as a “Toastmasters” speech, but in a slightly sarcastic sort of way. What that usually means is that it was an over animated “performance” that touched all the judging criteria in checklist fashion—like it were made specifically for the judges instead of the audience. Makes sense because it IS a contest, and win he did, but I felt it was missing authenticity.

I’ll add this, though. After going through and analyzing the speech, I have a tremendous appreciation for it overall, especially in terms of its execution which was near perfect.

- **Mama as the Guru:** His mama was the guru of this speech and she is the one who taught us the lesson of *Pull Less and Bend More*. In terms of how you’d want to implement a guru and the all-important *teaching moment* of a speech, he had all the correct elements. However, there was something *off* about the part of the speech when his Mama was explaining Cupid’s bow to Sindu and him. It’s subtle and I’ll do my best to explain it.

You want a guru to teach the audience the lesson. It’s more effective than you simply TELLING (preaching) them. There’s something about having that third party as a buffer between you and the audience that makes them more receptive to what you have to say. So, you, as the speaker, are simply a messenger relaying something you’ve learned—the audience is free to take it or leave it. And it’s the *freedom to choose* which makes it work.

With that said, the teaching moment in Manoj's speech felt more like preaching and here's why:

- The entire scene was one-sided dialogue with nothing happening apart from visual gestures showing the bow bend and pull.
- It seemed to last a long time, taking just over a minute (1:02) of her explaining the lesson.
- The audience didn't need to do any thinking at all because the guru *told* them everything. In other speeches I've analyzed, the speaker indirectly learns a lesson as a result of an experience as opposed to direct and precise dialogue. Rarely is the guru intentionally teaching, it's the action or the speaker's interpretation of an experience that turns into the teaching moment.

As a result of those points, it seemed as if the guru was preaching to them and that vibe gently trickled into the speech.

- **Cliché:** I felt there were a few cheesy/cliché lines such as this one: *"Toastmasters, you are proof that no matter what our differences are, by choosing to pull less and bend more, we can stay together."* The part *"we can stay together"* was a little silly. I feel that relationships between romantic partners is a message that's universal enough, why *pull too hard* beyond its true meaning?

To his defense, I've seen other champions invoke similar references to try to make their message relevant to every person in the world, and their grandma. I say let the message speak for itself.

- **Misc. Information:** This is more or less the [same speech](#) he gave when he placed 3rd at the 2015 Toastmasters International Speech Contest. This one is more refined in both the content and the delivery. To get a summary of what was different between 2015 and this one, check out [this video](#).