

Humor Can Help You Connect with Just About Anyone

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 not only to realize humor’s profound influence, but also to develop the necessary skills to be able to use it in a powerful and ethical way. As you become more and more skilled at incorporating humor into your presentations, you will discover that humor almost always has a place.

Research shows that humor can have all of the following effects:

- Creates a positive environment.
- Increases audience attention and involvement.
- Makes presentations more memorable.
- Entertains and empowers.
- Makes persuaders more likeable.
- Helps establish rapport and connection with the audience.
- Increases audience receptivity.
- Makes the audience more trusting.
- Disarms negativity, skepticism, and resistance.
- Distracts the audience from overanalyzing.

Great persuaders naturally develop rapport while using humor. I have always known that humor had some effect on rapport but my research is showing that the effect extends beyond anything I ever expected. Ultimately, your goal as a persuader is to give your audience the motivation they need to take the next step. You want them to come away with a fresh perspective that inspires them and makes them hopeful. Think of your humor as having a therapeutic effect that will give your audience the fortification they need to confront their challenges. Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “Laughter can relieve tension, soothe the pain of disappointment, and strengthen the spirit for the formidable tasks that always lie ahead.” It is very unlikely that your audience will feel angry,

depressed, anxious, guilty, or resentful while enjoying your humor. Your humor can have a domino effect of goodwill and of instilling positive emotions in your audience. If you can help your audience members to feel happier, you will in turn open the locked doors of persuasion and influence. Humor also increases energy and productivity, which will feed your audience's positive emotions even more.

Humor must be deployed cautiously, however. If used inappropriately, it can be offensive and may cause your audience to turn against you. Humor should only be used as a pleasant, but moderate interruption. An important rule of thumb: if you are generally not good at telling jokes, don't attempt to crack them when you are in a persuasive situation. Be sure that you have good material. Non-funny humor is not only ineffective, but it's also irritating. Modify your humor so that it is appropriate for your audience. Once your audience feels comfortable with you, they will be more in tune to your message and more likely to remain attentive. Don't despair if everyone does not laugh. In fact, many people won't laugh, but they will still be smiling on the inside. If your audience is smiling, either physically or mentally, you've done a great deal toward increasing your ability to persuade them.

This vital humor for persuaders not only connects you to your audience but also increases people's attention to you and your message. Humor can enhance or detract from your message. What has been found is that humor that is relevant to your message works (based on a good delivery), but when it is irrelevant, it will disrupt your message.

Humor puts your audience in a good frame of mind. When your audience is in a good disposition, they are less likely to disagree with you. When you develop rapport with your audience, they will like you more. Humor also increases trust.

The skill of using humor can be learned and mastered, but only with consistent practice. Sometimes you may fail, but keep at it until you have harnessed the power to make others laugh. Then others will always feel good when they are in your presence. They will also take what you have to say more seriously. Humor will give you the power to motivate and influence others in a productive, positive way. Humor is rapport.

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