

VIKAS JHINGRAN

CHAMPIONSHIP SPEECH BREAKDOWN

Speech Transcript:

My hands were shaking. My throat was dry. In my hand was a letter that was going to change my life. [R3] [ST] [PD] [SM]

Would it be for the better or worse?

The answer was inside.

I stared at the return address, MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The graduate school of my dreams. [PD] [SM]

Would it begin with “Congratulations”, or, “you’ve got to be kidding”? [Q] [SM]

The answer was inside. [CB]

My mind drifted back to the time when it all began. 14 years ago. [ST] [SM]

Madam Contest Chair, Fellow Toastmasters, and anybody here who remembers being a teenager. [R3] [SM]

The year was 1989. I was a teenager and my parents were desperate.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? [Q] [SM]

College was just a few years away and my grades, not there. My parents had been brilliant students and very trusting of each other because they ruled out any problems with my genes. [SM]

But, having tried everything from counseling to naturing, from threatening to explaining, they finally turned to the supernatural, the Swami. [H]x2 [SM]x3

One afternoon my mother and I travelled to the old part of the city of Calcutta, India. Where the houses were so close that sunlight was a myth. [PD] [SM]

The aroma of spices drifted in the hot humid air. And here in a small hut sat the holy man everybody called, the Swami. [PD] [SM]

His saffron robe drenched in sweat, he tried to answer the problems of the people who had come to see him. [PD]

My mother pleaded, “Swami, Vikas has lot of potential but grades are bad.” [SM]

To which the Swami replied, “Meditation. Try meditation.” And in a flash his attention was on the next person. [H]x3 [SM]

Now, I didn't want to get into this meditation stuff, but one look at my mother and I knew I would have to give it a try.

But then I got hooked. Did you know meditation is cool? Yeah, when my friends found out I was into meditation my popularity shot up like Apple's stock. [H]x2 [Q] [SM]x2

I was really enjoying all the attention. But behind closed doors my actual meditation practice was in some trouble. [SM]

Sitting in a room with my eyes closed should not be a big deal, uhhh, except I could not stay awake.

Th..the..The moment I closed my eyes I was sleeping like a baby. But, but this meditation was making me so popular, I had to do something about it. [SM]

So mom and I went back to the Swami. “Ask yourself question. Who are you?”
“Yeah.” [CB] [SM]

Have you ever looked at modern art and wondered which side is up? My visit to the Swami was equally confusing. [Q] [SM]

Over the next few months I tried hard to answer the Swami's question, and then miraculously, my grades started to improve. So much that I got into a good undergraduate school in India. [SM]x2

Freshman year in college, what's not to like about that? Out with meditation and in came girls. And then came my first semester grades. [SM]x2

I felt like life had kicked me in the stomach so hard that I was left gasping for air searching for answers and the next few months everything I tried to bounce back only made me believe that I did not have the ability until one day, tired, frustrated, I went back to my room, closed my eyes and returned to the Swami's question, "who are you?" [SM]x2

And in that deep silence, I heard the music of my dreams, the song of my talents, the symphony of my spirit. And I realized what the Swami had done. [R3] [SM]

Meditation was just a tool so that I stop and listen because the answer was not out there, the answer was inside. [CB] [SM]

14 years later once again the answer had been inside. Yes, the letter did begin with "Congratulations." I had achieved my dream. [H] [CB]x2 [SM]

Only because the Swami showed me that the answer is not in some magic pill, or with Doctor Phil. The answer had always been inside. [SM]

Friends, have you ever looked inside? What if the answer to your problems is not out there, what if the answer... [Q]x2 [SM]

I ask you now what the Swami asked me then, who are you? [Q] [CB]

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 684

Speech Length: 6:56

Title: The Swami's Question

Click [here](#) to watch the speech

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 22**

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

This speech averaged **3.17 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **31.09 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

First laugh came at **0:33** of the speech.

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 5**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: **“The answer was inside”**

Other notable and *related* phrases:

- “The Swami’s Question” – The title of the speech is relevant to the Foundational Phrase as well since it is the answer to that question.

- “*Who are you?*” - This fits in nicely with “The Swami’s Question” as well as the answer to the question (the FP), as this is the actual question.

There was one instance of him silently alluding to the Foundational Phrase when he put his hands over his chest as if to allow the audience to finish the phrase internally.

- **“You”; “Your”; “We”; “Us”; “Our” - x 6**

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 58**

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 2**

The speaker used “*Fellow Toastmasters*” and “*Friends*” to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 5**

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.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 7**

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. In this speech, not all FPs were included due to the close proximity of some of them.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 5**

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.*”

Vikas used this technique in the traditional ways but he also used it in a unique way in this speech. The question from the Swami, “*Who are you?*” was both 3 words and the question itself was referenced 3 times during the speech. For that reason, I counted it a total of 2 times.

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

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 stories. He opened with a core story (him about to open the letter from MIT), then he went back in time to tell of his journey about how he struggled with his grades and his visits to the Swami, and then at the very end he circled back to the original story that he opened with.

- **Stage Movement [SM] - x 31**

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:

- **Props:** Vikas used an envelope (letter from MIT) as the prop.
- **Facial Expressions:** He made use of facial expressions while in the middle of his story. He had a line where he was stepping out of the story to talk to the audience (expressing how he was feeling at that moment) when he mentioned seeing his mother's face. He proceeded to make a startled look as he looked at his mom. See [here](#) for the example. Solid timing and execution.
- **Voice He Used to Talk to Audience:** He used a down-to-earth voice when he'd talk directly to the audience. It was a sort of an insecure (intentionally so) voice. It was both funny and helped build a connection with the audience. See [example](#). You can see how he transitioned out of a story to talk with the audience.
- **Vocal Variety:** His vocal variety was captivating. A good example can be found during this [small part](#): *"The aroma of spices drifted in the hot humid air. And here in a small hut sat the holy man everybody called, the Swami. His saffron robe drenched in sweat, he tried to answer the problems of the people who had come to see him."* How he slowed down the words at the end of those sentences was masterful. He also had a rhythm that almost sounded like a song. There was also something to his voice that made him sound full of wisdom—particularly on this sentence: *"...answer the problems of the people who had come to see him."*
- **Time Goes By:** A common element in the championship speeches is that you get a sense that time has gone by from the initial hook to the time that the conflict gets resolved. A journey so to speak, one that the audience gets to be a part of. In this speech Vikas begins at the *end* (with his acceptance letter in hand), then takes us back to where this chapter in his life began, as a teenager doing poorly in school, his worried parents decide to get advice from the Swami (a couple of times), he progresses a little and gets into college but then his grades suffer again, frustrated and beat, he experiences his "aha" moment which changes his course and is used to segue back to where he began the speech—him achieving his dream by getting accepted into MIT. The speech was just 6 minutes 56 seconds, but we went on a life's journey.
- **Pauses:** Apart from speaking too soon on a couple of laugh moments, his pauses were impressive. They came at necessary moments and especially at the end of his speech. Instead of using too many words to try and sum things up, he used pauses to make his conclusion feel "full." Vikas made the most of the content that he delivered. I highly recommend studying this speech when it comes to delivery and overall speech craft.
- **Stage Placement:** He kept the Swami scene consistent with where it originally happened on the stage. He would walk back to the same part of the stage when he went back to see the Swami and he would also gesture toward that spot when talking about the Swami. This helped to avoid

crossing up parts of the speech which could potentially confuse the audience.

- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** The Guru in this speech was the Swami.
 - **Side Characters:** His parents (particularly his mother), the “next person” in the Swami’s hut, his friends, college girls, and Dr. Phil 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.
- **Character Impressions:** His character impressions made this speech feel alive! He had a separate voice for his mom, the Swami, and even for *himself* when he’d talk with the audience on a personal level.
- **Foundational Phrase:** The FP was “*The answer was inside.*” Another important phrase was the Swami’s question: “*Who are you?*” On top of that, the speech’s title was “*The Swami’s Question*” which is both relevant to those other phrases and ties in perfectly.
The Swami’s Question → Who Are You? → The Answer was inside.

Nothing conflicting about these and they all complement one another.

- **Additional Note about Foundational Phrase:** He offered the Foundational Phrase very early on in the speech and with some context. Then he began his storytelling which had a way of making me forget all about that, and when he ultimately returned to the Foundational Phrase, it was a perfect circle. A calm and comfortable callback that all made sense.
- **Guru Note:** The last breakdown I did was for [Ryan Avery](#), the 2012 Champion, and I came across an interesting technique in regard to the “Guru.” Vikas used this technique as well.

Simplified it goes like *this*: The Guru is consulted 3 times during the journey (the speech). The first 2 times the Guru is present. The 3rd time the Guru is consulted through memory or by thought. Ryan’s Guru was his mom. For Vikas, it was the Swami.

The first time, Vikas and his mom go see the Swami and he tells them to meditate. When he struggles with that, his mom takes him back to the Swami again only to be asked “Who are you?” Once he hits the metaphorical “rock bottom” he goes to his room, closes his eyes, and returns to the Swami’s question.

You see the difference? The final time the Guru is not there in the flesh but rather in the mind. What this does is distance the Guru from the present moment. Imagine getting advice from someone who is alive and well—in other words, just another imperfect human being like you and me. Now, imagine getting advice from someone who is alive through memories only—the memories are long-lasting and infallible, and thus held in higher esteem. And now that I think about it, the 2017 Public Speaking Champion, [Manoj Vasudevan](#) used this same technique (his

Guru was his mom). Could be that I'm reading into this too much but interesting to say the least.

- **Letting Audience Answer:** In some championship speeches, the speaker has been able to get the audience to repeat or finish saying the speaker's Foundational Phrase, or at least say it *with* the speaker. In this speech, Vikas did a similar technique but in a more unconventional way. He instead did this silently by putting his hands over his chest (to signal that *the answer was inside*). This required the audience to finish the sentence but in their own minds instead of out loud. A clever technique that is a safer version than hoping the audience will repeat something. Here's the sentence he used: "*Friends, have you ever looked inside? What if the answer to your problems is not out there, what if the answer...*"
- **Note About "You" vs "Me" Focused Words:** This is a perfect example that demonstrates that having more "Me" focused words versus "You" focused words does not make the speech impersonal or too "Me" focused. For example, [Ryan Avery's](#) speech had a similar ratio but lacked the additional elements that Vikas' speech had, which helped Vikas make it more personal between him and the audience. For instance, he would step out of the story on occasion to talk with the audience, he addressed the audience as "Friends" later in the speech during the conclusion, and he had many more questions for the audience than Ryan did.
- **Self-Deprecation:** Poking fun at oneself is a powerful technique when it comes to humor. He nailed it in this speech. The entire speech was basically him being a bumbling teenager and struggling to understand why. His down-to-earth manner of speaking when he would address the audience is a perfect example. The voice he used gave the impression that he was a bit of a moron—in an *endearing* sort of way.
- **Humor Derived From Story:** This is the case for most of the championship speeches, where the humor is derived from the story instead of trying to force jokes. In this case, the mere set up (the absurdity) of traveling to a holy figure (the Swami) to seek out answers for something as pedestrian as bad grades is just funny on its own. If he had been searching for a cure for his wife's terminal cancer and he traveled to the Swami for answers, well, that would simply make too much sense. That would no doubt be a dramatic story, but it would be in the realm of expected behavior for a desperate husband and would change the entire feeling of the speech. Food for thought.
- **Language Note on Humor:** Another thing I've pondered and largely suspect is that having a non-native English-speaking accent helps make certain jokes funnier than they might have otherwise been from a native English speaker. I talked about this for the [2013 Champion Presiyan Vasilev](#) as well.

For example, when Vikas mentioned "Dr. Phil." Now, it's a funny line no matter who might have said it, but I believe it makes it even funnier because there is a sort of disconnect that makes it more unexpected. Vikas, with apparent roots to India, is referencing something that one would associate with American contemporary entertainment/culture (or whatever you'd consider "Dr. Phil" to be), and that makes it both unexpected and a form of affinity with the audience (this contest was held in Phoenix, Arizona in the US). Now, I'm not saying this is a substitute for having truly humorous content; I am saying that it has the potential to amplify already-funny content.

Not necessarily related, but Vikas playing on things you might associate with Indian culture (Swami, meditation, etc.) works to make those parts funnier as well since they are in a way drawing attention to stereotypes—this connects to what I mentioned about self-deprecating humor.

- **Downplayed His Success:** When it came to the resolution in the speech, that is, when he brought the college letter back out of his suit jacket, he rushed through the fact that it began with “*Congratulations*” and that he had been accepted into his dream college. This was a wise decision. Keep in mind that it’s crucial to resolve the conflict by letting the audience know that the main character succeeded. He did that, but he was smart not to self-indulge and praise himself for the success. He quickly brought it back to the Swami as the *reason* for his success. He probably could have slowed down a little bit more than he did for that part; however, I’d say it’s better than the opposite.
- **Tie Up Loose Ends:** He opened the speech holding his acceptance letter in his hand and teasing the audience about whether he was accepted into the school or not. He later tied up that loose end by telling us that he *was* accepted to the college and that he had reached his dream in doing so.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Stepping on Laughter:** He stepped on laughter a bit on the very first laugh point in his speech when he said “...*you’ve got to be kidding me*”. Maybe he wasn’t expecting that big of a response? He did pause for a moment *after* he resumed speaking, but it still seemed to kill some of the laughter’s steam.

He also stepped on laughter for this line (maybe he didn’t expect laughter): “*I was a teenager and my parents were desperate.*” Laughter was beginning to build when he said his next line (“*Sounds familiar doesn’t it?*”), which was a line he actually intended to be funny, but that actually slowed down the laughter that would have come from the previous line.

Interestingly, there was a line that was starting to generate laughter, but one that he plowed through which I believe was the *correct* decision. The reason was that he added extra energy and volume to his voice which seemed intentional. It would have seemed odd if he had stopped the pace of this to allow for laughter. It was on this line: “*But, but this meditation was making me so popular, I had to do something about it!*”

- **Contemporary Humor:** He used contemporary humor when he referenced “Apple’s stock” and also with “Dr. Phil.” Using references to contemporary events in your speech can make them difficult to stand the test of time. Since this is an inspirational speech, I feel it should stand on its own, no matter who or when someone listens to it (then and now). However, this is a speech contest and being able to use something that resonates with *that* audience (and judges) was probably the right choice for Vikas. He did win after all...
- **Harsh / Loud:** There was a part I felt was too loud for too long and was a bit harsh on the ears. One other thing was that the volume and drama didn’t necessarily match the actual words (or an overreaction might be a better way to put it). I couldn’t relate to being that bent out of shape for grades, but I suspect in his case he truly did due to the pressure of his parents. So, this may have

been more of a personal disconnect from my perspective. It was during this exchange: *“I felt like life had kicked me in the stomach so hard that I was left gasping for air searching for answers and the next few months everything I tried to bounce back only made me believe that I did not have the ability until one day, tired, frustrated, I went back to my room, closed my eyes and returned to the Swami’s question, “who are you?”* (the parts are underlined)

- **Clarity:** There were a few parts in the speech that I had to pause and re-listen to in order to understand what he said. If I were in the in-person audience, I would not have had that luxury. There was one part that I am still not sure what he said. For this line: *“But, having tried everything from counseling to **naturing**, from threatening to explaining...”* I settled on “naturing” (another way to say “nurturing”) although I am still not 100% sure, but I understand it contextually so no big deal. This was either due to his accent or perhaps he mispronounced the word. It also sounds like “maturing” if said like this “mAYturing”—I still can’t be sure. The words “*threatening*” and “*myth*” were also tricky the first time I heard them. Apart from that, having an accent does force the audience to have to listen more intently, which can be an advantage for the speaker.
- **Perfection:** Usually I’m able to find a hiccup during these championship speeches, like a mispronounced word or a repeated word (false start), and this speech was no exception. There were a few hiccups in this speech overall, but for the most part they all seemed like natural things you’d expect in a normal conversation rather than a true flub of a word. Here’s an [example](#). Oh, and the word I couldn’t confirm.

A BOOK FOR OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING...

If you’ve wanted to get involved in public speaking but are having trouble dealing with the fear and nervousness that comes with it, please check out my [book](#).

The fear of public speaking was absolutely debilitating for me. The advice I got when I started out was “Just do it!”

Well, I took that to heart and started “doing it,” and each and every week I was getting opportunities to speak. But for some reason the fear was getting worse every time I got in front of an audience.

To tell you the truth, this was demoralizing and beyond frustrating. Who wants to put in time and

effort into something and get nothing back? That's what my journey to overcoming the fear felt like.

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I wrote the book for people that want to be able to speak in front of an audience but not have to feel like a sailboat floating in the middle of the ocean during a hurricane.

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