

LIGHTENING BOLTS

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FEATURE ARTICLE: Aging Gratefully

Irony is defined as the incongruity between what is expected and what actually occurs. Incongruity is also an element of humor. The punch line of a joke is often incongruent and that's what leads to the laughter. Take this poem for instance:

Roses are red, violets are blue.
Most poems rhyme but this one doesn't.

It's incongruent *and* funny! Feel free to share it with your incongruent friends – they'll love it.

Aging is also full of incongruity. What we expect or want is not always what happens. We could choose to see the humor in this incongruity but more often than not, we gripe, complain and become grumpy old men (or women).

Let's start with the physical changes. The most obvious sign of aging is the deterioration of our bodies. Our minds are *not* the first to go. Our bodies are the first to go – it's just that when our minds go, we forget that our bodies went first. At least that's what I recall.

For instance, as we get older, we become more interested in reading. We read the newspaper, magazines, and the tiny little instructions on all seventeen medications we're on. And yet, the older we get, the less we can see. That's ironic.

Then there's the digestive system. You'd think that after years of consuming thousands of different foods, our system would be tough and durable. Instead, one slightly spicy meal and too much fruit send us running.....literally. It does, however, allow us to have more quality time in the privacy of our bathrooms. That too is ironic.

Second are the mental changes. This mind of ours is a complicated network of ironic incongruity (does that cancel itself out?). For instance, as a child we were inflexible and insisted on having things *our* way. As we matured however, that changed and we learned to play well with others. Until we get our first Social Security payment. Then the rigidity returns and we can't even spell flexibility. We won't try anything new because it's too complicated; we go to the same doctor because he's known us since we were

born; and we eat dinner by 5:30 or else the whole evening is shot. In essence, we've matured into immaturity. Now that's ironic.

In addition, the older we get, the less we know. Instead of storing up an uncanny load of useless facts and information over the years, our brain begins to offload stuff as we get older. We can't remember what we had for breakfast; the facts of the "good ole days" are grossly exaggerated; and we are totally out of touch with contemporary culture. (Note: It's ironic and yet somehow reassuring that we're out of touch with the likes of Brittany Spears and Donald Trump.)

So how do we deal with this freak of nature that knocks us down over and over again as we age? We must not resist it, avoid it or deny it. We must face it head on and relish the journey. Here are a few suggestions for finding more FUN in the aging process.

1. Laugh at yourself. The more self conscious we are about the aging process, the more stress we will cause ourselves. We must accept the changes as part of our natural life and allow ourselves to poke fun at our shortcomings. I don't like getting bald but if I focus on it, I become very self conscious every time I bend over. If, on the other hand, I can laugh at the idea that the hair I used to have on my head has somehow found its way to my ears, I avoid the stress.
2. Align yourself with FUN people. The only thing worse than aging is hanging out with bitter old people! The people with whom we associate have an enormous impact on our outlook. If you surround yourself with happy, FUN people, you'll be happier and more FUN. If, on the other hand, you surround yourself with grumpy people, you'll become just as grumpy. Make sure you live in a "healthy" environment.
3. Do FUN things. Just because you're getting older doesn't mean you can't still have FUN. Watch movies, play bridge, spend a week working on a Sudoku puzzle – heck, just trying saying "Sudoku". Make sure you have a dose of FUN every day. Otherwise, you'll lose your ability to play.
4. Read funny things...especially about aging. Dave Barry, Erma Bombeck and Art Buchwald have all written funny things about aging. The value in reading this is that we begin to see the humor in our own lives. Try to find funny things to read so that you can sharpen your funny bone.

The way we cope with aging is all in the way we see it. Make sure you see it in a way that makes the process a wonderful journey instead of a long arduous trip. As someone once said, "Getting old is not the problem. It's when we stop getting old that the trouble starts."

HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: All dressed up...

The older I get, the more I forget. I never had a great memory to begin with but I've found that it's worse today. Last year I spoke for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life kickoff event in my hometown. The Relay for Life is a walking event that raises money to help those affected by cancer. I had spoken for the same event the year before and was honored to be invited back.

As I was getting dressed, I said to my wife, "I can't remember what I wore last year."

She said, "If you can't remember what you wore, do you really think anyone else will remember?"

I knew she was right and put on my blue blazer, blue shirt and gray slacks. I arrived at the event and was surprised to see, playing on the wall, a slide show from the previous year's event. There, for all to see, were several three foot high images of me.....in the same blue blazer, blue shirt and gray slacks!

Now that's just funny.

JUST HUMOR: The Games of the Elder Olympiad?

Here are some games we can play as we get older:

Sag, you're it.

20 questions – SHOUTED IN YOUR GOOD EAR!

Red rover, red rover, the nurse says bend over.

Kick the bucket.

Hide and go pee.

HUMOR RESOURCES

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

- Ron's book, *Is Your Glass Laugh Full?* It's truly a literary masterpiece.

- Link to Ron's monthly column *Humor Me* in the Observer newspapers.
- Video and audio products to help you lighten up.
- Articles on humor, healthcare, leadership and other topics.
- Archive of all previous newsletters.
- Links to many humor resources.

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HUMOR AT WORK: Getting Older with “Hattitude”!

Last year, I presented a program on humor for our town's cultural arts series. Just before the show began, about a dozen women walked in dressed in purple outfits and red hats. They were members of the infamous Red Hat Society out for an evening of FUN. Turns out, the Red Hat Society is all about having FUN and there are Red Hat women all over the world.

The Red Hat Society began in 1997 when “Queen Mother” Sue Ellen Cooper read a poem by Jenny Joseph which talked about her wearing a red hat and a purple suit which doesn't go and doesn't suit her. The poem is about approaching old age with a free spirit and some fun. Sue Ellen decided that her birthday gift for a dear friend, who had turned 55, would be a red hat and copy of the poem. The gift was such a hit, she began giving the same gift to other friends and before she knew it, the “Red Hat Society” had been born.

Once word spread, women all over the country wanted to start their own Red Hat Society Chapters. There are only two rules for being member. First, you must be a woman age 50 or older and you must attend Red Hat events in full “uniform” (red hat and purple outfit). That's it!

Their statement of purpose is as follows:

"The Red Hat Society began as a result of a few women deciding to greet middle age with verve, humor and élan. We believe silliness is the comedy relief of life, and since we are all in it together, we might as well join red-gloved hands and go for the gusto together. Underneath the frivolity, we

share a bond of affection, forged by common life experiences and a genuine enthusiasm for wherever life takes us next."

According to the website (www.RedHatSociety.com), these mothers, grandmothers and daughters have to one primary responsibility: Have FUN. A secondary responsibility is "to gain higher visibility for women in our age group and to reshape the way we are viewed by today's culture." And they do this with "good humor and laughter."

Pat Rhoads, an Associate Broker for a realty firm in Herndon, Virginia, is the Queen Mom for the Herndon Reston Red Hat Society for Ladies with "Hattitude". In 2003 a friend told her about the Society and she realized there were no chapters in her area.

Pat decided to start her own did not expect much interest from others. She advertised her first meeting and over 100 women came to hear more about being a Lady with Hattitude. Pat was thrilled.

The Herndon Reston chapter, now at 122 members, charges a modest \$1.00 per event to for favors and small prizes. The members pay their own for all other activities which include high tea, movies, theater, dinners and a book club. They also meet monthly to discuss their upcoming activities, recognize birthdays, play games, listen to speakers and give an award for the Contessa-O-Glitz, the most glitzy dressed member.

The women in the chapter are working, retired, married, single, and widowed. They are all over 50 and their husbands and boyfriends are not welcome. Pat says, "The men can start their own bowler and cigar club!"

The Red Hat Society is the epitome of aging with grace. Their youthful spirit and positive attitude will keep them young for a long, long while. As Pat Rhoads so eloquently states, "We don't allow anyone to belly ache or gripe. If they want to do that, they can start their own group."

Hats off to the Ladies with Hattitude!

QUOTE: Growing old is mandatory. Growing up is optional. – Art Gliner, humorist.

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.

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BACK QUOTE

If we can laugh at it, we can live with it. – Erma Bombeck, humorist