



## **Keep Your Funny Side Up - Discover The Humor Perspective**

By Steve Wilson

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Here's a sobering prediction I came across not too long ago: 52% of American executives will die of stress-related illnesses. As a psychologist I know that a good deal of the emotional tension and stress experiences by those executives will not be caused by the events in their lives. Rather, the stress will be caused by their perceptions of those events. It is not what is happening to us that hurts as so much as what we think about what is happening to us.

### **Good News/ Bad News**

How would you react if you received notice that the Post Office was trying to deliver an unexpected Certified letter to you? If you thought it was bad news, you would react with trembling, butterflies or knots in your stomach, increased heart-rate and blood pressure, perspiration; in other words, worry and stress. But imagine the letter will tell you that you have inherited a fortune and that all your troubles are over; no knots, no trembling, no skyrocketing blood pressure, no worry, no stress. You might even giggle. It all depends on what you think is going to happen, and you can control your thoughts.

Look at all sides of a situation and you will eventually come to the side that is absurd, ludicrous, zany, or ironic. Find the laughable side of a situation and you will reduce the emotional tension, which is part of your stress. Humor provides an emotional distancing with which your perspective changes by allowing you to step back and take a second (or third) look at things; trouble don't seem as large, and you can see more of the resources to help solve the problem. Alan Cohen encourages us, commenting that "laughter lifts us over high ridges and lights up dark valleys in a way that makes life look so much better."

There is always another way to look at things. There is more than one way to skin a cat. Life is a balance of opposites. Yin and Yang; the Ecclesiastical "time for all things": planting and harvesting, coming and going, crying and laughing. When you look at the proverbial glass of water, do you see one that is half full or one that is half empty? Personally, I see a glass that is twice as large as it needs to be - yet another way of looking at it!

So, one excellent way to handle emotional tension or stress, especially in the “lighter” stages - the minor irritations - is to look not just at both sides, but at all sides of the situation, and looking for the humorous side while you’re at it.

### **Grace Under Pressure**

You can also help yourself by having that A-Number-One all-important special sense of humor: the ability to laugh at yourself. According to psychologist Harvey Mindess, Ph.D., “Though we make fun of ourselves for being stupid or lazy or klutzy, by laughing at those flaws, what we are really saying is that we’re lovable nonetheless.” Develop your sense of humor and you will find it easier to see all sides of a situation and all sides of all sides of that situation as well.

Can you do it? Can you see your own shortcomings as funny foibles rather than fearsome failings? Can you take yourself lightly when the crunch comes? If so, you will certainly handle problems better, keeping your blood pressure at healthier levels. And there are bonuses such as winning the admiration of your co-workers for your ability to quell panic, get the job done, and not be disturbed by disappointment or discouragement. Lily Tomlin wryly and rightly observes, “The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat!”

Cultivate the ability to see the lighter side to everyday life and you won’t feel defeated nearly as often. Take the joke on yourself in a good-natured way and it will be impossible for others to make jokes about you. If you don’t feel very creative in this regard, just look around for examples from others who are able to adopt this attitude. Try to learn from them, but, at least, borrow from them. I know of a secretary who, when she drops the telephone (who hasn’t?), retrieves it and tells the caller, “Oh, you must be on candid telephone today.” She doesn’t get flustered or embarrassed or make excuses. She stays in control of the situation, maintains her poise and dignity, and gets the job done, probably winning the respect of the caller, too.

### **Who Are You Laughing At?**

You might try your hand at making up fun descriptions as one way of coping with the tougher parts of your work. Here is a job definition which might help teachers have a good healthy laugh at themselves: “A teacher is a person who can drink three cups of coffee before eight o’clock in the morning and hold them till three o’clock in the afternoon!” (Of course, teachers have a lot of class!) One nurse says that sometimes she thinks “R.N.” stands for “Real Nut.” (And we all know that nurses call the shots!)

Shakespeare created a play on words which compares a shoemaker to a clergyman, “A cobbler is a mender of men’s soles (souls).” Paul Harvey has fun with bumper stickers which he calls “bumper snickers.” Many of them are job related: “Plumbers go with the flow!” “Electricians want your shorts!” “Bakers roll in the dough!” And, “Doctors need a lot of patients!” What is your job like? Can you think of a phrase that will put it into a humorous and healthier perspective?

We have choices about how we look at the things that happen to us. Reader’s Digest compiled some questions that show that common annoyances can seem less irritating once you find an uncommon way of looking at them. Here are a few examples:

“Where else but in Washington, D.C. would they call the department that’s in charge of everything outdoors the Department of the Interior?”

“Why is it called baby-sitting when all you do is run after them?”

“Why are income taxes due April 15, the same day the Titanic went down?”

“How come the windshield wiper always works better on the passenger side?”

And the Los Angeles Times Syndicate poses this metaphorical question, “Do you ever feel that life is a car wash and you’re going through it on a bicycle?”

### **My Sense Of Humor?**

I realize that not everything is funny and that laughter can be completely out of place if the timing is wrong. But, the next time life’s little foul-ups are getting to me, I’m going to see if I can find the comic’s perspective and use my wittiness to outwit the dimwits and the nitwits and ... RELAX. You can do it, too!

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