

Humor is the affectionate communication of insight. ~ Leo Rosten

We don't have time to have fun.
~Anonymous nurse



Adding Humor: What's the Value?

“Hello Deb. We are planning a high content meeting and were told you do a wonderful job setting everyone at ease and adding levity. We would like participants to leave the event feeling good about having attended, and also excited about returning again next year. Can you help?”

What a complete pleasure it is to answer that question! And the good news: I am asked this very type of question more and more frequently. This is a *big change* after spending more than a decade explaining the benefits of humor and encouraging meeting planners to take such a risk. (Translation: Begging people to hire me!)

In my experience, nurses have been an especially hard sell when it comes to adding levity to educational programming. Time and time again I have been told that humor and fun are considered “fluff”, and certainly no substitute for clinical information. “Even if we had the time,” meeting planners confided, “how would we quantify measurable outcomes?”

Because I am a nurse myself, I know how much there is to learn and how little time there can be to squeeze in continuing education. I also know that when I am completely stressed and feeling overwhelmed, I do not learn nor retain information very well. Applying what I do absorb seems impossible when my spirits are low.

Because I've been an instructor and have had the responsibility of choosing speakers myself, I know how risky it can be to try anything out of the norm. I've seen first hand how a marginal chicken breast entrée can tank an entire set of conference evaluations. Bringing in a humorist who also does music is twice as scary!

Anecdotally, it has always been clear: meeting attendees sincerely appreciate even a small chance to simply sit back and laugh. They need time relax and recharge. But how do we justify prioritizing laughter?

I was determined to find empirical data supporting the value of infusing learning with humor and laughter. More good news! There are plenty of studies and the body of research is growing faster than ever before.

Here are just a few of the many ways adding humor to your next event has been shown to add significant take home value.

- Humor reduces stress, anxiety, and tension*
- Humor quickly establishes a rapport, solidifies a group, builds camaraderie and sets a warm, approachable tone that fosters group interaction. This is particularly helpful when an event involves colleagues from other departments or other parts of the country.
- Humor increases self-esteem and promotes a sense of empowerment
- "Lightening Up" improves creativity and enhances problem solving. We react with fewer options when we are stressed. We see greater possibility when we are having fun.
- Laughter improves alertness and attention. Why not sprinkle fun throughout the day to counteract monotony and lethargy?
- Humor is a persuasive and effective form of communicating. A successful negotiator almost always subtly weaves in humor. This is particularly useful when there is resistance to the many mergers and changes in delivery of healthcare
- Humor enhances memory and retention by fostering attention, retention, and retrieval. This means attendees learn more and apply more of what they learn. Ultimately, isn't that the goal for all of us?

The shortest distance between two people is a smile.



* For articles and resources visit the website of John's Hopkins University professor, Ronald E. Berk, PhD. www.mirthium.com

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