
2005

Mixing Business with Pleasure, Second Edition

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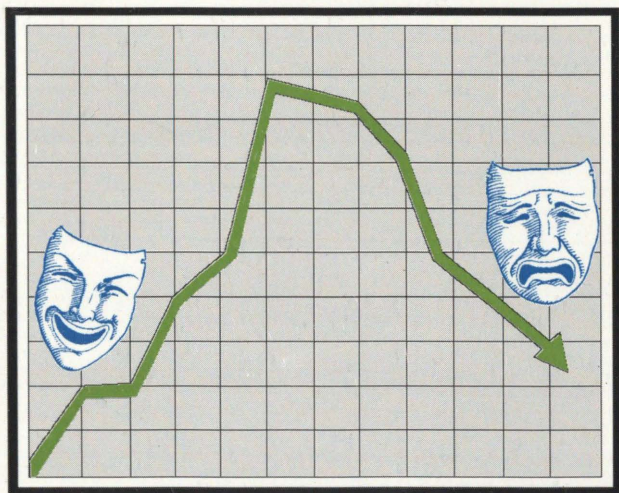


HARDING
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Mixing

BUSINESS

With Pleasure



**The Bottom Line
& The Punch Line**

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A
Commemorative Issue
of

The Entrepreneur

a quarterly journal

of the

Belden Center for
Private Enterprise Education

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Second Edition

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INTRODUCTION -- Jest for the Pun of It

Of all of God's creatures, mankind is the only one who can laugh--except the hyena; however, he is serious about it. Why would we want to discover the positive role of humor in our lives? Humor reacquaints us with our past--that dynamic energy which lies at the core of joy and laughter for every generation.

Jest think, if life was a matter of "*survival of the wittiest*," instead of "*survival of the fittest*," we could all die laughing. Only kidding. However, for starters, we can "*lighten up*." The basic forms of humor have been around for ages--maybe longer: surprise, exaggeration, understatement, reversal, imagery, word play, satire, etc.

All of these allow us to use humor for inspiration, motivation, instruction, and entertainment. For millennia, humor has been a way of taking peoples' problems and rubbing their noses in it. Accordingly, a good humorologist is worth his wit in gold, even though inside there is usually a *Sad Sack* who emerges only in private.

We need to take ourselves lightly, even if our work and mission are serious. Perhaps the biggest problem in life is that too many people want the same position: "*Boss of the World*." In reality it's an awful job---horribly demanding with killer stresses, and the compensation isn't all that good, either.

To the contrary, humor has become such an effective image-enhancer and stress-reliever that it has affected nearly every aspect of our lives. Ministers leaven their sermons with humor. We professors (try to) hold our students' attention by humor.

Spouses, in-laws, and even politicians attempt to accommodate each other through generous applications of humor. Speaking of politicians, let's not overlook what some call the language of politics. "Poli" means many, and "tics" are blood suckers.

We all have "image problems" from time to time (been thinking about this day and night since early this morning):

Dear Abby--I have two brothers and two sisters. One brother is a University Professor; the other brother is in state prison for grand larceny. Mom died from insanity when I was young. My sisters are dealing illegal drugs. Dad's gambling habit eats through the grocery and rent money. Abby, recently I met a girl who was released from jail, having served time for burglary and felonious assault. I want very much to marry her. Abby, if I decide to marry this girl, should I tell her about my brother who is a University Professor? Signed, Hassled.

Thank you, dear reader, for sketching through this monograph. In addition to providing some meat you can sink your teeth into, it's a pleasure to lighten your load by dishing up some low-cholesterol baloney disguised as food for thought--which you could relish. Don't want to milk this topic too much, but it brings home the bacon, and that's bread and butter to me.

If you enjoy this monograph half as much as I, then I will have enjoyed it twice as much as you. Truly, if I cause you to smile or laugh, then I have been successful. But if I cause you to think, then I have failed. Read on, but remember, no sense of humor is better than none at all, he who laughs last--was probably busy writing down the joke.

I. Humor and Heritage -- A Legacy of Laughter

Did I mention that I was born in a log cabin--which I built with my own hands? Hey, it's possible. The oldest activity and the youngest feeling down through the ages, humor has enhanced communication in useful ways. Around exam time, some of my students think I'm mean and heartless. Not true. I tell them that I have a tender conscience--the heart of a little boy (which I keep in a jar on my desk). Jest kidding.

In prehistoric times, early man seemed to have only two alternatives in panic circumstances: flee or fight. Today, effective use of humor presents us with a third option: laughter as an alternative to cowardice or violence. It's amazing what people will accept, good news or bad, if it arrives on the wings of humor. So, *"smile when you say that."*

Listen to the wisest mortal who ever lived, King Solomon: *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones"*--Proverbs 17:22; and *"A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones."*--Proverbs 15:30.

Minister John Gipson reported correctly that Solomon did indeed know of something better than medicine:

It's a prescription with unlimited refills. It produces no harmful side effects. You can take it and drive. There are no warnings on the labels. You do not have to keep it out of the reach of children. There is no childproof top, nor danger of tampering. You do not have to store it in a cool place. It does not have

an expiration date. You can exceed the recommended dosage.

Hear now the stark and piercing words of Matthew, the apostle of Jesus and former Jewish tax collector for the Romans: *"And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof on the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"*--Matthew 12:36-37. H. Leo Boles, in his signal Commentary on Matthew for the Gospel Advocate Co., provides further insight:

"Idle word" does not mean careless, innocent talk on subjects secular and social, and opposed to serious conversation. Rather it signifies wicked, malicious, injurious, slandering, impious words. Our social, insignificant words among friends will not be sufficient to condemn us; only such words as manifest the real principle of our actions, whether we love God truly, love the world and self, will serve to justify or condemn us. This does not mean that a Christian cannot engage in innocent jesting and levity. A genial and pleasant gracefulness of conversation in social relations helps to adorn a Christian.

Aristotle, the student of Plato, described laughter this way more than two millennia ago: *"It is a bodily exercise precious to health."* Later, medieval physicians, a very serious lot, were sometimes known for telling their patients jokes. It is not common knowledge, but Leonardo da Vinci, for a brief period in his life, was a standup comic who wrote and performed his own material. He played the lute, sang, and recited satires and jests at the court of Lodovico Sforza in Milan.

"Prepare for mirth, for mirth becomes a feast," said William Shakespeare. *"A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs jolted by every pebble in the road,"* countered Henry Ward Beecher. We can truly thank Mark Twain for this observation: *"Humor is a great thing, the saving thing, after all. The minute it crops up, all our hardness yields, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place."*

And Ralph Waldo Emerson put it this way: *"To laugh often and much, to win respect of intelligent people and the affection of children...to leave the world a bit better...to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, that is to have succeeded."* Garrison Keillor, of "Prairie Home Companion" fame, says, *"Humor is not a trick, not jokes. Humor is a presence in the world--like grace--that shines on everyone."*

So, is humor an essential adjunct to every activity? Yes. In fact, it may well be necessary for life itself. Abe Lincoln's trademark for commencing cabinet meetings was telling jokes, humorous anecdotes, and homely homilies. This frequently made his advisors anxious and agitated; they wanted Mr. Lincoln to focus on successful completion of the devastating Civil War. However, Mr. Lincoln was using humor to help himself and his cabinet to deal with the terrible stresses that the war exacted on both body and soul.

Thomas Edison was another visionary who relied on humor. Although Edison filled hundreds of notebooks (some of which can be viewed today at the Smithsonian) with results of his experiments, he also filled some of those notebooks with jokes. That

humor was routinely directed toward his colleagues during marathon research sessions in order to bond them as a team and to keep his colleagues' minds alert and engaging.

Few people would remember William C. Punch (1871-1940). Some professional humorists do. By them he is revered as the *"father of the stand-up routine."* It was Punch who created the *"knock-knock"* joke, the perennially funny rubber chicken gag. It was Punch who forever altered the form of the anecdote, giving it his now-famous *"Punch line."*

"Humor is counterbalanced," said James Thurber. *"Laughter need not be cut out of anything, since it improves everything. The power of it created the poodle, the platypus, and people who have integrated a sense of both comedy and tragedy."*

II. Humor and Physical Health-- Jest What the Doctor Ordered

Alas, dear reader, nothing lasts forever, except maybe Elvis. That fall off the wall didn't kill Humpty Dumpty; it was high cholesterol. And Einstein didn't die of natural causes; he was bumped off because he knew too much.

Although the anatomy and physiology of humor still challenge scientific researchers, the benefits of laughter are well known. A hearty belly laugh is excellent exercise, possibly on a par with cycling or jogging. Laughter reduces stress, relaxes muscles, stimulates adrenaline in the blood, and increases the brain's endorphins--creating, as it were, a type of natural "high."

Is it possible that laughter is contagious, and that if we're lucky enough to catch it, we could expect a healthier, more enjoyable life? Back in 1942, the year I was born, E. Forrest Boyd, M.D., wrote that laughter indeed aids circulation, massages the abdominal muscles, stimulates digestion, lowers blood pressure, begets optimism and self-confidence, and relegates fear and pessimism to the background.

Other doctors have proven scientifically that laughter enhances respiration and combats carbon dioxide levels in the blood. Actually, doctors in the business of dispensing humor along with, or in the place of, prescription drugs have known for some time that there is such a thing as laughing yourself back to health. The most well-known case would be that of Norman Cousins, the long-time editor of *Saturday Review* who managed a serious disease and documented it in Anatomy of an Illness.

What about those people with chronic pain who frequently don't do things they would otherwise enjoy? They believe they can't because of the pain; but often the opposite is true. So says Dr. David E. Breseler, former director of the Pain Control Unit, UCLA Medical Center, and author of Free Yourself from Pain. Dr. Breseler routinely inquires about his patients' "serum fun levels." He has found that their pain actually persists longer because they don't have any fun. "Laughter is both a good exercise and a great stress reducer," says Dr. Breseler.

Could the common cold be chased away sooner if humor is prescribed? It's doubtful. But Dr. Breseler advises people to go home and do something that they truly enjoy. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's fun for them. In other words, as strange as it sounds, have a good time being sick, and you'll probably be sick for a shorter time.

Is laughter really good medicine? It seems so. Laughter initially elevates the pulse and respiratory rates; then it brings on relaxation. Hearty laughter involves a significant number of muscles--providing even semi-invalid patients with nominal exercise. Laughter also aids breathing and clears mucous--a benefit to people with chronic respiratory diseases. It is significant that many U.S. hospitals and health-care facilities now have humor programs for patients.

Says Lawrence J. Peter, author of The Laughter Prescription, "Humor is tremendously valuable in many spheres. In health, it has been said for a long time that a person with a good sense of humor has better healing qualities; in recent years this has been tested scientifically. Now there is

evidence that laughter can increase circulation, respiration and the endorphin level in the blood--endorphins help control pain, and laughter can produce a great deal of relaxation."

Today's doctors view hearty laughter as great exercise. When we give out an explosive belly laugh, they say that our diaphragm descends deep into our body and our lungs expand, significantly increasing the amount of oxygen intake. Accordingly, the diaphragm delicately gives the heart a rhythmic massage. That grand organ responds by beating faster and harder. Circulation accelerates; liver, stomach, pancreas, spleen, and gall bladder are all energized--our entire system gets a tuneup.

From Allen Cleien, author of the book The Healing Power of Humor, we learn that *"...humor keeps us from being overwhelmed by life's distresses, and it has physical benefits too. Hearty laughter works out every system in the body--heart, lungs, glandular systems, etc. It relaxes muscles and seems to decrease the level of immune separation in the blood."*

So, laughter does all those good things: increases blood circulation, feeds oxygen to the brain, pumps out hormones that aid alertness, releases pain-killing endorphins. These effects can improve the mental ability to make decisions, organize data, and negotiate; so says Jim Pelley, founder of Laughter Works.

III. Humor and Mental Health-- Roll with the Punch Line

Do you ever feel like you're starting off on the wrong foot and you're a centipede--that humanity is at the crossroads and none of the traffic lights are working?--that the milk of human kindness is being stockpiled until prices go up?--that your ship came in while you were at the airport--that opportunity was knocking on your front door while you were on in the backyard looking for four leaf clovers?

Do you ever feel as if your candle is flickering and that, emotionally, you may be *"going around the bend?"* After all, we sleep one-third of our lives. Does that mean that two-thirds of our nightmares are real? Hey, drempt once I was in a faculty meeting. Woke up, and sure enough I was!

Psychiatrist Dr. Henry Olson says, *"Humor as a therapeutic tool must build instead of knock; therefore it excludes sarcasm and cynicism, which puffs up the self at the expense of others."* And yet here in America, we appear to be schizophrenic; we value a *"sense of humor"* and, simultaneously, we are sometimes uncomfortable about anything that is *"un-serious."*

According to Dr. Donald Ardell's *Wellness Report*, *"Living a wellness lifestyle is fun, romantic, and free, and people who choose to live this way are stronger, better looking, have higher morale, and more antibodies to resist illness. Humor is the soul of wellness. In order to live a wellness lifestyle, you can't always take life seriously."*

If humor helps people get better, can it promote staying well? Does it increase our self-esteem, sense of control, spiritual grounding, and rapport with others? Yes and yes. So, shouldn't we exercise our right to a sense of humor? After all, humor seems to have the same effect on the mind and spirit as physical exercise has on our bodies. As with physical fitness, our sense of humor must be gained the old fashioned way: earned and then preserved routinely through mental exercise.

We know the old saw, "*Use it or lose it.*" According to Dr. William Fry, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University Medical Center and Director of the Gelotology Institute (gelotology--from the Greek "*gelos*," or laughter--is the science of laughter), laughter can get rid of the fat between our ears.

As we laugh, the right hemisphere of our brain--that which governs emotion and creativity -- shows more fast-wave alpha activity (regarded as ideal for creating a sense of well-being and clarity of mind), than the logical censorious left. By distracting us from day-to-day concerns, and banishing gloomy thoughts, if only for a moment, laughter can relieve tension, boredom and anxiety.

No, the National Institutes for Health will probably never announce minimal daily requirements for humor supplements. Should that deter us from ingesting a daily dose of humor? Certainly not. Little is yet known about the long-term effects of humor; the scientific theory on the subject far exceeds the empirical evidence gathered to date. It's difficult to evaluate humor in a laboratory, for humor works best when we

are caught off guard and blindsided by surgical wit.

So what do we know? If we can get a person who is uptight to relax, that releases body tension. When we are relaxed, our vista broadens and we may see things we were missing before. When we are depressed, nervous, or upset, our sense of humor deteriorates. We can tell something about a person's mental health from how much his or her sense of humor comes into play.

Former President George Bush, speaking at the Harding University American Studies Institute Lecture series in 1997, provides this anecdote regarding his skydiving the previous year: "*The scariest thing about it was telling Barbara I was going to do it. She surprised me with, 'Great, it will be the first time we've seen you in a free fall since the 1992 election'.*" Asked what dangerous thing he'd like to try next, Mr. Bush responded, "*I'm thinking about trying broccoli again.*"

In politics, teaching, and in all forms of communication, relevant humor is tremendously valuable. If we can illustrate a point we are trying to make with a humorous anecdote, people are more likely to remember it. Humor is humbly and sincerely recognizing our shortcomings and not letting this recognition depress us--but make us all the more alive to become our best possible selves despite those shortcomings.

IV. Humor and Aging -- Levity Womb to Tomb

At this writing, I'm 63; should be 64, but I was sick a year. Life expectancy was up 40% in the 20th century alone. We can expect to live long lives, relatively free of pain, and die in good health (your mileage may vary). It has been said, "*There are Seven Ages of Man: spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills and wills.*" Fact is, the only way not to die is not to be born. And not being born would take all the pleasure out of not dying.

Do we stop laughing because we grow old? Certainly not. Just the opposite is true: We grow old because we stop laughing. Rather than having a perfectly functioning body, isn't good health more a matter of a wholesome attitude toward life? And, by the way, if tombstones told the truth, most of us would wish to be buried at sea.

According to David B. Wolfe in Serving the Ageless Market, if we're going to appeal to folks over 50, we need to have a greater propensity for humor; people tend to "*mellow out*" as they age. Serious subjects can be presented to them in a lighter vein. In gerontology studies, the use of humor noticeably assisted the elderly to be more sociable and physically mobile.

Robert Brody of the Los Angeles Times Syndicate reported that it was in 1896 when radioactivity was discovered and George Burns was born. Comedians do seem to live a long time: George Burns was 100, Chaplin was 88, Groucho went to 87, Red Skelton was 84, Bob Hope also hit 100, Milton Berle went to 93, and Henny Youngman was 92. Johnny Carson got his start writing jokes for Red Skelton. In the end and at 79, he was writing jokes for David Letterman.

Yes, apparently engineered for the long haul, Robert Brody observed that the stand-up comedian--*comicus erectus*--lives longer, on the whole, than most species on our planet. In 1989, Red Skelton, at the age of 76, collapsed during a performance. Milton Berle, then 81, watching from the wings, rushed into the breach with some jokes at the ready. Moments later, Skelton--always the trouper--resumed his routine.

Can a sense of humor prolong life? Can we, through laughter, train ourselves to live longer? Will a joke a day keep illness at bay? Can we, in fact, speculate on the existence of a "*Funny Bone Factor*?" Dr. Fry has written a monograph on "*Mirth and Oxygen Saturation Levels of Peripheral Blood*." He cites growing medical evidence suggesting the simple formula--"*He who laughs, lasts.*"

Dr. Fry also states that laughing evidently lowers levels of hormones called "*catecholamines*." Responsible for arousing high-frequency alertness, these hormones include epinephrins, norepinephrins, and dopamine. He also cites recent studies which show that laughter increases secretions of salivary immunoglobulin (S-IgA). This substance is believed to mobilize our bodily defenses against invasion of infection, especially in the respiratory tract. What a mouthful!

In my own case, when my dad was in his 80's, I inquired, "*What is the meaning of life, Pop?*" "Son," he mused, "*When you're young, your heart governs your head. When you're middle aged, your head governs your heart.*" (What about now, Pop?) "*Your kidneys govern everything.*"

So, do the funny die old? "*We'll never know,*" says Robert Brody. In joking around, a humorist gets to say what he might otherwise never dare to say. He jokes about what's wrong, because he knows that if nothing is wrong, then nothing is funny either. Levity is how he handles gravity. His philosophy in a nutshell: "*You laugh; therefore I am.*"

Take the case of Eldon Merriwether; he lived a long life. Merriwether patented the thermometer; lived to the ripe old age of 98.6 years. It was a very unusual burial--they held him upside down by his feet and shook him to the ground. Unbelievable, isn't it?

Yes, humor can ease tensions in less dramatic, but equally stressful, situations. A minister once said that while conducting a funeral service, he always tries to include in the eulogy the favorite joke of the deceased. I have done so myself. Robert Orben, the Dean of American comedy writers, believes that it serves as the temporary respite from grief and also brings back more memories of happier times.

Either way, "*Wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been,*" said Mark Twain. And I shall never forget the "*Secret to Long Life*" given me by Pop in one of his especially philosophical moods: "*Son, you work like a dog, eat like a horse, think like a fox, play like a rabbit...and, of course, see your veterinarian twice a year.*"

In the meantime, what to do? Eat right, breathe deeply, live uprightly, cultivate serenity, maintain a healthy outlook toward life, make peace with your Creator on His terms, live to be neither ashamed of yesterday nor fearful of tomorrow, and check the

newspaper obituary column each morning. If your name isn't there, give thanks, and have a great day! Incidentally, when asked by a guest what the Tonight Show host, Johnny Carson, would want on his tombstone, the Great One replied, "I'll be right back." My tombstone? I want it to read, "The Nut is Gone--The Shell Remains."

V. Humor and Families-- Don't Leave Home Without It

I told my teenage son one time, "America is a privileged nation." He said, "I disagree." I replied, "That's the privilege!" We were firm with our teenagers: "No, you're not going to that party, and that's semi-final!"

Where's the redemptive value of our lifetime of work and thrift? How do you spell relief? I always tell my audiences that the answer is this: F-A-M-I-L-Y. Family makes it all come alive. Family is the past, present, and future--closest thing to immortality this side of the grave. We need to be the best Dad, Husband, Brother, Son--Mom, Wife, Sister, and Daughter we can be. Give these family members good memories.

If we create a strong, loyal family, bound together and deeply rooted in faith and trust, we can work with purpose. Families take what we've accomplished and build on it. Real families can't be conquered. Families are for growing up in, for going away from, for coming home to. The best Department of Health and Human Services is the family.

Humor can be used to bind together family members by transcending age and gender differentials. Here is a lengthy sample (this is home brew):

I had a rough childhood. We were so poor we couldn't afford to pay attention. We had to chop wood to keep the TV running. We had leftovers on Thanksgiving Day. Mom and Dad crossed December 25th off the calendar and told us we slept through Christmas. To us a "Super Bowl" was any dish with food in it. We'd eat barbecue one day--lick our fingers the next. Had everybody

over together for a family portrait. The photographer said "cheese"--everybody got in line. No, we had food fit for a king--"Here King! Here King!"

I don't have a middle name-- we couldn't afford one. I was so skinny, my P.J.'s only had one stripe. When I was sick, the doctor wouldn't X-ray me; he just held me up to the light. As a toddler, my folks would say, "Walk to grandma!" She lived across the river. They read to me, over and over again, the story of The Little Engine That Couldn't.

I was so ugly that they'd sit me in the corner and feed me with slingshot. Ugly? They took me to railroad station -- train jumped the tracks and took a dirt road. Ugly? They took me to the beach; the tide went out (I know it's hard to imagine), and it never came back in.

I don't know why they named me "Don." Every "Tom-Dick-and-Harry" is named Don. It turned out to be a good move, because that's what everybody's been calling me. I had no personality -- I was a "Poster Boy for the Charisma-Impaired." Bad knees ended my athletic career early--I played marbles. My ball team was the "Possums." We played dead at home and got killed on the road.

I was so unpopular as a kid, my "Invisible Friend" hated my guts. I had no friends--I remember the park and the seesaw--I kept running from one end to other--one end to the other. My folks raised me on Parents' Magazine. They didn't read it. They rolled it up and whacked me on the rear.

Mom used to take me to the beach and let me wander off. The lifeguard would say, "Is this little boy yours?" Mom replied, "Finder's keepers." I remember learning how to swim--Dad threw me in the lake--the other kids were ice skating at the time. To this day, I'm afraid of ice--look what it did to the Titanic. Why mention the Titanic? The Titanic was a "one-liner." OK, let's personalize it. How many of you chew ice cubes? Shouldn't do it--causes hockey pucks in your bladder.

And here is another topic to have fun with (or get killed by): Marriage--the first union to defy management. I tell my students, "Fellas, you should know that man is not really complete until he is married--then he is finished." I tell them--"Women don't look for much in a husband--just a man to spend with, for the rest of their lives."

Sure, two can live as cheaply as one (if you're a schizophrenic). "Fellas, don't worry about marrying a girl who makes biscuits like her Mom--marry one who makes dough like her Dad." And if we have "Equal Rights"--how come diamonds are a girl's best friend and man's best friend is a dog? And what about the "Theory of Relativity?" The more money we have, the more relatives discover our existence.

When I met my wife-to-be--lights flashed, bells rang--She was playing the pinball machine in the arcade. No, actually we met in the L.A. airport. She said, "Are you looking for a me?" I gave her a big hug and kiss--stepped backward said, "No."

Actually, we met in October 1962--at a Halloween Party. She came dressed as a "slinky." I'll never forget the first time I saw her--she was coming down the stairs. No, nothing that glamorous--we met at a Laundromat--attracted by static cling.

I married above myself. People call us the "Great Lakes:" I'm "Erie" and she's "Superior." I love her so much. If she ever left me, I'd go with her. We've been married 41 years. The 25th anniversary is silver, the 50th is gold (the 60th is probably rust). What's the 41st? "Shrapnel," was her reply. She says that I never listen to her (or something like that). Had the flu last winter. The doctor said: "He looks bad." She said, "but he's nice to the kids."

On our way to "Happily Ever After!" Yep, She's had four decades of unspeakable joy. The secret of success? Horse sense (stable thinking): Men--Treat her like a thoroughbred. Ladies--don't be a nag. Never go to bed angry--one night we stayed up for three days! And never argue with your wife when she's tired (or rested). Married by a judge; should have asked for a jury.

We've been watching "Nightline" together. I asked her, "Do you think that the world's problems are caused by ignorance or apathy?" She said, "I don't know, and I don't care." I replied, "No sense of humor is better than none at all" (I should have stopped there, but I went on). "You're beautiful, but stupid," said I. She countered with, "I was made beautiful so you'd want me--and stupid so I'd want you!"

Now that we have family members laughing with each other and about each other, we can thoughtfully communicate:

Kids, we're truly sorry we haven't always been there for you. We've had to work so hard to pave the way for a bright and promising future for you. We owe you that. We'd give our lives for you. We are giving our lives for you. And guess what you owe us? Just one thing--your cheerful cooperation. That's all.

No, parents should not be taken for granted. It is true that the Wright brothers invented the airplane. But it was Mr. and Mrs. Wright who invented Orville and Wilbur. And I tell my students this:

If you are the kind of young people I think you are, you'll take your parents in your arms, tell them you love them, and thank them a thousand times for the start they've given you. Do that, and you'll live long and prosper. However, fail to do that and you will be poor, miserable, and all your babies will be born naked! Now, do you want that?

Of course they didn't. Now, you ask, were there ever times, however brief, that we felt like wringing our kids' necks? Sure. Did we ever return from a car trip and feel the urge to dropkick them through the hedge? You bet. Were there ever times when their ingratitude or procrastination just about sent us around the bend? Oh, yeah.

Did we struggle to gain even primitive two-way communication? Uh-huh. Have we ever wished they wouldn't tell people their last name? Yep. Did we get on a first-name basis with several auto-body shops in town? Without a doubt.

2 However, we decided to take the high road. Listen to the last paragraph of their Senior Letter written just before their high school graduation:

This Senior Letter concludes the same way it began. Please know that you have always been so much fun to be around. We do so look up to you. We are so proud of your tender conscience. You are always teaching us something wonderful. You never cease to amaze us. You are the best -- truly World Class. You'll always be in our "Hall of Fame." You make us so happy and proud -- so much so, that we have one final request -- can we have your autograph.

How will our young people beat the odds when it comes to marriage and family (there is one chance in two of making it)? For starters, long courtships. Do your homework. Study that person. Your future spouse might have weird mood swings when there is a full moon and the hormones are at high tide. How does he bond to other people? Is he honest, hardworking, faithful, even-tempered? Then, after marriage, daily reaffirm your personal values; firmly grasp what is important in life.

Daily consider your family worth preserving and enjoying, and you'll have the power to say "Yes" to them and "No" to anyone or anything else. Then, the person who marries you will be so lucky indeed. So, will your children, your parents and grandparents -- four living generations blessed with one decision!

VI. Humor on the Job -- Taking Ourselves Lightly

If you are like me, and I know I am, there will be times, while still in the car and in the parking lot, you find yourself saying, "*I hate this.*" I have quit 1,000 times, and that was just the first year. Then, I think about Brahms who took seven long years to compose his famous lullaby (he kept falling asleep at the piano).

Do you ever have people who come to your place of work and say, "*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen!*" Isn't it tempting to reply, "*Nobody knows the trouble you are!*" How do you deal with people like that? Tell your troubles; that will keep them from coming back.

We once had a Poetry contest. There were two rules: The poems had to (1) Rhyme and (2) Be Brief. The Winner? "*PAYDAY.*" See, if you're not in debt today, you're underprivileged. Some people talk to their pets or plants. At our house, we talk to our money: "*Leaving so soon?*" It doesn't talk back. "*It just goes without saying.*" Yep, my wife came home from shopping and said, "*I complained because I had no shoes, until I met a lady who had no credit card.*"

I occasionally speak at high school Employer-Employee Recognition banquets. Why do I get invited to speak? It's because I use a lot of "*four-letter words*" like "*work...save...grow...risk.*" I've had several jobs at one time every year since I was 11 years old. I've been in the work force over 50 years.

At this point in their lives, our young people may think that "*work*" is the "*crabgrass*" in the "*lawn of life*" -- the "*fast food*" in the "*banquet of life.*" Truly, if jobs

were really that interesting, we'd all be getting picture post cards from people at work. I remember times as a teenager, that my boss held a "Victory Rally," just to honor me for showing up for work that day. I remember showing up for work, not knowing if I was "in love", or just so excited I couldn't see straight.

I remember the time I told my boss that I had "just gotten engaged to be married." And he said, "Good, then maybe we can get some reasonable production out of you." I said, "I want a raise!" He said, "You wish." I said, "I want a raise or else!" He said, "Or else, what?" I said, "Or else, I'd keep working at the same low pay." My friends, be good to your job, and it will be good to you.

So, can humor at the workplace really help employees to learn, communicate, and develop better working relationships? Yes. Tasteful humor can foster team spirit, coordinate change, build self-esteem, improve productivity, enhance communication, reduce stress, and make the weather perfect every day.

Research has shown that people remember messages sent on the wings of humor much longer than other messages. Relevant humor increases retention of the subject matter. Humor is a superb vehicle with which to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning. Humor builds rapport between managers and employees. When trainees are laughing with us, it's difficult for them not to like us. And if they like us, they are more open to the presentation of our ideas.

Humor becomes a requisite for developing a positive attitude for personnel training in low key, open environments. Eliminate

tenseness, rigidity, fear of failing, and people will be more likely to learn. Their defenses are down, and they are no longer afraid of appearing foolish or dumb. They roll with the punch line.

Yes, comedy is infiltrating the workplace. Managers are increasingly turning to humor to boost employee morale, improve office communication, ease tension with clients and other associates, etc. For example, all of us can learn to avoid confrontation by walking a mile in the other person's shoes. It works every time; by then we are a mile away, and he has no shoes! More and more, according to C.W. Metcalf in *Corporate Health* magazine, having a good business sense means also having a good sense of humor.

"You don't have to be a comic genius to give your career a boost with humor," notes humor consultant Malcolm Kushner, author of *The Light Touch*. *"Ability to see the lighter side of business life can help you demand respect and attention, build morale and create a productive work environment."* Kushner suggests using humor the following ways: to motivate, to manage conflict, to enhance your image, to liven up what you're writing, to make your point.

Joel Goodman, founder and president of the HUMOR Project and also known in the profession as the first full-time humor educator in the country, summarizes it this way in a recent issue of his excellent journal, *Laughing Matters*:

Most workers and managers are far too serious. They look like they're in pain most of the day. We have people who are better trained in the pursuit of excellence, but they don't have any-

where near as much fun. Somewhere they confused professionalism with seriousness; they have put a lid on their natural sense of humor. That is a high price to pay for anyone. Human beings are by nature spontaneous and playful, yet as we grow and become more mature, it is less appropriate for us to allow it to be expressed. Over time, we learn to give the role of making us laugh to the professional comedian. We pay others to provide what we have stifled in our own personalities.

Sure, we all know some people who aren't working, but most of them have jobs. Can a love of mankind and a wholesome sense of good humor promote a better quality of life and make it more productive? Certainly, these two qualities are strong deterrents to stressful job demands. Humor has positive physiological as well as psychological benefits.

Conversely, people who receive little or no gratification from helping others, and who have learned not to laugh at life's ups and downs, will fall more often to stress-related ailments. And how do they handle their jobs? They also cope less well with setbacks at work in their careers, and also in their personal lives.

So, can humor at work help your career? A large majority of corporate vice presidents and personnel directors believe that employees with a zestful sense of humor do a better job, according to Robert Half, of Robert Half International.

Here's the importance of being funny: over 80 percent of human resource officers and vice presidents surveyed said that people with a good sense of humor enjoy greater success than those with little or no humor. Yes, people with a good sense of humor are better liked and, surprisingly, are more likely to be promoted.

A sense of humor can indeed help our careers. In another survey conducted by Burke Marketing Research, 84 percent of corporate executives said that employees with a sense of humor advance faster and farther than more staid types who confuse professionalism with seriousness. Employees with a sense of humor also tend to be more creative, less rigid, and more receptive to new ideas and methods.

Joking at work is now becoming appreciated as more than a pleasant diversion, according to research reported in a recent meeting of the American Psychological Association. Amazingly, the feeling of having fun at work is gauged as more important than overall job satisfaction in contributing to employee effectiveness. It is eminently wise for people who have exaggerated opinions of their status to learn to laugh with others at themselves.

Have you ever noticed how people put up signs as reminders of past decisions? A colleague has a sign on his wall that says: *"TODAY IS THE SECOND DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE--BECAUSE IF YOU EXPECT TO GET RICH IN TEACHING, YOU WERE BORN YESTERDAY."*

Ah, but teaching has the distinction of being the profession that creates all other professions. If we have never stopped to contemplate that, then we have missed something very special indeed.

Every person is the architect of his own fortunes. The ancestry of the "haves" and "have-nots" can surely be traced back to the "dids" and "did-nots." Or, as Archie Bunker would say--"*Let them that don't have nothing have memories of not getting anything.*"

If our graduates will be content to work just half a day, and not care which 12 hours it is, luck will follow them around. It's all luck--ask any failure.

VII. Humor and Commerce -- Jest for Success

I'm supposed to take audiences' minds off their troubles and talk about the economy. Learning economics won't make you a millionaire nor keep you out of the soup line. It will give you a better understanding of how you got there. Sure, deep down I'm an Economist -- a guy who has one foot in oven, the other in freezer and says "*On the average, things are not too bad.*"

On one occasion, I spoke to a very quiet group of company treasurers in Chicago (my kind of town). Later, they told me my applause was in the mail. So polite, they remained seated during a standing ovation. We still have the "*Grossest National Product*" in the world! Never forget this: We enjoy a standard of living beyond the dreams of kings. And owe a great deal of credit, to those who have extended us credit, to whom we owe a great deal.

The business of comedy is no laughing matter. Humor can be found in the funniest places. According to John Naisbitt's *Trend-letter*, a Nielsen survey found that network comedy programs attract 25 million viewers weekly, usually outrating dramas and television movies. Six of the 10 highest-grossing films in the recent year were comedies.

American advertisers -- who generally have been less adventurous than their European counterparts in trying humorous appeals -- are increasingly jumping on the comedy bandwagon. "*Nothing has a longer shelf life than humor -- it never loses its fizz,*" says a Pepsi Cola Co. creative director. Humorous ads are attractive and generate excellent recall.

Does humor hold opportunities for innovative entrepreneurs with trivial offerings? Consider Mike St. Lawrence of Orlando, Fla. He sells an authentic-looking insurance policy that promises \$10 million to any policyholder who can prove he was abducted and returned to earth by aliens. His firm, UFO Abduction and Casualty Insurance Co., has sold more than 6,000 policies so far at \$9.95 each. So far, no one has collected the \$10 million.

Actor John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, finds that there is a pervasive power of humor. *"If a person laughs with you, he likes you better and becomes more open to your ideas. If you can persuade him to laugh at a particular point, he acknowledges its truth. If you can get people to laugh at counterproductive behavior, they will be more likely to behave productively. The man with the best stock of new jokes is not a comedian--but a salesman."*

Henry Kissinger had a reputation for self-deprecating humor followed by dissection of his opponents. It was an attribute his boss, former President Richard Nixon, never fully learned. Many managers who take themselves too seriously can hit the wall early in their careers. Some stuffed shirts may make it to the executive suite, but pompous people usually don't advance, even though they may have good technical skills. Getting ourselves to lighten up is indeed good business.

Britain's Lady Margaret Thatcher, while keynoting Harding University's American Studies Institute Lecture series in 1996 and after observing the replicas of the British flag displayed around the walls of our large campus dining room, remarked to the audience: *"Well, I see the Union Jack prominently displayed here. It makes me*

muse that this were 1776 instead of 1996; if Britain had a female prime minister then, the result would have been far different." In that instant, she captured our hearts.

Business speakers should never lose sight of the fact that humor is a tool--not an end unto itself. It's the appetizer, not the main course. Timing is everything. We stage what Orben calls "*a comedic commando raid*" on our audience by roaring in, securing our objective, declaring victory, and then moving out. Does it always work? No -- hence the label of "*Stealth Humor*." You go in undetected, bomb, and then depart unnoticed. No problem; when they don't laugh, just pretend you were serious.

Amil Jarjano, President of Ally and Jarjano Advertising, says, "*Humor should not be an end itself. We have learned that humorous advertisements must grow out of the product or service. If you can create with humor an atmosphere where people feel good about your company and its product, then it will go a long way towards shaping attitudes.*"

Why have so many opinion leaders embraced humor? Because it transcends partisanship. Put it all together as does Robert Orben, the writer for many presidents, and it's quite a splendid feast:

Humor enhances and projects a favorable image, eases tensions, influences thinking, improves attitudes, helps reassert control, reduces the embarrassment of mistakes and awkward moments, serves as a useful teaching tool, is a potent and hard-to-defend-against weapon and usually conveys goodwill.

What could be more important than helping our listeners to bond, develop a sense of community, feel better about them-

selves, their company, and their country, too? It has been said that bologna has many uses. Sliced, it's used in sandwiches. Diced, it's used in salads. Printed, it's used in annual reports. Here is Orben's classic example:

"Mr. Chairman," asked the pesky stockholder at the annual meeting, "How much did AT&T give to charity?" "Ten million dollars last year," answered the chairman. The woman said mockingly, "I think I'm going to faint." The chairman replied, "That would be very helpful." Laughter and applause erupted from the audience. Control was back with the speaker.

Resourceful opinion leaders plan on salting and peppering their speeches with appropriate humor that grabs audiences. The professional speaker never leaves home without it. Yes, we can mix business and pleasure, as humor truly is a business asset.

Robert Orben, now retired, delights in telling about Louis Armstrong, the great jazz and blues trumpet player, who had inked an exclusive multi-year contract with a major recording company. One day a recording company executive thought he heard, perish the thought, Armstrong's strong and distinctive horn on another record label.

Corporate executives called the talented musician in for a meeting and laid out their accusation. Perhaps his finest hour, Louis Armstrong then proved himself to be, what Orben calls, "a master of comedic reconciliation." Armstrong said, "I didn't do it--and I'll never do it again." Both sides had leveled with each other, says Orben, but laughter defused the moment and permitted the relationship to continue.

SUMMARY--

Getting Down to Funny Business

Has there been a dearth of mirth on the earth? Yes; however, it doesn't need to continue. Humor washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. There we have it. Humor is to the mind as sunshine and fresh vegetables are to the body. It's good to laugh at ourselves; we'll live longer. I've always said that the richest person in the world is the one who...has the most money. Jest kidding.

So, when was the last time you had a good, hearty belly laugh? Well, that's too long. Consider the boom in the comedy clubs, going from 15 to over 300 in the past decade (their oft-tawdry brand of humor notwithstanding).

Humor is an all-season solution to our woes. It lightens human burdens, and makes the weather perfect every day. In the process, we'll take our work seriously and ourselves lightly. Laughing at bad days can help ward off mental decay. So, humor is jest what the doctor ordered.

In the Winter, when the thermometer is registering a low opinion of the weather, humor can apply a glowing warmth to the frostbite of life. In the Spring, when we all respond to the call of the open pothole, humor helps us get more smileage out of life.

In the good ole Summertime, we can apply a good dose of humor as a lotion on the sunburn of life. Every Fall survival kit of life should include a sense of humor. It's a tonic for the mind and body--the best antidote for anxiety and depression.

Seize the day. But, remember--despite all your accomplishments in life, the size of your funeral will be determined by the weather. If it is cold and rainy, don't look for me. In the meantime, whether on the job or at home, don't hold that laughter inside; it goes to your hips. Ok, don't blame me.

Epilogue: Humor as the Great Ones See It

"Humor affirms our humanity." -- Milton Friedman, Nobel economist.

"You grow up the day you have your first real laugh (at yourself)." -- Ethel Barrymore

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people." -- Victor Borge

"Wherever humor goes, there goes civilization." -- Erma Bombeck

"If you don't learn to laugh at trouble, you won't have anything to laugh at when you're old." -- Ed Howe

"Laughter is the most inexpensive and effective wonder drug. Laughter is the universal medicine." -- Bertrand Russell

"An emotional person may possess no humor, but a humorous person usually has deep pockets of emotion." -- Constance Roarke

"Wit is the clash and reconciliation of incongruities, the meaning of extremes around the corner." -- Leigh Hunt

"When a thing is funny, search for the hidden truth." -- George Bernard Shaw

"Most of the time I don't have much fun. The rest of the time I don't have any fun at all."
-- Woody Allen

"To make mistakes is human; to stumble is common place; to be able to laugh at yourself is maturity." -- William Arthur Ward

"The smile is the universal symbol for accepting others." -- Susan Isaacs

"Comedians will tell the world how important it is to laugh. Because when you laugh, you can't hate." -- Michael Pritchard

"Laughter in our home is its heart beating. Laughter leads us, kneads us, and sometimes helps bleed us of torments and woes." -- Bob Talbert

"Without a sense of humor, life doesn't make much sense." -- Robert Percy

"True humor springs not more from the head than from the heart. It is not contempt; its essence is love. It issues not in laughter, but in smiles which lie far deeper." -- Thomas Carlisle

"Comedy is the most serious state in the world. The vast situations--the funniest will be an exaggeration of an action in real life which was not at all funny in itself."--Charlie Chaplin

"People are endowed with a sense of humor as an anecdote to alleviate the incongruities of life." -- Steve Gioia

"A good laugh is like manure to a farmer -- it doesn't do any good until you spread it around." -- Michael Prichard

"Good humor is a philosophical state of mind. It seems to say to nature that we take her no more seriously than she does us." -- M. Dale Baughman

"A good pun is its own reword." -- International Save the Pun Foundation

"If someone complains that punning is the lowest form of humor, you can tell them that poetry is verse." -- Bob Davis

"Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air and you." -- Langston Hughes

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference -- and a sense of humor when I don't know the difference." -- Joel Goodman adding to Reinhold Neibuhr

"What I do is make people laugh so they'll see things seriously." -- William K. Zinsser

"You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in anything -- even poverty -- you can survive it." -- Bill Cosby

"Humor is the catharsis through which society purges its demons." -- Clifton Jolley

"The richest laugh is at no one's expense." -- Linda Loving

"Laughter is God's hand on the shoulder of a troubled world." -- Bettenel Hunzicker

"Do not take life seriously; you will never get out of it alive." -- Elbert Hubbard

"Nobody can teach you humor writing. The secret is passed on from one generation to another; and I'll not tell mine, except to my son." -- Art Buchwald

"Humorists are serious; they are the only people who are." -- Mark VanDoren

"Those who object to wit are envious of it." -- William Hazlitt

"It takes all sorts of indoor and outdoor schooling to get adapted to my kind of foolings." -- Robert Frost

"Any man who has had the job I've had and didn't have a sense of humor wouldn't still be here." -- Harry Truman

Appendix: Humorous Speech Titles Worth Their Wit in Gold

- (1) "The Peaks and Valiums of Our Lives" ...
- (2) "Life is in Session -- Are You Present?" ...
- (3) "Money Can Make You Rich" ...
- (4) "As Goes America, So Goes The Country" ...
- (5) "How to Try in Business Without Really Succeeding" ...
- (6) "You Too Can Overcome Peace of Mind" ...
- (7) "How to Convert Your Family Room into a Garage" ...
- (8) "Very Small Business Opportunities for Underachievers" ...
- (9) "You Can't Tell by the Honk of the Horn How Much Gas Is in the Tank" ...
- (10) "Tax Shelters for the Indigent" ...
- (11) "You Can't Have Your Bread and Loaf, Too" ...
- (12) "Show Me a Confederate Bugler and I'll Show You a Rebel Rouser" ...
- (13) "How to Be a College Professor and Talk in Other People's Sleep" ...
- (14) "Are you Drinking from the Fountain of Knowledge or Just Gargling a Little?" ...
- (15) "How to Stop Blowing Opportunities Right Under Your Nose" ...
- (16) "Bad Knees Ended My Athletic Career -- I Played Marbles" ...
- (17) "How to Start With Nothing and Still Have Most of It Left" ...
- (18) "Nothing Lasts Forever -- Except Maybe Elvis" ...
- (19) "Avenge Yourself -- Live Long Enough to Be a Problem to Your Children" ...
- (20) "You Can Paint a Buzzard Yellow, But That Doesn't Make It a Canary" ...
- (21) "How to Find a Husband to Spend With for the Rest of Your Life" ...
- (22) "Two Can Live as Cheaply as One -- If You're a Schizophrenic" ...
- (23) "If Life Is a Vacation, Are You the Last Resort?" ...
- (24) "How to Have People Worship the Quicksand You Stand On" ...
- (25) "How to Be a Regular Rock of Jello" ...
- (26) "How to Start Out as a Poor Slob and Not Let Success Change You" ...
- (27) "When You Get to Greener Pastures, Will You Be Able to Climb the Fence?" ...
- (28) "How to Postpone a Recession Until

Times Get Better" ... (29) "Why We Still Have the Grossest National Product in the World" ... (30) "If Tombstones Told the Truth, Most of Us Would Wish to be Buried at Sea" ... (31) "I'm OK -- You've Got Cooties" ... (32) "Man -- the Only Creature that Can Laugh, Except the Hyena (and He's Serious About It)" ... (33) "Did Your Answering Service Tell You it Was None of Your Business?" ... (34) "Feel Like You're Starting Off on the Wrong Foot and You're a Centipede?" ... (35) "Did Your Ship Come in While You Were at the Airport?" ... (36) "If Your Parents Didn't Have Children, You Probably Won't Either" ... (37) "Dealing With Post-Self-Realization Depression" ... (38) "Never Argue With Your Wife When She's Tired (or Rested)" ... (39) "Using Burnout to Get Sympathy" ... (40) "Clear-Cut Cases of Ambiguity and Important Trivia" ... (41) "How Viewing the Past and the Future Can Make You Wall-Eyed" ... (42) "Do Expressway Exits Turn You Off?" ... (43) "People Call Us the Great Lakes -- I'm Erie and My Wife Is Superior" ... (44) "How to Overcome Self-Doubt through Pretense and Ostentation" ... (45) "How to Make \$100 in Real Estate" ... (46) "The Joys of Hypochondria" ... (47) "Show Me a Kid Who Doesn't Believe in Santa, and I'll Show You a Rebel Without a Claus" ... (48) "You're Somebody 'Til Nobody Loves You" ... (49) "How to Whine Your Way to Alienation" ... (50) "Advice -- How to Ignore It and Prosper"

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In 2000, Diffine was inducted into the Samuel Moore Walton Free Enterprise Hall of Fame. He received the "Champion of Enterprise" award in 1995 from the Students In Free Enterprise Hall of Fame in Kansas City. The First Annual Distinguished Scholar Award was also presented in 1988 to Dr. Diffine in Cleveland, Ohio, by the Association of Private Enterprise Education.

Dr. Diffine's wife, Dion, is from Kailua, Hawaii. She is a math teacher in the Searcy public schools. The Diffines have two children: David, a family practice physician; and Danielle, a senior financial analyst.

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