



A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Podium

In my eight years in Toastmasters, I have seen some funny, funny things on the way to the podium. I bet you have too. Sometimes I laughed so hard it almost obscured valuable lessons to be found within the events. Consider some of the funnier scenes I've experienced:

ALL POINTS BULLETIN: MISSING TARGET SPEAKER

There was once a target, or test speaker, Steve, who left immediately after giving his speech. As each contest evaluator re-entered the room and began evaluating, there was a telltale pause as he or she struggled, in vain, to find the speaker. Finally, the last evaluator began with the customary, "Thank you Madame Toastmaster, fellow Toastmasters, most welcome guests, and especially Steve" – and promptly looked at me! Never mind that I wasn't the speaker to be evaluated. The evaluator needed someone to look at and for the next three minutes, addressed me as if I were Steve. It worked with the judges. He won that night's contest.

The lesson I learned: Sometimes continuity and the greater good is more important than drawing attention to a lapse, oversight or glitch.

UPSTAGED!

As a guest speaker at another club, I was scheduled to speak first. The second speaker, preparing to speak about dental hygiene, sat near the front, anticipating giving speech No. 9, wherein he was going to use props to make his point. While in the middle of my speech, I looked down at this man and saw him fiddling with his props. Nonplussed, I continued speaking. A few sentences later, one of his props, an electric toothbrush, suddenly sprung into action and started ambulating across the table, right in front of the lectern. In all my years of speaking I've been upstaged by coughers, sneez-

ers, snoring, cell phones, pagers, fire alarms, crying babies and even a minor earthquake tremor, but never an electric toothbrush.

The lesson I learned: While it is important to be unflappable, sometimes one must be unplaquable. Some have a brush with death; I had a brush with distraction.

SPEAKING HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS

During my district's Leadership Breakfast at a local hotel, our district governor was doing a wonderful job recognizing nominees for the President of the Term Award. As was his style, he graciously invited each nominee to join him on stage. Before we knew it the stage teemed with Toastmasters. And then – Whooosh! The entire stage collapsed and down they went. Luckily, it was only a two-foot drop and everyone on the stage remained standing. It was the funniest sequence of events: 20 people drop two feet and are suddenly out of sight. Then 100 people in the audience rise up, in unison, to see what happened. Our focused district governor, in true Toastmasters fashion, never missed a beat. In fact, his humorous ad-libbing "set the stage" for the day's entertaining keynote speaker to follow.

The lesson I learned: In life, it's less about what happens than how you handle it. A true leader is a situational leader. When no script exists, reflexes take over.

SMOOTH SAILING...NOT!

Once every seven years districts receive a visit from Toastmasters' International President. The President's visit to our district was my first opportunity to wear a tuxedo. In honor of the occasion I actually bought a tux, complete with special shirt, cummerbund and shiny new tuxedo shoes. What a thrill it was to wear



these items for the first time at our district's spring conference. Midway through the evening's affair my opportunity to speak arrived. I pushed back from my chair, rose and regally ascended the stairs to the stage. This was the thrill of a lifetime, to shake the hand of an International President. As I walked toward the VIP (visiting International President) to shake his outstretched hand, it happened very suddenly. I slid into the splits and became invisible to the audience. My brand new tuxedo shoes had bottoms so smooth I lost traction. The entire head table gasped. Among 200 Toastmasters there was utter silence. The suspense was palpable. Would he rise? Could he aright himself? Alas I did, and the emcee was heard saying, "He slides and is safe!"

The lesson I learned: *Sometimes one can be too smooth, or at least one's shoes can be too smooth! And many a misstep can be adroitly corrected with a choice rejoinder.*

COMING TOGETHER

I'll never forget the time at our regional conference when an international director was presenting an award to the conference chairwoman and gave her a hug – that didn't

end! We knew there was mutual admiration but the audience held its collective breath and waited for the two women to break their embrace. But they didn't. More accurately, they couldn't! The director's brooch hooked to the chairwoman's sweater. This gave new meaning to the phrase "I'm stuck on Toastmasters."

The lesson I learned: *There is great value in speakers connecting with their audiences but one shouldn't take it literally! We never know when we will be expected to maintain our poise and dignity.*

CLUES AND CUES: RETURN TO SENDER

Another amusing anecdote for my collection occurred when a past district winner of the International Speech Contest served as a test speaker for an evaluation contest. So as not to make the evaluations too hard for the contestants, he

made intentional gaffes. His title was deliberately "off" topic. His attire, by design, bore no relation to his topic. His speech was disorganized by design. Imagine his surprise when he was complimented on the very elements he had created for scrutiny!

The lesson I learned: *Be authentic and let the chips fall where they may. Furthermore, it's easier to be good than to try to be bad.*

Soon your district leaders again will be promoting upcoming contests and conferences. They will tell us about inspirational keynoters, wonderful educational sessions and other scheduled events being planned. What they can't tell you about are the unscripted, unexpected and unintended events that offer both entertainment and wonderful learning opportunities. So keep your eyes and ears open and soon you too will be telling audiences, "A funny thing happened on the way to the podium." **T**

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JEST PRACTICES:

Humor in the Workplace!

CRAIG HARRISON



WHAT ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT can increase productivity, enhance team building, encourage creativity and improve esprit de corps in the workplace? You guessed it...HUMOR!

Humor has physiological, psychological and practical benefits. It helps us clear our heads, stimulate mentation, and entertain ourselves and our co-workers. It makes hard tasks easier and actually creates an environment conducive to success. Just as an apple a day keeps the doctor away, so too does a fun environment keep a workforce happy and healthy. It's no coincidence that when the humor quotient rises the absentee rate declines and retention rates rally.

JEST PRACTICES shows you how to introduce fun, laughter and appropriate humor into your work environment. It helps you recognize and value your own humorous side, while also facilitating teamwork and the appreciation of others. Learn from the **JEST PRACTICES** of other successful organizations too.



Learning Objectives

- ▶ Discover five ways to enliven your work environment
- ▶ Learn six methods of invigorating meetings with humor to engage participants
- ▶ Develop daily practices for loosening up at and beyond work
- ▶ Techniques for breaking out of ruts at work
- ▶ Differentiate between humor's use as a shield, a sword and a bridge



How The Presentation is Delivered

Examples, worksheets, role plays and anecdotal stories all help audience members appreciate ways of utilizing humor to help relieve stress, relate better to co-workers and maintain equilibrium in pressure situations.



About Your Presenter

Since the age of eleven when he went door-to-door selling "Used Jokes," Craig has been employing humor to entertain and educate his audiences to express their excellence. In 2003 Craig founded www.LAUGHLOVERS.US in the SF Bay Area to promote humor in the workplace. In 2004-05 Craig served as president of the NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION's Northern California chapter. Today Harrison trains and coaches professionals in high-tech, banking, medical and other fields to not only communicate with confidence and clarity, but with levity too! Let him enliven your workgroup or audience to help them express their excellence.



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