

Best Resources for Humorous Material

I would say that your number one resource for funny material is yourself. When searching for comedic stories, think back on your own life experiences. Often those embarrassing moments and awkward scenarios provide excellent, true-to-life humor that people can appreciate, relate to and enjoy. Such personal stories are doubly effective when they underscore a key point you're trying to make to your audience or when they offer a lesson to be learned from the experience. Other definite perks of using your own stories include the fact that the material is truly authentic and original. Even if it's a common experience in the human family, your personal account will never be "worn out." As you go about your daily tasks, always be aware that the situation you find yourself in at any given moment may have some humor in it. You should always carry around a little pocket notepad and pen with you to capture ideas and insights when they occur.

The next best source for humorous material is friends and family. Again, their stories are the kind you know are genuine and that people are likely to respond to. The beauty of firsthand and secondhand accounts is that people can readily put themselves in the situation or imagine someone else close to them in the situation. If it's *real*, it's not ever going to come across as dry, manufactured or "trying too hard." Take the time to ask parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, friends, etc. about funny stories and experiences, and literally start building a "humor database." Sometimes gathering others' stories is easier to do with a handheld recorder than trying to write everything down. Whatever the method you opt for, get started today. The more stories you have up your sleeve, the more prepared you will be.

What makes people laugh? What can you use to create humor during a presentation? There are a variety of ways in which you can spice up a presentation with a few laughs and smiles. You can use a joke, a story, an embarrassing moment, an exaggeration, a pun, irony, self-depreciation, a metaphor, a put-down, silliness, surprise, an anecdote, satire, the one-liner, innuendo, an embellished story, a witticism or even an outrageous statement. Humor really works well when you catch someone off guard, especially with

exaggeration. For example, “It was so cold in NY that the Statue of Liberty was holding the torch under her skirt.” Even a little embellishment can go a long way. Notice in the local newspaper: “Missing dog, right ear missing; broken left leg; half of tail gone; recently neutered. Answers to the name of Lucky.” What about the shocking statement: “If you think nobody cares if you’re alive, try missing a couple of car payments.”

TV comedians do the put-down very well, but if you follow their strategy, you have to be cautious you do not offend your audience. David Letterman once said, “Fall is my favorite season in LA, watching the birds change color and die.” Keep watch and you will find plenty of material to spice up your presentations. Another example of effective humor lies in the way you say things. That is, the way you package your words. Don’t just call someone dumb, stupid or less than intelligent. Instead, you might use the following:

- ❑ Got a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic to hold it all together.
- ❑ Gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train isn’t coming.
- ❑ Most drink from the fountain of knowledge; he only gargled.
- ❑ Got into the gene pool while the lifeguard wasn’t watching.
- ❑ The wheel is spinning, but the hamster’s dead.
- ❑ If brains were taxed, he’d get a rebate.
- ❑ Studied for a blood test and failed.
- ❑ Dumber than a box of hair.
- ❑ Sharp as a marble.

Inspiration may also come from cartoons, comics, humor websites, books, comedy sketches/audios and movies. Immerse yourself in anything where you think you might find humor you can adapt to your needs. Take advantage of what’s there. If you check your local university, you may be surprised by some of the public-speaking arena offerings. The National Speakers Association also offers classes, some dealing exclusively with humor. Often, cartoons can be an effective presentation medium if you can use PowerPoint or an overhead projector. There are many websites that allow you to

search for cartoons by keyword or topic and then immediately download them for your own personal use. Sometimes you have to get permission or pay a small fee, but if you know a cartoon will elicit laughs, it's definitely worth it. Here are some of my personal favorite websites:

www.cartoonbank.com

www.comics.com

www.dilbert.com

www.cartoons.com

www.glasbergen.com

Other favorites I can recommend are Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Cosby, Tim Allen and Dave Barry for comedians and *Dilbert*, *The New Yorker*, *Calvin and Hobbes* and *The Far Side* for comic strips.

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