

new nuclear reactors or deploy troops, they would have to demonstrate that the decision was desirable, possible, and timely. They would attempt to build a case that proved the motion is in tune with the popular will, won't bankrupt the treasury, and is appropriate to the wider national or international situation.

REBUTTAL

While the debater is trying to prove her case, she is also trying to demonstrate that the other side has failed to prove theirs. In a debate, the interaction between speakers—offering the listener alternatives—is fundamental. However, if each team simply announced what they thought, with no way of comparing the two positions, you might as well decide the outcome with the toss of a coin. The debater's objective is not just to establish that her case is simply good, but that it's better than the alternative put forward by the other side. To do so, she points out that her opponent's ideas won't work or are immoral, unaffordable, or, frequently, have nothing to do with topic of the debate—although they may appear to at first glance. Often, speakers will contend that the arguments put forward by the other team are all well and good in themselves but have unintended consequences that outweigh any conceivable benefits.

What Are the Attributes of a Successful Debater?

All debaters bring a different blend of skills, knowledge, and experience to the tasks of building and rebutting arguments and cases. However, there are certain traits that the successful debater can expect to develop as he progresses in the art. This list sets out these likely attributes, which we discuss in more depth in later chapters.

- *An appreciation for clash.* The controversial issues in a debate, those that will be the source of the disagreement between the two sides, are referred to as "points of clash." Correctly identifying these points is important because doing so enables a debater to guide the adjudicator to the important areas of contention and identify why her team has the stronger arguments. (We look at clash in greater depth in Chapter 21.)
- *Well-honed critical thinking skills.* Much of a debater's progress relates not to the fluency or power with which she argues a particular position, but, rather, how she thinks about her position and that of her opponent. A critical thinker will analyze her arguments and question those of her opponents. Trying to list all of the questions that a critical thinker might ask in any given situation would be both time-consuming and unhelpful. Instead, critical thinking is better conceived of as an attitude that is unwilling to