



Photo Courtesy: Kevin Fox

Laughing In The Face Of The Recession

By: Clayton Fletcher

I'm a professional stand-up comedian based in New York City. I'm also an amateur psychologist, an 80s power ballad aficionado, and an unlicensed massage therapist. I'm not authorized to disseminate citations for bicycle traffic violations but that doesn't stop me from doing it. I'm a terrible cook and a very good kisser. I love pie, Motown, and The Facts of Life. What else is there to say?

If the first paragraph made you laugh, you're in love with me.

If the second paragraph confused or intrigued you, let me explain. It's been proven in countless studies that laughter releases endorphins. Endorphins are tiny chemicals in the brain that, according to the Berkshire AD/HD Research Group DNA-Research Project, "reduce pain and anxiety and increase the feeling of well being". They also "stimulate the immune system, cause a sense of euphoria, and they help you learn". And if you can't trust the BADHDRGDNARP, who can you trust?

So, fine, laughter increases endorphin levels. Great, Clayton, but where do you get off telling me I'm in love with you? Well, it turns out that other events in our lives also cause a release of endorphins. These include eating chocolate, exercising, sunbathing, and falling in love. And here's the kicker: your brain doesn't know the difference! The chemical reaction in the brain to chocolate, exercise, and laughter is almost exactly the same as the reaction to love. So if you really want someone to fall in love with you, tell her a joke while feeding her chocolate on a treadmill! She'll be yours faster than you can say "divorce court."

What does any of this have to do with business? The answer is "everything." In times of recession, people feel down. Prospects seem slim, negativity prevails. Anxiety and pain are commonplace. If I'm about to pitch an idea to a client and this Wonderland of Woe is my starting point, what chance do I have of really breaking through? Probably about the same chance I have of starting for the Mets.

But if you can remove some of that pain, assuage some of that anxiety, somehow turn that negativity into a sense of well being, you greatly increase your chance of success. And one really great way to do that is to deliver laughter. When you make someone laugh, (s)he falls in love with you. -You see this every day. Your phone rings and you're very busy. Your assistant tells you it's Mr. Carson from ABC Consulting. If Mr. Carson is a guy who lightens your mood every day and puts a smile on your face, you take the call. If he's Eeyore from the Winnie the Pooh books, he gets to complain to your voicemail.

Why do we drop everything else just because someone funny wants to chat? -Because we enjoy laughter, sure, but I believe that it runs far deeper than that. I believe it's because, in a very real way, we love that funny guy. At least our brain thinks we do!



I've developed a comedy seminar that I've presented to various PR firms in and around New York City, and the feedback has been astounding. When it comes to client relations, your ace in the hole is your sense of humor. I teach top executives all the way down to interns how to apply comedy techniques to pitch presentations, business calls and e-mails, department meetings, and even salary negotiations to improve success rates. The theory behind my seminar is that it's much easier for someone who is in love with you to say, "yes" (and likewise very difficult for that person to say, "no"). If someone is really cracking you up, you enjoy having her in the room with you. But your brain does not make the distinction between laughter and love when it comes to the chemicals that control the mood center, they're powerful endorphins!

Steve Cody is the founder and CEO of Peppercom, one of the agencies applying my techniques within the highly competitive New York City public relations market. Cody reports, "Fletcher's seminar has made a dramatic difference in the way Peppercom thinks about new business, current business, and our business. In an era when we are bombarded with non-stop doom and gloom; it's amazing to see how powerful a weapon humor can really be."

...And he's right. In these trying times, businesses are all seeking creative ways to compete in a difficult environment. The ones I work with say they've found one, a really good one.

So now the secret is out. If you want to succeed in business, you first have to get people to love you. And if you are trying to make that happen, laughter really is the best aphrodisiac.