

“Humor is truth, only faster.”

Gilda Radner

Want to get a few more laughs when you give your talk?

Here’s how to “find the funny.”

1. Get an ear for comedy. Listen to comics, speakers, and even friends to see what gets laughs. Notice what’s funny – and *why* it’s funny (Hint: You’ll begin to notice two things: surprise and exaggeration.)

2. Notice where *you* get laughs. Watch video of your own talks and notice where you get even little laughs from the audience. (And just like the pros, your laughs probably come from surprise and exaggeration.) The spots where you get little laughs are where you can probably get bigger laughs.

3. How to fit in the funny. Humor is a perfect way to heighten *and* lighten places in your talk where you deal with tension or stress. If your talk deals with struggling to be successful, grow a business, learn a new skill, balance priorities, or other challenges, then you’ve got potential humor spots. And getting a laugh at your own expense shows the audience that you are human, relatable, and resilient. Here’s some places where you might “find the funny”:

- ✓ In feeling frustrated, annoyed, confused “There were times when I was ready to”
“I didn’t know whether toor.....”
- ✓ In feeling inspired “I was so fired up, I wanted to ...”
- ✓ In learning a lesson the hard way “I learned that I will never” OR “The good news was that.....the bad news was.....”

4. Develop your exaggeration muscle Most comedy is based on exaggeration: taking the truth to a ridiculous extreme. And the good news is that you already exaggerate all the time – now you just need to do it more consciously. By yourself or with a friend, brainstorm lots of silly or outrageous responses to the statements like the ones below. And remember, the goal isn’t to come up with hilarious lines right away, it’s to get yourself comfortable with “thinking funny.”

I was so tired when after starting my business...

I was so poor I first started out ...

I was so excited my first time pitching my product ...

I was so overeager at my first networking event ...

I was so awkward at my first business meeting ...

I was so overly confident in my first business meeting...

5. Learn to use metaphor. Metaphors are short cuts to understanding – they compare one thing to another thing that people know well. (“My love is a red red rose.”)

An easy way to use a metaphor for laughs is to compare yourself or your situation to a well-known element. Use figures or images that will resonate with your audience. (movies, pop culture, biblical, political etc.)

“I was the Martha Stewart of Chicopee Falls.”

“My mentor was the Donald Trump; you know – an excellent listener and very sensitive.”

“My first job had some tension. It was like Jaws meets The Exorcist. * Only scarier.”

*This “X meets Y” is an excellent way to communicate the truth of something in a funny way. Make sure your combinations are known to your audience and then experiment.

6. Get physical One of your best tools for getting laughs is your body. Get comfortable using the expressive tools of voice and facial expression, and you’ll find your talk will not only be funnier, but also more impactful and memorable. Here’s some tips to get you started:

Use your voice Most of us don’t take advantage of the powerful instrument of our own voice. You don’t need fancy voice training (although it can be very helpful), but you do need practice. In everyday conversations, play with your voice – try slowing it down to gain attention and build suspense, or speeding it up to show energy. Explore the power of increasing and lowering volume. Try pauses in different places to build suspense and draw out a laugh. Also, play with modulating the volume of your voice to create variety and surprise. Once you’ve explored what you can do in everyday life, add vocal variety to your talk. (For inspiration, watch Joan Rivers or Chris Rock play with vocal speed, volume, and pauses.)

Let your face tell your story This is one of the least risky and most sure-fire ways to get a laugh. Simply let your face show your emotion and look at the audience without talking. Let them appreciate and enjoy your facial expression for a beat or two. Whether it’s angry, frustrated, sad, or confused, the audience will love seeing a deeper glimpse into you. (For inspiration, watch Bill Hader, Ellen DeGeneres, and Lucille Ball)

As you find your funny, don’t expect miracles or instant success. Be patient, allow yourself to experiment and refine repeatedly. Remember this is supposed to be fun for you too. If you enjoy it, that’s great, keep going and maybe even take an improv class to boost your skills and creative thinking. And if you find that humor isn’t really for you, that’s okay too. These tips may help you to just have a bit for fun with your audience.

So, go on, give it a try. And if you need more help, let me know. Cathy McNally
cathy@mcnallycommunications.com 413-575-5164