

# HUMOR, SERIOUSLY WORKBOOK

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## Introduction

Humor is serious business.

In fact, research shows that it's one of the most powerful tools we have in work and life, making us appear more competent and confident, strengthening relationships, unlocking creativity, and boosting our resilience during difficult times. Top executives are in on the secret: 98 percent prefer employees with a sense of humor, and 84 percent believe these employees do better work.

While most people understand humor's power pretty intuitively, when it comes to actually harnessing it with intention, few know how. As a result, humor is vastly underleveraged in most workplaces today.

Which, of course, is why we're all here. To put the power of humor to work and help you – your teams, communities, and organizations – create cultures where fun and joy can thrive.

The purpose of this workbook is to channel the most powerful, practical applications of humor gleaned from years of research with top executives, comedians, and academics. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to use these activities (and the levity within them) to bring more productivity, clarity, and joy into your life.

Because as President Eisenhower once said, "A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."

If Dwight David Eisenhower – the second least naturally funny president ever after Franklin Pierce, thought humor was necessary to win wars, build highways, and warn against the military-industrial complex, then you might consider learning it too.

Seriously.

Now let's get to work.

# *Humor, Seriously Workbook*

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## CHAPTER 1

# *The Humor Cliff*

**“Humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.”**

*— Mark Twain*

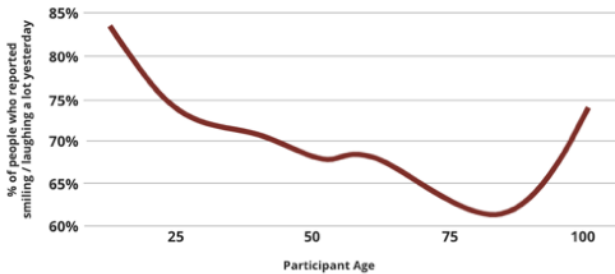
## Chapter Overview

We, people of this workbook, have lost our sense of humor.

We're all going over the Humor Cliff together, tumbling down into the abyss below along with at least 1.4 million survey respondents in 166 countries:

### Global Humor Cliff

(Gallup data 2013, n = 1.4 million)



In short, we got to work and stop laughing.

This is a travesty. Because the reality is, when we refuse to take ourselves so seriously, we relieve the stress standing in the way of serious work. We defuse tension, create more meaningful connections with colleagues, and open our minds to more innovative solutions.

This workbook is your guide to climbing back up the humor cliff.

In the following activities you'll reflect on your unique sense of humor, become more aware of where you find humor in your life, practice shifting moments from transactional and heavy to authentic and light, and feel (physiologically) the power of living on the precipice of a smile.

While these may seem like small steps, they are foundational building blocks of the following activities. Without further ado, let's get climbing.

# Key Concepts

- Right around the time we enter the workforce, we stop laughing, and we don't start again until we retire. This is the result of a **fundamental misunderstanding that humor has no place amid serious work.**
- In fact, humor is one of the most powerful - and most underutilized - tools in the workplace today. And it's one that **we all secretly possess.**
- After we surveyed more than seven hundred people across a wide range of industries and levels about what holds them back from using humor at work, four deadly humor myths emerged:
  - **The Serious Business Myth:** that humor simply has no place amid serious work. That using humor at work will make people take us less seriously.
  - **The Failure Myth:** people a deep, paralyzing fear that their humor will fail.
  - **The Born with it Myth:** that humor is an innate ability
  - **The Being Funny Myth:** to use humor and levity in the workplace, you have to "be funny."
- There are four primary humor styles – the **Magnet**, the **Sniper**, the **Stand-Up**, and the **Sweetheart** – and understanding your unique humor style will allow you to wield it with precision.
- The differences in levity, humor and comedy are similar to the distinctions in movement, exercise and sport.
  - **Levity is a mindset** – an inherent state of receptiveness to (and active seeking of) joy.
  - Humor is more intentional. **Humor channels levity** – just as exercise channels movement – **toward a specific goal.**
  - **Comedy is the practice of humor as a structured discipline.**

# Discussion Prompts

- When was the last time you really laughed? Describe the event with as much detail as possible: who were you with? Where? When?
- In general, who or what makes you laugh most in your life?
- When was the last time you made someone else laugh? Describe the event with as much detail as possible: who were you with? Where? When?
- Who do you feel the funniest around -- who appreciates your humor?
- Think of the humor you embody with friends and family. List at least three beliefs that prevent you from bringing that same levity to work.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Activities

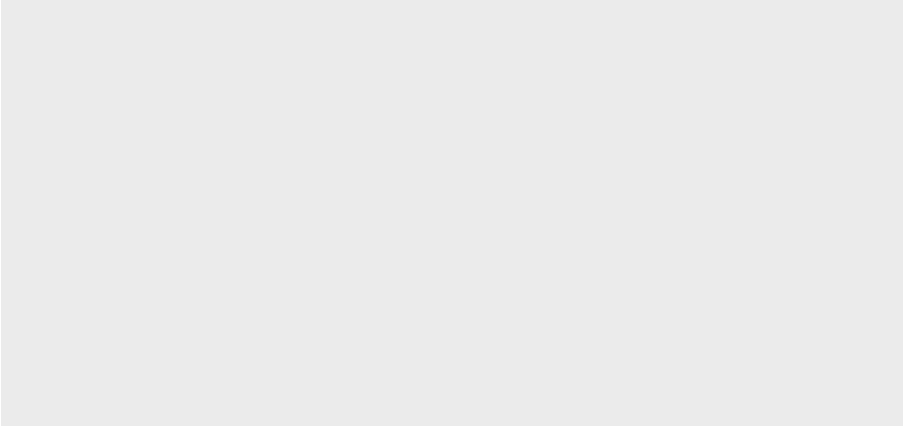
### TYOLOGY EXERCISE

Read through the descriptions below. **Which one best describes your natural humor style?** (PRO TIP: If you're having trouble, send these to a few friends and see what style they say you are!)

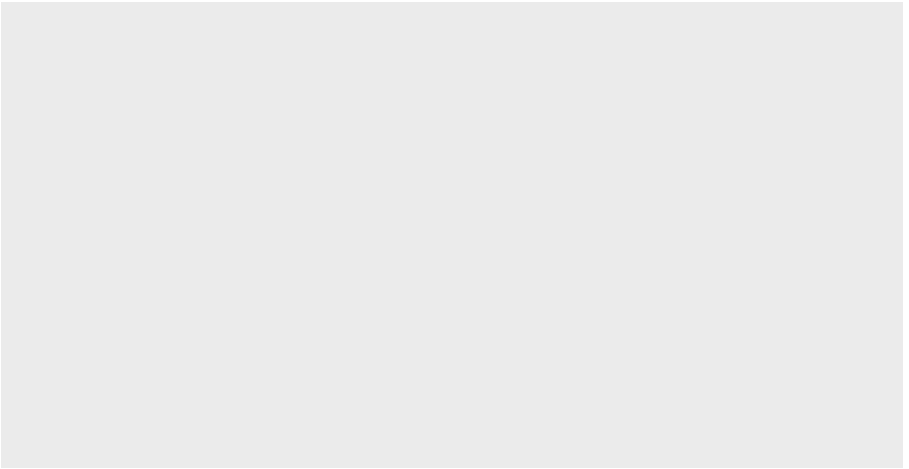
- **THE STAND-UP** – Stand-Ups are natural entertainers who aren't afraid to ruffle feathers to get a laugh. They come alive in front of crowds – cracking jokes in group situations, and volunteering to break the ice at company karaoke night. Stand-Ups don't shy away from cursing, dark humor, pranks, or jokes that might offend. They can take it just as well as they dish it out, and in fact, see being the butt of a joke as a sign of affection. If the world is your stage and you don't mind sacrificing some dignity (or other people's feelings) to get a laugh, you might fall into this style. (Think: Eddie Murphy, Ilana Glazer, Wanda Sykes)
- **THE SWEETHEART** – Sweethearts are earnest, honest, and often fly under the radar. They aren't interested in the limelight and prefer to plan out their attempts at humor – a laugh line carefully woven into a speech or presentation, as opposed to a joke told on the fly. They're reluctant to hurt feelings and tend to keep their comedy PG – using humor as a tool to uplift those around them. If prefer not to be the center of attention, writing someone a funny email over joking around with them in-person, and have an optimistic bent to your humor, you may fall into this style. (Think: Tig Notaro, David Sedaris, Demetri Martin)
- **THE MAGNET** – Magnets have an ability to boost people's moods with unwavering good cheer. They keep things positive, warm, and uplifting, avoiding controversial or upsetting humor while radiating charisma. Their delivery tends to be animated and sometimes even slapstick – they readily slip into impersonations and characters. They are the ones who break during the delivery of a goofy joke because it's just too damn funny. They might do improv comedy (or have been told they should) and give great toasts at weddings (equally heartfelt and hilarious). If you come home from parties with your cheeks sore from smiling, you may fall into this category. (Think: Ellen DeGeneres, Jimmy Fallon, Conan O'Brien)
- **THE SNIPER** – Snipers aren't afraid to cross lines in pursuit of a laugh. But unlike the expressive Stand-Ups, Snipers tend to do so under their breath or in writing. They often describe their own humor – which leans sarcastic, edgy, and sometimes quite dark – as an "acquired taste" (one that not everyone will acquire). They prefer to watch from the sidelines before making their move, giving them time to silently craft their next zinger. Don't expect them to laugh easily; in general, you need to earn the Sniper's laughter, which makes it even sweeter when you get it. If you have a way of delivering a deadly one-liner with a perfectly deadpan delivery you may fall into this category. (Think: Bill Burr, Michelle Wolf, Daniel Tosh)



**Your highest score indicates your most natural humor style. How does this humor style resonate / not resonate with your own understanding of your humor?**



**How does your humor style differ at work versus in social settings?**

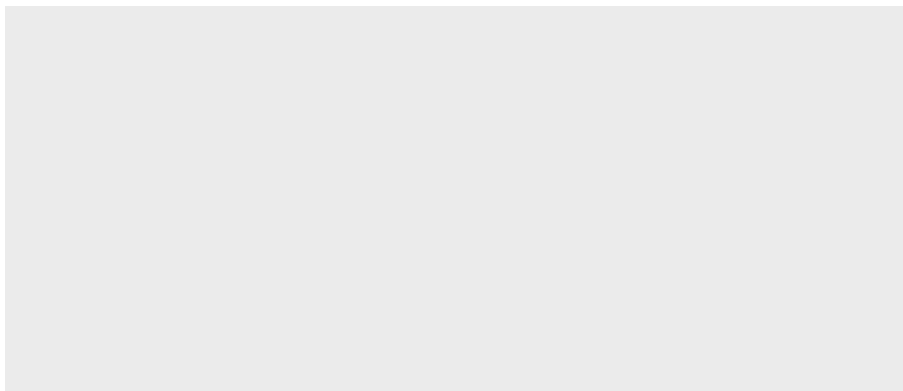


## HUMOR ANTHROPOLOGIST

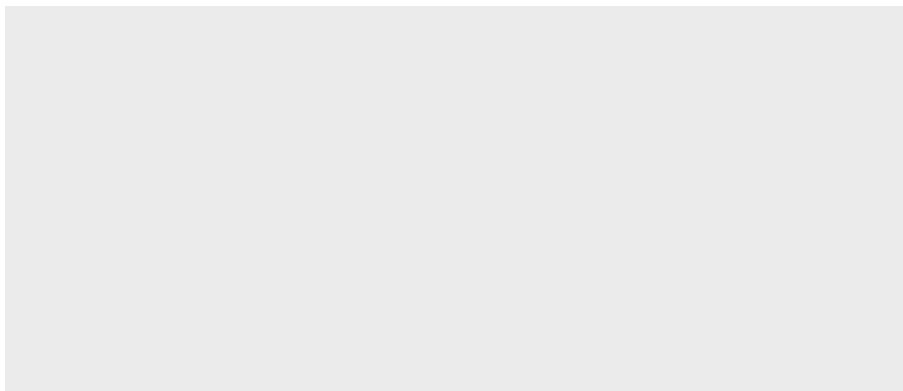
In the book, you completed the Humor Audit activity to spark self-awareness about various aspects of your unique sense of humor. Building off that activity, for Humor Anthropologist, you will record moments when someone made you laugh and moments when you made someone else laugh. You've got this!

**In each box, jot down at least one moment when (a) someone made you laugh and (b) you made someone else laugh. Write down: who it was, what was the laughline, critical pause, body language or expression, or physical prop that created laughter? What was the impact on you and other(s)?**

### Moments when someone MADE YOU LAUGH.



### Moments when you MADE SOMEONE ELSE LAUGH.



## FIND YOUR APPLE MOMENT

In the book, we shared with you how this journey started for us: with a two-day summit at the Second City in Chicago. At the end of that summit, the two of us bade adieu to our collaborators / fellow performers, and parted ways at O'Hare Airport.

As Naomi walked to her gate, the most unexceptional thing happened.

She tried to buy an apple from an airport bodega.

As she approached the woman behind the register, she asked if the apples stacked in a gorgeous, waxy pyramid display were for sale. To which the woman looked Naomi up and down and curtly replied: "If you want one, get in line." So Naomi got in line, and watched as the cashier continued snapping at one customer after another. Impatient. Terse. Tarter than the Gala apples stacked before her.

When it was Naomi's turn, she could simply have said, "I'll have an apple." But after her weeklong full-body immersion in the world of comedy, she saw an opportunity to introduce a spark of levity into the interaction.

"Can I please have your favorite apple?" she said with a smile.

The woman paused, confused. "My favorite?"

"Yes. Your absolute favorite."

Then, a smirk. On a dime, everything shifted. The woman began digging through the pile of apples, laughing at first to herself and then with Naomi as they meticulously inspected each. When Naomi went to pay, the woman replied, still smiling, "Don't worry about it. I don't charge for my favorite apple."

We hope you'll think about bringing humor into big, important moments, but also the little ones in between. Whether you're pitching an idea to your team or buying fruit from an airport bodega – a hint of levity has the power to transform an interaction, forge a connection, and signal that you see the other person.

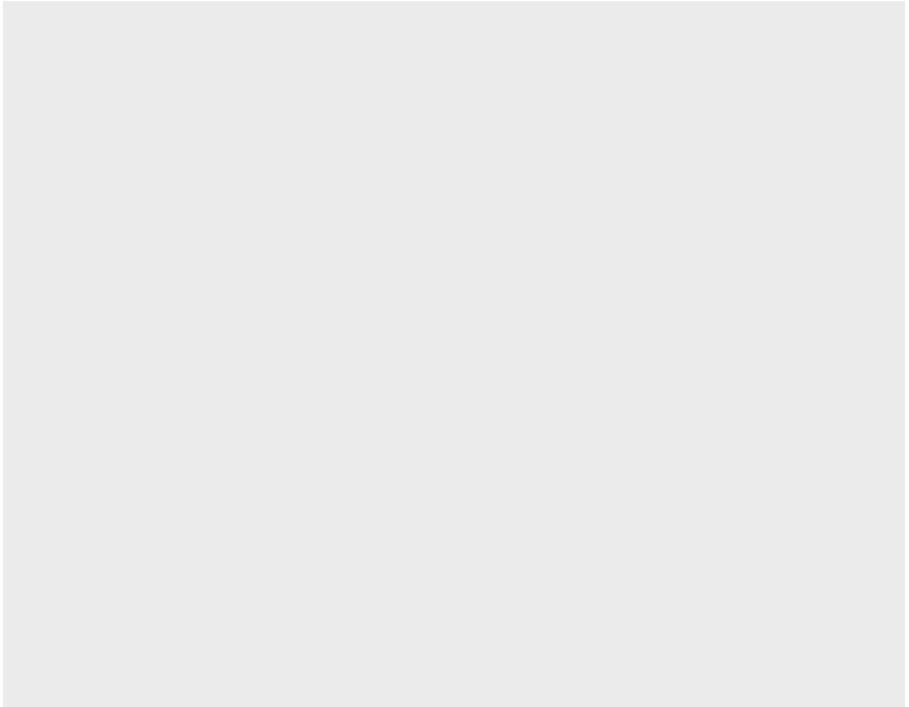
By doing this, we can shift the way we look at the world—and the way it looks back at us. It's time to start creating you own apple moments. You've got this.

We believe in you.

\*\*\*

Create your own apple moments today and tomorrow. For each moment: Pick someone. Anyone. A friend, a family member, a stranger, a group. Then all you need to do: throw some levity into an otherwise transactional exchange in a surprising way. Sign off an email to your tax accountant with a funny P.S. Check in with a loved one and make them smile. Put an uplifting sign in your window that people can see when they walk by. **Create as many apple moments as you can. Write them down here – just a short sentence or title of your apple moment story.**

**Write down at least one apple moment but go for as many as you can!**



## CHAPTER 2

# *This is Your Brain on Humor*

**“Humor is by far the most significant activity  
of the human brain.”**

*— Edward de Bono*

## Chapter Overview

Let's talk cocktails. Sort of.

When we laugh, our brains release a cocktail of hormones that make us feel happier (dopamine), more trusting (oxytocin), less stressed (lowered cortisol), and even slightly euphoric (endorphins). By working humor into our professional interactions, we can serve our colleagues this powerful hormone cocktail, and in doing so we can literally change their—and our—brain chemistry on the spot.

While humor's influence stretches far and wide, there's a wealth of behavioral research linking the use of humor in business to increasing:

- *Power*, by enhancing others' perceptions of our status and intelligence, influencing their behavior and decision making, and making our ideas more memorable.
- *Bonds*, by quickening the path to trust and self-disclosure in new relationships, and making us feel more satisfied with our relationships over time.
- *Creativity*, by helping us see connections we previously missed, and making us feel psychologically safe enough to share our risky or unconventional ideas.
- *Resilience*, by reducing stress in the moment, allowing us to bounce back more quickly from setbacks.

Mark Twain is said to have observed, "The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter." By understanding exactly how this secret weapon alters our brain chemistry, psychology, and behavior, we can become more adept at wielding it strategically.

In the following activities, you'll dive into exercises that illuminate the science of humor – and in particular, how it can boost power, bonds, creativity, and resilience.

# Key Concepts

- Humor makes us **appear smarter and more confident, helps us create more meaningful connections, and opens our minds** to more innovative solutions. According to science.
- Shared laughter doesn't just create closeness in the moment. It's equally effective at **strengthening relationships over time.**

# Discussion Prompts

Humor is a superpower that can be used to increase power, bonds, creativity, and resilience. List below one in your life person who...

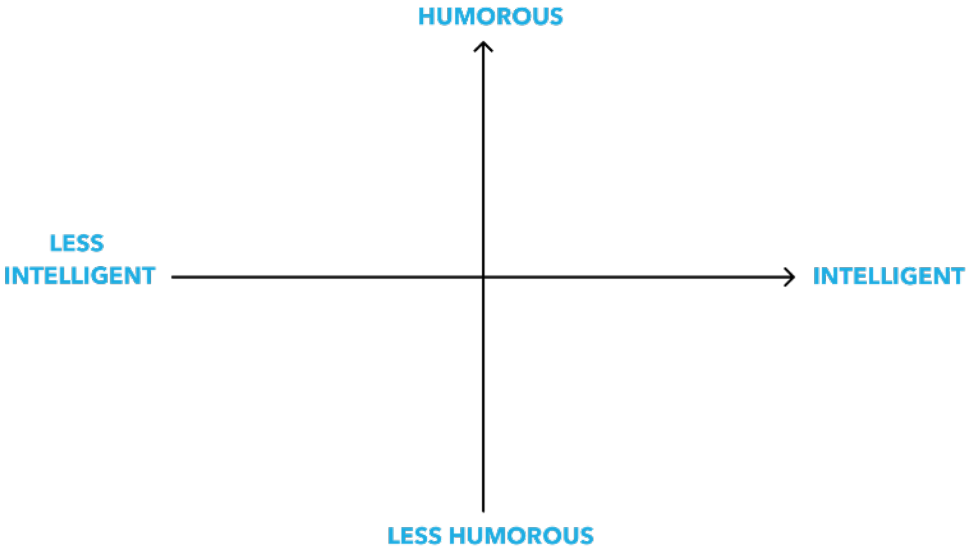
- ...uses humor **signal power** and strength in front of colleagues, friends and family  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ...uses humor to **strengthen bonds** with colleagues, friends and family  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ...uses humor to **navigate and endure difficult experiences**  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ...uses humor to **stimulate creativity**, both in themselves and in the people around them  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Activities

## LOOKING SMART

One’s levity prowess—both the ability to generate humor and the ability to appreciate it—correlates directly with measures of intelligence. Let’s bring this concept to life in your own experience.

**Below, plot the funniest people in your life on the following 2x2. Does humor correlate with intelligence? Who are the outliers, and why do you think they’re pierced that way?**



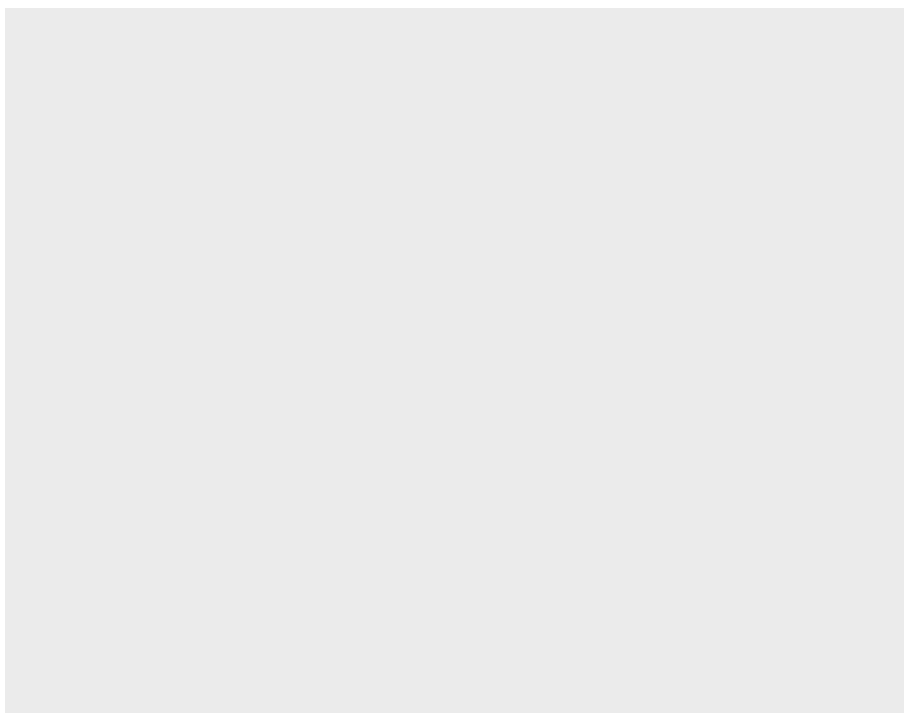


## FACIAL FEEDBACK

Smiling and laughter has been proven to release a powerful cocktail of euphoric chemicals in our brain. This activity allows us to experience the power of a smile first hand.

Pick any activity that you regularly do throughout the week that doesn't require you to speak (e.g. reading the newspaper, cleaning the kitchen, responding to emails). **Do the activity exactly as you normally would, except do it while holding a pencil in your mouth (horizontally!) so it forces your lips up in the shape of a smile for at least 5 minutes.**

**How did holding the pencil in your mouth (and therefore, forcing a smile!) impact your mood compared to other times you've done this activity?**



## CHAPTER 3

# *The Anatomy of Funny*

**"Comedy is simply a funny way  
of being serious."**

*— Pete Ustinov*

## Chapter Overview

Comedians are superhuman beings who can produce a steady stream of content that is funny, timely, and artfully crafted to tackle some of the most sensitive and socially charged issues of the moment.

Their mastery is a combination of raw comedic athleticism and years of hard work: performing in dimly lit improv theatres, sharpening their material on unforgiving audiences at open mic nights, and writing sketch upon sketch that might never see the light of day.

As we've learned from the hundreds of comedians and writers we've studied and worked with over the years, comedy is an art, but it's also a well-honed craft—with common techniques that show up across comedians and formats.

In the following tip sheets, you'll find a quick summary of those techniques. Not so you can quit your job to become the next Dave Chappelle, but to help you understand the basic principles of how humor works so that you can better appreciate it, craft it, and bring more of it in your everyday life.

In the activities that follow, you'll start playing with these techniques: first watching comedy to see them in action, and then mining your own life and crafting your observations into comedy, and finally, delivering a comedian's content with your own unique flair.

Grab a mic (and a cocktail if you're feeling frisky) and let's go!

## Key Concepts

- **Truth lies at the heart of all humor:** instead of asking yourself what is funny, start by asking what is true.
- **All humor contains surprise and misdirection:** when we think someone will zig, and instead they ham sandwich.
- To craft humor, 1) Find the funny (mine your life for truth), 2) Form the funny, 3) Delivery the funny.

## Discussion Prompts

- Reflect on what type of professional comedy most consistently makes you laugh. Perhaps it's a sitcom, a certain stand-up performer, a reality show, or watching improv live. What is it about this format that you love?
- Many of the comedian techniques you just read are things you're probably already doing. Which techniques do you tend to lean on most consistently? Which ones are surprising?

## Tip Sheets

### HOW TO FIND THE FUNNY

(credits: Sarah Cooper)

Find the funny -- Mine your life for truth.

1. **Create humor out of the assumptions that other people make about you.** Ask them to fill in the blank: "If I'm being honest, you seem like the kind of person who \_\_\_\_\_."
2. **Incongruity | Notice incongruities and contrasts within your own life.** E.g. look for differences between how you behave and how other people behave. Or try this angle on incongruity: If aliens suddenly landed on Earth, what would they find objectively illogical?
3. **Emotion | Notice what you feel.** Ask yourself: What makes me happier than it objectively should? What frustrates me more than it seems to frustrate other people? What do I absolutely loathe, for no good reason?
4. **Opinion | Notice what you think.** Consider starting with norms or widely accepted behaviors that you think are appalling or absurd. Think about things that make you say I will never understand why \_\_\_\_\_ is the norm.
5. **Pain | Notice what makes you hurt or makes you cringe.** Next time you find yourself in a miserable—or miserably awkward—situation, take solace in the fact that eventually it'll make for a great story.
6. **Delight | Notice what makes you smile.** By being on the lookout for things that make you smile, we're primed for something, we are more likely to find it, faster and more often.

## HOW TO USE COMEDY WRITING TECHNIQUES

Form the funny – Most jokes follow the fundamental structure of **setup + punchline**. The setup is the observation or truth, and the punchline is what surprises audiences by flipping expectations (i.e. misdirection).

1. **Exaggerate.** Humor often plays with scale and magnitude. Hyperbole and exaggeration can be fantastic sources of misdirection and contrast.
2. **Create contrast.** Areas of contradiction in your life such as ways you've changed over time, inconsistency you notice in the world, and inconsistency in how people behave.
3. **Use specifics.** Specificity, detail, and color can take a comedic bit from good to great.
4. **Make analogies.** Analogies highlight the ridiculousness of a behavior or situation by comparing it to something totally different but equally over-the-top.
5. **Rule of three.** List two normal or expected elements, then add an unexpected third element.
6. **Build out the world.** Ask yourself: if this is true, what else? In other words, if that first funny thing you just said is true, what else follows from it?
7. **Here and now.** Ask yourself, "What's funny right now, to this group only?" Acknowledge the obvious thing that people are thinking.
8. **Use callbacks.** Listen for moments of laughter, make a mental note of them and be on the lookout to invoke them later.

## HOW TO DELIVER YOUR CONTENT FOR LAUGHS

Deliver the funny – There is a melody and rhythm to good comedy.

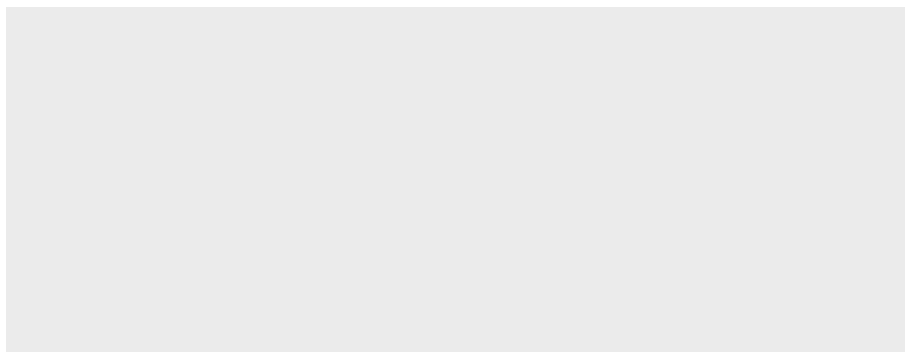
1. **Pause before the punch.** Draw out silence to build anticipation before delivering the punch line.
2. **Act it out.** Take on (and exaggerate) a character's physical behaviors, mannerisms, voice, and point of view.
3. **Dial up the drama.** Heighten the emotion in your narrative by varying the pitch, tone, inflection, and pacing of your delivery.
4. **Repeat funny lines.** You'll notice that after delivering a punch line, comedians often repeat it.
5. **Match delivery to content.** Humor needs to be authentic to your content and style.
6. **Land with confidence.** Deliver punch lines emphatically. Enunciate, speak boldly, clearly, and with authority.

## Activities

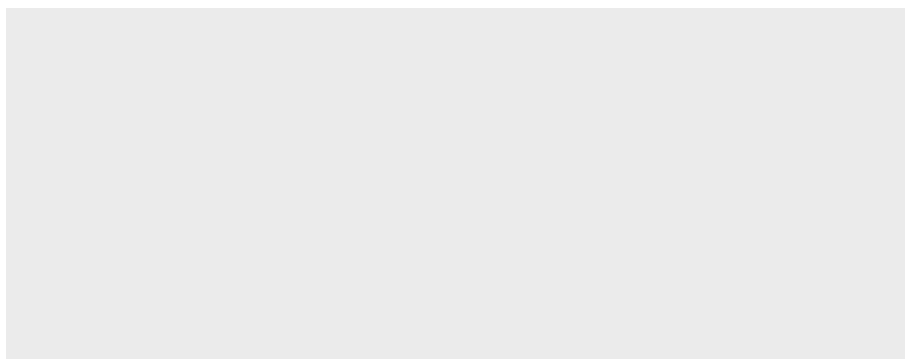
### STANDUP BREAKDOWN

Find a comedian you like and watch a stand-up set. **As you watch, take note of the content and delivery techniques they used.**

**CONTENT.** What was an observation or seed of an idea that the comedian started with? What techniques did they use to take this from idea to humor?



**DELIVERY.** How did the delivery complement and accentuate the writing? Notice pauses, vocal variety and enunciation, physicality, and other approaches that helped the jokes land.



## KILL THE JOKE

*(credits: David Iscoe)*

Read a joke from the list below.

**Write down the core observation (truth) in a way that isn't funny at all.** Bury the punchline, un-heighten the exaggeration, take out the analogy, until you can find no humor at all. Just the simple truth.

By killing the funny, our goal is to uncover what was keeping it alive.

\*\*\*

1. "So I took my son to the show. We sit right up front, the lights go down, and one opening after another goes on. Then finally Kevin Hart takes the stage. Crowd goes f'ing nuts, thousands of people... I was furious." – **Dave Chapelle**

**Observation:**

2. "I went to Las Vegas for the first time and I've not been to every place on earth I should say that now, in the interest of full disclosure I've not been to every place on this planet, and yet I'm pretty sure Las Vegas is the worst place on it." – **John Oliver**

**Observation:**

3. "So me and my friend drove for about twenty minutes, to what I thought was going to be a restaurant. Instead, Dave pulls over into an abandoned parking lot. Kills the engine, looks over at me, and goes, "Alright dude, we're here." I was like "Where, at my murder scene?" He was like "No dude, we're getting tacos over there." And he points to the corner of the parking lot to a truck, a food truck. Which I've now learned is quite common in America." – **Trevor Noah**

**Observation:**

4. "Clap if your father is between the ages of 60 and 75. Yeah. What's going on with them? What's wrong with them? They're so emotional! My dad hugs me so tightly sometimes I'm like – "Is one of us about to die?" And my dad has no friends. And your dad has no friends. If you think your dad has friends, you're wrong. Your mom has friends, and they have husbands. Those are not your dad's friends." – **John Mulaney**

**Observation:**

5. "I said "What do I do about my foot injury?" He said, "Nothing you can't do anything about it. It's an inflamed nerve from wearing the wrong kind of shoes." He said "Are you wearing soft soled shoes like tennis shoes?" and I said, "Yes, that's what I'm wearing." And he says, "That's the wrong kind of shoe. The best shoe for you to wear is a cowboy boot." – **Ellen Degeneres**

**Observation:**



6. The founding fathers were dumb, because they made the constitution and they numbered it and the order is weird. They sat down with a feather – they knew how to make a pen, they were just being jerks – and were like, “Amendment number one: Freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. Ok that’s one. How ‘bout two?”
- “YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE GUNS YOU WANT!”
- “For two? How bout like seventeen? Nineteen?”
- “NO. TWO. GUNS.”
- “Alright, we’ll put guns, he seems upset. Amendment number three...”
- “THE ARMY CAN’T LIVE IN YA’ HOUSE.”
- “Ok buddy, I think you’re going through your own thing in life right now. I think a soldier might be sleepi...” – **John Mulaney**

**Observation:**

7. “Getting married was like a reverse Lord of the Rings situation where I got married and then lost half of my powers.” – **Hasan Minhaj**

**Observation:**

8. “Every conversation with my dad is like an M. Night Shyamalan movie. It’s just 90 minutes of build-up to no payoff. ‘That’s the ending??’” – **Hasan Minhaj**

**Observation:**

9. "I love my wife so much I married her three times. The first time was in Melbourne Australia because my wife is from there. The second time was in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. And then we got married in New York for green card purposes." – **Ronny Chieng**

**Observation:**

10. "So I took my son to the show. We sit right up front, the lights go down, and one opening after another goes on. Then finally Kevin Hart takes the stage. Crowd goes f'ing nuts, thousands of people... I was furious." – **Dave Chapelle**

**Observation:**

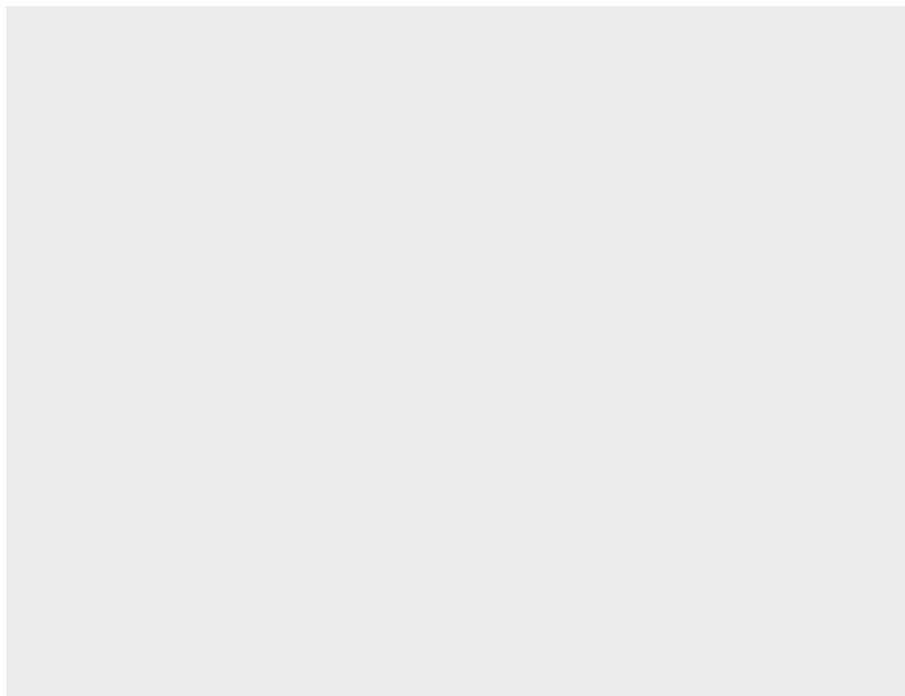
## MINE YOUR LIFE

We learned that the simple observations in our lives are often the seeds of humor. For this activity, mine your life for these observations, and apply some of the techniques summarized in the tip sheets (a few pages earlier) to turn them into humor.

- 1. Jot down ten observations about yourself or others.**
- 2. Create five jokes by applying comedy techniques to these observations.**
- 3. Write down the one joke you're proud of and share it with someone else.**

*Pro challenge:* Looking to take this activity to the next level? Try creating two different jokes based off the same observation by using different comedy techniques (e.g., create contrast in one, follow the rule of three in another).

**The one joke you created that you're proud of:**



## LAND! THAT! JOKE!

Read through the prompts below and make notes about how you would deliver it to amp up the funny. Consider pauses, changes in speed, pitch, and tone, etc.

Find someone to do this activity with you. **Deliver the joke to them and get suggestions for further refinement.** We encourage you to play around with what it's like to only leverage your voice, or only body language.

1. "I get so much anxiety from the waiters that refuse to take your orders and write it down. They insist on memorizing your order. I don't know why they insist on doing it—like they're impressing us in some way—like we're gonna go home later that night and lying in bed talking: "I still can't get over that waiter! Every single thing he remembered..." — **Ellen Degeneres**
2. "I really do appreciate you guys coming to this thing because you didn't have to and it's really easy not to go to things. It is so much easier not to do things than to do things that you would do them is remarkable. Percentage wise, it is 100% easier not to do things than to do them. And so much fun not to do them. Especially when you were supposed to do them. In terms of like, instant relief, cancelling plans is like heroin." — **John Mulaney**
3. "We don't care about democracy. There's only one country on the planet who has respectable turnout to their elections—it's Australia. They have 100% voting in Australia. How do they achieve this? Well, in Australia it's illegal not to vote. That is brilliant. Who would have thought they were capable of that kind of thinking down there? It must be all the blood rushing to their heads I don't know." — **John Oliver**
4. "New York city is the only city I've lived in where people fight subway trains and win. Any other city on the planet, when the train doors start to close, that means that train is departed. You're supposed to shut up and wait patiently for the next train. Not in New York. In New York you can slip a piece of paper between those doors—one millimeter of space that's all you need—you've got a fighting chance." — **Ronny Chieng**
5. "I am halfway through my 20's and I am done with this shit. Oh my god I'm sick of my 20's. I'm so sick of people telling me to enjoy them. They're not fun. They are 10 years of asking yourself, "will I outgrow this or is it a problem? Like is this a phase or a demon?" I just need to know. Like am I fun or should I go to a meeting? Someone help me." — **Taylor Tomlinson**

## CHAPTER 4

# *Putting Your Funny to Work*

**“There is nothing like a gleam of humor to reassure you that a fellow human being is ticking inside a strange face.”**

*— Eva Hoffman*

## Chapter Overview

Hear that? It's the sound of rubber meeting road.

Building on the theory from the previous activities, it's time to dive headfirst into practical ways you can bring levity and humor to work. Now, we realize that the notion of using humor in your professional life might feel overwhelming or uncomfortable. If you're having heart palpitations just thinking about trying to land a joke in front of your boss, your co-workers, or that one guy in accounting who never smiles, we encourage you to lower the bar. Remember, the goal is not necessarily to tell jokes or even be funny—it's to make more human connections during everyday moments, and to be more productive and effective (not to mention less bored) in the process.

In the activities that follow, you'll put your humor to work: by taking stock of your current communications (read: weeding out the bullsh\*t), writing emails with personality (and levity), and giving your bio a makeover.

## Key Concepts

- The goal is not necessarily to tell jokes or even be funny—it's to **make more human connections during everyday moments**, and to **be more productive and effective** (not to mention less bored) in the process.
- By identifying small, tactical, and mundane ways to shift the words we use and the messages we send with levity—minor adjustments in how we “move” that **make a major difference in the way we show up in the world**, and the way it shows up in return.
- **Acts of humor can help us navigate critical crossroads at work**—whether you need to say hard things, make hard decisions, or motivate others to do—well, anything at all.
- Strategically placed levity can help **shift mindsets to unlock creative and productive work**.

## Tip Sheets

### HOW TO WRITE A BIO WITH LEVITY

People often form opinions about us before we walk into a room with them. So it's more crucial than ever that our online presence be a reflection of the impression we want to make. A lighthearted bio is like greeting them with a smile rather than that pesky "resting boss face." A well-written bio with humor can show wit, humility, and confidence against the backdrop of your talent and fit for the role. When you're one of hundreds or thousands of more or less equally qualified candidates, it's often the little things—like making the person on the other end of the hiring process smile—that get you through the door, which is sometimes the hardest part.

1. **Strike the right balance.** Find the right balance between making a serious bio infused with some levity and going overboard with the humor. Don't downplay your accomplishments; instead, use levity to signal that you're a multidimensional person who's not only skilled and talented, but fun to be around.
2. **End on levity.** Save your "punch line" until the end: no one will see it coming after a string of serious and impressive qualifications.
3. **Choose content strategically.** Don't just grasp at anything that's funny. Use levity strategically to
  - a. mitigate unwanted perceptions people might have of you, and
  - b. showcase details that are impressive, personally important, or just plain fun to talk about but might otherwise be strange or awkward to include.
4. **Self-deprecate with caution.** Only use this if you're someone who is high in status with a killer resume. If you're going to self-deprecate, make it about something unrelated to your work.

### HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH LEVITY AT WORK

1. **Talk like a Human.** Read your emails aloud. Are you boring yourself? Would a chatbot sound more lifelike than what you've written? Does it rank 5 or above on a scale of 1 to "soul-crushing"? Make your emails more conversational. The closer they mirror something you'd actually say to this person, the better. Fight the urge to use jargon in your writing and don't check your personality at the door.
2. **Callbacks to Conversations.** Recall a conversation topic from a previous encounter – or better, a moment you laughed with the person – and work it into a follow up email in a lighthearted way.
3. **Spice Up Your Sign-offs.** Avoid standard sign-offs like "Best," and instead use sign-offs that are personalized and interesting. Here are a few humorous sign-offs that have caught our eye:
  - a. When asking a favor: *With fingers and toes crossed,*
  - b. When apologizing for an absurdly slow response: *Sheepishly,*
  - c. When in heads-down mode: *Yours, heavily caffeinated,*
  - d. In reference to a phone call with dog barking in the background: *Still wondering who let the dogs out,*

## Activities

### BULLSH\*T CONFESSIONAL

It's time to come clean. We all use words at work that we'd never say out loud. **Circle all the words that you're guilty of using in your professional communication:**

ACTIONABLE

GIVING 110%

PUNT

BAKED IN

IMPACT

QUICK FIX

BEST PRACTICE

IN THE CARDS

REACH OUT

BLEEDING EDGE

KUDOS

REINVENT THE WHEEL

BOIL THE OCEAN

LEVERAGE

ROBUST

BUY-IN

LOTS OF MOVING PARTS

SCUTTLEBUTT

CAREER-LIMITING MOVE

LOW-HANGING FRUIT

SCALABLE

CORE COMPETENCY

MAKE HAY

SOLUTION

CORPORATE VALUES

MARINATE

S.W.A.T TEAM

DEEP DIVE

MOVE THE NEEDLE

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

DRINKING THE KOOL-AID

NINTH INNING

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

EMPOWER

ON THE SAME PAGE

YOUR TAKE

FULL SERVICE

OVER THE WALL

VERTICAL

GAIN TRACTION

PEEL THE ONION

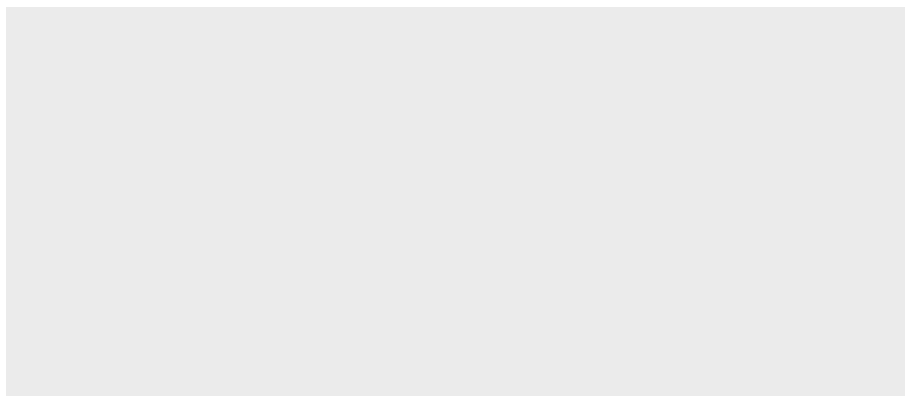
XEROX



## EMAIL POST MORTEM

When we write emails, we often write in ways that make us sound like robots instead of real humans. **Review the last 5 professional emails you've written, and record the robotic works/phases that feel inauthentic / stilted / disingenuous.**

**Words in my emails that sound robotic:**



## WRITE LIKE A HUMAN

In the tip sheets for this chapter, we've outlined some of the easiest and most practical ways to incorporate levity into the messages you send. These shockingly simple techniques are perfect for turning a tedious back-and-forth into an authentic conversation. **In your emails this week, incorporate some of these techniques in your communications:**

- **Serendipitous Sign-offs:** Avoid standard sign-offs like "Best," and instead use one that is personalized and interesting.
- **Callbacks to Conversation:** Recall a conversation topic from a previous encounter – or better, a moment you laughed with the person – and work it into a follow up email in a lighthearted way.
- **Words that Humans use:** Read your emails aloud. Make your emails more conversational to mirror something you'd actually say in person.
- **A Delightful Post-script:** Include a lighthearted PS at the end of your email.

## LOW BAR

There is an absurdly low bar for humor in business relative to other domains. In this activity, we'll see how low we can go...

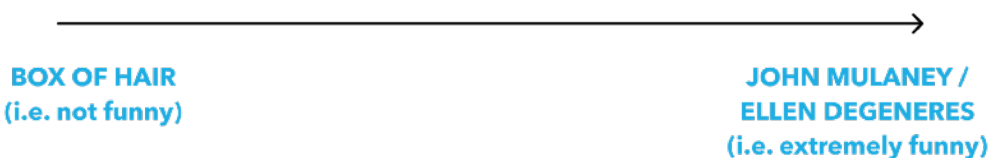
**List out the following:**

**The three funniest people from work**

**The three funniest people in your personal lives**

**The three funniest people you've ever seen (including comedians)**

**Place each of these individuals on the following spectrum:**



## BIO WITH LEVITY

**For an increasingly connected and mobile workforce, first impressions are often made before we even enter a room with someone**—via a bio, a LinkedIn profile, or good old fashioned internet stalking. Research reveals that adding a touch of humor to your bio can make others perceive you as more intelligent, likable, desirable as a colleague and leader and – wait for it – better looking! Yes, that’s right. This workbook makes you better looking. But only if you finish it. Sorry, it’s science. Here are a few tips:

### Strike the right balance

In a professional bio, a touch of levity goes a long way. A humorous bio should be just as impressive as a serious one. Humorous doesn’t mean you sell yourself down the river, and for most executives, a lighthearted line or two is all that’s needed to move the needle. Here are two versions of Steve Reardon’s bio, to show how the same bio can be written with different degrees of levity:

**A touch of levity:** *Stephen has worked in a range of businesses including his own electronics start up, a midsized sports retail chain and a global banking group. As CEO of MoreCycle, Stephen drove the launch of the biggest retail cycling store in the Southern Hemisphere. Most recently Stephen has been assisting Barclays to develop a strategy for fintech engagement in Africa. He’s also been building BlindSpot, a politics and economics podcast described by his wife and two daughters as “long, boring, and utterly devoid of substance.”*

**Full-on funny:** *Steve’s short attention span has led him to start and run four different businesses in fashion, photography, golf, and cycling. Quickly running out of industries to work in, he moved to Stanford to pursue an MSx degree (an MBA for less talented, much older students). As a native of South Africa, Steve has been known to speak with an odd pronunciation which can be heard on his podcast: BlindSpot. It’s politics and economics based, and it has been described by his wife and two daughters as “long, boring, and utterly devoid of substance.”*

**The most natural way to incorporate humor into a bio is with a lighthearted line at the end.** For example, here is the bio of April Underwood, former Chief of Product at Slack, which ends on funny, leveraging Rule of 3:

*April Underwood is a Consumer internet junkie with a passion for platforms and partnerships, now tackling the enterprise at Slack. She is a product gal who can also do deals and partner / ecosystem strategy. Usually found bridging product / engineering and business teams. April is fascinated by improving life in the offline world with the online one, a fun lady to work with, and is not bothered by dangling prepositions, usually.*

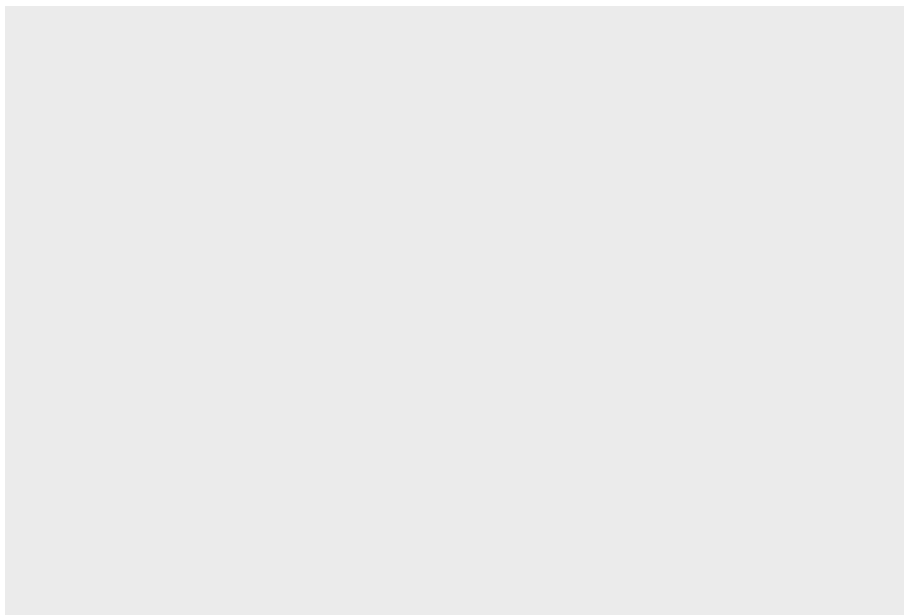
### Choose content strategically

Humor opens the door to a different kind of conversation. Once you add a humorous line in your bio, you may find an outsized number of people drawing upon that detail to start conversations. Executives often choose details about their families, hobbies, strengths, or

simply fun facts. If there is something important to you that does not come through in the rest of your bio, a humorous line can sneak it in seamlessly.

\*\*\*

**Your mission is to create a bio that incorporates humor.** You should be able to use this as the summary section of your LinkedIn. If you are ambitious (and you are), try two different versions: one with a touch of levity, and one that's full-on funny. The former will work better in an everyday business context, but the latter will prompt ideas and hilarity you may not have thought of otherwise.



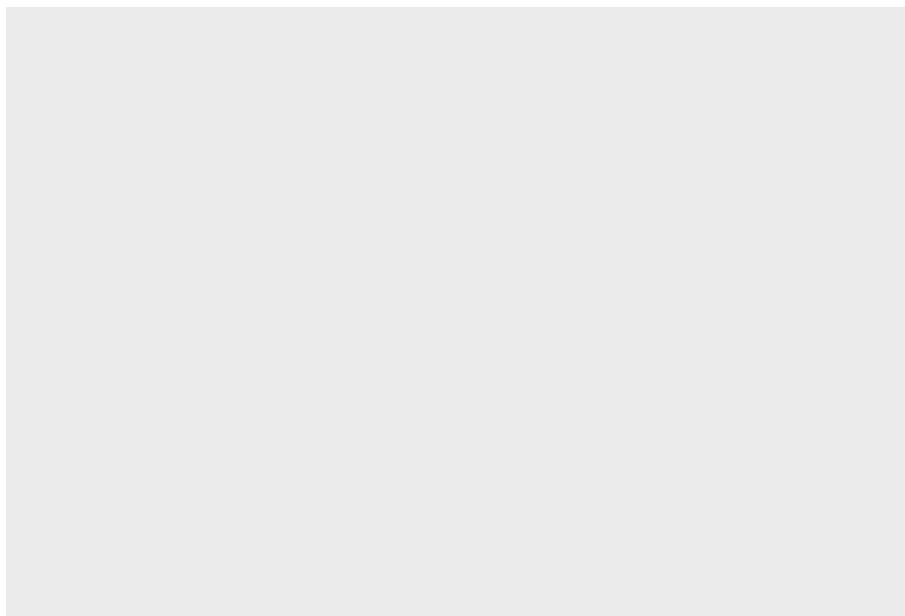
## HUMOR HOOK

Choose someone who would be an absolute dream to connect with. This person should be doing work you really believe in – work that is aligned with your personal or career aspirations.

Now, this person is likely very important and nearly impossible to get in touch with.

Your goal: **Using humor as a hook, ship an email – or use another creative approach** (a la Sara Blakely's mailing a shoe) – **to connect with this person**. Strive to do this in a way that helps them (not you); it may be a thank you note, sharing content on a topic of common interest, or a surprise compliment.

**Reflect on how it felt to ship this email (or shoe) versus another approach for connecting? And if you got a response, how did it compare to your expectations?**



## CHAPTER 5

# *Leading with Humor*

**"A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."**

*— Dwight D. Eisenhower*

## Chapter Overview

In the quaint days of yore, inspirational leaders reigned as a rarefied breed possessing some unique combination of intelligence, bravery, charisma, moral superiority, and cunning resolve. Ernest Shackleton drifted on sheets of ice for months to courageously rescue his stranded crew from the Antarctic sea. Henry Ford reinvented transportation and made the automobile affordable for middle-class families nationwide. Marco Polo traveled across the mountains of Asia and inspired generations of children to venture blindly across swimming pools. But the days of the mythic and infallible leader are behind us.

A 2019 Harvard Business Review survey found that 58 percent of employees trust a complete stranger more than their own boss. Pause. Read that sentence again. Your employees trust a stranger more than you!

In another 2019 survey, employees were asked what characteristics inspired trust in a leader; the top responses—like “knowing the obstacles the leader overcame to be successful” and “speaks like regular people”—told a consistent story: Today’s employees yearn for leaders who are less mysteriously brilliant and more authentically relatable. Aspirational, yes—but not without flaws. In short, it used to be that leaders were revered; now they need to be understood.

Humor helps. It is part of what makes us human. Sharing a laugh sparks self-disclosure and fosters trust and camaraderie in a way that few others things do. In the words of author Eva Hoffman, “There is nothing like a gleam of humor to reassure you that a fellow human being is ticking inside a strange face.”

In the activities that follow, we’ll help you rediscover more authentic, lighter versions of yourself in the workplace. And because this can be a tricky proposition, these activities will start by taking a look at those who are already leading with humor—plus those who have tried and failed. Finally, you’ll explore...

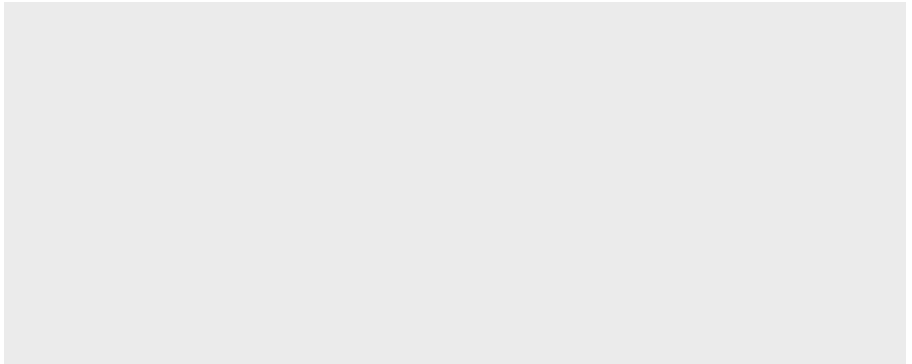
## Key Concepts

- Today’s employees yearn for more authentic, human leaders. Humor helps leaders **build trust, break down status barriers, and balance authority with approachability.**
- If you’re in a leadership role, what’s far more important than “being funny” is signaling your approval of humor and simply **being generous with your laughter.**
- By channeling their unique sense of humor, **leaders can better unite, persuade, motivate, and inspire**—and, ultimately, be the kind of people that others want to follow.
- At a time when employee turnover has increased 88 percent over the last decade, costing companies billions, the **impact of humor on employee perceptions and retention is a timely salve to a silent crisis** affecting leaders and organizations worldwide.

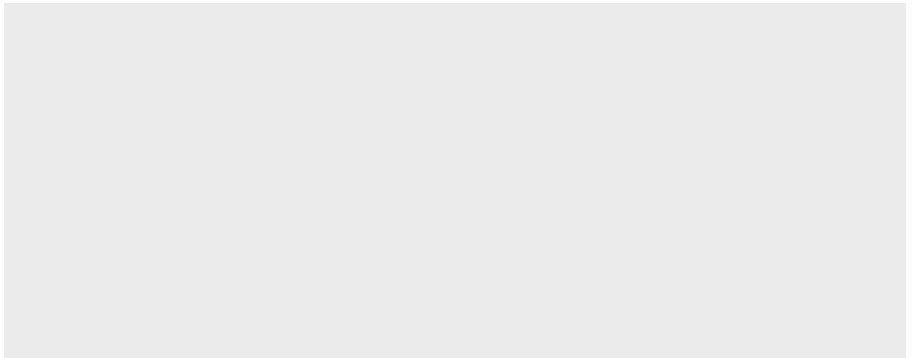
## Activities

### HUMOR WIN

**Find an example of a humor win - where someone in a leadership role used humor in a positive and impactful way.** Maybe it furthered specific business goals, built camaraderie and trust, lessened the status barrier and made them more approachable, made a difficult topic easier to approach, inspired action toward a cause of interest, or had an otherwise positive impact. Provide a synopsis of what happened, and then analyze why it worked.



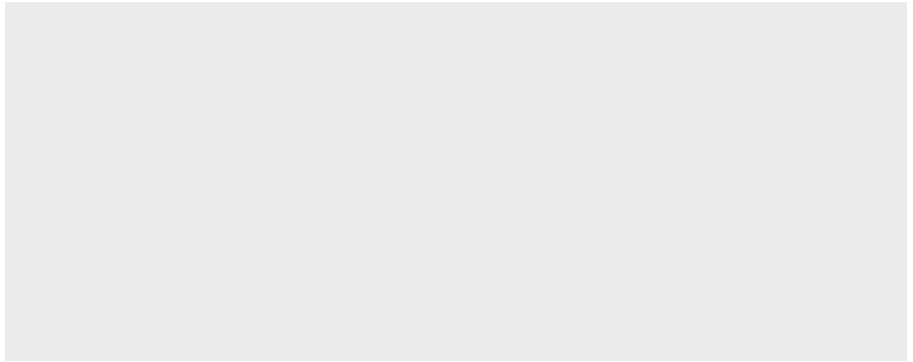
**Create a humor win of your own!** Some ideas: Use humor in a job interview. Choose an otherwise humorless place or situation and infuse levity. Practice a random act of kindness. Plan a (nice) prank. Do something special for a friend or colleague. Provide a synopsis of what happened, and then analyze why you crush at this exercise and also life.



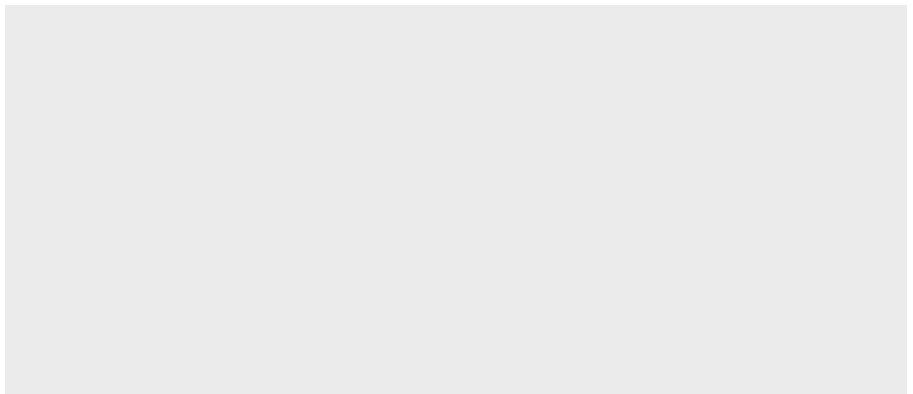


## HUMOR FAIL

**Find an example of a humor fail - where someone in a leadership role used humor and it had a negative impact.** Note humor fails happen for a variety of reasons. We all have different styles. Humor can be misinterpreted when taken out of context. The appropriateness of a joke depends on the power structures of those involved. Different people have different perceptions of what crosses the line based on personal experience, cultural context. And a range of other factors. Provide a synopsis of what happened, and then analyze why it failed.

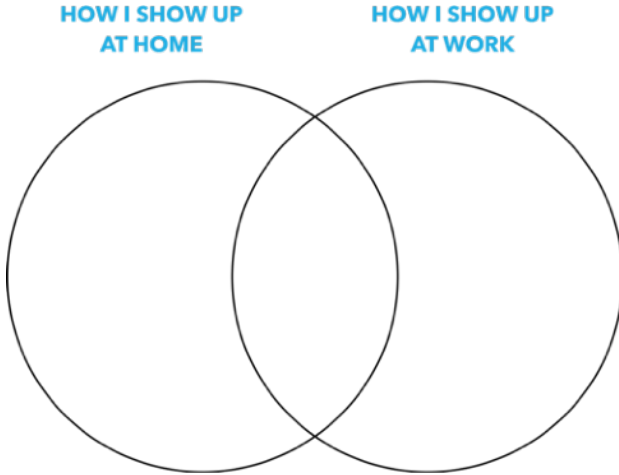


**Reflect on a humor fail of your own!** Anytime you learn a new(ish) skill or work a new(ish) muscle, you are going to fail. It doesn't matter how impressively comedic you are; humor fails happen. They should be celebrated and learned from. So if you had an epic (or minor) humor fail, describe what happened and analyze why it failed, what you learned, and how you might try things differently in the future.



## COMING OUT OF THE LEADERSHIP CLOSET

Many of us feel closeted at work, unable to bring our full selves. **Fill out the venn diagram below with adjectives that describe your “work self” and “home self”:**



**Take a moment to reflect:**

- Why do the differences between these selves exist?
- Which of the behaviors in the “home” circle do you aspire to move to the center or the “work” circle?

A large, empty light gray rectangular area provided for the user to write their reflections.

## CHAPTER 6

# *Creating a Culture of Levity*

**“I’m stuck by how laughter connects you with people. It’s almost impossible to maintain any kind of distance or any sense of social hierarchy when you’re just howling with laughter.”**

*—John Cleese*

## Chapter Overview

It seems obvious that a culture in which employees can do their best work while having fun is desirable. For an example, we need look no further than the team of animators who produced one of the most creatively ambitious, lucrative, and trailblazing films of a generation: *Toy Story*.

The world's first feature length computer-animated film, *Toy Story* was a quaint tale about the adventures of a ragtag band of lovable toys who come alive when humans are out of sight. In many ways, the making of the movie mirrored the plot itself. The small, impassioned creative team would routinely pull all-nighters during which the eclectic bunch of engineers and animators at Pixar would—not unlike Woody and Buzz—come alive.

Pixar's culture was imbued with an infectious, energizing spirit of levity and play. Some nights, that meant mini-golf tournaments and scooter races in the cramped hallways of their Los Angeles studio. (These recurring contests were so competitive that senior producer Tom Porter was once awoken at home in the middle of the night to return to the studio and protect his long-held record.) The interns held elaborate dress down Fridays, showing up in matching costumes like Jedi or Cub Scouts. The company hosted "Pixarpalooza", with as many as twenty different bands of Pixar employees playing covers of their favorite songs.

As Ed Catmull, the former president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios, reflected, "Lots of humor and levity in the good times solidify the relationships, making it easier for people to call on one another during the hard times."

How can we create cultures of levity in our own teams and organizations?

Some leaders set the tone from the top: publicly embodying—and enabling—humor, sending strong, consistent signals that levity and play are desired and embraced. Others embrace the underground: identifying and elevating people in the organization that have an outsized impact on the culture. And then there are those who work to institutionalize: building it into the fabric of the organization itself.

Through the following activities, you'll identify "levity unicorns" in your organization to understand who you should gravitate towards (and avoid) in service of a joyful workplace (and reflect on the power of your coworkers to create, or destroy, cultures of levity). Next, you'll cultivate greater awareness of the ceremonies and experiences that bring you joy, to understand how you can change your work habits to engender a culture of levity.

## Key Concepts

- **A culture of levity** doesn't have to come from the top down. Even the smallest gestures of surprise and playfulness can shift a team or company's culture in meaningful ways.
- **Lots of humor and levity in the good times solidify the relationships**, making it easier for people to call on one another during the hard times.
- **There's no one way to build culture.** You might be comfortable in the spotlight, pulling your company's culture toward you, or instead prefer to influence culture more indirectly by elevating a charismatic co-worker or altering your office's physical space.
- The employees who can help create this culture—were commonly described as one of three archetypes: **Instigators**, **Culture Carriers**, and **Hidden Gems**.
- The art of institutionalizing levity is to **build it into the fabric of your organization itself**.

# Activities

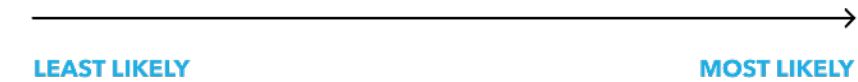
## FINDING YOUR LEVITY UNICORN

Different people can disproportionately impact our experience of joy at work. In this activity, we'll identify the people you should gravitate towards (and avoid) in service of a joyful workplace.

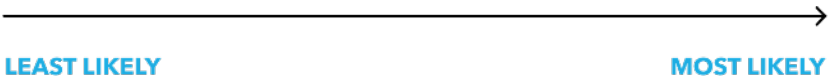
**List the 3-5 people who you work most frequently with:**

**Place the initials of these people along the following spectrum:**

MAKES ME LAUGH



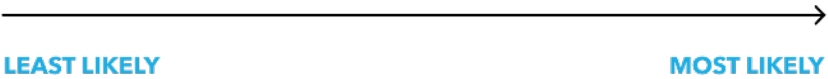
HELPS ME GET INTO A STATE OF FLOW



HELPS ME FEEL THE LEAST SELF-CONSCIOUS



MAKES ME FEEL SAFE



**List the people who are consistently on the right (i.e. "most likely" to engender levity).  
Huzzah – these are your levity unicorns!**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**List the people who are consistently on the left (i.e. "least likely" to engender levity).  
Beware– these are your levity vampires!**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*

Levity unicorns should be cultivated and celebrated. Our goals are to spend as much time as possible with them throughout our days. In contrast, levity vampires should be avoided; these individuals are most likely to sap energy and bury your humor.

## LEVITY MADLIBS

Fill in the blanks below to cultivate more awareness of experiences and people who have helped engender a culture of levity at our organizations.

- \_\_\_\_\_ is the work tradition/ ceremony that brings me the greatest joy.
- I feel most playful when I'm meeting with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- I laugh the hardest at work during \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- The time my coworkers \_\_\_\_\_ was extremely meaningful.

**Which, if any, of your responses were most surprising?**

**Based on the people or situations mentioned above, how might you change your work habits (or work environment) to cultivate more levity and joy?**



## CHAPTER 7

# *Navigating the Gray Areas of Humor*

**“Humor plays close to the big hot fire, which is the truth. And the reader feels the heat.”**

*— E. B. White*

## Chapter Overview

If you've ever had a disagreement about whether something is funny with a friend, colleague, or partner (who you then look at in bed that night while they're asleep, clutching a pint of Ben & Jerry's as a single tear runs down your face, wondering whether your mother was right and you've made a monumental mistake), then these activities are for you.

We all have different tastes and sensibilities when it comes to humor. You might think *Seinfeld* is the most brilliant show ever to grace the airwaves, while your best friend thinks it's "just okay." Maybe you think political humor is too taboo to bring into the office, whereas your co-worker is constantly impersonating the current occupant of the Oval Office. Or maybe your seventeen-year-old daughter is obsessed with a YouTube channel or a Twitch stream you find utterly inscrutable.

The point is, what we find funny—or appropriate—is far from universal. There are a whole lot of gray areas when it comes to humor.

Your goal is to wield humor responsibly: with sensitivity, empathy, and hilarity all working together. By understanding its nuances, we can make humor feel less risky and more versatile.

In the exercises that follow, you'll explore how you and your colleagues interpret humor differently, apply a framework for understanding how you can shift the appropriateness of a joke, and navigate a handy decision.

## Key Concepts

- There are **a whole lot of gray areas** when it comes to humor. The goal is to wield humor with sensitivity, empathy, and hilarity all working together.
- The point is, **what we find funny—or appropriate—is far from universal.**
- Exploring the **lifecycle of a failed humor attempt**—how to recognize when you've bombed, diagnose the situation, and make it right.
- Comedy has three key components: **truth, pain, and distance**:
  - **Truth** is the heart of comedy.
  - **Pain** can be physical or emotional.
  - **Distance** is a measure of how far an individual or group of people is from the subject of your humor. It can be temporal, geographic, or psychological.
- Recognizing the **signals of appropriateness gets harder** as you rise in rank.
- **Derogatory humor doesn't just push boundaries or highlight divisions.** It can perpetuate prejudice and impact behavior by those with prejudice views. It further divides.

# Activities

## FIND THE GRAY

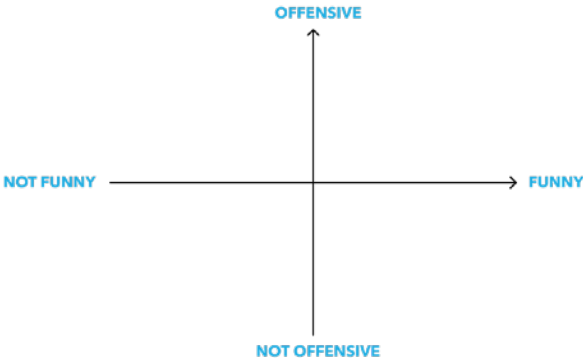
In this activity, we'll explore how you (and your colleagues/friends) interpret different types of humor. **For each of the humor prompts below, draw a dot on the two-by-two that follows, rating them on a spectrum from funny/not funny; offensive/not offensive.**

Prompt 1: *Cards Against Humanity* launches a version "for her" with the following box and description:

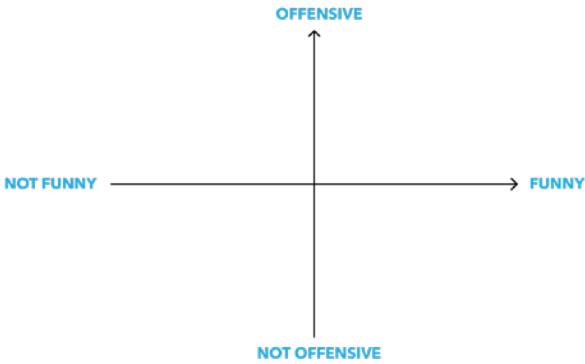


Everyone hates it when the men retire to the parlor to discuss the economy and the various issues of the day. What are us ladies supposed to do?

Now there's an answer. **Cards Against Humanity for Her.** It's exactly the same as the original Cards Against Humanity game, but the box is pink and it costs \$5 more.



Prompt 2: In 2019, Joe Biden was accused inappropriately touching woman. In April of that year, after the controversy erupted, he jokingly said that he had permission to hug a child that was standing with him on stage.



Prompt 3: This tweet by a Chrissy Teigen

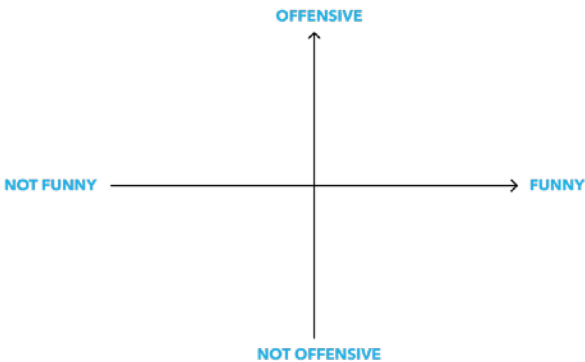


**Chrissy teigen**  
@chrissyteigen

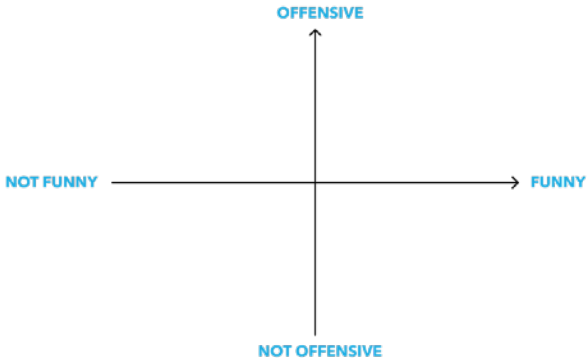
Active shooting in Canada, or as we call it in america, wednesday

11:34 MM | 22 Oct 2014 | [Twitter Web App](#)

1,137 Retweets 1979 Favorites



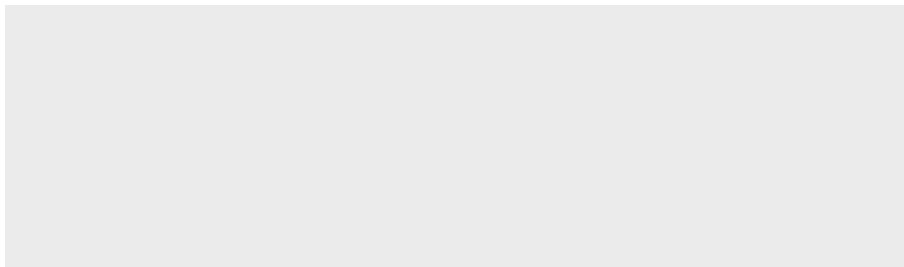
Prompt 4: In April 2019, the NYTimes pasted the following cartoon:



## TRUTH, PAIN, DISTANCE

Truth, pain, and distance are extremely important in determining the appropriateness of a joke. In this activity, we'll explore how truth, pain and distance impact your felt experience of an uncomfortable humor moment.

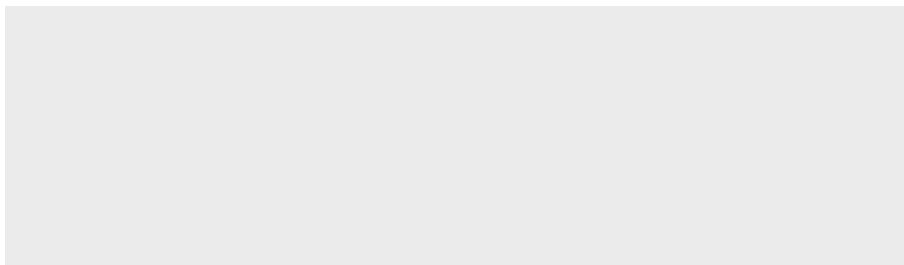
**List a situation involving humor that elicited a sense of unease, discomfort, or offense.**



**Rate the unease from 1-10:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Now, rewrite the situation if it were one or more of the following:**

- Slightly less true / more absurd
- Slightly less charged / painful topic
- Further in temporal / geographic distance



How did that change your felt experience of the event?

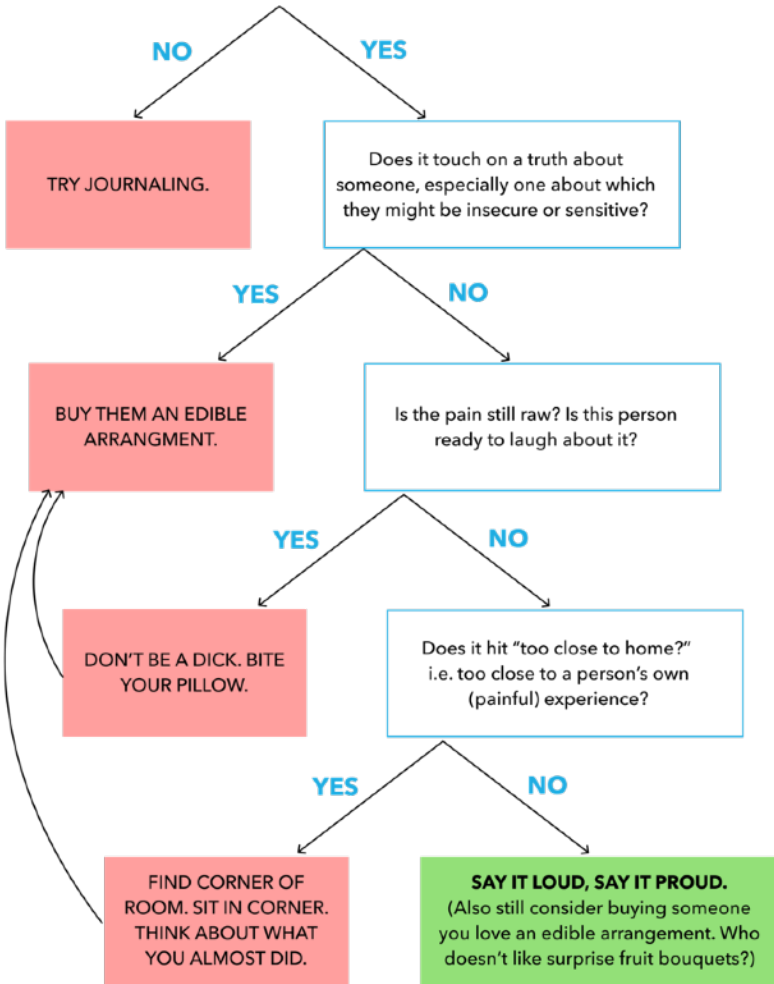
**Re-rate the unease from 1-10:** \_\_\_\_\_

# “SHOULD I SAY IT?!” DECISION TREE

Want to say something funny at work but not sure how to say it? Tired of abstract concepts? Longing for a decision tree? You’re in luck! Just use your nifty “Should I say it?!” decision tree!

JOKE: \_\_\_\_\_

If you removed the humor,  
would you still say it?



## CHAPTER 7.5

# *A Secret Weapon in Life*

**"A sense of humor... is needed armor. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person deep down has a pretty good grasp of life."**

*— Hugh Sidey*



## Chapter Overview

You've come to the end of this workbook. You are now a master at infusing your work life with humor and levity. But here's the thing: Once the workday is over, you go home to your full and beautiful and complicated life. What then?

As you know by now, our research extends well beyond humor to the drivers of human well-being: how do people create meaning in their lives, how is meaning different than happiness, and ultimately: How does one design a life well lived?

Don't get us wrong: We care about you becoming a badass business titan. We care about your bottom lines. We even care about your top lines. But we care more about you as a whole person. We care more about your opportunity to use the concepts in this book to live better, more fulfilling lives.

So with that we end our journey together by merging these two different yet profoundly connected sides of our academic research: humor and human well-being.

In the following exercises, you'll seek out meaning in your own life through cataloguing your signature stories. You'll practice infusing a mindset of levity into how you tell your life's stories and how you handle even the most challenging aspects of your life.

## Discussion Prompts

- When are you most bold? With whom?
- When are you most authentic? With whom?
- When are you most present? With whom?
- When are you most joyful? With whom?
- Who do you love deeply? Who deeply loves you?
- Who are the important people in your life who you want to say something to, but are holding back?
- How could you use levity to unlock these difficult conversations?

## Activities

### SIX WORD STORIES

Many jokes that seem spontaneous have in fact been written, workshopped, rewritten, practiced, and told in front of countless audiences countless times. Most comedians have not just one or two but a whole catalog of jokes like this in their back pocket to call upon when needed.

You can do the same by starting to catalog your own signature stories. These are your go-to stories, the ones you love telling, that always get a laugh - whether at cocktail parties, in the boardroom, or to your significant other who's heard them a million times. Great stories persist because they're in some way universal—not just to people, but to circumstances.

Write down (in 6 words or less) the stories that have defined your life so far— the ones that capture who you are, what you value, or the most important parts of your life.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

## LEVITY REFRAME

Humor (and life!) is tightly connected to the stories we tell about ourselves and others. In this exercise, we'll hone the humor superpowers you've cultivated thus far to reframe a negative story.

**Select an event or experience that has some gravity.** Think of a difficult turning point in your life, a challenge you overcame, a defining experience that led to an important realization, a seemingly mundane moment that actually reveals something important about you and your values. Whatever it is, don't start by thinking about what's funny. Start with gravity and meaning.

**Write this story in one paragraph below. Be sure to infuse as much detail / specifics as possible.**

**Reflect:** Circle the emotional words that you feel after recounting this story.

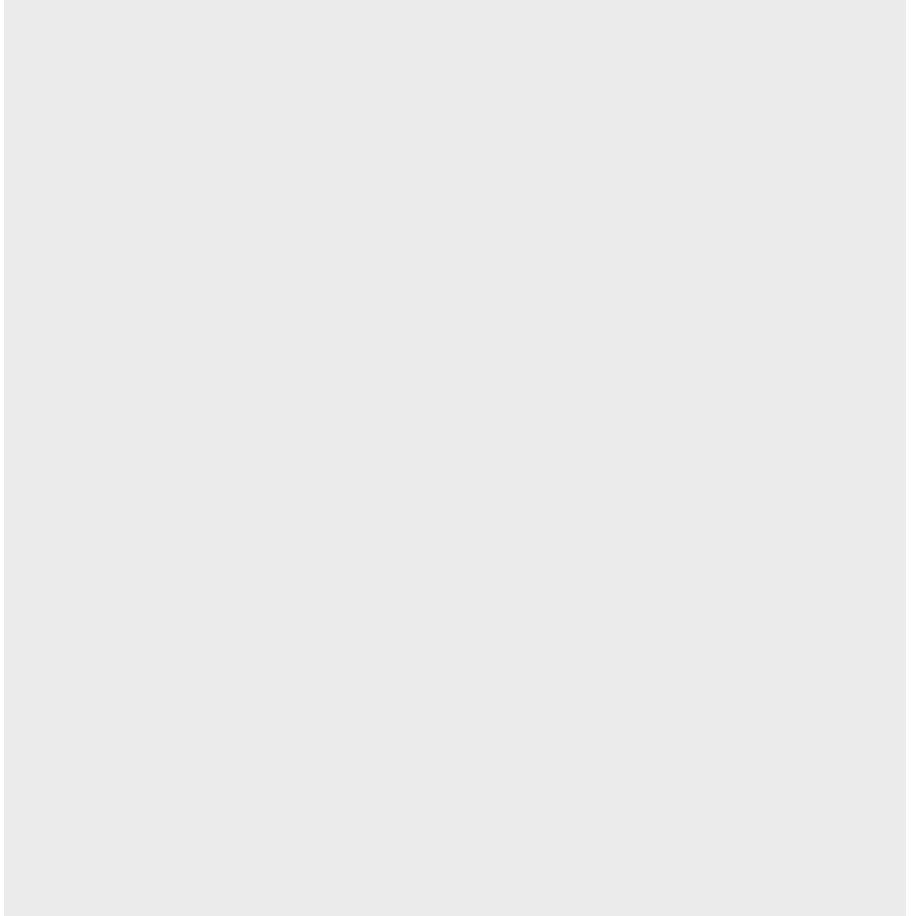
ACCEPTANCE	DISAPPOINTMENT	LONELY
ADMIRATION	DISGUST	LOVE
AFFECTION	DREAD	NERVOUS
AFRAID	EMBARRASSMENT	NOSTALGIC
AGGRESSIVE	EMOTIONAL	OPTIMISTIC
AGONY	ENTHUSIASTIC	PANIC
AMAZEMENT	ENVOIOUS	PASSION
ANGER	EXASPERATED	PEACE
ANNOYANCE	EXCITED	PESSIMISTIC
ANTICIPATION	FEARFUL	PITY
ANXIETY	FLUSTERED	PRIDE
AWE	GENEROUS	QUIRKY
BITTERNESS	GRATEFUL	RELIEF
BLISS	GRIEF	REMORSE
BOREDOM	GUILTY	SAD
CHEERFUL	HAPPY	SARCASTIC
COMPASSION	HOMESICK	SCARED
CONCERNED	HOPEFUL	SENTIMENTAL
CONTEMPT	HOPELESS	SHAME
CONTENT	HUMILIATED	SHOCK
CRAZY	HURT	STRESSED
DEFEATED	INSECURE	TRUST
DEFIANCE	IRRITATED	WORRIED
DELIGHTFUL	JADED	WONDER
DEPRESSED	LAZY	

**Now rewrite your story with levity.** Apply the principles gleaned from the previous chapters to find humor where there was none.

If you're stuck, try the following tips and tricks:

- Get some distance from the experience by having someone else read it to you.
- Try rewriting the experience from the perspective of someone you find funny.
- Try rewriting the experience from an inanimate object that was present, or an alien who has no understanding of human norms.

**My re-written story, with levity.**



**Reflect: Circle the emotional words that you feel after recounting this story.**

ACCEPTANCE	DISAPPOINTMENT	LONELY
ADMIRATION	DISGUST	LOVE
AFFECTION	DREAD	NERVOUS
AFRAID	EMBARRASSMENT	NOSTALGIC
AGGRESSIVE	EMOTIONAL	OPTIMISTIC
AGONY	ENTHUSIASTIC	PANIC
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DEFIANCE	IRRITATED	WORRIED
DELIGHTFUL	JADED	WONDER
DEPRESSED	LAZY	

## UNLOCKING WITH LEVITY

Go for a walk, journal, or meditate. Think about something you haven't said but feel like you should to someone that matters. If you were to die tomorrow, this is something you'd want to have said. Reflect on the following prompts and record your thoughts in whatever medium you feel most comfortable with.

**PERSON:** Who comes to mind? Why?

**WORDS:** What would you want to say?

**HOW:** How do you think you would say it?

**FUTURE:** What would be your ideal future state after you reach out?

# *About the Authors*





**DR. JENNIFER AAKER** is the General Atlantic Professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and a leading expert on how purpose and meaning shape individual choices and how technology can positively impact human well-being and company growth. Her work has been widely published in leading scientific journals and in *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, and *Science*. A recipient of the Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award and MBA Professor of the Year, Aaker counts winning a dance-off in the 1980s among her greatest feats.



**NAOMI BAGDONAS** is a Lecturer at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and an Executive Coach. She helps leaders be more creative, flexible and resilient in the face of change by facilitating interactive sessions for Fortune 100 companies and nonprofits, and coaching executives and celebrities for appearances ranging from *Saturday Night Live* to *The Today Show*. Formally trained at The Upright Citizens Brigade, Bagdonas performs at comedy venues and teaches improv in San Francisco's county jail. Her constant stream of foster dogs describe her as gullible and full of treats.

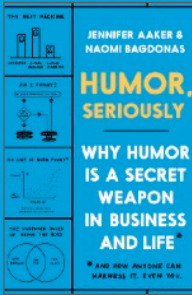


**CONNOR DIEMAND-YAUMAN** is Co-CEO of Merit America, a nonprofit preparing low-wage workers for skilled careers at scale, with a goal of driving \$1 Billion in wage gains in the next five years. Prior to Merit America, Connor cofounded and led Philanthropy U, the world's largest trainer of working adults in the social sector, and led Coursera's B2B strategy and business line (focused on partnering with employers as hiring partners, content producers, and B2B customers). Connor is a lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, where he teaches a course on using humor in leadership. His academic research on improving learning outcomes has

been cited in over 250 academic articles and covered by *The Economist*, BBC International, and the NY Times. He is the recipient of the Pyne Prize, Princeton University's highest distinction, and was named to *Forbes'* 30 under 30. Connor received his yoga teaching certification from Yoga Vidya Gurukul in Nashik, India, and was a contestant on season 17 of CBS' *The Amazing Race* and season 4 of ABC's *American Idol* (and lost on both!). In his spare time, Connor enjoys boxing, cycling, teaching inmates at SF's County Jail #1, and writing obnoxiously long, self-referential bios in third-person.

Workbook design: Nicole Aw

# Praise for HUMOR, SERIOUSLY



"Humor is magical. It can make fear and pomposity vanish and creativity and resilience appear in their place. The ultimate guide to using the magical power of funny as a tool for leadership and a force for good, *Humor, Seriously* is an intoxicating mix of science, strategy, and slapstick – a knee-slapping, mind-expanding tour de force." – **Daniel H. Pink, #1 NYT bestselling author of WHEN, DRIVE, and A WHOLE MIND**

"A smart, funny, brilliant book on how to be smart about being funny, brilliantly. And I'm not just saying that because they say I am smart, funny, and brilliant in it. Buy it." – **Sarah Cooper, Comedian and author of 100 TRICKS TO APPEAR SMART IN MEETINGS**

"Business is serious and the world is serious, especially right now. That means we need the ideas described in *Humor, Seriously* even more than ever. Not because levity and humor are ways to relieve the pressure of serious times, although they are, but because they unlock our humanity in the moments where we most need it." – **Tim Brown, Chair of IDEO and author of Change By Design**

"I've learned (often the hard way) that the best way to be taken seriously is to not take yourself too seriously. My teams are always at their best when approaching problems with levity, which entails both humility and optimism and always engenders trust. Plus, it's more fun – like this book!" – **Eric Schmidt, former CEO and Executive Chair of Google (Alphabet)**

"Fresh, profound, and consistently entertaining. Aaker and Bagdonas bring some irresistibly compelling science to the art and application of humor." – **Kelly Leonard, Executive Vice President of The Second City**

"A sharp, incisive, and genuinely funny argument for the power of laughter and humor in the workplace; *Humor, Seriously* translates the knowledge of the world of comedy to tools that actually work in the world of business." – **Anne Libera, Director of Comedy Studies at The Second City**

"If you think your workplace would work better if everyone laughed more, this is your playbook." – **Chip Heath, #1 NYT bestselling author of The Power of Moments**

"I've always used humor as a secret weapon at Spanx. Jennifer and Naomi make a scientific case for the importance of using humor not only in business but in life. It's an incredible way to connect with customers and build culture. This book will help anyone embrace the power of laughter and humor, both." – **Sara Blakely, Founder and CEO of Spanx**

"Humor is a powerful tool for fostering connections between people. It's an act of social courage that, when used correctly, has a transformative effect. *Humor, Seriously* gives us the tools we need to deploy humor expertly in any environment." – **Susan Cain, #1 NYT bestselling author of Quiet**

"Eye-opening, hilarious, and absolutely original, *Humor, Seriously* will change the way you think on the job, about the world, and in your life." – **Leslie Blodgett, Founder and former CEO of bareMinerals and Humor CEO Ambassador**

"Of all the known ways to ruin humor, the most common start with the words 'research,' 'analyze,' and 'professor.' The bad news is that this book features all of those words. Prominently. The good news is that against all odds, you'll actually have fun reading it. It probably won't turn you into Ali Wong, Dave Chappelle, or Hannah Gadsby, but it will give you a much deeper appreciation of how they think – and teach you some new ways to make people laugh." – **Adam Grant, NYT bestselling author of ORIGINALS & GIVE AND TAKE, host of the TED podcast WorkLife**

"In this eye-opening, important and utterly enjoyable book, Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas use science to explain how humor at work (and in life) helps alleviate stress, anxiety, and burnout. Come for the humor, stay for the insights." – **Arianna Huffington, co-founder of The Huffington Post and CEO of Thrive Global**

"If this book and Brad Pitt walked into a bar, and I could only pick one, I'd take the book home with me." – **Nancy Lublin, Former CEO, Crisis TextLine and DoSomething.Org**

"Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas have written a remarkable book for a remarkable moment in history. I long ago learned that when weighed down by serious matters, one may best be taken seriously by seeking out a certain light-heartedness as an expression of humility, optimism and confidence on the road to the serious business of nurturing trust and leading others." – **Joel Peterson, Chairman of Jetblue Airways**