

The Use of Humour

Laughter is the best medicine!

Much is written about the benefits of humour, you can look it up on the internet if you like. I will not mention this here as I am sure you will have a good intuitive idea of what I am talking about.

In the days when I used to work in the mining industry I remember being in a meeting in Rockhampton about a series of personal damage occurrences ("Accidents") that had occurred. Two representatives of the company that manufactured the equipment involved were in attendance along with a number of industry Safety Advisers. The manufacturer representatives would not acknowledge that the design of their equipment was a factor and were spinning us their company line about how safe their equipment was. Tempers progressively got more frayed and we were getting nowhere. My workmate Terry Condon came out with a classic, humorous one-liner that defused the tension and set the scene for meaningful progress.

That was the first time I have seen humour used in a meaningful way in business. I watched Terry in action after this and noted his frequent effective use of humour.

Humour can be used effectively in formal and informal presentations and in general interaction in business and non-business life.

Avoid humour that focuses on religion, politics, race, class, sex, age, physical appearance. To use any of these will run the risk of upsetting someone. I hear you asking what the hell else is there that I can use? The only safe butt of your humour is yourself! You can also use mythical people whose characteristics you do not describe.

There are joke books you can buy but storeys from daily life are more acceptable.

Be funny early and often.

Introduce the humour in the general flow of your conversation.

For a major presentation rehearse and listen to yourself on a tape recorder.

Like many things in life humour follows the 6 P rule-Prior Preparation Prevents Piss-Poor Performance.

If giving a major presentation have a small pilot first and respond to the comments you receive.

Try to use humour that relates to things others see as an annoyance.

Know your audience and try to relate to them.

Quotations from famous people are often sources of humour, you can search these on the internet, Laurie Lawrence's web-site has a lot of quotations.

Stretching the truth is forgivable.

Do not take yourself too seriously.

You can use a storey to illustrate a point.

The Readers Digest and t.v. comedy shows are good sources of material. It also helps you to observe how the professionals use humour.

Poking fun at the establishment may be an appropriate and inoffensive way of using humour.

Appropriate self-disclosure can be an effective way of enhancing communications and interpersonal relationships. I was introduced to and practised appropriate self-disclosure in a Psychology subject. You will find in a new relationship if you reveal a little bit of you (provided it is appropriate) the other party will reveal a little bit of them (provided it is appropriate), if you then reveal a little bit more of you (provided it is appropriate) they will reveal a little bit more of them (provided it is appropriate), and so the cycle goes on. This is very simple, incredibly effective and I use it all the time to build relationships. Of course if you really hang all your dirty washing out it will probably stuff up the process.

Telling a humorous storey about yourself can be a great way of starting the appropriate self-disclosure process.

Being an OHS professional I attend a number of safety conferences and courses, these are inevitably dull, dry and boring affairs. It is a pity things are taken so seriously! Perhaps the same thing happens in your speciality? If you are a presenter who uses effective humour, presents well and has a relevant message you will be invited back.