

news

Official Publication of the National Association of Professional Organizers



Make 'em Laugh: Getting Clients Past the Guilt and Fear

Cathryn Golden, CFO, CFSC, CGLC; Balanced Environments, Del Mar, CA



Groucho, Carson, Seinfeld, DeGeneres, Leno, Letterman—one, if not all, of these names probably brings a smile to your face. They are (or were) in the business of laughter after all. And in all

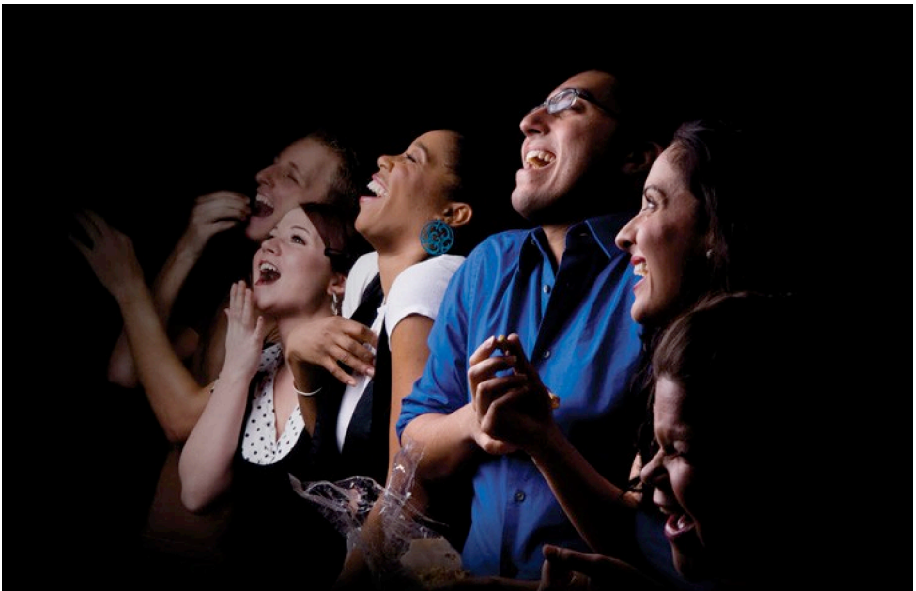
likelihood, you have been a happy recipient of their humor on more than one occasion. (If not, either fill in your favorites...or stop reading this now.)

Stand-up, sit-coms, dot-coms—there are whole genres devoted to making us laugh. Well maybe not that last one. I wanted to see if you were paying attention. Even before the dawn of movies, TV, and heaven-forbid-I-should-forget YouTube, it has been the intention of authors, artists, and entertainers to elicit that gut-busting reaction of hysterical laughter from us.

So What?

So besides the obvious financial windfall to the performers, what's the point of all this? Quite simply—laughing and having a sense of light-heartedness make us feel good. And scientifically, it has been proven that laughter affects our body chemistry by increasing our endorphin levels. It literally makes us healthier. Well, so does broccoli, but I honestly think laughing is much easier to swallow (excuse the pun)

continued on page 3



*What does humor
 have to do with
 organizing?
 In my humble opinion:
 everything.*

What's Inside

- President's Message 2
- My Grandmother Plucked the Feathers for this Pillow ... 4
- Why You Need to Have Fun at Work 6
- Why You Should Marry a PO 8
- Bylaws Change 10
- NAPO Education Schedule 12
- Getting the Most out of NAPO.net 14
- Board Meeting Highlights 14
- Call for Nominations 14
- Quantum Leap 16
- NAPO in the Schools 16
- BCPO Certification Update 16
- New Golden Circle Members 17
- NAPO to Help the Public "Get Ready" during National Preparedness Month 18
- Save These Important Dates 18
- Corporate Associate Member Committee 18
- Chapter Buzz 20
- Advertisers 5

and so much more fun. The saying is true: “Laughter is the best medicine.”

What does humor have to do with organizing? In my humble opinion—everything. I continually talk to and work with clients who have some measure of guilt or fear lurking around their clutter issues. Sometimes you can just hear it in their voices or see it on their faces. Sometimes they actually bring it up. And sometimes you simply feel the heaviness of their emotions. There is disease here, and I want them to feel at-ease!

Virtual Tools that Work

By helping my clients see humor in what appears to be a chaotic situation, it's like adding rocket fuel to jet engines. They really take off. They soar. And when they need to land, they easily find clear runways.

Over nine years, I've created many “virtual tools” in my quest to establish what I call the humorous “org-com” genre. Simple, light-hearted, non-judgmental—so I'm offering four of them to you to try out. Have fun with the process. Adapt them. And may they become good supplements to your virtual tool bag too.

A Reprieve from the Governor (aka a Papal Dispensation)

When a client begins telling me “the stories” or “the explanations” about how they got themselves into their clutter or disorganized messes, I kindly acknowledge that I completely empathize with their frustration. And I do—we all have our issues. Then I pause, smile, look side-to-side, and quietly tell them that I have great news, that it's their lucky day. In my bag I have brought a “reprieve from the governor” (or a dispensation from the Pope). The reprieve carries with it the right to never feel guilty again about what may have led to their situation. The get-out-of-jail-free card has arrived. They are now off the hook. Permission granted. Absolution is here.

In all my years of doing this, I have never had anyone who doesn't laugh and get it—that it's all right to let go. At least figuratively—literally comes later. We laugh together. They do the big exhale. This sets the tone of how we will work.

Now they can breathe deeply again, and know this is doable. All systems go.

Aunt Martha's Teacups

We all have the clients who are reluctant to literally let go of something they've received, because of self-imposed “story-guilt.” The funny thing is, quite often they don't really like the item, and they may not even like the person who gave it to them. I refer to this as: an “Aunt Martha's teacups” situation. They don't drink tea, they don't like tea, their friends don't drink tea, and they never liked Aunt Martha, but they've still got her teacups. Yet they are paralyzed, unable to let them go in case Aunt Martha makes a surprise “inspection” (I mean visit), even though they haven't seen her in more than 10 years. Still, if she did show up, she might question them about the whereabouts of her infamous tea cups. That is some exhausting energy to be hauling around.

When I frame it this way, I always get a nod of agreement and a big laugh. And I assure them that the governor's reprieve is still in effect. It's like a crowbar for helping them release “the stuff.” Then together we figure out the best distribution method for moving Aunt Martha's teacups out of the space, which is a whole other article in and of itself. It works. (My apologies to anyone who has a devoted Aunt Martha out there.)

The 11th Commandment— thou Shall not Dump

I don't like being preachy and doing the finger-pointy-wavy thing. At the same time, my goal is to get clients to agree to some guidelines for success. During any ongoing project, one of the biggest issues is keeping the cleared and organized areas free from anything new that may enter the premises, especially along a key path. So I appear to have a more serious demeanor, and tell them I have a deal-breaker. I reveal that, unbeknown to them, there has been the discovery of “the 11th commandment—thou shall not dump.” I let them know it's all right to put things in other areas we haven't worked on, but a cleared-out space is a dump-free zone. No exceptions. I ask them to raise their hand and take the pledge with me.

Again, by presenting the issue with

humor, this important guideline is always well-received. And it still gives clients room to live their lives and experience their progress. I jokingly mention that I don't want to have to take back the governor's reprieve, “So work with me on this.” When I return, they make a point of showing me how they have kept the commandment—the area is still clear. Then we all laugh.

I Hear Voices

This actually came about from feedback I received from my clients. In my quest for the “transference of skills,” I strive to give them memorable visuals, examples, and explanations. My humorous repetition of guidance seems to ingrain it in their brains. Later on they tell me: “Oh my gosh, I was working on fill-in-the-blank, and I heard your voice telling me to fill-in-the-blank regarding organizing.” They are always so excited about this and find it very funny.

So I now take it upon myself to pre-alert new clients to the “phenomenon” that may happen: the “I hear voices” experience, as I call it. It's only my voice, but that doesn't sound as good. I laughingly explain that I just want to assure them this is normal and I haven't cast a spell on them. It simply means it's working and they're learning organizing skills. They laugh, they smile, and they remember.

And Finally...

As professional organizers, I think we have a profound opportunity to both help our clients establish some external order in their lives, and assist them in letting go of the more toxic inner clutter of guilt, fear, and overwhelm. I have found humor is one of the easiest and most efficient ways to do this. And my clients agree.

Through laughter, our clients can move on and embrace new habits in a fun way. I hope this perspective has made you laugh a little...and perhaps embrace that “org-com” comedian that is lurking inside of you. Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh. Your clients will love you for it.

Contact Cathryn Golden at
cg@balanced-environments.com