

Lights...Camera...HUMOR!

A Comedy Secret for a Professional Presentation

By Darren LaCroix

There you are sitting and watching someone else's presentation, and they are getting laughs. It looks easy, so you ask yourself, "How can I do that?"

What do some presenters know that others do not? Secrets from the comedy world! When you see a comedian on TV what you see looks easy, what you don't see is all of the work it took to look easy. They probably performed that same five minute routine for seven nights in a row at two comedy shows per night. Never mind the years of experience as well. Don't beat yourself up!

The other advantage is they know comedy principles. Since I started in stand-up comedy back in 1992, this was the biggest eye-opener. There are actually comedy writing exercises that comedians use. This was huge for me because I was not naturally funny, but I was willing to do my homework in order to learn to get the laughs.

Are you ready for a simple one that you can use in your next presentation? We all need to be a "student of humor." I'm still learning myself.

Fellow students of humor, stand up and make 'em laugh! I say "fellow students" because through teaching others and making techniques and concepts graspable I, too, gain more clarity. I'm still on my own ever-changing path of humor mastery.

Many of you have heard me speak in person. One of the favorite things that I like to teach is the **Rule of Three** - with a humor twist. (Just one of the ideas from The Humor Boot Camp

www.humorbootcamp.com) Some of you may be aware that in professional presentations a “list of three” is often used to illustrate examples. For instance, in my observations about happiness, I talk about the excuses we all make. We would be happier IF: “If I just had a little more money....If I just had a little more time....If the kids were just a little older.”

Three illustrations are optimum because two may not give full clarity or allow the audience to recognize themselves. Four items seems to belabor the point. Unless it is an unusually difficult concept to grasp, no one likes it when people over explain.

This concept works very well with the setup/punch format. And anyone can develop the technique. The *setup* “creates an expectation.” The *punch line* “changes that expectation.” We can use the Rule of Three to develop a pattern. Establishing the pattern then allows for us to break the pattern and get a laugh!

I was giving a humor workshop in Sarasota and so I scheduled an appearance at a comedy club in town that same night. Some of the attendees mentioned that they were coming to the show. I decided to challenge myself and create a local joke based on the Rule of Three so they could see it “in action.” My friend Elizabeth, one of the attendees, worked through the process with me. Here is how I started the show....

“I’m excited to be visiting Sarasota. My friends were delighted to show me the local wildlife. They took me to see the dolphins at Miaka, the alligators at Sonata Island, and the drivers on Route 41.”

Notice the pattern.

AB AB AB (a pattern needs to be created in order to “change the expectation.”)

A: Location

B: Animal

Notice, too, that the “wildlife” gets progressively wilder. That is why I started with dolphins rather than alligators.

You are creating a pattern... A pattern creates an expectation... An expectation is a setup for a nice “humor twist.”

Setup: Creating an expectation

Punch line: Changing that expectation

But how is the idea created? What is the process?

Humor often stems from tragedy. I started by asking about some of the common local complaints. One thing that screamed out from the top of the “pet peeve” list was the drivers. (You usually don’t have to look too far!)

The local drivers were going to be my punch line. So now I went back and looked at how I could “hide” the punch line and “setup” the joke. Noticing that there were many vacationers in Sarasota, the idea of vacations seemed like a logical way to hide the punch line.

A great example from a student of humor

While recently speaking in Montreal, John Gupta, DTM Past District Governor of a Toastmasters group in Montreal, was in attendance. As he introduced me, he used the Rule of Three that I had taught him at a previous conference. He actually put an added twist on it. I have asked his permission to share his humor.

“When people find out that I’m an Indian, people think I practice Yoga, I meditate, and I’m poor..... (pause). The third one is correct!

He used a 1,2,3... then bang formula. It was very funny! What John did was use an unfortunate stereotype to his advantage. At the same time, he loosened up the audience, showed that he takes himself lightly, and set a creative tone for his presentation. The magic was he did all of that in just 23 words. Brilliant! I loved seeing someone use what I teach. It works, yet most people will not even attempt it.

The greatest benefit to his creation is that he can use it whenever he speaks to an audience. A little effort goes a long way. John can use this bit for many years to come. It is a nice “ice breaker.”

What can you do?