



**GURU  
GUIDE**  
with  
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with  
**Farweez Imamudeen**

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**GETTING KIDS TO  
SPEAK EFFECTIVELY**



# A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'Guru Guide' is an attempt to refine decades of hard-earned expertise into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

## The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

## INTRODUCING



**VIDUSHA  
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON  
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.

## INTRODUCING FARWEEZ IMAMUDEEN

I (V) first met Farweez when I moved to Kandy and my daughter started Toastmasters, where he held the Presidency of the Club she was a member of. It wasn't difficult to understand why Farweez was so different to many office bearers of other clubs; what stood out most of all was the absolute passion and commitment he had for enabling people to speak.

Under Farweez's tutelage, both my daughter and my son improved in leaps and bounds and my son, who was far more shy than my daughter, is today quite the talkative chap in many ways thanks to Farweez's influence and training.

Farweez, a proud product of Trinity College is a speaker par excellence, but a teacher above all.

Kids who come to him not only learn to speak, but more importantly learn to have a certain level of confidence that he is able to instil with ease. Working both in person and online, Farweez has the ability to have the same positive impact which very few - I have personally seen - do seamlessly.

Above all, Farweez is one of those rare few who is on a mission to make a difference, rather than on a mission to make money. He is invested in the growth and development of the children and young adults that call him 'Sir', and will truly pour all his energy into ensuring they grow - both as speakers as well as individuals.



## HOW DID YOU GET INTO PUBLIC SPEAKING ?

It all started when my youngest brother Farhan said, "You should pay a visit to a Toastmasters club. Maybe after that you'll be qualified to tell me whether it's really a waste of time"

What was there to see in a club where people did nothing but speak? Nevertheless, when he challenged me, it made sense, although I never expected it. Resolving to prove him wrong, I found myself climbing up the staircase at the Ceylon Electricity Board building in Kandy, wondering what might possibly be awaiting me at this club, where people did nothing but speak.

Two hours later as I was heading back home in a tuk-tuk with my head buried inside my palms like a defeated loudmouthed warrior, I realized that I had gained an all-new respect for my brother. It took me more than two decades to realise how challenging it is to do nothing but speak.

I could talk, but I could hardly speak.

I was put to the ultimate test when I was asked to stand up and give an impromptu speech for only two minutes in front of fifteen people. I froze despite the A/C being turned off. This I realised, is the difference between the greatest leaders and those who talk. As we all do everyday, it takes the least effort to say something to our parents, friends or work colleagues since we talk to them everyday. *But put yourself on a stage and challenge yourself to inspire a team through words and suddenly, something that we do with so much ease, day in and day out, becomes the most gruelling challenge ever!*

Yet in that gruelling challenge lies the fascinating beauty, because it is human speech from the time of Lord Buddha to the time of Tony Robbins, despite the monumental revolutions from industrial to digital, that continues to transform lives.

That first Toastmasters meeting was an eye-opener, and I realised that there was a road not taken. Thus, the journey began.

## **BUT SPEAKING SHOULD BE EASY ENOUGH FOR A KID, ISN'T IT ?**



Speaking is...effectively speaking, especially in public right? Not really.

Just as much as adults fear public speaking, kids do too and in fact, it is this early fear as a child that carries forward to the fear as an adult as well. So, if you address it when they are young, chances are they will learn a lot faster than trying to change them when they have grown up - and the fears have taken root.

This is the reason I took an interest in doing programmes for kids because I found that my own kids have a fear of speaking in public! There are many occasions that kids are asked to come to the front of the class and speak about a multitude of things and when they can't do it well enough, you see them ebbing in confidence overall. Even naturally confident children feel their confidence faltering if they don't get a clap - or worse - children laugh at them when they make a mistake. So learning to speak well when they are young helps them in their confidence building overall.

## **WHY IS SPEAKING BECOMING SO IMPORTANT NOW? WE NEVER HAD IT GROWING UP!**



Even back then, being able to speak well mattered; it's just that we probably had much fewer opportunities to showcase it.

Effective speaking and communications are an essential skill for anyone to have, and it's becoming even more important given that most careers require it, though very few schools actually teach it.

The real need comes when young adults start working and they have to make a presentation at short notice. Chances are that one presentation - especially in front of seniors - will have a direct impact on how they are 'perceived' inside the organisation. This is when people realise the importance and join clubs like Toastmasters to improve their public speaking skills. So, why not start them off young and make their futures easier?

## WHY IS TEACHING KIDS IMPORTANT ?



Two main reasons:

- 01) Children learn faster and the fears (though they are very present even at a young age) are not deep-seated.
- 02) When children learn how to speak in front of a crowd, it also helps them have a lot more confidence - which is possibly far more important than speaking itself. This confidence gained then transcends the childhood stage and becomes a life skill.

Teaching kids has its own challenges, but the importance of it can never be overstated. Children, especially if you start at a very early age, develop really fast under the right tutelage and the skills they learn last their entire life. So, making sure that they are given the opportunity to grasp basic life skills (of any variety - not just public speaking) is critically important if you want a wholesome individual as an adult.



## CONCEPT 1 : TAKE THE FEAR OUT OF THE EQUATION



Talking is something we all do with absolute ease. However, speaking is different and this is where the fear comes in.

If we are able to teach kids to be able to 'speak' as naturally as they 'talk', we take the fear out of the equation and we can then focus on things like content, delivery, postures, modulation, humour, body language and all the other finer points.

But the key hurdle to jump is taking fear out of the equation and this cannot be done purely by sending them to a class. It requires involvement from parents, siblings, and everyone around them. Whatever is done in class to improve confidence (and step up to the mic and the stage) should be reinforced and supported by everyone around them.

Taking out fear is building confidence and the age old saying that it 'takes a village to raise a child' is very true when it comes to this as well.

## **TOOL 1 : HOW TO TAKE THE FEAR OF SPEAKING OUT OF A KID**

### **01**

Firstly, before anything else, they must know that failing is ok - and nothing to be shy about or feel bad about. For this to happen you must actively encourage any child to talk : and make mistakes : and be encouraged and supported irrespective of the mistakes. They must WANT to improve : and this only comes with encouragement.

### **02**

It is also important to give kids little tips on how to make sure they can speak without faltering. Practice comes into play here big time. If they know the words, and are familiar with what they are talking about, chances are they will speak with a lot more confidence.

### **03**

It is also important to get kids to see other kids speak : and see them making mistakes as well. This 'normalises' the process in their minds : allowing them to understand they all go through the same mistakes. This enables them to try more often : knowing that they are not alone in the journey.

## CONCEPT 2 : TELL A STORY



Telling a story is something kids do instinctively. Observe a school van: all the kids are wrapped in animated conversation about what happened in school; they enact their teachers and parents, poke fun at each other and do this without any effort!

The trick is for kids to be able to tell stories just as animatedly on stage and in front of 'strangers'.

Being able to tell a story comes naturally and instinctively, and kids do it way better than most adults. So, we play on this natural strength and grow them through it. Storytelling is by far one of the best ways of making a speech effective and given that kids have a natural knack for that, we exploit it.

Start getting your kids to tell a story in front of others whenever the family gathers and you will find their public speaking skills will improve quite naturally.

## **TOOL 2 : 3 SMALL TIPS TO HELP YOUR KID CRAFT A STORY FOR A SPEECH**

### **01**

Remember : they must have a story that they can relate to. The best way to do it is for them to 'write' their own story : which ensures they 'own' the story. NEVER make the mistake of scripting a story on their behalf : this makes it so much more difficult for them to tell it.

### **02**

The second little tip is for them to ensure they think of what they want to tell through the story. Kids do connect the dots when allowed to : so, ask them to write the 'lesson' you learn from the story : and they will start making much better speeches overall by connecting the dots at the end.

### **03**

The third tip is to get your kids to read a lot. They pick up on the words and also the little subtleties of story telling by reading story books - and the 'beginning, the middle and the end' will come naturally if kids read avidly.

So, as much as you encourage speaking, encouraging the reading habit as well.

## CONCEPT 3 : PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



Kids may not want to practice a lot, but it is important that they do. Practicing helps them understand the process of getting better at anything and also helps them build discipline - another essential life skill.

Simply practicing isn't enough. You must take the time to be with them when they practice and correct the little mistakes they are bound to make. This level of interest is important in ensuring that practicing becomes a concentrated activity rather than a passive repetition.

Learning to practice - and practicing right - will ensure they get that much better every single time, and it will also help them become truly disciplined in their endeavours. It will help their speech and life in general.

## **TOOL 3 : 3 WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD PRACTICE SPEAKING**

**01**

First, get them to practice by themselves, and ensure they are able to tell the speech without being prompted. Make sure they are absolutely thorough with the content before doing anything else.

**02**

Once they are 'word perfect' focus on their voice modulation and mannerisms. Get them to practice in front of the family : and offer lots of praise - and then give them 3 things to improve (NEVER more than three) and keep repeating this until they are thorough.

**03**

Finally, get them to make the speech in front of a few relatives and friends whenever they come around. Repeat the 'praise' and 'critique' combination here too : and help the child incorporate this in to their next speech.

## SOME FINAL TIPS



### » Lay the Foundation, Start Early

- » Public Speaking is more like the Sydney Opera House in Australia. The beauty that is apparent on the surface would have been long gone if not for a firm foundation.
- » To lay the firm foundation for Public Speaking, parents should expose their children to reading from a very early age. The reason is obvious: reading primarily helps the child develop a vast repository of vocabulary and knowledge. Everything else follows.
- » Introduce writing early and encourage the child to write. For instance, you can buy a beautiful journal for your child's sixth birthday and encourage the child to maintain a diary.
- » Writing helps the child organise ideas and develops the habit of forming meaningful and powerful sentences. This best practice would eventually help the child to speak impromptu with ease without stumbling over words.

## SOME FINAL TIPS

### » Make Public Speaking Fun & Consistent

- » Once a week, organise a storytelling hour. Let the whole family share their weekly stories over a cup of evening tea and some snacks. Time doesn't matter. This is where the stories from the kids' diaries can come in quite handy. Storytelling helps the child organise their ideas and stimulates their right brain to think creatively. To make this fun session insightful, you can ask them to share the lesson they learned from a story.
- » Impromptu is a great speaking activity that helps children think on their feet and speak off the cuff. Kids love suspense and they are always curious to know the unknown. So all you need to do is come up with some creative and fun topics, write them down on a paper, fold them and let the children choose one. The parents can take part too. If you're creative enough then you can come up with several variations for this interesting game. Here's one - treasure hunt!
- » Play games like charades to encourage kids to stretch their imagination and use facial expressions and non-verbal communication. This will create a fun environment where children can develop their skills of non-verbal communication.
- » Have you ever tried asking your children how their day was? If you start young, then you'll be amazed to see how interactive they become when you show interest in the little things that they do daily in their lives.

## SOME FINAL TIPS

### »» Some Dos & Don'ts

- »» YouTube can be a great source of inspiration. There are a number of great videos on YouTube, from TED Talks by kids to world championship speeches by Toastmasters that kids can draw inspiration from.
- »» Don't alter nature: Kids are naturally endowed with the skill of expressing their feelings unrestrained by shyness or self-consciousness. As parents, we only need to provide that environment for them to play around with their expressions and freely express their emotions as long as it's not offensive to anyone, and you'll be surprised to see its effect on their level of self-confidence. And self-confidence is key to Public Speaking.
- »» While encouraging reading, writing and storytelling may lay the foundation for Public Speaking, it is better to be on the lookout for a good mentor who can guide the child to nurture those skills and master the art of Public Speaking. For example, it is like learning to swim. Swimming in the river may make the child a swimmer, but to learn the nuances of swimming and truly master the art the child needs a mentor.
- »» Don't handicap your kids through academic strain - overemphasis on academic skills and neglecting soft skills, or what they now call essential skills has a drastic effect on the overall personality development of a child. It is better to start young and give equal importance to both soft skills such as Public Speaking and creative thinking as well as academic skills.

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