

How to Make your Next Speech Funny or Funnier

One of the best ways to create humor in your speech is to tell a story. You can always find a story: A story about a happy client, how a product was developed, how a project was carried out. A story draws us in with details that create pictures, sounds and smells that put us in the moment with the speaker. And stories can easily become laugh out loud funny by adding exaggeration to those details, so the images and sounds take us to someplace we don't expect. Surprises are funny! One of the things I do for my speech coach clients is to help them add humor to their presentations. (*To find out more about Speech Coaching please visit www.PattiWood.net/coaching.asp*) Sometimes I do this with them face to face or they send me the notes of their speech. Recently, I did a comedy punch up to an already wonderful story written by an Endodontist in Florida. He was preparing to share the story of his office roof repair, which caused this huge list of problems in his office with a large group of other dentists that refer patients to him. This Endodontist is a warm gregarious person, but the story he wrote sounded too much like a rant of complaints, his wonderful sense of humor needed to come through.

I want to share with you, a few of the changes I made so you can see how you can tweak your next speech.

Change One:

The original opening was dry and not worded to bring the listener in. "I wanted to share with you my horrendous week in July." Few people want to hear about someone's bad day, much less a bad week. Audiences need to open up to you and like to laugh with you. Make sure you draw the listener in by resonating with their lives. I made a change that was not really funny, but was designed to get the audience nodding their heads as they identified with the speaker.

My Change:

"Have you ever had one of those bad weeks in your practice where everything seems to go wrong? You know a week when you were ready to send up a white flag and yell I surrender! Recently I had one of those weeks."

Change Two:

A simple description about the AC removal, to fix the roof and prevent the rain coming through the holes is changed.

My Change:

"On Monday the roofers took the two air conditioners which, I had just purchased off my roof to redo some electrical work. The resultant holes leave the roof looking like a giant piece of Swiss cheese. It's summer...which means Florida rain...You guessed it. Swiss cheese is great on a sandwich but I do not recommend it as roofing material."

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Change Three:

I then changed a simple description of coming into the office and listing the damages.

My Change:

“Monday we come in to the office and we are greeted by a downpour of rain INSIDE the office. We had been thinking of putting a small fountain in the lobby. A Tsunami, not so much.”

Change Four:

A description of the wet carpet is tweaked, by adding in descriptive details so the audience can image walking on the carpet themselves. Then some of those surprising details were added.

My Change:

“The carpets wet enough to pass for creek beds. We pull up the pant legs of our scrubs and wade in. By the afternoon were expecting minnows, bull frogs and large mouth bass.”

The creek bed is the detail and that in itself is a surprise. That surprise would make and audience laugh, but adding the fish and bullfrogs goes beyond description to a bigger surprise that will hopefully get a laugh.

Change Five:

The fans and humidifiers from Chem Dry, used to dry out the office, are wonderfully described in the original piece by the doctor-as sounding like jets taking off. And he goes on to explain how the dental patients hear this. What a funny leap from planes sounds to patients?

My Change:

“As we seat the patients, we consider asking them to fasten their seat belts, put the dental trays in the full upright position and give them peanuts and ginger ale after take off.”

In the doctors originals speech he shares how he has to project his voice over the loud jet noise. I exaggerate that and extend it slightly to say.

“I develop a deep airport announcer voice that projects over the noise to both my assistants and patients. By Tuesday, I am announcing regular take off and landings.”

Change Six:

The doctor describes coming in later in the week to another flood. He makes a wonderful humorous reference to Noah’s ark. I take that a little further and change it a bit.

My Change:

“I then walk out into my hallway to be greeted by yet another flood; I check the parking lot for the Ark with animals being loaded two by two.”

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The poor speaker relates other calamities, fire alarms going off, computer brake downs, a pest control problem and a loss of internet connections. The last mishap makes him and his wife miss their dinner plans at the club and end up eating at Checkers hamburger joint. I think that is already funny. But you can make comparisons funnier by adding in the details.

Let's just imagine the differences between those two dinners.

“Our wonderful dinner plans at the club change slightly; instead of the Beef Wellington with the water view at the field club, we eat beef on a bun at Checkers with the parking lot view. I love how the sun sets on the asphalt.”

I have added throughout the speech a running gag. With each calamity, I give him a new job, with the jet sound he becomes an Airport Announcer, with the fire alarm he becomes a Fireman, with the second flood he becomes Noah, with the pest problem he becomes a Pest Control guy. His audience knows he is thinking of retiring, so his audience gets the inside joke of having even more jobs.

Change Seven:

At the end of the speech he originally said he was looking forward to another “relaxing” day of work tomorrow.

My Change:

“I am now finally home, dry and looking forward to tomorrow's new adventure at work. I have already been an Airport Announcer, Fireman, Noah, and Pest Control guy--What adventurous job awaits me? Who could ever want to retire and miss all this fun???”

Change Eight:

The last change is to the end of the speech. The original ending is good. The doctor talks about his great staff. But the purpose of the speech for the doctor is to connect to the physicians that refer patients to him, so he wants to say something that makes them feel good about the change.

My Change:

“I love what I do and I am blessed with the wonderful patients that I so appreciate you sending me. I am truly looking forward to going to work tomorrow. If you love what you do and have a great team behind you, any environment can be bearable...for a limited time that is! Let's say less than 40 days and nights. And as you enjoy your labor day a celebration of occupations, remember to enjoy as I do all the jobs that life brings your way.”