

Turn Your Goofs Into Guffaws

By Nick Arnette

Nothing brings people together quite as easily as humor. Victor Borge said, “Laughter is the closest distance between two people.” It’s hard not to like someone after you’ve shared a laugh with him or her. It’s a great door opener and barrier breaker. Why don’t we use it more often?

In almost every joke there are two elements that cause us to laugh. The first is the element of surprise. Something unexpected happens; that’s why it’s funny. The second component is conflict. That’s right, something that is disagree-able. Sitcoms are based on conflict; an everyday situation has gone awry. We can relate to the problem or situation, and we laugh about it.

What two factors contribute to our everyday problems like stress, anxiety, anger, frustration, impatience, worry, etc.? Did you guess the elements of surprise and conflict? If so, you’re a winner! *The unexpected and conflict are the same two elements that trigger both laughter and anxiety.* We need humor to give us balance in our lives. You can get all worked up about something, or you can find the humor in it. You have a choice to be active or reactive. I know which one I’m choosing.

Kids laugh about four hundred times a day. The average adult laughs out loud about 15 times a day—on a *good* day.

What happened to us adults? Why did we stop laughing so much? Well, it could be that as children our parents couldn’t wait for us to learn how to talk. Once we learned to talk, they loved all the hilarious things we said as toddlers and preschoolers. Then about the age when we entered school, our parents kept telling us things like, “Sit down and shut up,” “Wipe that smile off your face!” or “I’ll give you something to laugh about.” □ The older we get, the less we laugh—and the more it takes to make us laugh. We become more learned. It takes a whole lot more to surprise us. A baby will laugh when you hide your face behind your hand and say “peek-a-boo.” Try that on an adult; the only reason they’d laugh is because they’d think you lost your mind!

As we mature, we start taking ourselves more seriously. We think we are supposed to act or look a certain way during home, work, or leisure time. We have a work face, a parent face, and a friend face. We have just a few “faces” that tell everyone who we are, and we’re afraid of showing the world what we’re really thinking. Again, let’s take a look at children. They are very expressive with their faces; they are easy to read. We know what they are thinking just by looking at their faces. They don’t worry what other people are thinking of them; they live “in the moment.”

But when we’re older, we have a harder and harder time being in the moment. Responsibilities pile up on us, and when something unexpectedly goes wrong, we can

snap. But if we can use those elements of surprise and conflict to make ourselves laugh, we've won the battle. It's all in our perspective. Remember your circle with the dots from the very first chapter? There was more space than dots, right? So instead of letting surprise and conflict create stress and tension in your life, let's work on flipping that equation. Let's make those situations work for us, instead of the other way around.

If you've ever laughed while watching a sitcom, you definitely appreciate that comedy is based on conflict. You laugh at the situation the characters are in and you can identify with them. Believe me, most of what we are stressed out about today we'll be laughing about some day. Most of my comedy act is based on things that have gone wrong or didn't work out for me. Today's stresses are tomorrow's jokes. You might even say, comedy equals tragedy plus time.

For example, my worst gig: It was a Christmas party for a bunch of guys who hauled hay to farmers and ranchers. They were a rough bunch, and I was booked as the "clean" comedian, which is what the boss wanted. It wasn't what they wanted. They had an open bar before I went on, and they were in no mood for listening to clean comedy. They didn't get any of my jokes at all. I tried all my best jokes, and there was absolutely no response. Within minutes there was a lot of talking, and they stopped paying attention. About five minutes into it, they were louder than me—even with my microphone turned all the way up!

When I said, "Okay, I give up!" I got a standing ovation. They absolutely delighted in my failure. They jeered me all the way to my car. It wasn't funny at the time, but I guarantee you that I'm laughing about it now, even as I write this. Sometimes things are so bad, you just have to laugh to keep from crying. After some time passes, you just have to laugh...period.

Think of some things that have happened in your life that were a bummer at the time but now you have a good laugh when you share the story with your friends and family. Maybe it's the time you tore off the fender on your dad's first brand-new car, or the time you got your head stuck between the railings in the hallway, or the time you bounced a basketball on the piano keys to hear how loud it would be only to hear one of the keys break inside. I'm just using these as examples. I'm not saying they happened to me...or did they?

Think of a "tragedy time" event or two. You deserve a good laugh today!

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

-End-