

are gathering dust and the names of the champions are nothing but a whisper on the wind, something remains. What lasts are the intellectual skills gained from the process.

Adjudication plays an important part in refining and honing those skills. However, it should be the start of a process rather than the end. When an adjudicator highlights an argument that didn't work or a flaw in a case, she may elucidate why there was a problem or she may not. However, it is an issue that the debater should certainly address. Everybody has assumptions about certain ideas that don't stand up to scrutiny, we all give credence to particular views and arguments that don't really make sense. We all are guilty of not challenging the opinions of those who claim to be more important or better informed than we are.

Debate is a method for correcting some of these oversights, and adjudication plays a significant role in that. It will quickly become apparent to any debater that some adjudicators have thought about some of these issues more than others, likewise that some have more experience or are more willing to share that experience than others. Don't make the mistake of assuming that the adjudicator who says the most necessarily has the most to say but do listen honestly and intelligently to those suggestions that are offered in the same spirit.

Adjudication is primarily an art rather than a science, and experienced adjudicators will usually admit that they have encountered close decisions that, on another day, could have gone another way. That's simply part of the process and it evens out over time. Win or lose, however, good adjudicators should make debaters think for a moment about more than just glean tips to help win a future debate—although they are important. It can provide an opportunity for all concerned to ponder the processes of thought that made certain arguments stronger than others. Was the evidence applied more effectively, was the argument more consistent with the rest of the case, were the logical steps pursued with greater precision? Equally, why did one particular team win and another lose; were the speakers more engaged with what else was being said, did they genuinely appear to appreciate that all of the ideas flowing around them should and could be considered and weighed in the balance?

EXERCISE

Act as a judge in a live competitive debate, if possible. Alternatively, watch a debate online and act as though you were the judge. Take notes and reach a decision. Follow the rules of the format for how that decision should be reached—individually, by ballot, or by consensus.