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After They Laugh, They Listen And other lessons learned from HUMOR Boot Camp®

By Desalina Allen, Mentor Program Coordinator
at the Lake Forest College Career Advancement Center

Imagine that you're in the middle of presenting to a group. As you are speaking (about something incredibly important, of course) you look out into the audience only to see a group of disinterested people browsing the internet on their iPhones. Many of us have encountered this situation. As the students on our campus become inundated with flyer after Facebook message promoting presentations, programs, and social events, we may only get one chance to make a great first impression and drive future program attendance. So, how do we keep our audiences engaged during presentations? How do we ensure that they leave with the information they need to be successful? As the grateful recipient of the Midwest ACE Professional Development Scholarship I set out to find the answers.

With my scholarship funds I was able to attend the [HUMOR Boot Camp](#), co-taught by Darren LaCroix and Vegas Headlining Comedian Vinnie Favorito. As the 2001 Toastmasters International World Champion of Public Speaking, Darren attributes much of his public speaking success to his ability to engage audiences using humor. The great thing about humor, he says, is that after an audience laughs - they listen!

Darren and Vinnie shared some excellent tips on how to become a better presenter and they convinced me that just about anyone can be a "humorist". Darren explained, "The difference between a humorist and a



comedian is this - For a comedian, 'humor' is the message. For a humorist, 'humor' is the medium to the message."

Here are a few tips on how to incorporate humor into your own presentations:

- **Know how you do funny.** Lots of things make people laugh: sarcasm, tone of voice, impressions, facial expressions, surprise, and exaggerations. What's funny coming from you might not be funny coming from someone else and vice versa. Test out different approaches and ask trusted friends for feedback on your style.
- **Keep a funny file.** All of those "creative" resumes, funny recruiting stories, and interview blunders we encounter can be great ways to illustrate certain points. Keep a file with funny stories, quotes, documents, and video clips that you might be able to use in future presentations.

What better way to emphasize the importance of resume proofreading than by presenting some funny errors like: “SKILLS: I’m try-lingual¹” or “Received a plague for Salesperson of the Year.”²”

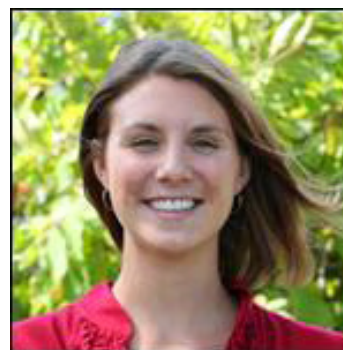
- **Don’t write, re-write!** Great speakers and comedians don’t constantly write new content, in fact most have a few signature stories that they adapt for different settings and presentations. The reason these stories work is because they’ve been evaluated, streamlined, and tweaked over time. If you often present about a certain topic, brainstorm ways that you can add in some humor. It may be as simple as changing your pacing, making a quick sarcastic comment, or telling a funny story to illustrate a point. Then record yourself, listen, and edit!
- **Come up with something funny to say if XYZ happens.** There are certain things you can predict will happen at some point during your presentations - a cell phone will ring, someone will sneeze, a certain person will raise his/her hand, you will experience technical difficulties - create a list of these common occurrences and come up with a funny response to each.

¹ Resumania.com

² Jobmob.com

About the author

Desalina Allen currently works as the Mentor Program Coordinator at the Lake Forest College Career Advancement Center in Lake Forest, IL where she creates opportunities for students to develop as professionals and connect their liberal arts experience to the world of work. In the fall, she will begin a Master of Public Administration program at New York University, and work part-time at the NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development.



For example after conducting over 10 trainings for our Speed Networking program, I noticed the question “How do I follow up with professionals I meet at the event?” would often be asked. I always responded with a straight face and said “Send each and every one of them flowers.” Of course, this was followed by the appropriate answer. After the event, I was happy to hear from the professionals that students were great about following up with a thank you card or email. *After they laugh they listen, right?*

- **Control what you can, and acknowledge what you can’t.** Do what you can to take control of your setting. The lighting, temperature, and seating arrangements all should be things you think about and influence (if possible) in advance. However sometimes things go wrong or your setting isn’t ideal. In these cases, acknowledge what you can’t change to your audience - Jeeze, it’s freezing in here! - so they can move on and focus on you. Even if you don’t make your audience laugh, having a good attitude and striving to be a great presenter will go a long way!