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Oak or Pine?

I love the holidays, but the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is so busy I often forget to enjoy it. The week following Thanksgiving is usually filled with regular speaking engagements, then I try booking the next two weeks with The Baby Boomer Comedy Shows, so I am intentionally unavailable to do holiday parties. Even though theatre shows are less lucrative, I find holiday parties stressful.

Holiday parties include all the ingredients for disaster.

- They are usually held in the evening when people are tired.
- The audience is often drinking and, contrary to popular opinion, alcohol does not enhance comedy. It dulls people's thinking so they don't get punch lines quickly, upsetting my timing.

- Too often dishes are being cleared from tables, or, even worse, people are still eating. People cannot laugh with food in their mouth. In fact, it can be dangerous.

All of these contribute to people not laughing. Tim Allen of *Home Improvement* says doing comedy in front of people who don't laugh is like being in front of a bad firing squad. They don't quite kill you. They just leave you standing there.

Once in Chicago, just after being introduced, a dessert cart the size of an SUV pulled directly in front of me. The waiters spent the next fifteen minutes walking back and forth from tables to this cart, blocking the audience's view. I can only presume this is why they hated me.

Another catastrophe was performed in the round because the restaurant did not have a stage. I am in the middle of the room and, even though I am spinning in circles like a top to keep everyone involved, this group was more interested in their chicken dinner than anything I had to say. Finally, a guy breaks the silence by yelling, "I don't know what's wrong with you people, this is funny." Now there is tension between the one

guy who thinks I'm funny and everyone else who is organizing a firing squad.

My partner in The Baby Boomer Comedy Show, Jan McInnis, and I were bemoaning the disastrous holiday shows we've experienced when it dawned on me I am doing the same thing with holiday parties I encourage others not to do with stressful events in their life.

William James, the father of American psychology stated, "Thinking is the grand originator of our experiences." Richard Carlson, author of the *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* books, points out in his book, *You Can Be Happy No Matter What* that before we experience any feeling, we've had thoughts that precede those feelings. If you feel happy today it is because you've had happy thoughts preceding those feelings of happiness. I stress about performing at a holiday party because I have stressful thoughts about it. The important thing to remember is the thoughts you have about stressful situations are no more important than any other thoughts. Negative thoughts do not mean you have to experience negative feelings.

Of course, I doubt Richard Carlson

ever had to perform from behind a dessert cart.

I have to remind myself of this every time I go to the hardware store. Although Tim Allen and I share a distaste of silent audiences, the similarities stop there, due to my complete ignorance when it comes to home repair. I don't know how to do anything around the house, plus I have no motivation to learn because my wife, Twyla, can do anything; plumbing, carpentry, electrical work. She's like Bob Vila without the beard.

When Twyla does a project, my responsibilities are to cook, stop asking stupid questions, and go to the hardware store for supplies because I don't know if you've noticed, but the hardware store guys treat every man walking in there like he knows what he is talking about and every woman walking in like she doesn't. The problem is I have no idea what I'm talking about.

Twyla sends me to buy staples for her staple gun. I have a number for the size, but there are 30,000

kinds of staples at Lowes, not one of them M5613. So I buy a new staple gun with staples in it. I said I'm ignorant, not stupid.

And I could do without Twyla's sarcasm. When I hand her the second staple gun, she says, "I'm glad you know how to pump gas, I'd hate to buy a new car every 400 miles.

She sends me for lumber. The entire drive there I'm rehearsing, "I need five number one, two-by-fours, eight feet long, five number one, two-by-fours, eight feet long."

Filled with confidence, I walk directly to the lumber section telling the lumber boy, "Hey, son, I need five number one, two-by-fours, eight feet long."

I nail it (no pun intended).

The kid asks, "Oak or pine?"

I'm thinking, "Come on Kent, you've watched *Trading Spaces*, you can do this."

I say, "Well we're working in the attic, what would you suggest?"

He goes, "Well, that depends, are you working on the joists?"

"What? Hold on a minute, I'm going to call my ... contractor."

Turning away, I call Twyla, "Honey, you want oak or pine?--- Pine?---Hey, when the buzzer goes off, take the meatloaf out of the oven."

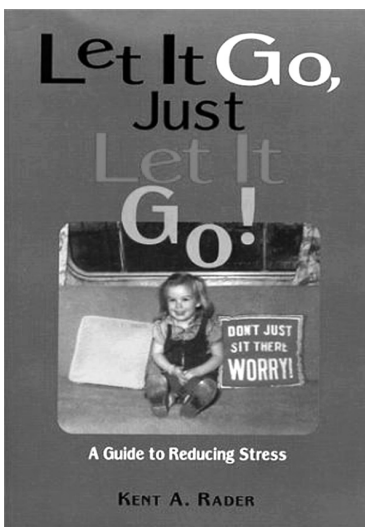
Turning to lumber boy I say, "We'll take pine."

He asks, "You called your wife? Well, don't feel bad. Last month some woman returned a staple gun because her husband is too stupid to buy staples."



I wish you continued success in 2011 and should you be looking for a quality, clean comedian for your next holiday party, please call Jan McInnis at 800-492-9394. Always remember the words of Gilda Radner, "Laughter matters."

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*Known as the world's cleanest comedian and speaker, Kent Rader helps people learn and experience how laughter matters in reducing stress. A reformed accountant, Kent has written the stress reduction book titled **Let It Go, Just Let It Go** available at Amazon.com and featured in the Country Inns and Suites Read It And Return Program in 200 hotels. Kent and Jan McInnis are performing *The Baby Boomer Comedy Show* in theaters throughout the country. (www.babyboomercomedyshow.com) One audience member observed, "You are a wonderful reminder that our human nature provides unlimited opportunities to laugh, share, and defuse the stresses of our lives in a way that is neither offensive nor exclusionary". For information or a free DVD, please contact Kent at 405-209-3273 or email kent@kentraderspeaks.com.*



Jan McInnis

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The Funny Side of Serious

What's almost as bad as performing comedy at a holiday party for intoxicated people? Well, twice I've been introduced after they've read off the names of the people in the association from the past year who had DIED! That's right, I have been on the agenda in some whacky (read: serious) situations in which I have to then turn the tables and make 'em laugh.

At one of those eulogy events, they did a very solemn ceremony in which they lit a candle for each person who had passed on. . . and then it was my turn! I looked around the room, noticed some unlit candles and said, "I see we have some extra candles. I think some of you all weren't supposed to be here this year. Did anyone get a funny look at registration? Bob. . . is that you?" It got a huge laugh and people were able to move on and get into my program. Whew!

The times when you think you can't laugh are usually the times when you NEED to laugh the most. I can't think of many subjects that don't lend themselves to at least some sort of humor, and thankfully so, because humor in tough situations gives you a mental break and allows you to focus on something else. If you watch any comedian on TV or in a comedy club, you'll hear them talk about all the really horrible stuff in life: death, divorce, drugs, dieting. And the reason 99% of comics are talking about it is because they've experienced it firsthand; we comedians have just found a way to make the sad situations funny.

I haven't seen Aron Ralston's *127 Hours*—a movie based on a true story in which Ralston was trapped under a boulder in Canyonlands National Park and had to cut off his arm to free himself— but I did get a chance to work with him. His story is amazing, but despite the gravity of his situation, he still joked about it, and I had some fun as well. I got the chance to follow him on stage by saying "I was feeling bad for Aron. . . until he told us that during the ordeal, he lost

5 POUNDS A DAY. That's so cool!" While there's nothing funny about losing a hand, losing weight is always fair game!

A friend of mine saw a Denzel Washington movie in which he had to GAIN 40 pounds for the role. She said "I don't know if I'd gain weight, even for a million dollars. Would you?" I said, "Well, why not? I'm doing it for free now!"

In addition to getting you to re-focus in a serious situation, humor also convinces people to listen to your serious information! Take airline safety instructions – nobody listens to them, unless you're flying on Southwest Airlines! The flight attendants joke about one of the most serious topics on the planet. My favorite one comes after the safety spiel, when they say "To those of you who listened to our safety instructions, thank you. And to those of you who didn't. . . good luck!"

Southwest has realized what a lot of other companies haven't: that communicating isn't just about telling people important information, because it doesn't matter what you say if nobody

listens. I see speakers giving great information all the time—people talking about big, important stuff, like health care reform and how it affects you. Yet the audience members are checking their blackberries, dozing off and/or stepping out to make calls. Humor grabs people's attention, and keeps them listening to you so that your message is heard and remembered.

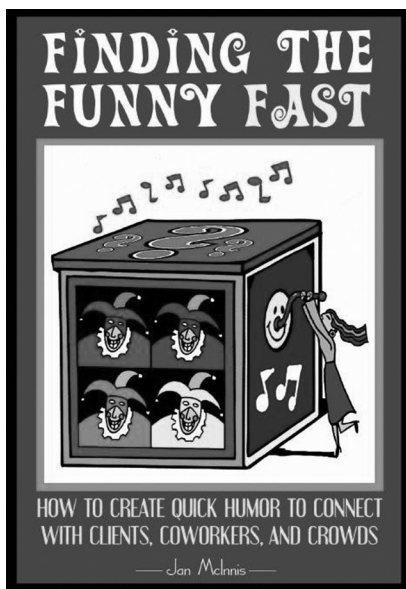
And it's not just serious speeches that need a little humor. I'm a fan of the Animal Planet show *I Shouldn't Be Alive*

about people taking exotic vacations in remote areas, and then, SHOCKER, they almost die. It should be called "*I shouldn't have done that.*" Many times the survivors talk about using humor to help get themselves through the situation. Even some of the Chilean coal miners, who spent over two months trapped in a mine, came out laughing. One guy even handed out rocks as souvenirs!

Humor has helped me and my family through all sorts of serious situations. We used it a

lot when my sister was in the hospital. I've figured out their system in the emergency room: the person who is bleeding gets to the top of the list. My sister wasn't bleeding. . . AT FIRST. After ten hours of waiting, I said, "Debbie, I've got to cut you!"

So don't shy away the next time you're faced with a serious subject in a business situation. . . address it with some humor and keep everyone in the room interested and engaged!



*Jan McInnis is a comedian, professional speaker, and comedy writer who has shared her customized humor keynotes "Finding the Funny in Communications," "Finding the Funny in Change" and "Cubicle Comedy" with thousands of associations and corporations. She is also the author of "Finding the Funny FAST," and she was featured in the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post for her clean humor. Jan and Kent Rader are performing *The Baby Boomer Comedy Show* in theaters around the country (www.babyboomercomedyshow.com). From the executive director at a health care association: "Thank you again for providing the keynote address (*Finding the Funny in Communications*) at our annual convention. You worked hard to make sure that you understood our audience before the event and it showed. Your sense of humor and remarks were on target with our members – many commented to me that they could really relate to your stories. Your keynote was the perfect kickoff our 60th anniversary convention. Let me know if you need any references for future events – I am happy to recommend you to any group."*

Jan can be reached at Jan@TheWorkLady.com or 1-800-492-9394.

COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU...

The **BABY BOOMER COMEDY SHOW** is a hilarious 90-minute laugh-fest, with clean humor on topics that the "boomer generation" can relate to - family, kids, work, do-it-yourself projects, dieting, aging and all.

Fellow baby boomers and veteran comedians **JAN MCINNIS** and **KENT RADER** have joined their talents together in this unique show that's packed full of funny along with many "ah ha" moments for everyone!

Jan and Kent have a combined 30 years experience performing for theaters, corporations and associations throughout the country - they've been a hit at thousands of conventions and professional events.

www.BabyBoomerComedyShow.com