

Activity 3

Humour – what works and what doesn't?

3

Purpose

To show participants how humour, used appropriately, enhances presentations; to demonstrate the pitfalls of using humour inappropriately.

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Introduction

To be able to make people laugh is a true gift, and the truth is some of us have it and some haven't. However, very few people are completely humourless. Most of us enjoy a laugh, as long as it is not at our expense! Adding humour to a presentation can be a very effective way of getting the message across.

Purpose

To show participants how humour, used appropriately, enhances presentations; to demonstrate the pitfalls of using humour inappropriately.

Application

This activity can be used during programmes on Communication, Feedback, Leadership, Managing Yourself, Presentation Skills, Stress Management, and Team Building. It can also be adapted for one-to-one coaching.

What happens

You open the activity by asking participants to deliver their first prepared presentation on 'What makes you laugh?'. They then move on to discuss how we all find different things amusing, what works and what doesn't. The participants give their second presentation, 'Laughter is good for you', incorporating points made during the previous exercise. They share with each other what they enjoyed about their own presentation and those of others.

The activity closes with a review of what the participants have learned about humour in presentations that can be put into practice in future.

Time

Overall time required: 1 hour 35 minutes

Materials & resources

- Introduction: 5 minutes
- What makes you laugh?: 20 minutes
- What works and what doesn't? 15 minutes
- Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh: 50 minutes
- Session close: 5 minutes

- 2 OHT masters:
 - 3.1 *A definition of humour*
 - 3.2 *Ancient Chinese proverb*

- 1 Handout master:
 - 3.3 *Humour – what works and what doesn't?*

- Overhead projector, or PowerPoint® compatible laptop computer and projector, and screen
- Flipchart and stand or whiteboard
- Marker pens for trainer
- Flipchart paper and coloured marker pens for participants
- Paper and pens for participants
- OHT acetates
- OHT acetate marker pens
- Video camera and tripod
- Video playback machine and TV monitor
- Clown's red nose or false nose and glasses
- Space for participants to move around when presenting and for setting up video equipment

In preparation

Set up and test the equipment prior to the activity. Brief the participants (using the Participant briefing letter, page xxii, if you wish) to bring two prepared presentations: the first of 2 minutes duration on the subject of 'What makes you laugh?', for the first exercise, What makes you laugh?, on page 3–4, and the second of 5 minutes duration on the subject of 'Laughter is good for you', for the exercise Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, on page 3–6.

If this activity is being run in conjunction with other activities earlier in this resource, then participants will already have a videotape. Ask them to bring their tapes with them. If it is not, prepare videotapes with participants' names on them.

If possible, find someone to provide technical support and operate the camera; this will leave you free to concentrate on the participants' performance.

Place a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door.



TRAINER'S TIP

If you are a naturally humorous presenter yourself, then share that side of your personality with the participants. However, if you are no Victoria Wood or Eddie Izzard, then be true to yourself and still share your experiences with the participants. Either way, this should be a light-hearted activity, with energy and fun running through it.

How do I do it?

INTRODUCTION



TRAINER'S TIP

Hopefully, participants will be amused to find you presenting wearing a red nose or false nose and glasses – most audiences do! It will work if you can carry it off; it won't work if slapstick isn't your style. Either way, you can use it to demonstrate the importance to participants of being themselves with humour – what works for one person may not work for another.

So, if you are intending to, put on your red nose or false nose and glasses, welcome the participants to the activity and start by telling them that the ability to make people laugh is a true gift, and that some of us have it, and some haven't.



Show OHT 3.1

A definition of humour

Remove your red nose or false nose and glasses and continue by saying that few people are completely humourless. Most of us enjoy a laugh, as long as it is not at our expense and without our permission, as you have just proved to them!

Tell the participants that adding humour to a presentation can be a very effective way of getting their message across, as long as it isn't forced or false. An audience will soon pick up on discomfort and insincerity. Say that you are going to show them in this activity how humour, used appropriately, will enhance a presentation and demonstrate the pitfalls of using humour inappropriately. Spend about 5 minutes making your introduction to the activity.

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

Participants will, no doubt, have noticed that everyone's sense of humour is slightly different. Ask them if they have ever tried to be humorous and it went wrong. Discuss their experience with them for a few minutes. Most of us have experienced this at some time and know how terrible it can feel. It is something best avoided during a presentation!

Ask the participants to share their prepared 2-minute presentation (see In preparation), 'What makes you laugh?', with the others in the group. Invite each participant to stand up and deliver their brief presentation. Follow each presentation with a round of applause.



TRAINER'S TIP

As this is a short presentation, do not video it, but do encourage laughter and fun and share what makes you laugh with participants.

When everyone has had their turn, discuss for a few minutes the different things that make people laugh. The effective use of humour strengthens rapport between the presenter and the audience, adds enjoyment, makes the presentation memorable, and can disarm tensions and hostilities. Most presentations or speeches have room for some humour. In fact in some circumstances, audiences will be expecting it (see *Activity 19 Specific set pieces*). However, as they will now see, humour will work in most situations, but not all.

Allow about 20 minutes to discuss what makes people laugh and hear the participants' presentations.

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T?



Distribute Handout 3.3

Humour – what works and what doesn't?

Ask participants to form pairs and discuss for 5 minutes what humour works and what doesn't, building on the ideas in the handout. Give each pair a supply of flipchart paper and marker pens and ask them to write down their ideas.

Take feedback from each pair and check that participants understand that the real key to being humorous is to be yourself. Good presenters are always themselves, only more so – yourself with the volume turned up and all the house lights focused on you! They should consider their audience at all times and the appropriateness of including humour in their presentation.

If humour is something participants struggle with, suggest they concentrate on what they are good at. If in doubt, leave it out. The presenter's platform can be a very lonely place for a comic who doesn't get laughs – there is no hiding place! Very few people can deliver stand-up comedy well, so assure participants that it is rarely expected of them when they present. Most presenters can, nonetheless,

sprinkle their presentation with a short funny story, a witty phrase, a funny one-liner or some other type of humour, however slight.

Allow about 15 minutes to explore humour that works and humour that doesn't.

MAKE 'EM LAUGH, MAKE 'EM LAUGH

The participants are now going to have the opportunity to fine-tune and deliver their prepared 5-minute presentation (see In preparation), incorporating what they have learned about humour and each other, what works and what doesn't. The subject is 'Laughter is good for you'.

Explain to participants that it takes 47 muscles to make a smile, and that you want their 'smile muscles' to have plenty of exercise. Emphasise that this is not a competition, but an opportunity to take a risk and try something different.

Allow them 10 minutes to review and prepare their presentations.



TRAINER'S TIP

If you are operating the video camera, then check that the camera and TV monitor are working, whilst participants are preparing, or brief your technical support that each participant will hand them their videotape as they come up to deliver their presentation.

The presentations will take about 30 minutes, allowing for changes of videotape between presentations and for groups of more than four participants.

When the participants are ready, ask them to come to the front of the room in turn, hand their videotape to either you or the camera operator, deliver their presentation, collect their videotape

and return to their seat. (Make sure they each return to their seat to rapturous applause from everyone else.)

When the presentations are finished, spend about 10 minutes asking each participant what they enjoyed about their own presentation and those of the other participants. Add comments of your own.

These presentations and feedback should take about 50 minutes in total.



TRAINER'S TIP

This exercise should be upbeat and fun, and concentrate on what participants have achieved, especially those who may have struggled to inject humour into their presentation. If time allows, play the videotapes back on the TV monitor.

SESSION CLOSE

Take about 5 minutes or so to review this activity with the participants. Say that they have considered the pros and cons of using humour in a presentation, discovered what works and what doesn't and had opportunities to put what they have discovered into practice.



Show OHT 3.2

Ancient Chinese proverb

Close the activity by reminding participants to use humour naturally, rather than forcing it.

Remind them also to take their videotapes away with them for review.



TRAINER'S TIP

If your participants for this activity have completed *Activity 1 How good are you now? (1)*, and *Activity 2 How good are you now? (2)*, they will have an action plan. Spend a few moments with each person, following up on their programme and setting new goals that have come from this activity.

A definition of humour

3.1



3

**The quality of
being amusing**



3-9



Ancient Chinese proverb

**Don't say anything,
unless you can improve
the silence**





Humour – what works and what doesn't?

What works

- Humour from the heart, genuinely funny and up to the minute.
- You being you – the essential ingredient that makes the difference between an ordinary presentation and a worthwhile one is the part that is you, being yourself.
- Short stories relating to the subject, witty phrases, one-liners.
- Timing of humour – get it right and the audience will find your presentation more memorable.

Anything else?

What doesn't work

- Patronising, victim-based humour.
- Using a member of the audience as the foil for humour.
- Racism, sexism, ageism – any 'ism'.
- Putting across a joke that clearly isn't appropriate and isn't working.
- Trying to be something you are not.

Anything else?

