



## Humor in Business – Really?

By Jan McInnis, Keynote Speaker & Comedian

“I am not signing a contract with the devil!” I said. The agent burst out laughing. It was Halloween and I was at the airport rental car counter. She was dressed as the devil and had just handed me the contract. She said, “But you must.” I said, “But I can’t.” We went back and forth for a minute while we, and everyone around us, cracked up. What a fun and memorable time at a rental car counter. Yeah, I know, between pushing the pre-paid gas option on you and scaring you into buying extra insurance, chatting with the rental car agent is generally neither memorable nor funny. I made a boring communication interesting, and you can too.



At the IIMC Annual Conference this past May, I had a BLAST sharing my keynote on how to use humor in change situations. I hope those of you who attended are using some of my tips—if not, this is your friendly reminder. As a follow up, and to catch up the rest of you, here’s a quick refresher article with more tips. We talked about using humor to handle change, but it’s perfect for many other situations that involve customer service. Whether you must calm someone down or cheer them up, humor helps.

Humor is memorable. Experts say that if you want people to retain information, you must connect that information to an emotion. Humor is a great emotion to use because people will take time for something funny, and they’ll also remember it and share it. A lot of cats got famous on YouTube because they pawed a piano or stole a dog’s bed (seriously, look up “cats stealing dog’s bed”). Businesses spend millions of dollars

on funny ads because they know that humor works. Luckily you don’t have to spend millions to inject a little humor into work situations. If you need people to remember a new city ordinance, some safety information, or some other “municipal-like” thing, try connecting it to something funny.

Humor will also get you out of embarrassing situations. How do I know this? I’ve been there. I once spoke at a conference in which the other keynote speaker was the Secretary of Health and Human Services. . . and we both wore the exact same outfit. (Apparently, she shops at Sears, too.) She spoke ahead of me, so I was able to follow her with a few humorous lines such as, “I almost missed this keynote, because I got stopped by security for impersonating the Secretary of Health and Human Services.” I relieved an awkward situation quickly.

And, of course, you can use humor for your personal goals — it’ll help get you free stuff. The next time the restaurant messes up your order, channel that anger into something funny and see if you don’t end up with a complimentary bottle of wine.

You may be thinking, “But I’m not naturally funny.” Don’t worry, we’re not talking about being a comedian, just injecting some well-placed humor here and there. You can find humor everywhere!

One quick way to find humor is to take the road less traveled and pay attention. Drive a roundabout route home, go in a different door at work, or change your routine somehow to wake up your brain cells and get another perspective. If we do the same thing every single day, we miss a lot. Have you ever written an important email and read it over and over, and then the minute you press send, someone finds a huge error? Your brain just skipped right over the mistake because it was used to seeing the same words. To find humor, you need to mix up things and look with fresh eyes. I once spoke at a women’s event in which there were so many women, that we had to take over the men’s room. Guess which bathroom I went in? This gave me a great line when I pointed out that the men’s bathroom had a baby changing table just like the women’s bathroom, but in the

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men's room, the table had NEVER BEEN USED. The women loved it.

Paying attention to your daily route also gives you ammunition because you find out what others are experiencing. Is there construction nearby causing a traffic jam? Maybe there's a crack in the sidewalk the size of Arizona outside a particular door? You can have fun with it by maybe pointing out that it's not really a crack in the sidewalk, it's a new system we have to stop people from walking and texting at the same time.

Another technique is self-deprecating humor. We can poke tasteful fun at ourselves to make an instant connection to others. My humor about my size 12 shoes (true) always gets a laugh and people come up to me afterwards to compare feet. Even if you don't have big feet, you can find humor in your experiences. A quick exercise is to make a list of everything that happened to you last week, and then look for the humor. When I did that today, I remembered that last week I dropped a friend off at the airport, and turned to my other friend and said, "The drive home will be fine as long as the rain holds off, which it looks like it will." At that very second, the skies opened up and poured rain so hard I couldn't drive. That made me laugh. I said, well, "I now have the skills of a weatherman."

And, finally, you can find humor by comparing things and using analogies. What you're trying to do with humor is to say something without saying it. You could say "This room is really cold," but that's boring. Instead compare it to something by making a list of cold things: ice, Alaska, snow, my ex-spouse. Then have some fun with it: "This room is colder than my ex."

The first joke I ever sold to Jay Leno for his Tonight Show monologue was about counterfeit clothing being sold at the Super Bowl that year. I made a list of things we associate with counterfeit clothing, like bad quality, irregular logos and lower price. I came up with "CNN reports that this Super Bowl weekend lots of vendors will be selling counterfeit sports items that aren't officially licensed by the NFL. An NFL spokesperson said that you can tell the T-shirt is not an official Super Bowl T-shirt IF YOU CAN AFFORD IT." The next time you're trying to make small talk about the weather or whatever, compare it to something funnier and you'll get people smiling.

And, remember with humor, start small. Comedians start out doing three minutes at an open mic night because we can't do a whole hour at first. So, start by

bringing up one funny thing you noticed, doing one funny comparison, or mentioning one funny experience you had. Then as you get more comfortable, and you're enjoying getting the chuckles, you can do more.

I truly hope you'll give humor a shot and spice up communications with those around you. You'll find out that it's fun and rewarding.

*Editor's Note:* Jan McInnis is a keynote speaker, author, comedian & comedy writer who shows businesses how to use humor. She's shared her keynotes with thousands of groups, has written comedy for everyone from *The Tonight Show* to guests on Jerry Springer (her parents are proud.), and been featured in TONS of media including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Huffington Post*. Jan can be reached through her website [www.TheWorkLady.com](http://www.TheWorkLady.com) and email: [Jan@TheWorkLady.com](mailto:Jan@TheWorkLady.com).

*A note from Jan...*

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- Enhance your communications

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Check out her videos and other information at [www.TheWorkLady.com](http://www.TheWorkLady.com) or [Jan@TheWorkLady.com](mailto:Jan@TheWorkLady.com)

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### A few comments from attendees at the International Institute for Municipal Clerks conference:

- "Highly entertaining while still providing information to assist in job performance and good life strategies"
- "You do not feel like you are in "class" but still getting great tips to apply at work"
- "Serious messages shared in an amusing manner"
- "Great way to add to the conference in a more fun and entertaining way."
- "Awesome, engaging, entertaining but brought home the point!"