

LIGHTENING BOLTS

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FEATURE ARTICLE: Turning the Mundane into FUNdane

Writing is tough. Any writer will tell you that sitting in front of a blank page is misery. In fact, I sat for seven straight hours before I came up with that pithy opening. OK, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration. It's not *that* pithy.

The challenge for most of us, whether we're writers, engineers or stay-at-home moms, is doing those things that we *have* to do – especially when those things are no fun. For me, the trick is finding a way to make everyday mundane activities more *FUNdane*. For instance...

AT HOME. When our kids were small, they hated Brussels sprouts. Whenever I mentioned we were having Brussels sprouts for dinner, both of them would cock their heads, stomp around the room and whine, “Naahhht Brusssssels sprouts!” Something had to change or we would have been forced to sell our kids on Ebay.

So here's what we did. Every time we had Brussels sprouts, my wife and I would dance through the house singing, “We're having Brussels sprouts, we're having Brussels sprouts!” Unable to refuse something this fun, our kids would eventually join in on the parade. We had made it into a game. Today, the mere mention of Brussels sprouts elicits a snicker in both of them. Sweet!

AT WORK. Friend and author Sam Horn told me she likes going to a “third place” to write. No, this is not a secret place where she talks to Sybil and the “others” but a location that is neither home nor office where she can work anonymously in an energized environment. My third place is Starbucks. I arrive at 9:00 a.m. and order an extra hot triple grandé decaf soy latté then settle into a big comfy coffee-stained, crumb-filled chair for 2-3 hours of writing.

You see, drinking lattes is fun for me (sad but true). Watching skinny people buy espressos and large people buy gigantic frozen coffee milkshakes is fun for me. Finishing a subjectively funny column is fun for me. Writing a subjectively funny column is not fun for me. So, going to Starbucks makes the *process* more fun.

IN THE COMMUNITY. In June, our local American Cancer Society (ACS) will hold their Relay for Life. Relay for Life, the signature nationwide fundraising activity for the ACS, began in 1985 when Dr. Gordy Klatt walked around a track for 24 hours to raise money for the cancer resources. Today, the Relay involves teams of participants who

take turns walking for 18 hours raising at least \$100 per person. Last year, our Relay raised \$150,000.

The American Cancer Society knows that participants would be bored if they did nothing but walk around a track all day and night so the Relay is designed to be a fun event. A DJ blasts music, people sell food, masseuse's offer massages and there's even a contest for men dressed in drag. And even though you're there for many hours, the time flies by while everyone raises money for a very worthy cause.

So, the next time your routines get you down; think about a way to make them more fun:

- Instead of just putting the socks away, shoot three-pointers into the drawer.
- Listen to comedy tapes, audio books or satellite radio on your way to work.
- When you're washing dishes, put on your MP3 player and crank it up.
- Don't work through your lunch hour. Read a book, do Soduko or play tennis.
- Next time your dog deserves a snack, give him peanut butter on a cracker with the peanut butter side up and watch him try to lick the peanut butter off the roof of his mouth. It's hilarious.

Finding the FUNdane in the midst of our daily grind takes nothing more than a little effort and creativity. The benefits however are far reaching. Give it a shot while I order up another soy latte.

HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: Laughing Your Way to Success

The April edition of *Fast Company's* online magazine focused on humor in the workplace. Michelle Loyalka's article, "Laughing Your Way to Success," addresses the issue of transforming a mundane work environment into something more fun. And the coolest part of it all? The article features your favorite Director of Everything! from FUNsulting, etc.

Loyalka quotes "Last Comic Standing" winner and business tycoon John Heffon who says the "sterile all-work-and-no-play corporate environments simply drive people to other diversions – be it daydreaming, surfing the Web or playing Solitaire. By bringing laughter into the office, a business owner can at least have some control over when and how the entertainment happens." Cool or what?

To check out the entire article, go to this website: www.fastcompany.com/articles/2006/04/laugh.html

JUST HUMOR: Country Corn

City man: Why doesn't that cow have horns?

Farmer: Some cows are born without horns. We de-horn some cows. Some cows shed their horns and some breeds don't have horns. But this particular cow doesn't have horns because it's a horse.

This fellow said that Hazard, Kentucky is so far back in the mountains, the Episcopalians are handling snakes. – George Goldtrap, comedian

Country man to his friend: I think we're going to have to move to Florida 'cause my wife keeps mumbling about the sun and the beach.

HUMOR AT WORK: The Know-It-All

For most people, reading the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* would be the ultimate punishment from that high school teacher with the horn rimmed glasses and the large mole on her face who always had it out for you. I can hear her now. "Ronnie, read the encyclopedia and turn in a 350-page report by Monday."

But for A.J. Jacobs, this was an *enlightening* experience and through his book *The Know-It-All*, he not only educates the reader on intriguing *britannic* facts from around the world, he exposes his intellectual demons and the challenges of taking on such a task in the midst of work, marriage *and* some nagging fertility issues. All of this is done with sharp wit, a touch of heart and scalloped pages which, by the way, give the book a nice feel.

On page 116 of Jacob's book, you'll find this entry:

Glyndwr

A district in Wales. Please buy a vowel.

That's the tone of this wonderfully funny book chronicling Jacob's year-long journey reading the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* on his quest to become "the world's smartest person." I had the distinct pleasure of talking with A.J. about this unusual endeavor.

A.J. was always funny. When he was one, his mother claims that he played his first practical joke by hiding his juice bottle. In high school, he wrote a funny column for his

high school newspaper and then, in college, he was a philosophy major (Now that's really funny!).

He eventually discovered that he was funny *and* highly skilled at creatively putting words and sentences together. Since college, writing has been both his vocation and avocation (“a subordinate occupation pursued for enjoyment” according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, a cousin of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*). He has produced numerous articles, a couple of books and a regular website blog (www.AJJacobs.com) all written with great insight and a honed sense of humor.

A.J., like other writers and humorists, works at his humor. After developing an idea, usually based on personal experiences, he looks for themes and key words upon which he can develop the humor. So, just like the rest of us, he must consciously attend to finding the humor – it doesn't just show up on the page.

You can see the humor in this excerpt:

baldness

My newfound knowledge bubbles up in my brain at strange times. In the elevator up to work, I stood behind an Asian man who happened to be bald. That's odd, I thought to myself. According to the encyclopedia, baldness in Asians is rare. It's rare in Asians and Native Americans. I guess what we have here is one of the unlucky few Asians who couldn't hold on to his follicles. I feel like giving him my condolences.

Lucky for A.J. and for us, *his* measure of what's funny also seems to be funny to his readers. In addition to *The Know-It-All*, he's the author of *America Offline* and *The Two Kings: Jesus and Elvis*. He has also written for *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Glamour* and *Esquire*. Currently he's writing a book about living for a year according to the “rules” in the Bible. Now that's a lot of thou shalt not's!

In addition to a regular writing schedule, A.J. keeps the laughs alive by enjoying the work of other humorists. He reads Ann Lamott, Mark Twain, P.J. O'Rourke and watches comedians like John Stewart, Ray Ramano and Steve Martin. Exposure to humor not only keeps us all in a humor state of mind, it jump starts the creative center in our brain. A.J. knows this and uses it to his advantage.

A.J. Jacobs has achieved the ultimate success in turning the mundane into the FUNdane. Anyone who can read the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and produce such an engaging “book report” is a brilliant writer and humorist. He sums up the process most accurately in the last few lines of his book:

I know that you should always say yes to adventures or you'll lead a very dull life. I know that knowledge and intelligence are not the same thing – but they do live in the same neighborhood. I know once again, firsthand, the joy of learning.

Write on!

QUOTE: *The one serious conviction that a man should have is that nothing is to be taken too seriously.* - Samuel Butler, author and poet

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

The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get to the office. - Robert Frost, poet