

FUNsulting, etc. Times

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Welcome to another edition of FUNsulting, etc. Times. This issue deals with humor as a coping mechanism when faced with adversity. Please feel free to copy this information and use it in any way that is helpful. Also visit my website at www.funsulting.com for information about programs, services and products.

- Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, Director of Everything!, FUNsulting, etc.

Humor In Practice - When Is It OK To Laugh?

The days following my seven year old nephew's death were a blur of activities. The busy-ness of making funeral arrangements, greeting friends and sharing memories kept us conveniently distracted so that our brains would not stumble into the pockets of grief scattered throughout our mind. We would spend enough time there over the months ahead so the distractions were welcomed.

After two viewings, a memorial service and a graveside service, our family gathered at my parents' home for a needed meal and some rest. We picked at our dinner, a generously donated gift of the usuals. Chicken Tetrazine, green bean casserole with the little canned onion rings on top, buttery homemade rolls and rich chocolate brownies made from scratch. Then we slumped into our seats in the living room and let out a collective sigh. We looked like warriors that had just returned from battle and our faces showed the fatigue of defeat. THEN, for the next two hours, we told jokes.

In retrospect, this seems crazy. It even hints of disrespect and yet no one protested. Was it disrespectful? Was it wrong? Were we teetering on the edge of sanity? Not at all. We were feeling the effects of grief overload and we needed a well deserved break. Not a break that is disrespectful or cruel but a healing break that would allow us to face our grief the next morning with renewed strength. We knew that the days ahead would be full of reminders of the loss we had experienced but in that moment in my parents' living room, the laughter gave us the strength to go on.

In the days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many people asked how I could do presentations on humor in light of the tragedy. My answer was and is the same. Humor gives us a break from tragedy. Humor that is neither distasteful nor insensitive will give us both a new perspective and a brief time away from the pain.

Our tendency to focus on the negative is not healthy. We miss the positive opportunities in our lives. Humor gives us a positive balance to the negativity of the world.

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Humor also creates a buffering wall around us that protects us from the consuming power of adversity. Not that using humor denies the reality but that it gives us the emotional objectivity we need to cope. Just as the shoulder pads on a football player do not deny the reality of a hit, they just allow the player to endure more hits.

So when is it OK to laugh? Whenever we have the opportunity. Humor is a gift that will keep us strong. And as long as we use it with a sensitive spirit being mindful of others, it can be the key to our emotional endurance.

Life does not cease to be funny when people die; just as it does not cease to be serious when people laugh.

—George Bernard Shaw

Humor Resources

For more information on humor and management, check out these resources:

The Healing Power of Humor, Allen Klein (Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.)

Anatomy of an Illness by Norman Cousins. (W.W. Norton & Co.)

Health, Healing and The Amuse System by Paul E. McGhee. (Kendall/Hunt)

The Power of Positive Thinking by Norman Vincent Peale (Fawcett Columbine)

Humor In Real Life

In the mid 1990's, Kirk Douglas suffered a "brain attack" as he calls it, a stroke that left him unable to speak clearly. In his recently released book, *My Stroke of Luck* (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins), Douglas describes an experience in which he realized the necessity of humor and laughter. The following is an excerpt from the book as reported in *Parade Magazine* (January 6, 2002):

One day, I pulled myself out of bed...daring to look in the mirror. I felt deep shame and disgust. I walked over to my desk. In the lower drawer was the gun I had used in "Gunfight at the OK Corral". I picked it up. In another drawer was a box of bullets. I took two and loaded the gun. I stuck the barrel in my mouth and— "ow!" — it bumped against my teeth. I pulled the gun out — and began to laugh. A toothache had delayed my death! I laughed hysterically. Humor saved me that day.

Kirk Douglas is a living example of the way humor helps during times of adversity. He does not deny his disability but instead uses humor to sustain himself through the tough times.

Just Humor

A law firm in Philadelphia opened an office in Washington, DC. To celebrate the

opening, the Philadelphia office sent an arrangement of flowers to the Washington office. However, there was a mix-up in the delivery. The flowers that arrived had a note attached that said, "Our deepest sympathy". And elsewhere, at someone's funeral, there was an arrangement of flowers with a note that read, "Congratulations on your new location"!

The longer we dwell on our misfortunes, the more power they have to harm us.

—Francois Marie Voltaire

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Ronald P. Culberson, MSW, CSP, Director of Everything! at FUNsulting, etc., helps people and organizations find and enjoy humor to achieve a healthier perspective in life or work. He is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the highest earned award from the National Speakers Association, and is one of only 421 individuals worldwide who have received this designation. He has provided entertaining and informative programs to over 40,000 people in more than 500 associations, government agencies, non-profit organizations and Fortune 500 companies. To find out more about programs, services and products visit his website at www.funsulting.com or call (703) 742-8812.