



Use Humor to Your Advantage

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Do you listen for humor in presentations you attend? Do you pay attention to the presenter's set up – the preparation before the laugh parts that entertain you? Humor helps to build rapport with your listeners and in you as the presenter.

Use a Humor Tool

A tool used to present humor is called “ad libs.” You may want to emulate these humor techniques in your own presentations.

Ad libs are facts that are overstated or understated through exaggeration. They are typically exaggerated well above the scope of normal reality line or minimized way below it. Ad libs may be prepared or impromptu.

Understatements

Ever feel stressed out and overwhelmed? When asked how you are today, do you find yourself replying “I’m fine” when you’re really not? With proper preparation and set-up this frequently occurring understatement could be a laugh-getter.

“Oh.....by the way” is an understatement you’ll find used in the workplace, on television and socially. Think about the television show “Columbo.” In nearly every segment, Peter Falk had an exaggerated – seemingly impromptu – line that was intentionally written into his script. He usually delivered it as he was leaving a room or other investigation site, and typically about 6-10 feet away from his prime suspect. “Oh.....by the way” was his understated attention-getter tossed out gently in an off-hand manner. It was like a fishing line loaded with bait, and intended to give great attention to a major point of the case he was investigating in a casual way.

Ad lib exaggerations can be a good way to get your audience to take home

specific points. They may be several of the few points will people remember after your presentation – so make them count!

And, by the way.....an unaware professional speaker pal of mine – who is now my client – diluted the impact of her presentations each of the 13 times she used this technique within a 45-minute presentation delivery! It just happened to be her unconscious way of delivering. This great technique is most effective when practiced in advance and used sparingly.

Overstatements

Overstatements are often short, attention getting statements. They usually create a contrast between actions, objects, behaviors; or provide a visual opportunity to compare something with something else.

Well-known examples of overstatements are:

-If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times!
-His eyes were as big as his stomach!
-I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse.

Are these overstatements **really** so funny? No..... It is the reality of the human body's stomach size contrasted with putting an 1100-pound horse inside of it that drives the laugh.

Prepared and Impromptu Ad Libs

Impromptu remarks are made on-the-spot without a written script or practice. Prepared ad libs are written into material before it is presented. Remarks are delivered as if the presenter just came up with them at that moment.

I've always been an avid "I Love Lucy" fan. I can still remember most of the words to most of the episodes, the breakouts and snippets presented. I know that Lucy has a "plan" – she always does, and it's often v-e-r-y exaggerated.

Even as I gracefully age, I enjoy Lucy. She made a peerless mark in the television world. Old reruns still play today, and I watch them from a presenter's perspective. Lucy is irreplaceable; and, watching her perform is seeing art in motion!

Lucy delivers lines – unparalleled ad libs – that are not that funny – when you really think about them. The audience, however, always responds enthusiastically! Why?! Her DELIVERY of the material! What are some of her trademark delivery techniques?

The methods she used were frequently accompanied by much “innocent” eye-blinking, pouting, instant tears or crying, a fingertip to her lips or her arms akimbo. Sometimes they were in tandem with other gestures or physical expressions that were out of context with the issue at hand. See a pattern in her overreacting or underreacting?

Delivery Tips

Use the following tips for incorporating humor into your own presentations.

- **Know** you can get the audience to respond with laughter. Believe it and act accordingly and you will find a poise and confidence in yourself that your audience will respond to favorably.
- **Prepare** your audience for the coming humor, joke, ad lib or impromptu lines. You can use lead-ins, stories or a set-up to keep people with you while you move them to the funny parts.
- **Add** life and real experience to your funny material. Your own stories and experiences will enhance your material when you share them. Be personal.
- **Show** your listeners how much you are enjoying yourself and your delivery of the funny stuff. Give your audience opportunities to see “you are enjoying telling and hearing” these funny spots (Milton Berle).

Take time to enhance your awareness for good “spots,” impromptu and ad lib materials to build into presentations you deliver. By the way.....if you’re a television watcher, quit the mindless use of the machine and use the time to consider how what you’re seeing or hearing could be used to advantageously energize and add humor to your own presentations!

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