



The Keynote Chronicle

Humor News from Jan McInnis
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My new book coming out this spring is titled *Convention Comedian: Stories and Wisdom from Two Decades of Chicken Dinners and Comedy Clubs*. In it I give people a peek into life as a comedian, along with some of the wisdom I've learned from these experiences that applies to everyone. Here's an excerpt from the chapter in which I discuss some of the weird set-ups I've been asked to perform in:

“You want me to perform where?”

Comedy is one of the easiest forms of entertainment . . . if it's done right. All you need is a microphone, a stage, lighting and a focused audience. But have one of those things out of kilter, and you get a vastly different experience.

When I started out working some tough bar gigs, my goal was to get so successful that I'd never again have to perform in a room in which you can hear the blender! Bartenders seem to have great timing: they always crank it up right as you're hitting a punchline. No one hears it and you look foolish. Little did I know that there are room setups that make the blender gigs look easy.

I once got to do comedy at a company party on a turntable or Lazy Susan for those of you over 50. The room was stationary but the part of the floor that I performed on spun around, making a 360-degree lap every 10 minutes. In a 60 minute show, everyone got to see my face six times. There was a wall behind me, so people on each side of the room couldn't see each other, which made it even more interesting because I'd spin slowly into one part of the room, annoy the people who had forgotten there was comedy, and then I'd spin out. Sixty minutes of this. The client was drunk when I got there, so she didn't see the problem. She probably was drunk when she reserved a spinning stage and a comedian, but I can't say for sure. My only saving grace was that the DJ was booked through the same agency, so I had a witness to this mess. Needless to say my comedy-on-a-turntable did not resonate well with the group.

I got another chance to spin at an event a few years later, but instead of the floor spinning, it was just me! The company that hired me said that since there would be more than 1,000 people in attendance, they wanted to make sure everyone could see me. So they put me on a pedestal in the middle of the room, with people sitting all around me, and asked me to spin while I told jokes. I've always wanted to be put on a pedestal— figuratively, not literally. I didn't know about the spinning until I arrived at the event, and the client kept asking me before the show, “So do you think this is okay?” I refused to say yes because I didn't want to take the blame for it, so I just responded, “I'll try it.” I did end up having a lot of fun with it, and even though the show went very well, I would not recommend spinning comedy. This is when I decided that being famous would come in really, really handy because I could put my foot down and demand that I not spin. But I needed the money and I'm not famous, so spin I did!

Of course there are stationary room setups that are not conducive to comedy either. Try telling jokes in the basement ballroom of a fancy hotel with posts placed throughout the room. I started off trying to dodge in between them and around them and beside them, until I finally blurted out, “I went to college so I didn't have to get a job dancing around a pole!” It got a big laugh and I got to acknowledge the situation I was in. At least everyone in the room was experiencing my “pole dance,” so it was funny and the show still rocked!

And sometimes, the stage is a little more makeshift than I'd like. I did a show at a college, during lunchtime, in which I had to stand on a long, narrow lunch table. These college gigs are called “nooners” because they happen at noon in the cafeteria. Many comedians do them and the comedy-on-a-tabletop is pretty standard. Weird. I don't know how many decibels the noise level got to that day, but I'm pretty sure no one heard my jokes; the students were more interested in their burgers and fries than my humor. But no one questioned why an almost 40-something woman was standing in their cafeteria on a table. I did my act to the clock. When it struck 45 minutes, I jumped down and left. Now, I do a lot of

Spotlight

Jan's Keynotes:

- *Finding the Funny in Change* - Learn to use humor during change situations to diffuse tense situations, kick off tough topics and facilitate communications.
- *Finding the Funny in Communications* - Learn how to use humor in your business communications to connect with clients/coworkers, sell your product/idea/service, get people to listen to you and be memorable.
- *Hilarious Hosting* - Keep your audience engaged and keep the program running smoothly and on schedule with Jan as your emcee.
- *Cubicle Comedy* - Clean, customized comedy focusing on work, family and day-today life.

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events for health care groups, and they have a term called a “never-event” for a mistake that should have never happened, like operating on the wrong body part or injecting the wrong medication. I think that term, never-event, sums up these nooners.

In addition to these venues, just a few other off-the-wall venues I’ve told jokes in (and some actually worked!), are:

In a bakery ■ on a gigantic bowling alley with people inside gigantic clear bowling balls rolling by me ■ in a winery ■ outside in a field next to a canal with huge barges going by ■ on a floating dock on a lake with the audience on the grass embankment on shore ■ at a restaurant while people were eating ■ at a restaurant filled with hundreds of statues ■ on an aircraft carrier with the wall open behind me so you could see the ocean ■ inside a museum, on the steps leading to an exhibit

WISDOM: Don’t overthink things. Some of these situations came about because the client was overthinking the audience, such as “Comedy will make the students eat lunch.” No, hunger will make the students eat lunch, but the client was trying to fix something that didn’t need fixing. Thinking about things from too many angles can make your head spin, even if you’re not telling jokes on a Lazy Susan!



I hope you enjoyed this excerpt. If you want to pre-order my new book, I’m offering a pre-sale price of \$10 plus \$2 for shipping. Send a check for \$12 along with your shipping address to me at the address on this newsletter, and be one of the first to read it. Thanks!

*Jan has shared her customized humor keynotes with thousands of associations and corporations, and she is coming out with her second book, titled Convention Comedian: Stories and Wisdom from Two Decades of Chicken Dinners and Comedy Clubs. Jan is also the author of “Finding the Funny FAST: How to Create Quick Humor to Connect with Clients, Coworkers and Crowds,” and she was featured in the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post for her clean humor. From a recent education client: **“Thank you Jan. You were a HIT!!! It was a good conference and you capped it up for us perfectly.”***



Scan this code to see my new video of my popular keynote *Finding the Funny in Change!*

Baby Boomer Comedy Show; Clean Comedy For People Born Before Seatbelts, Safety Helmets, and Facebook

Jan McInnis co-stars with Kent Rader in the Baby Boomer Comedy Show for theaters and private events around the country. This is a hilarious 90-minute laugh-fest, with clean humor on topics that the “boomer generation” can relate to. The show is a huge success! Check out their schedule at www.BabyBoomerComedyShow.com.

Comedian Jan’s Humor Article Inside - “You want me to perform where?”

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