

# 5 Tips For Making Humor A Hit At Your Next Event

Karyn Buxman, MSN, CSP, CPAE

"We need something to liven up our conference. Like a humorist. Whom would you suggest?" It's wonderful when the phone rings with a potential client who is looking for some humor. But before making your final decision, do a little humor homework. Here are five tips to make your next choice a home run.

**What's the audience's humor style?** Some prefer intellectual humor. Others like visual humor or even slapstick. One of the ways to ascertain this is to ask about whom they've used in the past. There are speakers in the industry with the good-clean-humorous, storytelling style like Bill Cosby. There are others with the off-the-wall, zany style of Robin Williams. Some have the clown like abilities of Lucille Ball. Others have an understated style like Bob Newhart or Steven Wright.

**What are the group demographics?** Ask any humorist and they will probably tell you that the easiest audience is a room full of middle-aged women. Their laughter is uninhibited and they are eager to be entertained. Start adding men to the group and the dynamics change. An all female audience will laugh much more readily than an all male audience, especially if there is a hierarchy within the all male group. The older the group, the less likely they are to enjoy a rapid, fast paced humor. Younger groups, on the other hand, like a presentation that includes lots of quick wit. Their attention spans are shorter and may be lost on a slower, methodically paced humor style. Ethnic diversity will also affect how the humor is received.

**What is the timing of this event?** An opening session first thing in the morning will be tailored differently than a been-all-day-at-meetings-then-open-bar-reception-followed-by-a-heavy-dinner presentation. Be sure to ask not only is the timing for the program, but also how long is the requested program. Thirty minutes of entertainment is a different ball game than a ninety-minute general session.

**What's the overall objective for this slot?** Is the purpose of this program to begin the conference and set the tone? Is it to break up a day of tedious and technical material? Perhaps it is one of many breakouts intended to provide tools to cope. Or maybe it is to close the conference with a bang so participants leave feeling great. Knowing why the humor is desired in the overall picture will be an asset to you and your speaker.

**How will you know if the speaker is on target?** What is the specific objective(s) for this slot? This is probably the most important question of all and surprisingly, this is the question most often left blank on my pre-program questionnaire. Many program planners really haven't given that much thought about what they want that speaker to specifically accomplish. Finding out the answer to this question gives the speaker a target and the planner a means of evaluating whether or not the speaker hit that target.

For example, the audiences may be similar, but one planner responds, "Our audience is so stressed out. Just make them laugh and feel good for awhile." Another responds, "Leave them with a means of dealing with their stress using humor." These are two very different objectives. The first planner wants the audience to be entertained. The second is looking for content on how to deal with stress using humor. They both expect the program to be entertaining, but to what degree will be different.

Placing the wrong person in a humor slot is no laughing matter. By taking the time to explore these five areas, you can be sure there will be smiles all the way around.

---