

## **LIGHTENING BOLTS**

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### **FEATURE ARTICLE: Enjoy the Ride**

The newly installed president of the National Speakers Association rode onstage precariously perched atop a red tricycle. Humorously upstaging the previous president who rode onstage on a Harley Davidson motorcycle, incoming president Scott Friedman was embodying his theme for the year, “Enjoy the Journey”. As I pondered the theme (by the way, I don’t often ponder for fear it will contaminate my shallowness), I realized that “Enjoying the Journey” is a perfect theme for our lives.

When we get to the end of our lives, we’ll most likely ask ourselves reflective questions like this: What did it all mean? Did I do the right things? How will I be remembered? Why do people with un-skimpy bodies always wear skimpy swimsuits? What we’re really exploring is the processes in our lives.

There’s a motorcycle saying that goes, “It’s not the destination but the journey”. In other words, if we only focus on the destination, we miss the scenery along the way. Similarly, our lives are one big journey and we embrace the process or we’ll miss some wonderful opportunities.

What are the processes in your journey? Can you find some ways to make them more FUN? More enJOYable? More enLIGHTENing? To quote the late Mr. Rogers, “I bet you can.” Here’s how.

The first step is to recognize the process. It will be hard to improve something unless you know what it is. This may sound simple but how many times have you been driving down the road and don’t remember the previous few miles? Even though we think we’re aware, we fail to see the processes around us.

The processes in our lives are simply the ways we do things. They can be easy processes such as fixing breakfast and driving to work or complex processes such as facilitating a meeting or maintaining a personal relationship. In essence a process is the “how” of our lives.

The second step is to figure out how to make the processes more fun. It’s that simple. Let’s look at a few examples.

I am a single person business and I work out of my home. Yet, if you were to come into my office, you'd see a picture of me on the wall with a caption that says, "Employee of the Month". By adding fun decorations to my office, I enjoy the process of my day.

My contract for speaking engagements is called a "Program HA-greement" (Get it, I do humor and my contract is a ha-greement!). I think this is very funny. Yet, I frequently get calls from clients, often government procurement officers, who say, "I have a question about your Program H. A. Greement." In other words, they don't get it. I love that! It makes the boring process of paperwork more fun.

When I was President of the Washington, DC Chapter of the National Speakers Association, the first item on the agenda of every board meeting was called, "A Visit from Hugh Moore." We started each meeting by sharing something funny that we had seen or that had happened to us. It was a great way to make the process of the meeting much more pleasant.

There are so many opportunities for us to improve the process of our work and personal lives. Why waste the joy of your existence through stress, boredom and discomfort? Instead, carve a new process that adds joy, pleasure and fun. In the end, the ride will be as significant as the destination.

### **HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: Having FUN at the Office**

In April, I spoke at the Indiana Health Information Management Conference. One of the attendees, Kerry Moore, shared this experience with me (edited for length).

I work at a state-operated psychiatric facility. All state facilities are being threatened with privatization. Our superintendent is one of the greatest administrators I've ever met. Not only is he concerned for all our 300+ patients, he feels the same for all 500+ employees.

Recently he left the hospital for a three-day seminar and jokingly told the top administrative team, "If you get a good price, sell her." He was referring to the hospital.

So we did!

When he returned on Monday he was met at the front gate with a huge "SOLD" sign and in his office, he found cardboard boxes and official looking memos stating he must vacate the premises within 3 days. We also affixed tags with "Property of State Surplus" on his furniture. He loved it.

Instead of coming in on Monday in a grumpy mood, he got a huge laugh.

## **JUST HUMOR: The Title Role**

I was recently honored as Chapter Member of the Year for the Washington, DC chapter of the National Speakers Association. During the award presentation, current president Michael Aronin, a friend and fellow humorist, parodied my book. The real title is *Is Your Glass Laugh Full?* Here are the titles he came up with for “sequels”:

Is Your Book Half Full?  
Is Your Glass Paper or Plastic?  
Stop Looking at My Glass.  
Nobody Cares About Your Glass.  
Who Moved My Glass?  
Does this Dress Make My Glass Look Big?

## **HUMOR RESOURCES**

Here are some resources that focus on the process of what we do:

*Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success* by Kevin and Jackie Freiberg (1996).

*Joy At Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun On The Job* by Dennis W. Bakke (2005).

*The Light Touch: How To Use Humor for Business Success* by Kushner, Malcolm (1990).

*Blink The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell (2004).

## **HUMOR AT WORK: The Funny Business of Second City**

Since 1953, some of the greatest comedic actors have walked across the stage of The Second City Comedy Theater in Chicago. Among them were John Belushi, Gilda Radner, Mike Myers, Tina Fey, Dan Akroyd and John Candy. Yet Second City is also in the business of using humor and improvisation to help organizations become more effective.

Recently, I spoke with Mike Diefenbach, a marketing and communication consultant and founder of The “Tell ‘em Good” Group(SM). Last year, Mike did sales and business development work for *Second City Communications*, the corporate training and consulting division of Second City. Mike gave me some great insights as to how this unique organization uses humor as the process for creating new business results.

Based on a well-established track record in humor, comedy and improvisational acting, Second City Communications helps companies communicate better – with customers and with themselves. Their services include three distinct offerings: Live messaging and entertainment, corporate training, and customized video services. As their website states, they “use *show biz* to help organizations excel in *their biz*.”

In live messaging and entertainment, the group gives clients an opportunity to have members of the Second City Comedy Troupe energize and entertain their staff. Second City actors also apply their unique skills to help launch new products and put a new twist on marketing messages.

For training and workshops, Second City Communications uses improvisation – a skill most business use on a day-to-day basis without even realizing it –to help clients adjust to change, build better teams, communicate better, create a more positive work environment and stimulate creativity.

This creative group also develops customized videos for special events, marketing initiatives, awards programs or to motivate employees. Second City writes and films the videos and incorporates clients’ personalized information to make the video both funny and relevant.

Diefenbach acknowledged that humor is really just a delightful by-product of these services rather than the goal. While Second City is known for their humor, what they’re really selling is the end result of putting the *function* back in *dysfunctional* organizations and putting a genuine and more human face on corporate marketing programs. These results are much easier to sell than just humor, yet the humor is still the process by which the results come.

Improvisation is a process used by Second City that contains humor and has many applications in business. The basic premise behind improvisation is to accept whatever happens and to build on it rather than resist, analyze or critique it. Since this kind of flexibility is also a great asset for businesses, Second City’s use of improvisation is a perfect way of teaching a skill that will help organizations perform better. Whereas Enron and WorldCom might be accused of “improvising” their numbers, this is *not* the kind of improv suggested by Second City!

The humor in improvisation happens during the process of the activities. The television show *Whose Line is It Anyway?* is a great example of the potential hilarity of improvisation. In Second City’s work, the situational humor reduces resistance and tension while allowing the group to work together more effectively. In essence, their clients leave the experience tighter *and* lighter!

Second City's corporate training, entertainment and consulting business has been around for about 20 years. Beyond developing an additional revenue stream for the theater, it also allows them to make greater use of their talented actors in a different kind of "performance". So, everyone wins – the theater, the actors and of course, their corporate clients.

Most of us will never have the opportunity to work for a company like Second City where we get to engage in funny processes as part of our work. However, most of us could add a few humorous processes to our daily work routine. Over time maybe we'll at least get a *second* chance to make our work lives a little bit more enjoyable.

For more information about Second City, go to [www.SecondCity.com](http://www.SecondCity.com). For more information about Mike Diefenbach, go to [www.tellemgood.com](http://www.tellemgood.com) or drop a line to [mike@tellemgood.com](mailto:mike@tellemgood.com).

**QUOTE:** I never did a day of work in my life. It was all fun. Thomas Edison

## **HUMOR ME**

Ronald P. (Ron) Culberson, Director of Everything! at FUNsulting, etc., is a speaker, humorist, author of *Is Your Glass **Laugh** Full?* and former hospice social worker whose mission is to work with organizations that want their people to lighten up by using humor to minimize stress and maximize effectiveness. He is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the highest earned award from the National Speakers Association, and is one of less than 7% of speakers worldwide who have received this designation. He has provided entertaining and informative programs to over 70,000 people in more than 600 associations, government agencies, non-profit organizations and *Fortune 500* companies.

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## **BACK QUOTE**

Time flies whether you're having fun or not. Lila Green