

LESSONS FROM LEGENDARY LAUGHMAKERS By Larry Wilde

Motivational Humorist Larry Wilde is a former standup comedian and the author of 53 published books of humor. His Great Comedians Talk About Comedy contains interviews with 17 world-renowned comedic entertainers including Woody Allen, Jack Benny, Johnny Carson, George Carlin, Phyllis Diller, Bob Hope, and Jerry Seinfeld.

Recently, we asked Larry what these famous funny people had to say about the attributes necessary to achieve success. This is what he told us:

“This book started out as an undertaking to help me become a better comedy performer, to improve my understanding of the mechanics and craft of making people laugh. It very soon became a priceless textbook for developing and perfecting better ‘people skills.’

“I learned a lot of lessons from the great comedians. In addition to having the talent to make people laugh, I discovered they had many other impressive attributes like perseverance, a penchant for meticulous preparation, a pleasing personality as well as a scholarly understanding of human nature.

“Here are views expressed by some of the comedy superstars.”

JOHNNY CARSON: “...the most important thing to me, in comedy — the greatest thing a performer can have if he or she is going to be successful, is an empathy with the audience. They have to like the person.”

WOODY ALLEN’S view on achieving success is that “ it isn’t the jokes.... it’s the individual himself. It’s the funny character emergence that does it.”

PHYLLIS DILLER: ...”Believing in yourself is imperative. Every doubt you have weakens you. You have to be able to face humiliating failure. You have to have great stamina. Success takes years of work and experience and training. When it looks easy you're looking at art.

JACK BENNY pointed out that evoking laughter was not enough. “There has to be something more than just getting laughs. Laughs are not everything. To become real successful the people must like you very much.”

JERRY SEINFELD had this to say: ”You have to analyze every aspect of how you communicate and think about how you can improve it. You have to figure out who you are and express it well and that’s hard to do.”

BOB HOPE stressed the importance of study and getting lots of work. “You’ve got to find out what’s best for you to do — you can only do that by experimenting. Applying different techniques.”

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The great French entertainer MAURICE CHEVALIER explained that the comedian’s rapport with the audience depends ‘on the quality of the laugh!’ He indicated that “a laugh coming out of a warm, human situation is more meaningful and longer lasting than the harsh, quick response that comes from embarrassment or shock.’

Aside from God-given talent, successful laughmakers possess countless character traits in common: they are highly intelligent, have a mastery of their craft, endless enthusiasm, enormous energy, and phenomenal self-awareness.

They also agree unanimously that making an audience laugh is the singularly most difficult quest of all the creative arts.

In a London, England hospital, Edmund Keene, the renowned British actor, lay on his deathbed. A close friend and colleague clasped his hand and said, “Edmund, how does it feel being so close to taking your final curtain call?”

“Dying is easy,” replied the famed thespian. “Comedy is hard.”

A painful lesson, I subsequently had to learn throughout my career.

“Since becoming a motivational humorist, I now realize that many of these highly regarded standards of excellence are just as critical to achieving lasting success in the speaking profession.”

Larry's actual conversations with the “Great Comedians” can be heard on LAUGH.COM CD's.