

TERRI'S TALK

As the send-off to send SPEAK 2011, Terri Branson inspired the teachers with these words.

If you looked at the schedule, this segment of the conference is simply labeled "Terri Talk." I love it! In light of that, perhaps I'd best introduce myself. As far as I can tell, I'm the oldest living (still participating) speech coach in the state. I've been participating in speech activities in one way or another for most of the last 45 years. I'm speaking to you because I begged Steve to be able to talk to you about what I consider the most important aspects of this conference.

This morning, Scott spoke of his history and the role speaking and communication have played in his life, which gave me the perfect introduction to what I want to say this afternoon.

After my third parking lot experience, I finally managed to cross Limestone and approach the front door of the Student Center. Memories washed over me when I looked around. I remember being on campus, standing in the same spot, looking around me in the spring of 1970 when a speech event was cancelled because protesters had blown up the ROTC building. I opened the doors and realized that the inside of that part of the Student Center hasn't really changed, either. The lobby, as it was known all those years ago, is where postings were. That moment made me smile. *KHSSL*, I thought, *has come back home*.

A few weeks ago, I went back home to my 41st class reunion. Several of us were asked to introduce and honor faculty members from our high school years. I was lucky enough to introduce my high school speech coach, who gave me the only formal coaching training I ever had. You have to understand that I grew up in Harlan County, so far back in the mountains you really do have to look up to see the sky. I didn't know until I graduated from college that any kind of speech competition existed except for KHSSL regionals and state. I was able to thank my coach and tell her just how far her influence has reached. What she taught me has reached all the way across our commonwealth. For example, I look at Steve, my former student, and I am so proud to see what he has helped put together today for coaches across the state. He and I are now friends, but he was only in junior high when we began our speaking journey together ~ and it all began with my high school coach. I think of the influence coaches have over people and become keenly aware of the opportunity we have to make students' lives better.

This conference is a dream come true for me. Several of us have spent years bringing all the different parts of the state and the various organizations together for one purpose: helping kids. When I began coaching in central Kentucky, I followed a coach who was unpleasant and perhaps even unethical in his determination to win trophies. I was confounded by the unfriendly attitude of some of the more competitive coaches when I went to tournaments. I hadn't even known the former coach. Time passed, I became friends with some of the other coaches, and several of us decided to change the adversarial atmosphere of Kentucky speech. Our efforts have paid off in more ways than you can imagine. We have driven all over the state to coach kids from other teams; we have traveled together; we have formed lasting friendships. Our students have coached each other and formed friendships that frequently continue long past graduation. And after that? After that, we go to tournaments and try to beat each other's pants off. That is my first point: You do not have to be hateful to be a successful coach, and being unfriendly never won a trophy. By

helping each and every kid to be the best performer possible, we do nothing less than improve the entire state.

As I listened to former classmates and teachers speak at the class reunion, the beginnings of my personal educational philosophy became clear to me. I first formed my beliefs, without even realizing it until 41 years after the fact, starting with the way I was taught and treated as a student. Teaching and coaching are personal. Those educators molded my friends and me by teaching us not only content but also how to behave. It was personal. They expected us to be our best selves and demanded that we give that best part of ourselves to everything we did. I was stunned by those nearly 60 year old men who tearfully thanked teachers and coaches for the lessons they had taught them. These men have lived long enough to realize and be thankful for the fact that their personal and professional successes were due, in part, to adhering to the principles they learned in high school from people who cared about them as human beings. Make it personal.

One of those tearful men spoke of how he had been successful because his coach had taught him that in order to win, you have to first show up every day. Many of you have never coached before. That doesn't matter. You think you don't know what you're doing. That doesn't matter, either. (Besides, we'll help you,) This is what I want you to take with you today. Show up. Be there for the talented kids we have across this state. Showing up really is the most important part. Just keep showing up every day. It will matter. I promise.

My coach showed up, and 41 years later, here we are.

Thank you for coming, be careful driving home, and be in touch if you need help.

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KHSSL State Champion in Dramatic Interp back in the day