

SENSE OF HUMOR

Humor is a social lubricant. It gives us something to share and creates bonds of appreciation. We are automatically endeared to people who make us laugh.

Successful people take their commitments seriously, but seldom take themselves or life too seriously. Above all, they have the ability to laugh at themselves. People appreciate those who can see the humorous side of any situation.

Humor should be appropriate, however, if it is going to be effective. Keep the following suggestions in mind:

Keep it in good taste. Know your audience and the type of material that they will appreciate. Some people are more inhibited than others. Use discretion and respect their standards of good taste.

Don't go overboard. If you are making someone laugh, do not assume that being "on a roll" justifies going on indefinitely. If their body language indicates that it is time to get back to work, then get back to work! People appreciate digressions as long as they are short and sweet. You do not want to be known as "that clown who doesn't know when to stop."

Humor is not just telling old jokes. If you rehash jokes that have been circulating for years, you will be regarded as a jerk rather than a person with a great sense of humor. The best humor consists of original, spontaneous comments that flow with the conversation or the ideas being discussed.

Look for humor in everyday life. This is the best way to improve your sense of humor. Some people believe that a sense of the comic is a God-given talent, but it can be cultivated. There are numerous opportunities for you to increase your repertoire of humorous anecdotes and comments. If you make an awkward mistake, remember: Don't take yourself too seriously.

The television star Lucille Ball is a perfect example of someone who learned to take her tasks seriously but not herself seriously. Ball was given the opportunity to audition for the part of Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*. In the middle of this serious dramatic reading, she dropped the entire script on the floor. As she kneeled down to pick it up, she tried to continue reading. She was so nervous that she continued to read right from the floor, picking up the papers as she went. The Director was shrewd enough to realize that although she was wrong for the role, she was a talented comedienne who had the ability to laugh at herself but take her tasks seriously. He ended up giving her first big break.

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"Conversation never sits easier than when we now and then discharge ourselves in a symphony of laughter, which may not improperly be called the chorus of conversation," according to the eighteenth-century essayist Sir Richard Steele.

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