

## LIGHTENING BOLTS

October 2005

Vol 3 No 4

### FEATURE ARTICLE: Americans with Disabilities Acting up

As I get older, I find that my moving parts just don't work like they used to. Some times I feel like the Tin Man in the *Wizard of Oz* but I need a lot more than an oilcan to loosen up. Recently, my doctor, my trainer and some man who plays a doctor on TV suggested that my back and hip pain were stress related. In other words, they think it's all in my head. Well, that totally stressed me out!

I started to analyze my situation. I reflected on everything in my life and my work and couldn't immediately identify anything that was causing me stress. As I got more anxious and wondered if I was going to have a panic attack right there, something occurred to me. *I have a disability.* That's right. I'm disabled, crippled, gimp. But here's the kicker: Mine is an invisible disability. It's invisible to others.....and sometimes to me.

My disability is best described as a part-genetic, part-environmental unconscious propensity to create stress for myself when there is really no need to do so. In other words, I automatically manufacture stress from non-stressful things which interferes quite inconveniently with my ability to function. And before you start judging me for my apparent neurosis, you need to realize that you're disabled too!

In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, *disabled* is defined as "physically or mentally impaired". When you consider the broad implications of this, we are all disabled in some way or another and many of our disabilities are invisible.

In the *Humor at Work* article on page 3, I discuss how my friend Michael Aronin uses humor to cope with Cerebral Palsy (CP). He says he considers himself lucky because he's always had CP. Since he never experienced life without it, he simply accepts it and deals with it. I feel the same way about my Appalachian upbringing. I ain't knowed nothing different.

For most of us though, our disabilities are not so obvious. In fact, we're often blind to them, which in a weird way is like having two disabilities! Our prejudices, our quick tempers, our insensitivities and our rudeness (and I could go on) are all impairments that affect our ability to function properly.

For instance, my stress-creation problem manifests itself in many ways. I have physical problems due to tense muscles. I am short tempered with my children. I make decisions based on fear rather than good information. And my blood pressure goes up when the car in the left lane is going 50 mph, the driver is talking on his cell phone and his turn signal won't stop **BLINKING!** Sorry.

In effect, the stress I create for myself disables me. But just like Michael, I can use humor to overcome these disabling effects.

Since our *invisible* disabilities often develop from insecurities and fears that are not always based in reality, humor can be a great remedy. By taking ourselves a bit less seriously, we can sidestep the pressures we put on ourselves. Humor also allows us to take others less seriously making it much easier to deal with all those folks who are not nearly as smart or refined as we are! Seeing and using humor is a great way to disable our disability. You'll see examples throughout this newsletter.

Clearly, having insecurities is *not* the same as having Cerebral Palsy. And yet some of us are far more incapacitated by these self-imposed impairments. If we can lighten up, as Michael teaches us, we have the ability to rise above our disabilities regardless of whether they are real.....or perceived.

### **HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: Rotarians Laugh it Off...Literally**

The Rotary club In Batavia, NY wanted to raise money for their local hospital. Rosalie Maguire, a member of the club suggested they sell calendars. And that they did. The club has sold over 3,000 copies earning more than \$20,000 for the hospital. And what's the appeal of this seemingly innocent calendar? The 2005 Men of the Batavia Rotary Club Calendar features local businessmen from a variety of occupations appearing nude in tasteful photographs where truck doors, newspapers and "tools" cover anything offensive.

The club has received national attention and calendar orders from almost every state. When asked why the calendar is so appealing, Maguire told *Rotarian* magazine, "People just want to smile."

Now that's using what God gave you to make other laugh!

JUST HUMOR: Don't Disable Your Humor Antenna! Seeing the humor is half the battle. For instance...

Sign on a doctor's office in Vienna, VA:

Dr. John Smith  
Ear, Nose & Throat  
Rear Entrance

Taco Bell has printed messages on the labels of their hot sauce packets. We found the following on two different packets:

Where are you taking me?  
Pick me! Pick Me!

Sign in Minnesota:

Cease Funeral Home

## **HUMOR RESOURCES**

Don't forget about these resources on our website ([www.FUNsulting.com](http://www.FUNsulting.com)):

- Ron's book, *Is Your Glass Laugh Full?* It's truly a literary masterpiece.
- Video and audio products to help you lighten up.
- Articles on humor, healthcare, leadership and other topics.
- Archive of all previous newsletters.
- Link to Ron's monthly column *Humor Me* in the Observer newspapers.
- Links to many humor resources.

## **HUMOR AT WORK: Michael Aronin Walks the Talk...Sort Of**

A nine-year-old boy with Cerebral Palsy was shopping with his mother when he tripped and fell. A salesperson rushed over to help the boy's mother lift him back onto his feet. As they were pulling him up, the boy looked at his mother and said, "I should've never had that second drink".

That young boy was my close friend Michael Aronin who is now a comic, a professional speaker and one of the more than 750,000 people in the U.S. living with Cerebral Palsy.

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a condition in which damage to the brain, usually during childbirth, leads to muscle weakness and poor muscle control. Many individuals with CP exhibit jerky movement of the arms and legs as well as slurred speech.

Very early in his life, Michael realized he was different. He couldn't walk or talk like other boys his age and he needed his mother's help for even the simplest tasks. But he also knew that he was funny.

“At Thanksgiving Dinner when I was seven, something sparked in me,” says Michael. “I stood on the table and started singing *Light My Fire*. Even though my mom was the only one to ask for an encore, everybody laughed.”

Michael realized that making people laugh represented acceptance and in a world that does not easily accept those who are different, that meant a lot.

His mom was his early humor role model making him laugh by spilling her drink when shaking caused him to spill his own. He wanted to make others laugh like she did. As he got older, he used humor as a way to connect with others and to overcome the dis-ease that others had with his disability.

Once when applying for a job at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Michael told the interviewer that there was something missing from his resume. When asked to explain, Michael said that he had assisted Dr. Ben Carson on numerous surgeries to separate conjoined twins. The interviewer laughed and at that moment, knew that Michael was qualified for the job.

Without his sense of humor, Michael believes he would be bitter and would feel that the world had somehow cheated him. He has seen this in others and though he passes no judgment, he knows that his humorous outlook has led to personal and business success.

Michael and I were at lunch one day when the waitress asked for our drink orders. In his typical way of speaking, Michael ordered a coke with lemon. The waitress was noticeably uncomfortable with his speech and quickly retreated to the kitchen. We both were aware of her reaction and it was awkward at best. But Michael did not allow someone else's discomfort to interfere with his lunch.

He said to me, “Watch this.” Then he turned his menu around. When the waitress returned, Michael said, “Excuse me, but they've printed my menu upside down.”

At first the waitress was dumfounded. Then, as she realized it was a joke, she smiled and eventually laughed. From that moment on, she was his best friend. Michael's use of

humor was brilliant and he showed me how he creates acceptance by making others laugh. And not only can does that help Michael, it can also help others.

When a manager at a large insurance company came home from work one Friday, his wife surprised him with two tickets to the DC Improv Comedy Club. He was tired and wanted to stay home but she convinced him to go anyway. Michael was performing at the Improv that night. After seeing Michael, the manager admitted that his stress had melted away as he laughed during Michael's performance. He was so impressed; he hired Michael to speak at his insurance company a few months later.

Michael's mission in life is to help people lighten up so they see how he has overcome his challenges and led a positive, productive and fun life. He hopes they will realize that their life is not so bad.

There's no question in my mind that he has done that already.

**QUOTE:** Everything is funny as long as it's happening to somebody else. – Will Rogers

## **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.

To find out more about our programs, services and products visit our website at [www.FUNsulting.com](http://www.FUNsulting.com) or call (703) 742-8812. To change your address, email us at [newsletter@FUNsulting.com](mailto:newsletter@FUNsulting.com).

©2005 FUNsulting, etc. Permission is granted to copy this newsletter as long as the above information is included.

## **BACK QUOTE**

Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others whenever they go. – Oscar Wilde