

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“But I’ve Only Got Two Hands”

At a recent speaking engagement, I gave an example of the pervasive yet unexpected occurrences of humor all around us. I said, “I saw something funny in the airport bathroom yesterday.”

The audience erupted with laughter.

Now, I consider myself quite adept at the art and craft of humor yet I had no idea why this particular comment generated so much laughter. Rather than reveal my ignorance, I confidently smiled, pretended it was intentional and continued with the story.

I had seen a man standing at a urinal, doing what most men do while standing at urinals (Numero Uno for you left brain mathematical types). But something was different. As I got closer, I realized that he was using BOTH hands to send an email through his cell phone! Apparently, this guy’s urinal was equipped with some sort of hands free device. I was in awe of his technique and was tempted to get a better look but instead stood several urinals away in case something went wrong with his *technology*.

The audience laughed at this story and after the presentation, my client commented on how funny it was. I quietly confided that I didn’t understand why everyone laughed so hard before I got to the funny part. He reminded me that I had been in the Minneapolis airport where only a few weeks earlier, a well-known senator had “tapped” his way out of office. Duh.

Besides the fact that I obviously need to tune up my humor radar, there is a much more serious problem with this story: Multitasking is out of control.

Our to-do lists keep us from fully participating in life’s simple pleasures. We can’t even enjoy the *relief* of a visit to the restroom without being interrupted by emails, phone calls or multitasking senators. I think it all started in our cars where we are able to eat, talk and check email when we really should be minding the road. I once saw a bumper sticker that read, “Hang up and drive.” That would have been a nice reminder if the driver of the car hadn’t been shaving at the time! Oh the irony.

We clearly have too much to do and apparently, if we don’t do it all at once, we’ll never get it all done. But why does it *all* need to get done in the first place? If I die and still have things on my to-do list that haven’t been done, it just means that someone else will have to do them. That’s not such a bad concept.

Perhaps the allure of multitasking is that we think we're so important, we must appear to be busy all the time? The President of the United States is pretty important but you never see him text messaging during the State of the Union Address. In fact if he did, I bet more of us would send a message saying, "What the hell are you talking about?"

I think most multitasking is just bad planning. We don't manage our time and end up behind schedule. Sometimes it's genetic. In fact, my wife was born without an Ontymeus gland. In case you're not familiar with that part of the human brain, it's a gland that contains the hormone responsible for alerting you when it's time to leave home for an appointment. Thank goodness she married me because I was born with an enlarged Ontymeus gland and usually arrive 1-2 days before most appointments.

Regardless of the reason for our need to multitask, when we engage in many things at once, we not only fail to enjoy the specific task but we miss other experiences all around us. If we're checking phone and email messages while driving to work, we'll miss the pretty lights on the police car when we're pulled over for running a red light. If we've always got the television on, we won't have those meaningful conversations with our teenagers who are listening to their iPods while doing their homework. And if we read the paper during breakfast, we'll never truly appreciate the complexity of the flavors in Cap'n Crunch.

I suggest we consider exchanging multitasking for *monotasking* by taking the time to string our tasks end-to-end rather lumping them all together. If we relish each experience, we'll never have the problem my friend has. He said, "My wife laughs during sex no matter what book she's reading."

For a funny guy, that's a bit too close to home.

Until next time, just humor me.

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Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit www.RonCulberson.com.