

TOASTMASTER®

JUNE 2005



**Why
Laughter
is Good
for You**

**When They
Don't Laugh**

Special Humor Issue:

Humor 101

**Introductions:
A Nice Applause
for Whatshername**

Mastering the Laugh

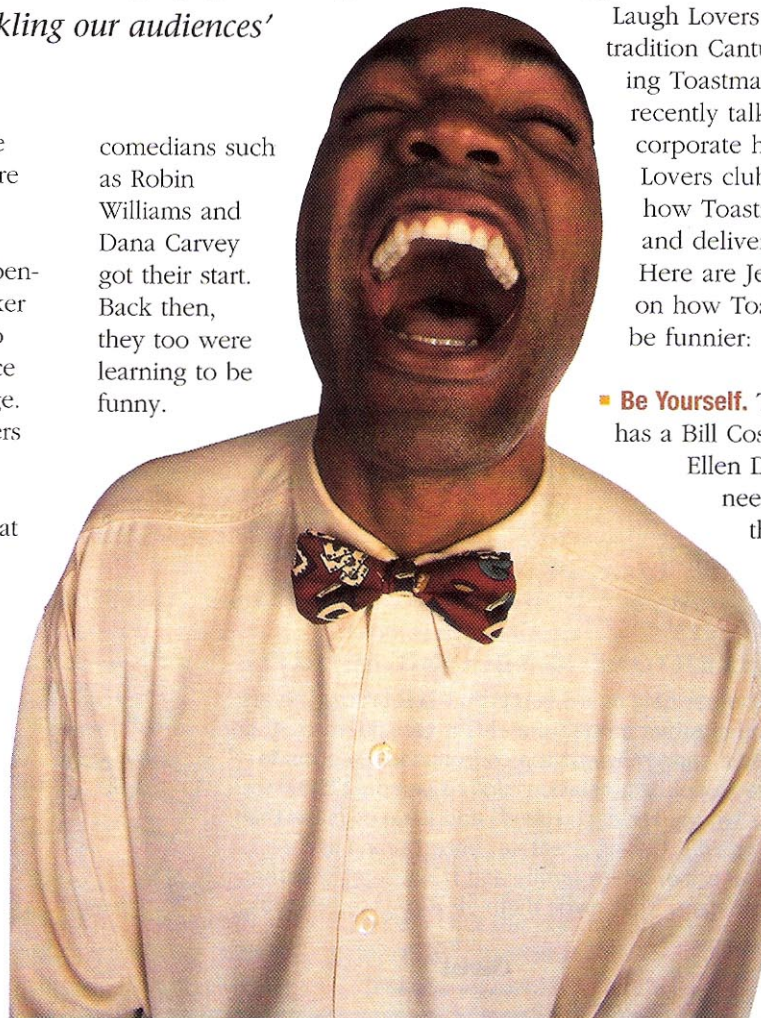
Let's face it, humor is hard! Toastmasters helps us overcome stage fright, speak to strangers and think on our feet. We're adept at speaking to inform, persuading our audiences and touching them with inspirational tales of love and loss. But how do we "break a leg" (a good thing in comedy parlance) by tickling our audiences' "funny bones"?

Speeches employing humor are better received; audiences are more receptive when they've laughed. They relax, lower their defense mechanisms and become more open-minded. They often connect quicker with the speaker when induced to laugh. But how to get the audience to laugh? Therein lies the challenge.

Recently, District 57 Toastmasters in Northern California formed a "comedy" club to help seasoned speakers become more proficient at writing and delivering humor. Meeting once a month in the San Francisco Bay area, Laugh Lovers helps members learn about the art and science of humor. After all, we can all get an audience to laugh *at* us, but the key is understanding how to get them to laugh *with* us!

Laugh Lovers was inspired by the late John Cantu, a humorist and comedy coach who once managed the Holy City Zoo comedy club in San Francisco. It was there that

comedians such as Robin Williams and Dana Carvey got their start. Back then, they too were learning to be funny.



John relished the role of "humor helper" to comedians, fellow Toastmasters and members of the National Speakers Association worldwide. John believed we could all become funnier with practice and an appreciation of the rules of comedy.

Laugh Lovers carries on the tradition Cantu started, of helping Toastmasters be funnier. I recently talked to Jeff Heidner, corporate humorist and Laugh Lovers club president, about how Toastmasters can create and deliver funnier material. Here are Jeff's top 10 tips on how Toastmasters can be funnier:

- **Be Yourself.** The world already has a Bill Cosby, Jay Leno and Ellen DeGeneres. It doesn't need another one. Yet there is room for your unique brand of humor. What's your brand? That's your first assignment. Whenever you're conversing with someone and you say something that makes them laugh, that's a clue! That's your unique brand of humor.

Recommendations

Craig and Jeff recommend:

1. Use Toastmasters' advanced speech manuals, such as *Humorously Speaking* and *The Entertaining Speaker*, to help you hone your humor skills.
2. Take an improv class. Like *Table Topics*, improvisational theater will help you think and speak on your feet, appreciate audience dynamics and overcome speaking fears through experimentation.
3. Use *Table Topics* as opportunities to create and relieve tension through humor, work on your timing and utilize the element of surprise for comedic effect.
4. Study successful humorists, comedians and storytellers. Observe the histrionics of Bill Cosby, John Cleese and Carol Burnett. Study the timing of Cedric the Entertainer, Billy Crystal and Steve Martin. Analyze the mannerisms of stand-up comedians such as Jay Leno, Whoopi Goldberg and Eddie Izzard.
5. Admire the writing in television shows like *M*A*S*H** and *Seinfeld* where many laughs are written into the dialogue.
6. Read and learn from a pair of our favorite free humor e-zines: John Kinde's *Humor Power Tips* (www.humorpower.com) and Karen Buxmon's *Lytebytes* (www.humorx.com).
7. Visit John Cantu's site (www.humormall.com) for a hefty helping of humor resources.

If you live in the Bay Area and are interested in attending a Laugh Lovers meeting, e-mail Craig at humor@craigspeaks.com. If you don't live in the Bay Area and you're interested in creating a Laugh Lovers club for your district, then – you guessed it – e-mail Craig.

Craig Harrison, DTM, can be reached at www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.

Jeff Heidner can be reached at www.havinghumorhelp.com.

■ **Take Notes.** Whenever you say something that makes someone else laugh, write it down. And don't forget to write down how you said it, and the context in which it was said. Otherwise, when you look back at it a month later you may find yourself wondering, "What was so funny about that?" Just the process of committing your amusing articulations to paper will go a long way toward helping you discover, develop and define your unique sense of humor.

■ **Pepper your speeches with humor.** Just as pepper spices up your favorite dish, you can (and should) use humor to season your speeches. Sprinkle humor into your next speech to grab the audience's attention. When used as an accent, humor adds just the right amount of flavor without overpowering everything else. Use humor to accent the important points in your speech and your audience will remember those points long after they've left the presentation.

■ **Special delivery recommended.** How you deliver your material is key. I've performed with many comedians who are talented writers but don't get laughs on stage. They get so frustrated when they see comedians who are lesser writers "bring the house down" at will. The next few steps offer delivery suggestions:

■ **Use your voice.** Toastmasters teaches us the importance of using vocal variety in our speeches. It's just as important, if not more so, when using humor. Change your inflection, use characters and establish different voices for each one. For added impact, fluctuate your volume. Doing so will help you create vivid images in the minds of your audience members, heightening the laughter you will garner.

■ **Timing is everything.** WARNING: Please pause prior to proceeding with the punch line. First, you need to be sure your audience has digest-

ed the setup before you launch into the punch line; if they don't get the joke, you won't get the laughter! Second, by pausing just a beat or two after your setup, you create that much more tension and, consequently, induce that much more laughter.

■ **Surprise.** Humor and tension go hand in hand. When you set up your audience for a moment of levity, you create tension. When you deliver the punch line – or the twist or surprise – you allow for that tension to be released. That release is manifested in the form of laughter.


■ **Stay clean.** No, I'm not talking about washing behind your ears. I'm talking about using humor that is appropriate for the audience you're addressing. Remember, humor is supposed to make people feel good – not embarrassed, insulted or offended. Stay away from comments that are sexist, racist, ageist or otherwise controversial. Of course, if you want

to make fun of yourself, go right ahead. Self-deprecating humor is a great way to put your audience at ease with you as a speaker so that they can get to know you as a person.

■ **Write-minded.** Write, rewrite and write some more! The more you think about your sense of humor, the more you'll notice the funny things you say to your friends; the more

you practice using your sense of humor in your speeches, the more comfortable you'll be with it. If your audience doesn't think your funny line is so funny, then play with it, tweak it, rearrange it and try it again.

■ **Have fun.** That's a direct order! If you don't enjoy delivering it, then how can you expect an audience to laugh at it? Humor is contagious.

Jeff and Craig agree on one more point: Toastmasters, You Cantu Be Funny! 

Professional speaker **Craig Harrison, DTM**, founded Laugh Lovers Club 596430 in Oakland, California, in honor of the late John Cantu, a Toastmaster and professional humor coach. Craig can be reached through www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.

Jeff's Jocular Jargon For Toastmasters

A Beat – A unit of time that you can measure in your mind by counting to yourself (two beats equals the time it takes to say “one one thousand, two one thousand”) to build suspense.

Callback – The art of reusing a word or phrase from a previous punch line to create new laughs in a different context.

Comeback – Material comedians write in advance to deal with hecklers, just in case one appears and needs to be dealt with: “Thank you, but I prefer to work alone!” (may be followed by a rim shot).

Heckler – An audience member who interrupts a comedian's performance.

Hook – If a comedian's act is so bad that it's hurting the show, a club owner may opt to “give him the hook” by yanking that comedian off of the stage prematurely – as if using a giant hook.

Punch line – The phrase, line or word that releases the tension created in the setup and garners laughter from the audience.

Setup: “If I were two-faced...”

Punch Line: ...would I be wearing this one?” – Abraham Lincoln

The first phrase contains the setup and the second phrase contains the punch line.

Rim Shot – The proverbial drum/cymbal combination (ba-dum-ching) that follows a painfully obvious or extremely corny joke or pun.

Rule of Three – Writing technique that creates a pattern with the first two items (setup) and breaks that pattern with the third (punch line).

Example:

Directions to the 2004 Toastmasters International Convention

1. Directions to Reno from West: Take Highway 80 East
2. Directions to Reno from East: Take Highway 80 West
3. Directions to Reno from Far East: Board a 747 bound for Las Vegas and then head north!

– Tom Antion

Saver – A line used by a comedian to get a laugh after a previously delivered joke bombed (usually self-deprecating).

Setup – The phrase or line that creates the anticipation and tension in an audience.

Corporate humorist **Jeff Heidner** is president of Laugh Lovers Club 596430 of Oakland, California. For more about Jeff visit www.havinghumorhelps.com.



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.

JEST PRACTICES shows you how to introduce fun, laughter and appropriate humor into your work environment. It helps us recognize and value our 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

Stories, worksheets, role plays and anecdotal stories all help audience members appreciate ways of utilizing humor to help them relieve stress, relate better to co-workers and maintain their 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 2004-05 Craig served as president of the NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION's Northern California chapter.

He 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.

To book Craig contact him directly:



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