

How to Have Fun with Your Emails

By Robert Middleton

What's funny, anyway?

Something is funny when it absurd, out of place, and unexpected.

A fish is not funny.

A fish wearing a ballet tutu is funny.

An ordinary face is not funny.

A face with a strange, distorted expression is funny.

A comment about doing something ordinary is not funny.

A comment about doing something completely unexpected can be very funny.

Here's a good example:

"It has been a few months since we last spoke. I have been colluding with the Russians. I know, I know, that is not in style

these days but I just couldn't help it. They have such good caviar and vodka.”

Mentioning that it's a few months since we last spoke is expected. Colluding with the Russians is not. So it's funny. Then there's a build up to the caviar and vodka. Also funny.

Now, remember, that this is from a consultant, an ordinary person who does everyday things. But when you say something like this, it's immediately funny.

So making something funny is taking an ordinary situation and throwing in an unexpected absurdity.

A comment I made to a client:

“I'd appreciate receiving a testimonial about the work I did for you.”

They replied, “Sure, I'd be happy to share the results I got from the many ideas you've given me.”

Then I added, “Yes, and just tell it straight forward. Tell them you're now a multimillionaire! You know, a filthy rich meditation teacher.”

That got a laugh because it was not expected based on the first statement. It was obviously a joke.

So humor is all about contrast. From straight to absurd.

But why use humor in emails in the first place? Why work so hard at being funny?

The purpose of humor is to change/alter/modify the state of the person reading your email.

You want to lighten things up.

Look, you're going through your email inbox and almost everything you see is either serious or boring. Sometimes it will be something important or valuable.

But as you are reading, you are focused, trying to see what to keep, what to read and what to discard. You are in a serious state of mind.

You couldn't say you're having the best time in your life. You're slogging through things because you have to.

And then you get an email that is different, unexpected, absurd, silly or wacky.

And if it's done well, it elicits a laugh.

The reader can't help it. It's unexpected. It just comes. Pow!

And now the reader is immediately in a different state. He or she is smiling and wondering what this is all about.

It's unusual, different, and provokes curiosity. "What the hell is this?" you think. And so you keep reading.

And if the rest of the email incorporates a little more humor here and there, it keeps you reading.

And this is the big challenge of emails, isn't it? To get you to actually read the damn things.

But if the email is fun, entertaining, different, it stands apart from everything else in your inbox.

Now you are engaged, open, curious, and feeling good about the message.

The whole purpose of any kind of business-related email is to both inform and to stimulate the reader to take action.

And when also you interject some humor into your emails the chances of that happening rises dramatically.

Jon Buchan, who accidentally wrote a funny cold email (after getting drunk) that got great response, figured out various techniques to make emails funny.

They are actually pretty simple formulas that are easy to emulate with a little practice.

The most fundamental is called “The Reverse.”

You create a mental image and then you shatter it.

That’s pretty much what I did with the examples above.

“I haven’t gotten back to you because.... I’ve been colluding with the Russians.”

Ask for a very straight-forward testimonial... But then tell people that you’re now a multimillionaire.

Both are reverses.

It’s like calmly walking down the hallway in your office and then falling headlong into a vat of lime Jell-O. Not expected.

The reverse is a perfect device when contacting a past client whom you know.

It's not unexpected to say you are following up. But it's completely unexpected to say you've been colluding with the Russians.

But it could be anything:

You were kidnapped by a tribe of rogue tax accountants.

You contracted a rare disease that made your skin glow.

Once you have the formula, you just try a number of things until one makes you giggle.

It needs to be unexpected, silly and fun. If it conjures up a visual image, so much the better.

The reverse can be your primary tool in getting laughs from your emails.

But you only get good at it by practicing writing them.

One way to do this is by writing an ordinary email. One that is completely straight-forward and sane:

“I’ve been really busy the past few weeks but wanted to get back to you. I’ve been thinking of some ways we could improve that plan to get even better results.”

That’s expected, normal, boring. So change the second sentence into a reverse.

“I’ve been really busy the past few weeks but wanted to get back to you. My nefarious plans for world domination took an awkward turn when my cellphone was hurled into a wood chipper. But now that I’ve recovered the data, let me share some ideas with you.”

It’s not boring anymore. It’s fun and a little wacky.

And guess what? People love to work with fun people.

How not to overdo it

Look, there is a chance that you could go completely off the reservation and turn somebody off. It’s not being silly that’s inappropriate, it’s straying into tricky territories.

So this one might not work so well:

“I’ve been really busy the past few weeks but wanted to get back to you. Being so stressed, I attempted suicide by jumping out my window. Luckily, I live in a one-story house.”

Yeah, it’s funny, but suicide is a very touchy subject. So stay away from that kind of stuff. No sexual innuendo, politics or death and dismemberment. No drugs or crime. If you know your recipient has a sick sense of humor you can sometimes get away with that stuff. But also don’t make it so tame and wimpy that it’s just lame.

Here’s the good news.

I’m giving you guidelines for writing funny emails, but before you send them out, you can send them to me for approval, fine-tuning and humor enhancement.

Will they all work? Probably not. But this approach increases the chances that you’ll hit the target more often.

In this program we’ll be writing emails to three kinds of prospects:

Category 1 – Those you know well, such as past and current clients, and close business associates and friends.

These are definitely the easiest. They already know you and like you. You can get away with a lot with this group.

So these are the people you want to write emails to first.

You want to contact them to get conversations and meetings to explore future business opportunities.

Category 2 – Those who know you or have some kind of an affiliation with:

People on an email list to whom you've been sending articles. People who have attended a presentation or webinar you've given. People who belong to the same professional association (even if you've never met them). Virtually anyone on LinkedIn or other social media followers.

Basically anyone you have a connection with, even a pretty weak connection.

With a little work you can find a lot of people in this category. You can join a professional association and immediately have

a ton of prospects in Category 2. You can give a talk, collect cards and have a ton of prospects to follow up with.

Category 3 – Those who are complete, absolute strangers that you have virtually no connection with other than they could be good prospective clients.

Humor works really well in contacting people like these. In fact, humor is often the *only* way you can get their attention.

Our Plan of Action

As we go through the program, we'll explore the various ways to reach out to prospective clients in all of these categories.

We'll work together to develop the most effective, fun, and engaging emails that will make people want to get back to you.

In the meantime, practice The Reverse in a silly email or two.

Cheers, Robert

P.S. If you are struggling with this, it usually means you are taking yourself too seriously. That is a terminal condition, so stop it already!