

“I’m Just Not That Funny!”

By Judith Filek—President
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Most people enjoy humor. They love to laugh. However, when it comes to the workplace, opinions vary. Some people feel it’s a good thing, others do not. Even in the camp that says humor is a good thing, a lot of folks would say they are just not funny! Humor, if done right, can be a great tool for relating to your listeners whether face to face, on the phone or virtually.

Why humor works:

Humor lightens any situation. There is no doubt that some situations are trying; profits are down, customers are dissatisfied and the competition is eroding business. By addressing the elephant in the room in a lighter fashion, it releases anxiety and fear. The speaker suggests that we can’t be overwhelmed, and we can move forward. There are brighter tomorrows! William Arthur Ward, author of *Foundations of Faith*, said, “A well-developed sense of humor adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life.”

Humor turns a mundane, boring topic into something dynamic and worthwhile. People go from meeting to meeting all day long, every day of the week. They are on information overload. After a while, the information they are hearing can sound like background noise, music in an elevator. A humorous comment prevents people from pressing the “off switch.” The presenter’s points are remembered and highlighted.

Lastly, humor makes you look real; others want to get to know you because of your upbeat personality. Hugh Sidey, an American journalist for *Life* and *Time Magazines* said, “Some laughter on one’s lips is a sign the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life.”

When it doesn’t work:

Humor doesn’t work when others are the brunt of the joke or comment. No one likes being put

down. If humor insults a person’s gender, race, sexual preference, creed or age group, it is vulgar. Jobs have been lost in a second with a misplaced attempt to be funny.

None of us are David Letterman or Jay Leno. Joke telling is never a good idea. Let me repeat. Joke telling is never a good idea! If you tell a joke about zebras, you have zebra lovers who might be offended.

How to use humor effectively:

First consider the situation. Is it appropriate? Too much and you can look frivolous. As the speaker, you have to decide whether the risk will pay off.

Humor that is effective has a lot to do with calling attention to one’s own foibles or missteps. People who are good at workplace humor frequently relate experiences that are familiar to their listeners so that their audience shares in the experience firsthand. Stories about business travel, career paths, client blunders, and family, for example, usually score a hit.

Some people don’t tell any stories but are still funny. They simply make an aside or a one-liner based on what someone else said. The look on their face, a roll of their eyes or the shaking of their head can evoke laughter, even when they haven’t said a word.

In addition, a speaker can be seen as witty by quoting others. Obviously, comments from humorists like Mark Twain, Garrison Keillor or Dorothy Parker can add color to any topic. However, some people who would never be called funny make outrageous comments if one pays attention. Mike Tyson, the boxer, said, “*I always have a plan until someone smashes me in the face.*”

Lastly, PowerPoint slides can fast-track you to becoming a memorable speaker. The visual is six times more compelling than the auditory. A clever graphic can speak volumes. It can highlight a point or diffuse a bad situation. Graphics can be

Continued on page 2

found by doing a search on the web, although some are copyrighted or require a small fee to purchase or use.

Many of us think we are just not that funny. However, there are plenty of things we can do to flavor a meeting. When deciding whether or not to add humor, just remember what Steve Allen once said. People will pay more to be entertained than educated!

Question: *Think about meetings where you have added humor. What have you done? How did it go over? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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