

Conversations with Judges: The Dreaded Critique

by Shirlee Whitcomb

Every instructor wants to be as competitive as possible, and this means that he/she is looking to the "score" to provide the information as to where the guard is in this regard.

Typically the questions an instructor has are:

1. Where do I stand relative to my competitors both in this contest and across the country?
2. What are the issues/qualities that cause you to place my competitor(s) ahead of me?
3. What was the issue that prevented my getting a block score?
4. What do I have to do to get into box 5?
5. What issues in my show need the greatest focus or attention for growth?

You can ask these questions, and judges will do their best to provide you with the answers. How you communicate your questions, is pivotal in establishing a dialog of value.

1. When going to critique, be prepared, be focused and know specifically what you want to address in the very short 3 to 5 minutes you have.
2. Be relaxed and "in control" of your fatigue, emotions and frustrations when you engage in this dialog.
3. Speak in a calm tone of voice, use the judge's name, look him/her in the eye and be direct in your questions. A smile and a cordial greeting will gain you more than you know, especially if it's sincere.
4. LISTEN to the answers. Some folks like to turn over the judge's tape and record the information, not as a negative tool, but as a memory jogger for upcoming reference. You can do this in a cordial manner and turn it into a positive experience for both of you. Not only will it let you reference the judge's additional input, but it will let you evaluate your own communication skill.
5. If you disagree with a comment, say to the judge: "There's an issue that we seem to be in disagreement on and I'd like to discuss it furthe". Then be specific as to the area.
6. Don't be surprised if the judge's recall is hesitant. Remember the information about the judge's process that was described earlier. Give the judge as much information as possible to get you both targeted on the same topic.

ALWAYS CREATE A WIN-WIN SITUATION

If you put the judges in a situation where you involve them in a calm exchange of ideas, information and concerns, you will not only enrich their knowledge base, but yours as well, and will put you both on a page that focuses on providing more quality and information for your students, your staff and you. And everybody feels like a winner.