MOHAMMED QAHTANI
CHAMPIONSHIP SPEECH BREAKDOWN

Speech Transcript:

What? [H]x2 [SM]

Oh, **you all think smoking kills?** Hahaha let **me** tell **you something**. Do **you** know that the amount of people dying from diabetes are **3 times** as many people dying from smoking? **[Q]x2 [SM]**

Yet if **I** pulled a Snicker bar **nobody would say anything**. Do **you** know that the leading cause of lung cancer is not actually a cigarette? It's **your** DNA. **[Q] [SM]**

You could smoke for years and nothing will ever happen to **you**. This whole war against smoking is just to restrict the farming of tobacco. **[SM]**

Mr. Contest Chair, **Fellow Toastmasters** and **Guests**…**[R3]**

I use these arguments, even though **I just made them up**, with a group of **my** friends. And the results, 5 of 'em believed what **I** said. **2 of 'em started smoking**. **[SM]**

Words when said and articulated in the right way can change someone's mind. They can alter someone's belief. **[SM]**

You have the power to bring someone from the slums of life and make a successful person out of 'em. Or destroy someone's happiness using only **your words**. **[SM]**

Does that seem a bit too good to be true?

A simple choice of **words** can make a difference between someone accepting or denying **your** message. **You** can have a very beautiful thing to say but say it in the wrong **words** and...phew...it's gone. **[SM]**

I have a son who's 4, and he had this bad habit of writing on the walls with crayons. And **one evening I** walked into his room and he's goin' at it **just writing and drawing** and so on, and **I** said "hey hey, hey hey, hey hey! Are you stupid? Don't you ever do that again!" **[H]x2 [ST] [SM]x2**

And guess what happened, **he did it again**. Nobody likes to be threatened, nobody likes to be intimidated. His pride would not allow it. He did it again just to spite **me**.

A week later I walked into his room and again he's goin' at it. And this time he was even lookin' at **me**, just…**[H] [PD] [SM]**

I came down, **I** said, "Sweetie, come here. Don't do that, you're a big boy now." And he never did it again, 'cause his pride wants him to be the big boy. **[PD] [SM]**

Have **you** ever wondered why nobody cares about global warming even though it's a very serious issue? It could kill all of **us**. **[Q] [SM]**

Because when **you** go home and **you** flip on the TV, and **you** see a scientist trying to talk about global warming, it goes something like this: "Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see from the graphs here, the temperature for 2014 it shows the water level is rising. This table shows that monodioxic level and the 3rd ozone layer...it's in an alarming position." **[H]x5 [PD] [SM]**

The message never get across. But most importantly if **you** are a person who's a role model, if **you're** a person who's been admired, anything **you** say could be believed. Anything **you** utter could be taken as truth. **[SM]**

My friend Nassir, **he loved his father. Idolized his father. He would do anything to make him happy**. **[ST] [SM]**

But his father was the kind of person who's not easy to impress. And year after year Nassir tried and his father's like **"meh."**

First year in college Nassir got straight A's. And he thought to himself, "this is it, this what will finally make my dad proud." **[SM]**

He picked up the phone, he called his dad, "Dad, I got straight A's. Are you proud? Please tell me you're proud, father."

"Yeah, listen son, I'll have to call you back. I'm busy."

"I'm busy" was the single sentence that broke the camel's back. And he **started drinking, doing drugs, hanging out with the wrong crowd**. **[SM]**

"Nassir, why? Why are you throwing your life away?"

"If the one person in the world that I care about the most doesn't care then, then why should I?" **[PD]**

And one evening I got the phone call, Nassir's in the emergency room. Drug overdose. **I** rushed to that hospital. **I** saw him on that bed, and **I** saw that machine go **beep, beep, beeeeeeeep**. And **I** saw doctors try to bring him back to life. "**Clear! Pfff, Clear!, Pfff, Clear! Pfff.**" **[PD]x2 [SM]**

It's clear that a single **word** could have saved this life. **Words** have power. **Words** are power. **Words** could be **your** power. **[R3] [SM]**

You can **change a life, inspire a nation, and make a...this world a beautiful place**. Isn't that what **we** all wanted? Isn't that what **we** are all in this for? **[Q]x2**

Your mouth can spit venom, or it can mend a broken soul. **Ladies and gentlemen**, let that be **our** goal. **[CB]** (cigarette prop)

Contest Chair...

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 764

Speech Length: 7:17

Title: The Power of Words

Click here to watch the speech

<u>COLOR KEY</u>

- ## Humor [H] - x 18

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

  This speech averaged **2.47 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **42.44 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

  First laugh came around **0:05** of the speech.

- ## Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 8

  Foundational Phrase for this speech: **"Words"**

  Well, technically in this case it's a Foundational *Word* rather than a phrase. However, the word wasn't particularly memorable on its own since there was nothing memorable about how it was said, nor did it rhyme or have any other trait that would make it stick. But it does encapsulate the core message of his speech which is summed up nicely in the title: *The Power of Words*

  The success of it was with the number of examples he used to demonstrate his point, which is that *words have power*.

- ## "You"; "Your"; "We"; "Us"; "Our" - x 26

  I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal). Talking *to* the audience will be more "you/your" focused. This could mean abstract ideas, "imagine this…" hypotheticals, concepts that describe how something works, etc. Those will naturally use more "you/your" words.

- ## "I" or "Me" or "My" or "Myself" - x 20

  The original reason for tracking this stat was the thought that it might be useful to compare with the amount of "You" focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought.

  The 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.

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

- ## "Ladies and Gentlemen" or "My Friends" [MF] - x 3

  The speaker used "*Fellow Toastmasters,*" "*Guests*" and *"Ladies and Gentlemen"* to address the audience.

  There was a subliminal use of "Ladies and Gentlemen" as well when he was pretending to be a scientist on the TV talking about global warming. I didn't count it in this total since it was technically character dialogue.

- ## Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 7

  Descriptive physical characteristics of people, things, 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.

  Describing complex processes may also be included since they are intended to make it easier for the audience to imagine.

  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.

  In this speech, there wasn't much in the way of descriptive words, but more in his character impressions (verbal and non-verbal) that gave us an image of his scenes.

- ## Callbacks [CB] - x 1

  Humorous and other. It's common for speakers to derive humor from callbacks to *something* or *someone* from the speech journey. Foundational Phrases after the first one are essentially callbacks as well.

  The idea of a callback is to move on from "it" (the eventual callback) so the audience is no longer thinking about it, and then call it back later so it's an "A HA!" moment of familiarity. For that reason, only *some* of the Foundational Phrases may be included, and some may not. Normally the Foundational Phrase (subsequent ones after the first) get counted in the Callback section, but in this speech, only the ones that had a recognizable phrase were included.

  There was only a single callback in this speech, and it was the cigarette prop. He had a lot of references to the effects of words, but none stood out as unique enough to be a

callback.

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

  The rule of three is all inclusive. Whether used for comedic effect or not.

  It's common to see the Rule of Three used all at once in a single sentence such as, "*He was tall, strong, and mean.*"

  Mohammed used it in various ways such as three example stories to prove his point. The opening (statistics) I don't really consider an example since it seemed to be more of an overt joke. Other examples include how he listed things during Nassir's story while at the hospital—the defibrillator "Clear!" and monitoring vitals "beep, beep, beeeeeep…"

- ## Questions [Q] - x 8

  Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not).

  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 or rhetorical 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. Because of that, those types of questions were included as well.

- ## 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 help to prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- ## Stories [ST] - x 2

  This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may be slightly exaggerated, 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 were 2 separate stories. One was about his son writing on the walls and how he handled it, and the other was about Nassir and his father. The core story of the speech was Nassir's story since it was the most impactful.

- ## Stage Movement [SM] - x 20

  This section covers how many times the speaker moved to a different place on the stage

during the speech. Minor movements for in-story character changes (for dialogue) or for small side steps for illustrating points or addressing different parts of the audience will not be counted. I'll also keep track of anything else that's notable about the speaker's stage movements**.**

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

Observations:

- **Opening:** Great opening. I consider it to be one of the best openings of all the champions. It was obviously shocking as some of the audience members felt compelled to shout, "no no no!" as he was about to light the cigarette. But not only that, he transitioned smoothly into his opening, and relevant, lines. Being shocking isn't difficult; being shocking AND relevant (without having to reach) is.

- **Props:** He used a lighter and a cigarette as props. He used the cigarette at beginning and brought it back at the end.

- **Character Impressions:** He did great impressions (facial, vocally, and use of gestures) of the characters he was portraying. The imitation of his son was one of the most humorous moments of the speech. The global warming scientist is another example. He received a huge laugh without saying a single word when he pretended to put on the glasses while making the face of a "nerd." Another example is his dialogue with Nassir. He pretended to take a swig from a bottle of alcohol before delivering a line as if he were drunk and depressed.

  Another note about this was that he made a point to have a character impression in all 3 of his main support sections (his son's story, global warming scientist, and Nassir's story).

- **Matching Vocal Variety:** When he demonstrated how the doctors tried to bring Nassir back to life he said "Clear!" 3 times, and each time he changed how he said it. It started from energetic, to even more energy, and then to a hopeless "Clear" that indicated that they had lost him. It was wonderfully executed on his part.

- **Gurus and Side Characters:**

  - **Gurus**: In this speech there were no gurus that stood out in the traditional sense. It was the stories themselves that served as the teachers. With that said, Mohammed could

technically be considered the Guru in his son's story since he learned from his mistake and subsequently used the right words to get his son to stop writing on the walls. Nassir's story, which was the core story, only showed the result of the "wrong" words.

- o **Side Characters**: His group of friends, his son, global warming scientist, Nassir, Nassir's father, "wrong crowd" and the doctors 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.
- o 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.

- **Guru Note**: To add to the above section, his son's story was the only one that showed the contrasting results of what could happen when using the wrong words versus the right words. The global warming scientist example only showed the bad option, but it did not show the right way to use the words for that subject. For Nassir's story, it ended in tragedy, leading us to believe that his father made the costly mistake of using words in the wrong way.

- **Telling Them Directly**: Mohammed's speech reminds me of [Jim Key's](link) championship speech in how he delivered his message. Jim had stories to illustrate his point like Mohammed did, but apart from that they both spent a good amount of time talking directly to the audience. Most of the other champions I've covered use their stories to deliver the message on their behalf instead of telling the audience directly. Another similarity between Jim and Mohammed was that most of their speech's humor was top-heavy, meaning, most of the humor was in the first half of the speech and the serious message was the focus in the second half.

- **Missed Joke?** During the global warming part, he said "It could kill ALL of us." This I thought was an attempt at a joke. I thought it was worthy of a chuckle, too, but the audience must have thought it was too serious a thing to laugh at. To his defense, it is a line that works both ways and was low risk to use it. If they laugh, he looks good. If they don't, it wasn't intended to be funny.

- **Comedian**: His humor and timing gave me the impression that he has some sort of experience in stand-up comedy. It was very well done and done with confidence. After searching about his roots, I came across an [article](link) that said this about him: *Qahtani joined Toastmasters six years ago. He competed in many speech contests and **honed his timing in standup comedy** before reaching his goal of earning the title of World Champion of Public Speaking…*

- **Organic Applause**: The depiction of a nerdy scientist talking about global warming received a genuine/organic round of applause from the audience. In a sense it was a performance within a performance.

- **Clever Transition**: When he told the story about the doctors trying to revive Nassir, he said "*Clear!*" Immediately after that, he transitioned to his next sentence with this: "*It's **clear** that…*" It was a simple and clever use of words to help moved his speech along.

- **Foundational Phrase**: There was no real memorable, repeatable phrase. The only thing that fits is the word "Words"—it fits his core message and he mentioned it throughout the speech. It just wasn't a distinct word. The volume approach is what I believe he was going for in this speech.

[Randy Harvey](#) did a similar thing, but I believe that Randy's use of the word "Love" was a little more distinct than how "*Words*" was used in this speech.

This does not mean that Mohammed's method was not successful. It absolutely was. Combined with his examples and volume use of the word "Words," he definitely made his point memorable.

- **Various Support Methods**: He supported his speech's main point using various examples. Each of the methods he used demonstrated a different way for how words could affect the person who hears them. His support examples were the fake statistics at the beginning and how he kept a straight face, his son's story about writing on the walls, the weak delivery by scientists which turn people off to their message, and Nassir's story about the lack of words of support from his father.

  Alternatively, a common technique used by some of the previous speaking champs is to only use a single story to navigate through the speech, and that single story is used simultaneously to reinforce the speech's main purpose. This, as opposed to what Mohammed did, which was use an assortment of support methods. Both methods are effective although I feel it's worth mentioning for Mohammed because he went away from the norm.

- **Somber but Real**: The speech seemed more somber in tone, but at the same time it felt real and down to earth. It didn't go over the top to try and give us an emotional, inspirational high that would wear off soon after. It was a hard reality of what words can do, and his examples showed us how it could apply in our lives.

- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** He began the speech by pretending to light a cigarette. He ended it by pulling out the cigarette and breaking it in half.

- **Ended with Impact**: His first few support examples were lighthearted while making his point. But he saved the final story about Nassir for his last piece of evidence. I think this was effective because Nassir's story is the one that the audience will remember most because it was the most emotional.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Deceptive?** The statistics portion at the beginning, although funny and purposeful to his point about words having power, ultimately was deceptive. Did this hurt the audience's opinion of the speaker? Perhaps subconsciously? Did this cause them to question the veracity of the information and stories that followed? I remember thinking about this the very first time I watched the speech back in 2015 following the contest. Something to think about.

- **Harsh**: The question he asked his son, "*Are you stupid?*" Perhaps a bit harsh to ask a 4-year-old. It played well and was ultimately funny, but did it serve *ever so slightly* to make Mohammed into a "mean" person?

- **Distracting Mannerism**: He kept tugging at the bottom of his suit jacket. See here, here and here for example. Was this a nervous mannerism or was the fitment of the suit bothering him? I feel it was the latter. He looked very confident including his voice; it was strong and didn't show signs of nervousness.

  He also used a resting position where he put his hands together just below his belt line. Another name for it is the "Figleaf" and it is usually used by nervous speakers. Again, I don't think that was necessarily the case here, but only Mohammed knows. He also did it while doing the impression of the global warming scientist although this seemed to be part of the character impression.

- **Perfection:** Even champions aren't perfect. There seems to always be one verbal hiccup in the championship speeches, and Mohammed's came just before closing when he said, "*You can change a life, inspire a nation, and make a...this world a beautiful place.*" Clearly it did not cost him 1st place.