

How to Use Humor Correctly

By Nick Arnette

Most people want to have a sense of humor or be around someone who does. So, how do you start adding a little more *Glee* to your *Me*? Don't be intimidated by humor. People appreciate a well-timed bit of humor to brighten up their day. But there are a few things to keep in mind:

* **Keep it clean.**

Offensive language is never appropriate in the work- place—and you may not get invited back to the neigh- borhood barbeque if you use it there, either. Yes, people may laugh at a dirty joke, but it's probably more out of embarrassment. As my good friend Adam Christing, the founder of Clean Comedians, says, "It doesn't have to be filthy to be funny."

* **Keep it PC.**

Yes, we live in the age of political correctness, and it's not going away. Racist, sexist, or suggestive humor is *never* appropriate. You don't know who might be offended by it, and it may come back to haunt you. Case in point: I once worked for a manager who was up for a promotion. When the woman with whom he was going to work found out this manager was being considered for the position, she informed their boss that he had used suggestive language on several occasions. Even though more than a year had passed since the incidents occurred, he was fired the next day. His co-worker had been offended and hadn't forgotten.

It seems like every week I hear of a new scandal involving some "leaked" internal videos from a highly regarded organization or individual. These private videos are meant to be funny but when revealed to the public they can be very offensive. They are certainly in bad taste and display poor judgment. Even if those involved try to explain the context—"We were just joking around!"—the damage is already done. The harm it does to their reputation or career can be irreparable.

* **Keep it brief.**

If you're going to tell a joke, don't tell long ones. As Shakespeare said, "Brevity is the soul of wit." A long joke is any joke that takes more than a minute to tell. If you're at the office, you're wasting valuable work time. And it's embarrassing for your audience to listen to a long joke and halfway through realize they've heard it before. Then they have to act like it was really funny, especially if it's the boss telling it. The exception for telling long jokes is when you're using them as a teaching tool to illustrate a point. Otherwise, I suggest using one-liners instead. Just do an internet search for one-liners on various topics. You're bound to find a couple you like and can put to use.

*** Too much of a good thing.**

How do you know when there's too much humor in the workplace? When your humor turns into goofing off. Take yourself lightly and your work seriously.

*** Get off the stage.**

Nothing is more annoying than someone who is "always on." You can never get a straight answer from these people. It's as if they're always hiding something, and that's not good for building rapport or teamwork.

*** Cut the sarcasm.**

Sarcastic humor puts people on the defensive and creates a negative work environment. After a sarcastic comment, the person at whom it was directed has a natural urge to get even with a more cutting remark. Sure, you might find put-down humor funny—as long as the joke is not on you. And another thing, people who don't know you well might not know that you're kidding.

The same goes with teasing. Be extra careful with it. When I was a special education teacher I had an assistant who was cleaning up a very unpleasant mess. Me, wanting to be a team player, jumped right in to help, saying, "Hey, I can clean up messes too." He took it as an insult to his job responsibilities.

My intentions were to make the best out of a bad situation using a little levity and showing what team-work looks like; however, my attempt at humor was misinterpreted as a put-down and caused unnecessary tension in the workplace. A word to the wise: Never tease anyone who can bench press over 500 pounds! □ Some people will never get your sense of humor, no matter how hard you try to convey it.

Teasing will likely backfire, so don't push it. Instead, stay in the active mode and focus on how you can best meet the other person's needs at that time. Take into account that 5 percent of people are in a bad mood four out of every five days. Try not to make it five out of five for them. □ A good goal for all of us is to never have to ask the question, "Can't you take a joke?" We all know that many times the answer is "No!"

*** Let other things be funny for you.**

Visual humor is often the most effective. Share a funny cartoon with your co-workers, or put a humorous picture on the fridge for your family or roommates to enjoy. A little goes a long way. It shows them you have a good sense of humor. And if they don't think it's funny, no worries. It's not your joke anyway, so don't take it personally.

These are just a few simple parameters to help you become the funny guy/gal vs. the obnoxious one. Incorporating humor into your daily life can be really simple.

The preceding article is an excerpt from *Me, We and Glee: How to have a great attitude*,

work as a team and keep your sense of humor, by Nick Arnette. Known as *The Feel Good Funny Guy*, Arnette is a popular keynote speaker at business meetings throughout the United States and Canada. You can contact Nick Arnette at www.NickArnette.com, email: nick@nickarnette.com

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