

## **Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)**

**Topic: Humor ☺**

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### **WELCOME**

During these highly stressful times, the tone of an organization's communication, the ways they enhance (or detract) from people's morale is of utmost importance. Recently The New York Times in a feature titled, Nurturing Your Company's Inner Child: Let There Be Fun! by Hubert B. Herring, delved into the importance of humor in the workplace. We can apply many of the theories and applications to face-to-face meetings and events.

This issue of T.I.M.E. carries a message that Humor is a necessary and appropriate tool for productive meetings (and productive people within productive organizations).

Despite business slowing down, despite worldwide events, and despite the uncertainty of our lives – personal and professional, humor can be one of our most important tools to survive and thrive.

Before I seriously discuss the topic of Humor, let me also extend my personal welcome to our new (100+ of you) and old subscribers.

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### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1) Humor Me During a Meeting
  - 2) Humor Expanded
  - 3) Humor & Perfume
  - 4) Biology and Humor 101
  - 5) Joke Books
  - 6) Freebies & Funnies
  - 7) T.I.M.E. Gone By
  - 8) Future T.I.M.E.
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### **1. HUMOR ME DURING A MEETING**

We hold meetings to:

- Communicate Important Messages
- Improve Morale
- Improve Productivity
- Create Great Teams
- Solve Problems

Humor Improves:

- Communication
- Morale, Job Satisfaction
- Productivity
- Team building
- Creativity, Problem Solving

And more! Humor improves:

- Conflict Management
- Stress Management
- Resilience
- Energy and Attention

Humor in a meeting doesn't make light of the meeting but it does lighten the mood. The content and objective of the meeting can remain as important and significant as before.

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## **2. HUMOR EXPANDED**

### Humor Facilitates Communication

Victor Borge said that Humor is the quickest distance between two people. Humor is a universal language.

And when your meeting will involve conflict or emotions, Humor provides a non-threatening medium for communicating with others without intensifying the emotional tone.

Humor also helps get your message noticed. In our information-overloaded society, any communication has to stand out to be noted. Advertisers are aware of the value of humor and earn millions of dollars each year to make funny commercials that will get noticed.

You should utilize the same principle to get and maintain attention, reinforce your points and improve your chances of having a message remembered.

### Humor Improves Morale And Job Satisfaction

A slowing economy does not equate into a slower pace at work. Layoffs mean that the remaining employees must do more work faster and more efficiently. Turmoil and uncertainty related to meetings and business travel do not mean a less stressful work environment.

Simply stated, Humor puts you in a more conducive mood. The ability to laugh at our work and ourselves lightens the load.

Humor is a low cost strategy to improve morale.

### Humor Improves Productivity

"Recent research suggests that the employee who can laugh in the face of hectic and stressful situations is probably not only a healthier employee," says Randall Osborne, professor of psychology at Indiana University, "but also a more productive employee in the long run."

### Humor Helps Conflict Management

With the right touch of levity anyone can not only make a positive impression but also often diffuse hostility. Laughter invites cooperation; anger typifies opposition. If you can laugh with people, you can work with them.

It is difficult to stay angry with someone when you are laughing. Humor aids in keeping the communication flowing without raising the emotional stakes of the conversation. You may have heard someone who is very angry say, "Don't make me laugh. I want to be angry." A person cannot maintain a high level of anger and laugh at the same time.

### Humor Builds Relationships

The development of culture, cohesion and a sense of team can be effectively facilitated by the use of humor. Humor allows people to feel connected. The very act of laughing together is a bonding experience.

### Humor Improves Creativity and Problem Solving

Humor provides a psychological stress reducer as it snaps our thinking to another channel. One of the characteristics of humor is that it involves incongruity. We find things humorous when they are incongruous or mismatched. Good jokes guide us down one path only to suddenly track us onto another. The tracking is what we call the punch line. Shifts in our thinking shifts lead to increased creativity.

In the book *In Search Of Excellence*, the authors state, "Success is a function of one's ability to innovate, which in turn is a function NOT of one's capacity for focused, analytical logic - but freewheeling flights of fancy." This is the kind of thinking people indulge in when they think humorously.

### Humor Improves Resilience

Humor not only helps relieve distress and fights environmental toxins when they occur, it also regenerates our "antibodies" so that the impact of the toxins is minimized. This regeneration bolsters antibody levels and helps sustain resilience. As we experience humor, we "stock up" on psychological antibodies. When a potentially stressful event occurs, psychological antibodies are then "activated" to address our emotional distress.

### Humor Improves Stress

Humor makes us feel good. A person can't feel stressed and feel good at the same time. At the moment we experience humor, negative feelings like depression, anger and anxiety disappear.

Humor activates a person's respiratory, cardiovascular and skeletal systems. Have you laughed so hard that tears rolled down your face?

Humor can serve as a break. Long, multi-day meetings are stressful for people as they are away from their routine, their families, and normal daily activities. Humor serves as a "refreshment" break from the meeting.

#### Humor Promotes Attending and Energizes

We know that all good lecturers have many jokes, stories, and anecdotes that are shared in order to command attention and energize the audience. Humor wakes us up and increases our attending.

Dr. William Fry a psychiatrist who has been studying humor for 40 years says that laughter triggers the production of catecholamines, the alertness hormones.

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### **3. HUMOR & PERFUME**

Humor is like perfume – you need to use it appropriately.

Sheila Feigelson in her book, [Energize Your Meetings With Laughter](#), talks about the GIVE principle for using humor appropriately.

Constructive humor:

Invites a **G**ood Laugh  
    **I**ncludes everyone  
Is **V**ictimless  
And is **E**nergizing

Here are some ideas to inject Humor into your next meeting:

- Use humorous invitations or memos – Humor will help get your message noticed
- Have a joke board next to the message board - Low cost method to bring a smile to everyone's day. And who knows what it might trigger on the part of the meeting participants
- Post a joke for the day – On the agenda, during a presentation, on the Intranet -- the more of a surprise it is the more effective it will be.
- Incorporate humorous speakers – There are a laughter speakers & groups & troupes from which to choose
- Encourage prank competitions – Utilize the creativity of your employees or meeting participants to generate ideas.

- Have a fun teambuilding exercise – 15 minutes from your agenda will allow you to re-energize the group, build new relationships, and increase attention.
- Have a humorous Master of Ceremonies – A funny guide through a serious program will add pizzazz and have the audience take notice.
- Use “Fake” Experts – Set your audience up for a surprise and watch their reaction.
- Allow people to wear “fun” or “funny” clothes to an event or meeting

At a recent seminar I conducted, each table was set with a Reserved sign that injected a bit of humor into the meeting. Instead of facing the usual stress of “where should I sit so I won’t be noticed” or “where can I sit so I can sneak out if it is boring”, participants were invited to sit at tables Reserved for Chocoholics, Reserved for People born in October, Reserved for People who would Rather be Shopping, etc.

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#### **4. BIOLOGY AND HUMOR 101**

Humor strengthens both our physical and psychological immune systems.

During a good laugh the physical immune system is bolstered through biochemical changes such as an increase in Immunoglobulin A. Laughter improves circulation, fills the lungs with oxygen-rich air, and stabilizes blood pressure.

Also Humor helps to sustain the psychological immune system by altering how we feel, think, and behave. Humor helps us be more resilient and able to encounter stressors and return to our previous levels of functioning. This is true on a physical and emotional level of our immune systems.

Here are the ways humor affects us:

Biochemically, humor has been shown to increase immunoglobulin A and decrease stress hormones. It has also been shown to increase our tolerance to pain. (Not that anyone has ever participated in a painful meeting!)

Cognitively, humor helps break rigid thinking resulting in our ability to perceive the world more "realistically" and without distortions. Our emotional state is greatly influenced by our perception of the events around us.

Emotionally, humor not only relieves distressful feelings, but it helps teach us that we have the ability to "manage" our emotional states. One can't experience distressing emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, guilt, or resentment *and* experience humor at the same time. You may have heard someone who is very angry say, "Don't make me laugh. I want to be angry." You cannot maintain a high level of anger and laugh at the same time.

Behaviorally, humor can energize and recharge us and increase our desire and ability to choose activity over inactivity. We are more likely to greet and connect with others when we experience humor.

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## 5. FREEBIES & FUNNIES

Just a few passing thoughts ...

How can there be self help *groups*? - Comedian Steven Wright

Fun is not a four letter word, fear is - Herb Kelleher, Southwest Airlines

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

I read a great top 10 list from Barrie Zucal, a Certified Laughter Leader. If you want to know the top 10 benefits of humor, email me for the list. Just send me a quick email with the words Laughter in the subject line and I will send you the Top 10 list

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## 6. JOKE BOOKS

No, these are not compilations of knock knock jokes or elephant jokes. Here are my suggestions if you would like to do more reading on the subject of humor in meetings.

### [Energize Your Meetings With Laughter](#)

by Sheila Feigelson

This is my favorite book (to-date) on the subject of humor and meetings. It is easy to read and chock full of ideas and techniques for energizing your meetings with humor. Or [click here](#).

### [Humor Works](#)

by John Morreall

Or [click here](#).

### [The Big Book of Sales Games: Quick, Fun Activities for Improving Selling Skills or Livening Up a Sales Meeting](#)

by Peggy Carlaw, Vasudha Katheleen

### [Better Sales Meetings In 3 To 30 Minutes](#)

by Malinda A Terreri

Or [click here](#).

I've read many other good books on Humor and the Workplace (email me for a reading

list) but these books contain the best ideas for incorporating humor into meetings.

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## **7. T.I.M.E. GONE BY**

Past issues of T.I.M.E. can be downloaded as a MS Word document. Here is an index of topics and “freebies” offered in the past:

May 2000: Teambuilding and (freebie) New York Times reprint and summary on why teambuilding programs miss the mark. [May](#)

June 2000: Green Meetings and (freebie) list of books that have 20-30 minute exercises for meetings and events. [June](#)

July 2000: American (Values) and (freebie) Meeting Analysis, a 1-page document that will outline the scope and needs analysis for your next meeting. [July](#)

August 2000: Minimum/Minimal Meetings and (freebie) Web Winners (web resources to make you and your meetings more productive). [August](#)

October 2000: Evaluations and (freebie) sample evaluation questions. [October](#)

November 2000: Politics and (freebie) on-line experiences. [November](#)

December 2000: Toys and (freebie) brainstorming ideas. [December](#)

January 2001: Sales, Award Presentations and (freebie) sales tips. [January](#)

February 2001: Change, Change Management and Communicating change and (freebie) Change Bombs (reasons change management fails). [February](#)

March 2001: Open Space Technology. [March](#)

April 2001: Adult Learning Styles and (freebie) Trade Show Timeline [April 2001](#)

May 2001: Trade Shows and (freebie) Trade Show timeline [May 2001](#)

June 2001: Emotional Intelligence and (freebie) EI quiz [June 2001](#)

July 2001: Presentation Skills and (freebie) Speaker Introductions [July 2001](#)

August 2001: Ice Breakers and (freebie) Resource List [August 2001](#)

September 2001: Facilitation and (freebie) Handling Difficult Meeting Personalities [September 2001](#)

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## 8. FUTURE T.I.M.E.

Mark your calendar for the following date when Sue will be speaking:

The Multiplier Effect  
American Society of Travel Agents World Congress  
New York, New York  
Sunday, November 4

Do you have a future meeting or event where you want to...

Add some Humor?  
Engage with Activity?

– or –

Bolster the Interaction?

Sue has worked with organizations and corporations to do just that. For more ideas and information contact Sue directly at SEAL Inc., 1415 N. Salem Blvd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004-4545 or at 847.394.9857.

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