Harnessing Humor for Humanitarian Work

by Pablo Suarez, Ph.D.
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1. Stand Up, Find a Partner  (& back-to-back)

2. Collaborative Game

Partners ‘Match’?  ➔  Shout “YES!”
Words we associate with ‘Humor’
“Brad, we’ve got to talk.”
How much Humor in Risk events?

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How much Humor in Risk events?

IT: [nice laughter]
P: ‘May I ask what is humorous?’
IT: ‘A powerpoint just started in room 17’
P: … [?] IT: ‘We can see a peak in wifi usage 😊’

http://unfccc.int/meetings/items/2654.php/2860txt.txt.php
Addressing Climate Darkness:
- Humanitarian Workers
- People at Risk
- Researchers
- Journalists
- Youth
“What I Hate”, by Roz Chast
“Mr Gandhi do you think you are properly dressed to meet the King?”

“Do not worry about my clothes. The King has enough clothes on for both of us”
“It is often necessary to laugh in order to survive.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in conversation with WFMT’s Studs Terkel
in Zambezi River Floodplain
Humor Engenders Trust.

Change Happens at the Speed of Trust
Humor Makes
the Strange Familiar
And the Familiar Strange
Participatory Humor

Does Help

Laughter = shortest distance
between people and ideas

“Audiences who laugh with you quickly come to like you. And if people like you, they’re much readier to take seriously what you have to say.” (The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking)
FUNES—FLOOD PREDICTION

TOGO

RAINFALL

DAM INFLOW

PREDICTION

Rainy season begins, rain on dry soil
Reservoir full, flooding occurs

Day 0
Day 1
Day 2
Day 3
Day 4

Inflow
Outflow
Water Level

Day 0
Day 1
Day 2
Day 3
Day 4
Humor Awakens

Appetite for Learning

“Raccontami!”
What is “Humor”?
Aristotle: “Superiority”

Plato

Pascal: “Incongruity”

Freud: “Relief”

The Humor Code

A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny

Peter McGraw and Joel Warner

Veach: “N+V”
“Love Yourself. Love Your Audience. Find the System Funny”
The Emergence of Humor Enables Breakthroughs in collective learning & dialogue
World Bank Event on Govt Accountability
World Bank Event on Govt Accountability

Why do we continue to repeat mistakes in public policy even in the era of evidence generation/use?

Context matters (What does 'void' do if none of you do it?)

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD 
AND INTO THE STREET

Try honking again.

Honking? Language issue

Agency in times of existential anxiety - feel impotence

I'm raising the issue - you can find the solution
Task: Cartoon Connections

1. See cartoons
2. Form trios
3. Discuss Connections [Vision. Action. Hope.]
“No, Thursday’s out. How about never—is never good for you?”
"You will make the same foolish mistakes you have made before, not only once but many, many times again."
Stakeholders: I love it!

Users: Me too!
“That can’t be good.”
"Escher! Get your ass up here."
1. See cartoons
2. Form trios
3. Discuss Connections

[Vision. Action. Hope.]
Words that Bob M. associates w/ ‘Humor’
Why HUMOR for RISKS

AHA!

HaHa

Huh?
Rethinking ‘Vision. Action. Hope.’

“Yes, and...!”

“Yes, but...”

“No!”
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