

How to Increase Persuasion with Humor

“It has always surprised me how little attention philosophers have paid to humor since it is a more significant process of mind than reason. Reason can only sort out perceptions, but the humor process is involved in changing them.” – Edward de Bono

Humor’s Role in the Persuasion Process

Many people take for granted the powerful persuading influence of humor. Humor is often tossed off as sheer entertainment or mere speech filler. The truth is, when you engage an audience with humor, you are accomplishing much more than just getting a laugh out of them. Humor disarms an audience, making them more likely to open up to you. Once your prospects feel comfortable with you, they will be more in tune to your message and more likely to remain attentive. Audience members usually *like* and are *drawn* to a person who can make them laugh, helping them become more receptive. And perhaps most powerful of all, in our fast-paced culture where most things are fleeting, they remember you and continue to hold you in a positive light long after the initial exchange. When you leverage the element of humor, any message coming from you receives more weight than one that comes from someone who has *not* created the audience rapport you have achieved. All people’s minds wander from time to time. Humor not only reels them back in but it also reenergizes their soul.

The use of humor can divert your audience’s attention from negative thoughts or it can counter an argument that is playing in their minds. Humor can also distract your audience’s tendency to overanalyze your message. Humor can even win over and disarm your audience. Herbert Gardner said, “Once you’ve got people laughing, they’re listening and you can tell them almost anything.” Understand that you can have a serious message without having to make the entire presentation serious. People hope and expect to be entertained while they listen. If they are not listening, they are not going to be persuaded. Your audience, be it comprised of one or one hundred individuals, will appreciate a moment to smile or laugh in this serious world they live in.

The actor John Cleese once said, “If I can get you to laugh with me, you like me better, which makes you more open to my ideas. And if I can persuade you to laugh at the particular point I make, by laughing at it you acknowledge its truth.” Understanding the value of humor in a persuasive context gives you tremendous leverage. Your task is to not only realize humor’s profound influence but also to develop the skills necessary to be able to use humor in a powerful and ethical way. As you become more and more skilled at incorporating it into your presentations, you will discover that humor almost always has a place. It doesn’t matter if you’re talking to an audience of two hundred people or you’re having an intimate discussion with your spouse. It matters not if you’re seeking to sway the favor of corporate executives or trying to convince your well-meaning but shortsighted teenager. Consider the following uses of humor in everyday situations, for groups or an individual, in formal or informal situations.

Humor During Your Presentation...

- Eases Emotional Pain
- Creates a Positive Environment
- Generates Interest in What You Are Saying
- Helps Your Listeners Sense Your Goodwill
- Increases Participation

Humor Will Help Your Message...

- Reveal Important Truths
- Become More Memorable
- Make Difficult Topics More Accessible
- Bring Needed Entertainment
- Strike an Emotional Chord

Humor Will Help You Do the Following with Your Audience...

- Ease Their Tensions
- Put Them in a Good Mood

- Disarm Them
- Maintain Their Attention
- Enhance Their Receptivity

Humor Will Help You...

- Increase Your Likeability
- Establish Rapport
- Increase People's Trust in You
- Enhance Your Image
- Strengthen Your Relationships
- Boost Your Own Confidence

The list could go on and on, but this should begin to give you a sense of just how far-reaching and consequential the use of humor can be.

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