

LIGHTENING BOLTS

Sept 2006

Vol 4 No 3

FEATURE ARTICLE: The Likeability of Laughter

In his book The Likeability Factor, Yahoo! Leadership Coach Tim Sanders says, "... unlikeability doesn't work."

The serving sizes at Cold Stone Creamery begin with the "Like It" size.

When I was six years old, I passed a note to my friend Robin. It said, "Ask Becky if she likes me."

Like it or not, we like being liked.

For instance, I dreamed of being "Class Clown" for my high school senior superlatives and yet I wasn't disappointed when I got the "Teachers' Pet" award. It meant I was liked – at least by the teachers.

Likeability is an asset. Likeability can also be a curse.

You can be very successful if you are liked. You attract friends, colleagues and others who want to be a part of your success. However, if everything you do is based on whether you'll be liked, then your like-ability will be a barrier that holds you back when trying something new, offering constructive feedback or standing up for an unpopular issue even if it's the right thing to do.

I ask my wife to read my humor writing before it goes to print. I do this for several reasons. First, I want feedback on the flow and style. Second, I want to know if the humor connects with her. And third, I want her to like it.

The problem is, my wife and I have different opinions about humor. I sometimes like to be sarcastic while humorously complaining about the normal routines in my life. My wife feels that this comes across negative and that people will think I'm not a nice person. I assume that my readers will see the humor rather than taking my message literally. My need for her to like my material conflicts with my writing style which often leads me to revise my material and, in some cases, compromise the quality...or the marriage.

Likeability is a powerful thing. And humor is a powerful tool to create likeability.

Research has shown that humor is a very likeable trait. When observing behavior in social settings, researchers found that people migrate towards those who, they perceive, have a sense of humor. But what makes it likeable? Several things come to mind.

Happiness. When someone tells a joke or you see a person laugh, there is the perception of happiness in that moment. Even though humor is often derived from some sort of pain (sarcasm, ethnic humor and banana peels), the use of humor seems to be a way of rising above the pain to a higher level of contentment. And that contentment is likeable – especially if we are at the time discontent.

Realness and Honesty. Playwright George Bernard Shaw said, “If you’re going to tell someone the truth, you better make them laugh. Otherwise they’ll kill you.” There are truths buried in most humor even though the truths may be exaggerated. Humor allows us to approach these sometimes painful realities with a less direct approach which is preferable and even likeable. By using the indirectness of a joke or story, we can laugh through our difficult realities without the abrasiveness of a direct encounter.

Connections. Humor connects. By discussing, through humor, our common life experiences, we relate to and like one another in a new way. Comedians Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres and Bill Cosby use humor to point out the shortcomings and inconsistencies in our lives and this connects us to one another through both the bond of laughter and those shared experiences.

Entertaining. Finally, if nothing else, humor is fun. Listening to a funny story, hearing a great joke or watching your favorite comedian is entertaining and as a result, we like that person even though (as with famous comedians) we may not even know him or her. Even Don Rickles, who was one of the most famous “abrasive” comedians, was likeable because he made us laugh.

If you have a likeability problem, and at times we all do, or if you’d like to enhance your likeability factor, consider humor as a way to accomplish that. You’d be far better off to have others laugh with you than laugh at you!

HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: Redundantly Obvious

In June, I was waiting for my luggage at the Oklahoma City airport when along came a suitcase unlike any I had ever seen. It was made of heavy burlap colored with loud large plaid squares of red, green, blue and orange. The brilliance of this suitcase was almost painful. But the kicker? As it went by, I noticed the owner had attached a bright rainbow-colored strap around the suitcase so it would be easily identified!

Now that’s funny.

JUST HUMOR: It Only Takes One Word

In a story about a man, who was “glued” to a toilet seat by pranksters in a Home Depot store, comedian Larry the Cable Guy said, “They had to pull the toilet out of the floor and lay him on his side. So, he’s laying there in the *fecal* position.”

Isn’t it amazing how one funny word can make all the difference in the world!

HUMOR RESOURCES: Not Funny, But...

A few weeks ago, I asked several of my colleagues to recommend a few good books they have read. I’ve listed the non-fiction recommendations here so that we can all benefit from their suggestions. I hope you find a good read that will enhance your fall!

Chasing Daylight by Eugene O’Kelly

The World is Flat by Thomas Friedman

Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell

Good to Great by Jim Collins

The Social Sector (monograph) by Jim Collins

The Devil in the White City by Eric Larson and Eric Larson

The Quote Verifier by Ralph Keyes

Blue Ocean Strategy by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne

Winter Dance by Gary Paulsen

Repacking Your Bags by Richard Leider

Double Lives by David Heenan

The Happiest Baby/Toddler on Earth by Harvey Karp

The Radical Edge: Stoke Your Business, Amp Your Life, and Change the World by Steve Farber

The Power of Focus by Jack Canfield

Surprised by Joy by CS Lewis

Marley and Me by John Grogen

PyroMarketing: The Four-Step Strategy to Ignite Customer Evangelists and Keep Them for Life by Greg Stielstra

Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner

Sunday Money by Jeff Macgregor

Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly by Anthony Bourdain

Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise by Ruth Reichl

It’s Not How Good You Are, It’s How Good You Want to Be: The World’s Best Selling Book by Paul Arden

Whatever You Think, Think the Opposite by Paul Arden

The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles by Steven Pressfield

Crazy Busy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD by Edward Dr. Hallowell

HUMOR AT WORK: The Bald and the Beautiful

Reprinted with permission from Ron's column "Humor Me" which appears in The Observer newspapers (www.observernews.com/humor.shtml)

One day after I turned thirty, I was in the bathroom studying the dense growth of hair on the back of my neck. I find there are few things more repulsive than a mangy neck. And mine needed a trim to keep the "ground cover" from going down my back.

Then my eyes drifted upwards and I saw, for the first time, a bald spot on my head the size of a Denny's silver dollar pancake. Based on the circumference, I determined it had been there for at least a year.

Old family photographs confirmed my worst fear. Both of my grandfathers, who died before I was born, were totally bald and one of my grandmother's curls looked a little thin. Since the gene skips a generation, I knew it was only a matter of time before the Denny's bald spot merged with my forehead to create a skin peninsula which would eventually work its way down to my ears.

I cut a lock of hair from my head and placed it in the safe deposit box figuring if Walt Disney could be unfrozen, maybe my hair could be telegenetically reborn at some later date. Then I decided to face the problem head on and proclaimed to my wife that balding was natural and I was going to accept the head that God gave me.

"Would you at least consider using Rogaine?" she responded.

Wait a minute. I thought. That's not the right answer. I'm looking for "I'll love you no matter how you look" or even "I think bald-headed men are sexy." I was not expecting, "For God's sake do what you can to stop the balding!"

Doubt filled my mind.

Did my head look that bad? Did she secretly want to marry Fabio? Was she freaked out by my bald head the same way I'm freaked out by clowns?

Whatever the reason, it was clear that she did not want to be Mrs. Kojak.

So, I considered my options.

I *could* try Rogaine. It was easy to use and had few side effects. However, the label did warn that if my head turned red and peeled, I should stop using it. Duh.

Propecia was also an option. This was a drug that when given to men with swollen prostates, grew hair. That's odd. A medicine for an organ on the opposite end of your body grows hair on your head. The thought of being called Prostate Head reminded me too much of high school

I thought about using Miracle Grow. It had done wonders for our azaleas while keeping the aphids away, but it was not yet FDA approved as far as I knew. Too bad.

Then there was a hair transplant. This was a procedure where "plugs" of hair from one part of your head are relocated to drilled holes in the balding area. That reminded me of a friend who bought a Christmas tree that was bare on one side. He drilled holes in the trunk and then transplanted severed limbs from the fuller side of the tree. I remember thinking; *something is just not right with that tree.*

Finally, I could have gotten a hairpiece. Then I could have joined the host of proud men who walked around thinking that no one else knew they were wearing a toupee while everyone thought, *Boy is that a bad toupee.*

You'll be happy to know that I chose a double cocktail of Rogaine and Propecia. For several years, I used it religiously and while it did not grow any new hair, it did stop the hair loss process. Every once in a while, I thought my hair looked fuller but my wife quickly suggested that "It was just the light." Dang it.

Five months ago, I decided to stop the hair drugs altogether realizing that I was only delaying the inevitable. Since then, I've lost half of the hair I had. I'm convinced it was God's way of punishing me for interfering with the process in the first place. My wife is slowly adjusting and now, I can't see much hair in any light.

I recently heard a motivational speaker say that we should not try to change what God gave us but instead we should rejoice in who we are and what we have. So I'm slowly trying to accept the fact that God made a few perfect heads.....and on the others, he put hair.

QUOTE: It's never too late to have a happy childhood. – Anonymous

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.

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

©2006 FUNsulting, etc. Permission is granted to copy this newsletter as long as the above information is included.

BACK QUOTE: I learned quickly that when I made others laugh, they liked me. – Art Buchwald, columnist