



Illustration by Tuko Fujisaki

TRENDS

Want to impress them? Laugh it off

Could clowning be the next corporate craze? Some professionals are flocking to how-to seminars on humor to improve their impact as speakers.

"Humor is a great way to connect with people," says Susan Wilson, a Newton, Ia., business consultant, professional speaker and recent graduate of Comedy College, a six-week course in making 'em laugh in Des Moines, founded by standup comedian Gavin Jerome.

"Jokes get attention and put the audience at ease," says Jerome, whose students — along with the Whoopi-wannabes — are primarily professionals looking to spice up their speeches.

"The best place to use humor is right on the bat to break the ice," advises Jerome. "If you make them laugh in the first 30 seconds it makes your job easier. Then you have them in your back pocket."

Executives must mind some business humor taboos, however. Bure or risque humor should be avoided, along with hard-hitting sarcasm or picking on a colleague's receding hairline.

"One of the first lessons I teach is to find things everyone can relate to, things from everyday life, middle-of-the-road humor," says Jerome.

Mine your own foibles, instructs the professor, or take a fresh look at everyday situations as does comedian Steven Wright who asks, for example, "Why do we always park in driveways and drive on parkways?"

But can you teach funny? You betcha, says Jerome. "It's like carpentry. I give them the tools, they build the house."

Comedy College costs \$99.95 and with sufficient enrollment Jerome will teach in cities outside Des Moines.

For more information call 515-285-2638.

Elaine Glusac