

Putting the Ha! In Aha: Humor as a Communication Tool

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Abstract

Speakers, trainers, and leaders are challenged with delivering important messages aimed at informing, persuading, and influencing audiences; audiences that are already overwhelmed with information, daunted by problems, or stuck in old patterns of attitudes and behaviors. Until recently, humor has been viewed as something that merely makes us feel good and distracts us from our daily drudgeries. Positive psychology offers empirical data that show that humor is a serious tool that creates connection between people, enhances charisma of communicators, engages attention, enhances memory, leverages people's willingness to shift attitudes and behaviors, and increases the resilience of communicators and their audiences. Humor does all of this, not despite the fact that it is enjoyable, but in large part, because it is enjoyable. Most research has used pre-produced humor (cartoons, stories, and videos), showing that communicators need not be producers of humor themselves, but can leverage the power of pre-produced humor to engage and delight audiences. This capstone includes a business plan for the creation of humorous video vignettes that can be utilized by the author, as well as other communicators, to bring speeches and trainings to life and make a message shtick.

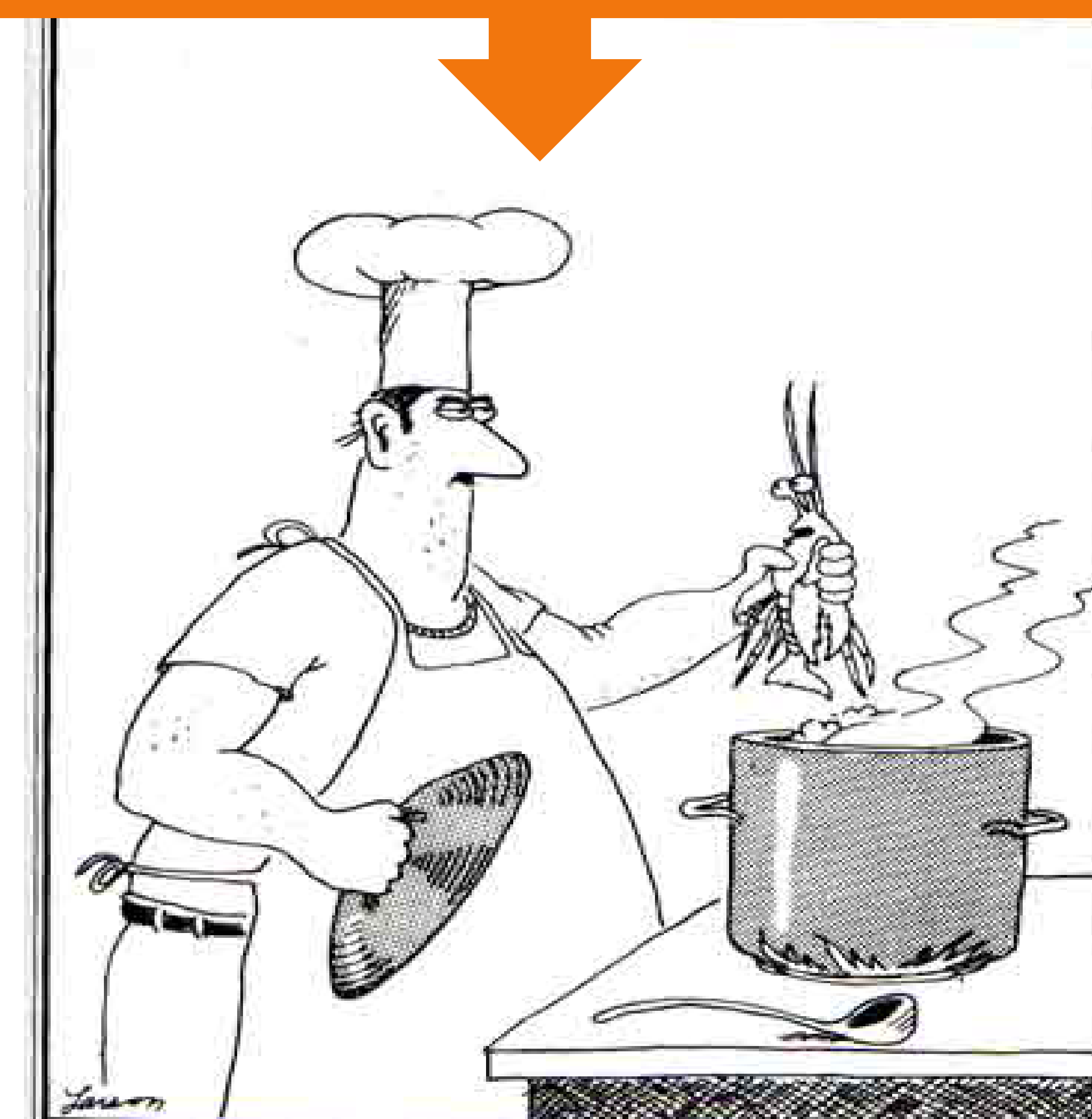
Communicators Who Add the Element of Humor:

- **CONNECT** with their audience by increasing mindfulness (Langer, 2005)
- **ENGAGE** attention by engaging the brain in complex cognitive processes (Weems, 2014)
- **ENHANCE** audience memory of information, both humorous and non-humorous (Schmidt, 2002)
- **CHALLENGE** audience perceptions, assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors in a way that is pleasurable and easier to accept
- **BUFFER** themselves from everyday stressors and increases their resilience by acting as an emotion-focused coping tool (Lefcourt, 2005)

Top 5 Reasons You Should Try to Become Funnier

5. Humor acts as a mild pain reliever to the body. (*Watch your favorite comedy and call me in the morning.*)
4. Humor is a mature defense mechanism. (*Like, totally...ya know?*)
3. Humor interventions increase positive emotions and decrease negative emotions for up to three months. (*Nothing funny about good science.*)
2. You'll be able to laugh instead of cry to relieve stress. (*Or laugh until you cry; great ab workout*)
1. You may survive a zombie bite. (*Humor strengthens the immune system.*)

Experiments designed to increase humor production often call for creating a caption for a cartoon. What caption would YOU give this cartoon?



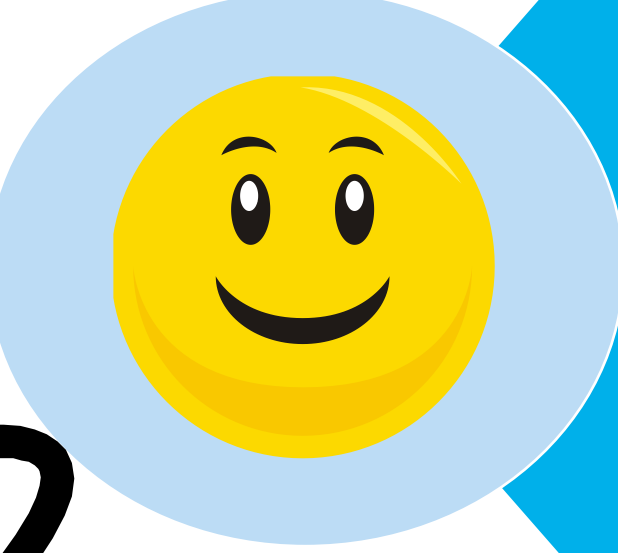


Humor Styles and Well-Being

	Benevolence	Hostility
Enhances Relationship	Affiliative (humor that seeks to create connection among people)	Aggressive (humor at the expense of another)
Enhances Self	Self-enhancing (humor to help cope with life's ups and downs)	Self-defeating (humor at the expense of one's self)

Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the humor styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*(1), 48-75.

Effective Humor for Speakers, Trainers and Leaders is...

-  **Brief**
Humor should add to the message, not distract or detract.
-  **Relevant**
Humor should be relevant to the message to enhance attention and memory.
-  **Affiliative**
Self-effacing humor (a type of affiliative humor) may work best to increase connection by lessening the perceived social gaps between the communicator and audience.



Learn more about Flip the Switch Productions

For questions, comments, suggestions, or details on production of humorous videos for trainings and speeches, contact Brandy Reece at breece_13@yahoo.com