

## CAN YOU LEARN TO BE FUNNY?

Here's an age-old argument that never ends; Can you learn to be funny? You'll get answers on both ends of the spectrum. What's interesting is the people who DON'T believe you can learn to be funny are *really* negative. They'll actually call me and leave a nasty voicemail about how you can't teach anyone to be funny. Makes me laugh, because the truth is "funny" is learnable.

As infants, we learn what funny is. If you look at a baby and you say "oooooooooh—BOO!" The baby, laughs! It's uncanny "oooooooooh—BOO!" You've probably seen it a hundred times. It's because the person doing the "performance" is creating an expectation with "oooooooooh." In the babies little mind "oooooooooh" is going to go on an on. Then you shatter that expectation with a quick "BOO!" It's the surprise that gets the laugh. Pretty simple concept and it doesn't change when we get older either. Surprise is still the number element that triggers human laughter. So, I'm sorry naysayers, you can learn to be funny.

It's as simple as sharpening your awareness of the opportunity to shatter the expectation and create the surprise. If you take any statement or piece of dialogue and you suddenly change the perception of what is being said or, say, change the perception of the meaning of a word, you'll have surprise which will result in funny. "I've been losing my hair lately. It bugs me a little bit. Like in the mornings when my wife is running her fingers through my hair, but I already left for work." That line gets a laugh every time because the audience has a perception of "running her fingers through my hair, " once I let them get that picture in their heads, I throw in that the hair she's running her fingers through is the hair left behind on the pillow after I went to work. Because their image was shattered, they laugh. Learn to

identify the opportunity to spin what you say at the last minute and you will learn to be funny.

In comedy, that's called a reverse. It's classic, and if used properly, that formula will get a solid, triggered laugh from an audience every time. Well, unless the audience doesn't speak the language you're speaking, or they're dead. And if you're running your jokes by a dead audience, then you should see a shrink, or better yet, stop playing the Hollywood Improv.

The reverse is just one of the humor formulas you can learn in your journey to learning to be funny. It's one that I teach in my comedy classes and seminars. It's powerful, but it's one of those formulas you want to avoid using in back-to-back jokes when doing a routine. Once you give up the formula your audience begins to anticipate the surprise. Then it's no longer a surprise, is it?

Here's a real-life scenario in which I used a formula to lighten the mood. My wife and I were expecting a baby. I came home from work late one night and she was laying on the couch. She said, "I'm having gas pains." I said, "Babe, everyone is, it's like \$4.25 a gallon!" She laughed. The we discovered that those "gas pains" were coming 3 minutes apart.

That is called the double-entendre formula. Take the perceived meaning of the word and turn it into something that the listener didn't expect. I'll talk more about that in a future blog...you know, the blog that I write where you can't teach someone the skills to learn to be funny...

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