

DO YOU TALK FUNNY?

7 COMEDY HABITS TO BECOME A
BETTER (AND FUNNIER) PUBLIC SPEAKER



DAVID NIHILL

Praise for

Do You Talk Funny?

“David Nihill talks funny. He also writes funny. But his book isn’t just entertaining, it’s incredibly useful. It’s packed with effective and easy-to-implement tips that have helped me in my presentations.”

—**AJ Jacobs**, author of *Drop Dead Healthy* and *The Year of Living Biblically*

“Your next talk will be 10 times more entertaining if you read this book.”

—**Charlie Hoehn**, author of *Play It Away: A Workaholic’s Cure for Anxiety*

“This is a book you don’t just read, it’s a book you DO. Look, I’m such an expert in this field that I’m quoted in the book, and even I learned a tremendous amount reading it, so I’m gonna guess you will too.”

—**Bill Grundfest**, Golden Globe Winner, 3-Time Emmy Nominee, Founder of NYC’s Comedy Cellar

“It is one of those rare books that makes you think, laugh, and embrace your quirky self. In an inspiring and entertaining manner, *Do You Talk Funny* teaches you how to find your inner storytelling mojo. A great read!”

—**Michael Margolis**, CEO, Get Storied

“This book is practical, actionable, and most importantly, effective. Not only does David nail how to add funny to your talks, he also practices what he preaches in this very entertaining read. My two complaints are: 1) This book didn’t exist when I started as a speaker and 2) I didn’t write it.”

—**Andrew Tarvin**, author of *Humor That Works*, award-winning speaker, NYC based comedian

“From writing to performing to where to put your hands, David Nihill will help you become a more humorous storyteller. I have been lucky enough to have a beer with the guy – and can confirm that he really does talk funny.”

—**Peter McGraw**, University of Colorado professor, director of the Humor Research Lab (HuRL), co-author of *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny*

“Anyone who wants to influence and connect with audiences more effectively should scoop up *Do You Talk Funny* immediately. David Nihill combines personal experience, expert research and practical tips to create - regardless of his protestations to the contrary - a truly magical handbook for presenters.”

—**Kat Koppett**, author of *Training to Imagine*, TEDx speaker, founder of Koppett & Company

“Read this book and you’ll enjoy presenting to people, they’ll enjoy listening to you and crucially they’ll happily retain your message. A riveting read, a super story and awesome advice.”

—**Neal O’ Gorman**, CEO, Artomatix

“As someone who runs sales conferences, I know first-hand of the value humor brings to a presentation. I consider this book my blueprint and will do my best to make sure all of our speakers read it before getting on stage at our events.”

—**Max Altschuler**, CEO, Sales Hacker, Inc.

“David has written the owner’s manual for adding a much needed comedic edge to any presentation or speaking gig. It’s a perfect balance of how to be funny ha ha and funny like a clown without being shot in the foot. Some people are born funny, they are called comedians. The rest of us will have to try a bit harder and read this book.”

—**Jason Miller**, author of *Welcome to the Funnel*, keynote speaker, senior content marketing manager at LinkedIn

“*Do You Talk Funny* is essential reading for professional public speakers and anyone trying to tell funnier, more memorable stories. Get it.”

—**Tom Morkes**, CEO, Insurgent Publishing

“After attending David’s FunnyBizz conference in Brooklyn, I knew I had to get my hands on this book. I read through each chapter, sometimes two and three times, taking notes, jotting down content ideas, and figuring out ways to infuse more humor into my own copywriting. The results speak for themselves: more people are engaged with my content, and my conversation rate is up! This book is a must read for any content marketer or copywriter.”

—**M. Shannon Hernandez**, founder of The Writing Whisperer

“In the ever-expanding TED-centric world of public speaking, this book should be compulsory reading for anyone aspiring to be a unique, memorable and highly entertaining presenter.”

—**David Howley**, Partner, Hedgeserv Ltd

“David has compiled a great resource for humor lovers and interwove lessons he learned from his own experience with what he gleaned from mentors. Glad your father showed you how to squeeze humor out of any situation, now you are helping others do the same!”

—**Darren LaCroix**, CSP, World Champion Speaker

“This is a cracker of a book, I really enjoyed it. As a nervous public speaker I know if I can make the audience laugh, it makes everyone (especially me) feel a lot less awkward. In the past I’ve lucked into a few laughs but already after reading this book, I’m making changes to my upcoming presentations that I know are going to get some laughs. It’s weird listening to comedy now, I can break down why each joke is funny. It’s a real eye opener!”

—**Dan Norris**, author of *The 7 Day Startup*, co-founder of WPCurve.com

“We all have short attention spans these days. Increasingly to get noticed you need to be funny. The good news is you can learn how. The even better news is that David can guide you on this journey in an engaging, entertaining and insightful way. So sit back, relax and soon you’ll be talking funny too!”

—**Philip Madden**, Founding Director, Kennoway Investments

“*DYTF* is a witty and clever take on how to apply the lessons of a business-savvy experimental stand up comic into today’s world of droll and monotonous business presentations. David gives great, practical advice how to structure any business talk to be as engaging as a 5 minute set at the Comedy Cellar. Highly recommended for anyone that has to do corporate presentations for 2 to 5000+ people audiences (and keep them awake and cheering you on).”

—**Rob Kniaz**, Founding Partner, Hoxton Ventures

“David’s rich life experiences shine through in this wildly entertaining guide to public speaking. Whether you’re reading it for fun or to stand out at your next business presentation, I promise you’ll be inspired.”

—**Sami Aziz**, Producer on ABC’s *Shark Tank*, 2014 Emmy Award Winner

“This book is great. I haven’t read it yet but David drew a picture when he was 6 years old of a penguin drinking beer in a Chinese restaurant and it was clear the potential for slight wisdom and misguided creativity were there”.

—**Marita Nihill**, David’s Mother

Do You Talk Funny?

DO YOU TALK FUNNY?

7 COMEDY HABITS TO BECOME A
BETTER (AND FUNNIER) PUBLIC SPEAKER



DAVID NIHILL

Copyright © 2015 by David Nihill

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publishers.

Cover Design by Rodellwahrin A. Pepito

Graphic design for internal images by 36t

ISBN 978-1-50-581929-8

For more information go to:

www.7comedyhabits.com

Dedication

To my father, Patrick Nihill, who taught me that you can squeeze humor into just about any situation.

Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Introduction](#)

[#1 Start with a Story](#)

[#2 Add Humor — Find the Funny](#)

[#3 Write Funny](#)

[#4 Rehearsed Spontaneity: Learning Comedy by Playing Banjo for an Empty Room](#)

[#5 Delivery](#)

[#6 Control the Audience](#)

[#7 Close the Book, But Not Fully — Permanent Beta](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Author's Note

Everything in this book I learned the hard way. It contains an array of tips and insights that I wish I had known at the start of my journey. They worked for me and I think they will work for you too.

If you feel this book doesn't help you become a better and funnier speaker I am happy to give you a full refund. To claim it, please send a video link of your not-so-great speaking performance, along with your receipt to help@funnybizz.co

Ten percent of the proceeds of this book will go to Arash Bayatmakou via Help Hope Live until he is fully back on his feet. Thereafter, the 10% will go to one of the many facing the same challenges after suffering a severe spinal cord injury.

Introduction

Byron Bay, Australia. I took a deep breath and swam within a few feet of the resting shark.

He sat oblivious to my attention 25 feet below the surface, next to the *Wollongbar*, a sunken ship that lost its tie to the old Byron Bay Pier during a cyclone in 1922 and sank. Long abandoned by its intended occupants, the wreck is now home to Wobbegong sharks that can grow to 10 feet in length. They are the pit bull terriers of the ocean. Their often-sleepy demeanor makes them appear passive but they can leave a serious and lengthy impression.

In February 2004, a snorkeler named Luke Tresoglavic learned the hard way. Bitten on the leg, Luke swam 1,000 feet to shore, walked to his car and drove to the local surf club... with the shark still attached. Luckily for Luke, the shark was young and only two feet long, and he only suffered puncture wounds to his leg from the shark's razor-sharp teeth.

The target of my attention was a bigger creature and sat an impressive 7 feet in length. I carefully detached my snorkel pipe from my mask and used it to reach out and tap the shark gently to initiate some movement. It obliged, rising and thrusting into motion with the same labored enthusiasm I do whenever I have a 4:00 a.m. flight to catch. As sunlight reflected through the clear waters, I looked upward towards my friends only to glimpse a sea of bubbles and panicked limbs as they fled the scene of what I am sure they thought was about to be my untimely death.

Most people are afraid of sharks it seems. I love them. Always have. The story has always rang true in my life: what most people are afraid of, I have been drawn toward. Danger, risk and fun have always been intertwined for me. Skydiving, cliff jumping, bungee jumping, free diving, poking wild animals—these are exhilarating to me, not terrifying. I don't chase the things that do scare me because being scared is about as pleasant as a cliff-jump gone wrong.

Incidentally, when my cliff jumping did go wrong, it led to a shattered leg on an isolated island whose only form of medical assistance was a vet. Thankfully, based on his prior experience, he didn't put me down.

One thing, however, has always had the power to turn me into a shaking,

sweating bag of wobbly jelly. Public speaking. To say I hate it would be a huge understatement. For me, it's everyone else's shark, dentist, spider, and mother-in-law rolled into one big ball of terror. And for most of my adult life, it has treated me just as kindly.

My name is Mustafa and I am an exchange student from Southern Yemen. That was how I started my Human Resource Management class presentation. Why? If only I knew. It seemed like a good idea after taking down four bottles of Corona in quick succession before taking to the podium. Before the presentation, I had walked into a group meeting with a six-pack in hand—two of which were already empty—and proceeded to drink two more while prepping for my turn to speak my brilliant opening lines. When speech time came, the lecturer understandably didn't take kindly to my lighthearted approach and lightheaded comments. Don't get me wrong, I am no alcoholic and your intervention is unnecessary. Drinking just seemed like a good idea to relax my nerves before speaking to the class. Had I known then what I know now, I would certainly have quickly vetoed my own plan.

That year, my final year at one of Ireland's top schools, I received first class honors in all subjects but one: Human Resource Management. Seventy percent was the magic number—it defined a first class honor and was generally the highest mark one receives at University College Dublin. My beer-soaked presentation had knocked me into a lower percentile and I graduated with a second-class honors degree. I felt bitter about it but only had myself to blame for my near miss. Damn fear of public speaking.

I took a year off to work and travel in Australia before returning to earn my Master's Degree. I selected the same course with the same lecturer in order to correct my mistake and do better the second time around. The lecturer certainly hadn't forgotten me, or my terrible public speaking ability. For the second time running, she gave me the exact same grade. Again, it was her course that brought down my average and meant the difference between a first-class honors degree and a second-class honors degree. Essentially in both my graduate degree and Master's degree, I narrowly missed out on earning the highest level possible due to my fear of public speaking.

Park Avenue, New York City, Irish Government Offices. It didn't take long for my fear to worm its way into my new working life. I landed a job with the Irish Government as a Marketing Executive, helping high-potential Irish start-up companies expand in the U.S.

The new recruits, myself included, had to present at a team get-together. I had no beer available to calm my nerves this time. I also had nowhere to place the chart I had drawn to illustrate my main points to the assembled executives. As my nerves took hold, I frantically searched for the best section

of wall to stick it to. One 4x4 framed section stood out as a perfect place. Perfect. I pulled a piece of duct tape and—No!!! I heard people suddenly scream. In my bubbling state, I had tried to stick my poster to a \$40,000 piece of artwork that I didn't even notice. Some may say I made a terrible first impression. By some, I mean everyone.

Shanghai, China. I was the only westerner working in China for Hult International Business School, the world's largest business school by enrollment. This, apparently, was enough to make me the ideal candidate to host the Asian leg of the Hult Prize, a global competition run in partnership with the Clinton Global Initiative. I actively tried to avoid it but needed the help of the organizer on another project, so I ultimately gave into the arm-twisting. I was a nervous wreck as usual. As I took the stage, I had enough paper in hand to rival *War and Peace*. I stumbled through it terribly, relieved only by the knowledge that most of the assembled 400-plus Chinese officials and participants had no idea how to comprehend an Irish accent. Of course, then I screwed up their Chinese names too.

That certainly translated.

Three opportunities to improve my educational and professional standing, three tremendous failures that stemmed directly from my inability to stand in the front of a room and speak like a person. It didn't make any sense. It didn't fit with my personality. I wasn't a painfully shy guy. I was outgoing. I could hold a conversation with just about anyone and walk away seeming intelligent, competent, and capable of handling pointy utensils. But the second I was faced with a captive audience, I became a guy my friends jokingly referred to as, "Shakin' Stevens." My alter ego sweated. He stammered. He shuddered. Sometimes he BYOB'ed. You wouldn't trust Shakin' Stevens with a sharp fork, let alone a room full of clients.

The time came to put an end to this sequence of embarrassment, but it was certainly not a decision I made on my own.

My friend Arash suffered a severe spinal cord injury in June 2012. A year on, I suggested organizing a comedy show and recruiting some top comedians to perform to raise funds for his continued physical therapy. As luck would have it, my old neighbor, Tim, was a headlining comedian and kindly agreed to do it. What I didn't anticipate was Arash's insistence that I host the event! He knew nothing of my fear of public speaking and had no idea just how bad I was at it. He just knew me as someone who was full of words in everyday life and scared of very little. There was no way that I could say no.

Knowing what I had gotten myself in for, I set out to learn all I could about standup comedy and public speaking before the event. Tim Ferriss is an

author and entrepreneur who popularized the idea of “meta learning,” learning a skill in the shortest amount of time possible. In *The 4-Hour Chef: The Simple Path to Cooking Like a Pro, Learning Anything, and Living the Good Life*, Ferriss deconstructed a skill he wanted to master into its most basic components and determined which of those components would give his ability the biggest boost. As a huge Tim Ferriss fan, I figured this would be a great way to raise the bar for my public speaking ability.

There was just one problem.

In *The 4-Hour Chef*, Ferriss opted to learn how to cook. It was something he wanted to do, not something that made him want to drop into the fetal position on the floor of his presumably very Zen kitchen. The idea of throwing myself head first into the ABC’s of public speaking sounded terrible. There had to be another way, something else that I could learn that was aligned with public speaking but didn’t make me want to flee to Japan to study yabusame. But what?

Standup comedy. It rattled through my brain for just a second but I heard it loud and clear. I did like to make people laugh and, provided that they were my friends and not an audience, I was pretty good at it. Standup put you on a stage. In front of people. To sink or swim or run off the platform in tears. Yes, standup would be my gateway skill.

I wondered if standup comedy could be broken down into processes aimed at mastery, as tested and popularized by Ferriss in his top-selling books. Could I use comedy to craft more memorable, engaging, and effective presentations for the audience without making myself want to die? What should I focus on in order to obtain the outcome I desired? What are comedians learning the hard way on stage, often through trial and error as they clock up the 10,000 hours that author Malcolm Gladwell says make a master? How does someone who is not naturally funny kill it on stage? By studying comedy and the processes used by standup comedians, can we make our presentations and key messages stand out while at the same time overcoming fears of public speaking. Can this be done quickly?

I’d soon find out that the answer to all of these is ‘yes.’

I am a keen kite surfer. One day after a session under the Golden Gate Bridge, I told a fellow kite surfer my show-hosting predicament. As chance would have it, he was a comedian in his spare time and took it upon himself to organize my professional comedy début. He contacted a booker friend, bending the truth ever so slightly by telling him I was a very funny comedian visiting from Ireland. Before I knew what was happening I was scheduled to perform for 20 minutes as part of a paid show. Twenty minutes! With the

charity show for Arash looming, I agreed to take the stage. It was certainly baptism by fire but, amazingly, it wasn't so bad. I got a few laughs along the way and it was a huge improvement from my days as Mustafa from Southern Yemen, the Corona-fueled madman with Shakin' Stevens moves and occasional opinions on Human Resource Management.

I decided I would keep the experiment going for a year, regardless of how the charity show went. I dedicated myself to applying the Pareto Principle to my public speaking ability through standup comedy, which is to say that I set about figuring out the 20% of the actions that would deliver 80% of the results I wanted. I would figure out what makes a joke funny, how to best craft and deliver it, and what comedians knew that business speakers did not. Surely the lessons crossed over, and I was going to figure out how. I have always walked the line between business and comedy in my own life, so this seemed like a great excuse to combine the two. If I could help a few others by documenting what I learned along the way then the quest would be worth it.

Why the focus on comedy? Beyond the demands of my comfort level, what made me so sure that standup would help me become a better public speaker?

Because science says so. "The brain doesn't pay attention to boring things," notes John Medina, a biologist and author of the best-selling book *Brain Rules*. "Laughter triggers a dopamine release, which aids memory and information processing. It's like a mental post-it note that tells your brain, remember this." Today's audience has been socialized to receive info via humor. They want infotainment, not information. Clients don't watch "20/20" or "Nightline" for news; they watch Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. They want and expect information delivered with a punch line.

Carmine Gallo is a news anchor turned author, columnist, and keynote speaker. In short, he's a guy people actually want to listen to. He says humor is one of the nine key items in successful TED talks: "Humor is proven to increase the likelihood that your pitch or presentation will be successful, whether you're pitching to one person or speaking to thousands." It also "lowers defenses, making your audience more receptive to your message."

As we will see, on a laughs per minute basis there are several TED talks that produce more laughs than the classic comedy, *The Hangover*. Needless to say they are also a lot more informative. At the time of writing, every one of the ten most popular TED talks moves the humor needle.

Top speakers, savvy startups, leading ad agencies, and Fortune 500 firms alike are turning to humor as the ultimate tool for being memorable amidst the ringtones, vibrations, and swipe-rights of modern life, and you should be too.

Great speakers know this. Every time I watch great business speakers, I see the same techniques used by standup comedians at play.

“Stage time, stage time and stage time.” These are the three keys to public-speaking success according to Darren LeCroix, who brings incredible stories and captivating humor to conferences around the globe, even though he is the first to stress he was “born without a funny bone in his body.” Darren is a self-proclaimed “student of comedy” and touts himself as living proof that humor is a skill that can be learned. He certainly knows what he is talking about. In 2001, Darren out-spoke 25,000 contestants from 14 countries to win the coveted title of World Champion of Public Speaking (yes, they exist). Storytelling nights like the Moth are enjoying huge popularity, and many of their better performers are comedians. Doug Cordell, NPR storyteller and Emmy-nominated writer, explained at a recent story event: “Comedians have a big advantage. They are on stage way more which means they are much more comfortable up there.” If the goal is improved public speaking, standup comedy offers a solid means of achieving it.

Open mics offer a perfect opportunity for inexperienced speakers to perform for a small audience, and they run nightly in all major cities. In New York City, it is not uncommon for an aspiring comedian to go on stage more than four times in one night. Most comedians will tell you it takes about seven years to make a living from comedy. Four hours a night for seven years means comedians invest roughly 1,428 hours of time each year to improving their craft. If stage time is the key to making it as a keynote, then adhering to even a fraction of the standup comedian’s practice schedule is a smart move.

Most comedians will invest an estimated 22 hours of work for every minute of a one-hour special show (normally produced yearly). As business speakers, we don’t need 60 minutes. Even one minute’s worth of comedy—with four to five laughs taken and spread out over a nine-minute business talk—will make you much funnier than 90% of business speakers out there because most speakers and presentations are boring! My time with the Irish government and PricewaterhouseCoopers combined to make me one of the most well rested men in Ireland. Because most presentations are glorified snooze-fests, long keynotes are becoming a thing of the past. Who has an hour to focus on one person? And besides, some of the best speeches in history have clocked in at less than 20 minutes. Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was 272 words and lasted two minutes. Winston Churchill’s “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat” speech was 688 words. The most powerful emotional expression two humans can say to each other is just three words: “I,” “love,” and “*cake*.”

It’s just as well, too, because most people switch off at around the ten-

minute mark. As referenced in *Brain Rules*, studies by noted educator Wilbert McKeachie demonstrate that “typically, attention increases from the beginning of the lecture to ten minutes into the lecture and decreases after that point.” This is why TED has shortened its earlier 18-minute format.

They figured out that brevity is levity.

Standup comedy, at its basic principles, is a combination of material (what you say) and delivery (how you say it). It is no different than typical speeches or presentations. TV slots for new comedians tend to be under five minutes, which forces them to continuously refine and refine and refine again in order to get maximum impact from each word. There is a saying in comedy that “a tight five is better than a sloppy fifteen.” Yet business presentations worldwide fail to abide by the same principle. Instead, there tends to be a lot of sloppy fifteens. Why? The necessary stage time, structure, and conscious editing in order to make maximum impact just aren’t there—most people don’t have to speak often enough to get it. Conversely, the speakers who deliver their talk most tend to be the best and most polished. They know where the laugh lines are, they know what phrasing works best, and they know their timing. Just like standup comedians.

Since the crash of 2008, employment markets and popular perspectives on how work should be have fundamentally shifted. The loyalty that comes from long-term employers and single company careers is gone. People no longer stand for their company because they have little faith that their company will stand for them. To be safe, and indeed prosper in this economy, what you can do and who you are needs to be transferable; what you did and whom you did it for don’t really matter anymore.

As Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn says it’s time for “the startup of you.” It’s time, as author James Altucher says, to “choose yourself”. To do this you need to market yourself (whether you like it or not), just as Tim Ferriss has done so successfully. A big part of this is taking every opportunity to tell your story. Tim, as it happens, is no fan of public speaking either. What does he have to say about it? “If you’re getting chased by a lion, you don’t need to run faster than the lion, just the people running with you. Speaking with other people is similar: you don’t need to be perfect, you just need to be better than a few others.”

The premise of this book is simple. Learning from standup comedy can give us a huge advantage in building our public speaking ability by providing the tools to help us not only outrun the lion, but leave him laughing in our dust.

In one year, I went from being deeply afraid of public speaking to being

able to headline a standup comedy show, hosting a business conference and charity event, and speaking at multiple business gatherings. For one full year, I performed as a comedian in several hundred shows across all of Northern California's top comedy clubs, interviewed thousands of comedians, performers, and public speaking experts and read every book, quote, and guru I could find on the topic. I broke the techniques down, applied the 80/20 Principle (thanks Pareto) and performed a series of experiments on yours truly to determine the seven key principles, or habits that brought forth the biggest outcome. And I have explained them here. Each of the seven comedy habits is explored in detail in its own chapter and is followed by a series of short exercises to apply the learning. These are seven principles that would have saved me a lot of time and embarrassment if I had only known them earlier. Trust me, if I could defeat Shakin' Stevens, you can get over your own fears too.

My year of study and self-experimentation brought me to three conclusions:

1. Top business speakers are using humor.
2. They are developing laugh lines using the same process as comedians, even though most are unaware of it.
3. You don't need to be naturally funny to get laughs. Most comedians I met were not.

To be honest, I still have a fear of public speaking. The difference now is it's manageable. I have a tried and tested array of stories and funny anecdotes I know will initiate one of the most powerful forces available to mankind: laughter.

"I am from Ireland so I do have a bit of an accent. If I say something funny and you guys don't laugh, I'm going to assume you didn't understand, and just say it again." These were the first words I said when I took the stage at one of San Francisco's biggest comedy clubs. It was a packed room and I was the first person to go on. Strangely I wasn't nervous. The sweating and shaking I used to feel were under control. Why? Because I knew the crowd was about to laugh. I was going to be the one making them do it.

I still use this line—in fact, I have used it many times—and it always gets a laugh. Developed in comedy clubs and at open mic nights, it's the same line I use when speaking in a business environment and it's one of many. It follows a structure and a methodology that when combined with six other habits will make you a funnier speaker and make your fear of public speaking a thing of the past. This is not a magic book. Application of these seven principles won't make you instantly funnier, more successful, or more

attractive to the opposite sex. Add a little practice, however, and it just might.

#1 Start with a Story

“Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.” —Robert McKee

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” —Maya Angelou

I woke in the middle of the night to a series of loud rumbling noises. My location was a small windowless room in volcanic Guatemala. I had just moved in with a local family as part of a Spanish language school home-stay program. Unfortunately for me, the epicenter of this rumbling was my stomach and the cause was food poisoning. And, as I was about to find out, it was a very bad dose. While I was curled up in the throes of intestinal anarchy, my host family was in the next room, completely unaffected by the gut-twisting superbug. The projectile vomiting started 20 minutes later and seemed to have no stop. With no windows, no trashcan, and no time to react, my backpack loaded with clothes bore the brunt of the storm with the floor and walls coming a close second and third. I heard footsteps coming to check on me. My host mother, Flor, a robust lady in traditional long local dress came rushing in to find me covered in puke and her white-washed walls looking like fifty shades of green. I was due to start classes the following day, so at this point my Spanish was non-existent. I rummaged through my sodden belongings to find a small pocket dictionary and flipped to the health section. I looked her in the eyes with my most pitiful puppy-dog-meets-drowned-rat face and pointing to my source of wisdom read aloud, “Vomitando”...“Vomitando aqui,” as I pointed to my bag; “aqui,” the floor; and, “aqui tambien,” (“here as well”) as I gave the walls a broad stroking. “Alcoholico de Irlanda,” she mumbled, assuming incorrectly that my culture and not her local dish had gotten the better of me.

Thankfully, my condition and my Spanish improved quickly. I never forgot the Spanish word for “vomiting” and I suspect you won’t either. Stories do that to you. Thanks to evolution, our brains are hardwired to recognize, remember, and appreciate the information that comes to us through storytelling. Stories help us learn.

Rapid language acquisition experts like Benny Lewis (a fellow Irishman) also stress the use of mnemonic devices. Defined as “any learning technique that aids information retention,” mnemonics aim to translate information into a form that the brain can retain better than its original form. Benny has a great example with learning the Spanish word “caber,” which means, “to fit.” Caber sounds like two words more familiar to native English speakers, “cab” and “bear”. Utilizing mnemonic devices, we can construct a short visual story of a bear trying to fit into a taxicab. To best remember it, you visualize the unlikely scenario in your mind in as much detail as possible. The premise of this idea is based on something scientists have known for a long time: The mind learns in stories and visual cues. Benny speaks 12 languages and he learned them all in less time than it took me to learn basic commands en Español.

Many of us will have been to a comedy club and laughed hysterically at the comedian, but struggle to remember his/her name or what exactly was said. The same applies to business speakers. When they deliver information as a series of facts or opinions, it’s hard for our brains to recall them all. Our aim as public speakers is to be more memorable and have our audience spread our message for us. The best way to do this is by wrapping the information in a story.

“The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories.”
— Mary Catherine Bateson

Ann Handley is a content marketer who inspires an entire industry. When it comes to storytelling she says, “Some brands are doing it really well, but storytelling is not a skill marketers have necessarily needed over the last few decades. It’s a new skill the marketing industry is developing.” The same can be said for those who need to self-market. It’s a skill that you need to develop and starting now will put you ahead of the curve. Whether your experiences tell how you disgusted your host family in Guatemala, or how you lead your company out of disaster, the same basic principles apply. You are always telling a story. How you tell it makes all the difference.

While most eight-year-olds were learning how to properly squeeze a lemon, Gary Vaynerchuck was managing seven lemonade stands across his neighborhood in Edison, NJ, his new home after moving with his family from Belarus. This kind of hustle has led him to numerous business successes, best-selling books, TV appearances, and has edged him a few steps closer to his goal of buying the New York Jets football team. He is also one of the best business speakers out there and no stranger to using humor. According to Vaynerchuck, *“Quality storytelling always wins. Always.”*

This is something the business world would do well to remember.

It does not take long to find a compelling example. Airbnb went from a failing startup to a billion dollar business built on a compelling story that their founders have become masters of telling. Airbnb started in 2007 when Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky, were struggling to pay their rent. There was a design conference coming to San Francisco and the city's hotels were fully booked, so they came up with the idea of renting out three airbeds on their living room floor and cooking breakfast for their guests. The site *Airbedandbreakfast.com* (later shortened to Airbnb) officially launched on August 11, 2008 and initially struggled. With no seed money, the founders hustled to self-fund and keep their dreams alive. They fell back on their design schooling and created special edition breakfast cereals that capitalized on the presidential election, with presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain as the inspiration for "Obama O's" (The Breakfast of Change) and "Cap'n McCains." In two months, 800 boxes of cereal were sold at \$40 each, which generated more than \$30,000 for the cash-strapped founders. Investor Paul Graham was impressed with Gebbia and Chesky's hustle and decided to take on Airbnb in his YCombinator program (an American seed accelerator providing early stage funding and advice for startups,) even though he initially didn't like their idea. They went on to raise multiple rounds of investment with top-tier firms and VCs and, in April 2014, they closed a round based on a valuation of approximately \$10 billion.

The reasons why they started Airbnb combined with the fact that they kept the idea alive with breakfast cereal made a compelling and memorable story for Joe and Brian to tell. It showed their idea was a solution to a real problem, that they were passionate about it, and that they were willing to do anything to succeed.

Seth Godin is a prolific writer, blogger, and very often-hilarious public speaker. He is the author of several notable marketing books, such as *Purple Cow*, *Small is the New Big*, and *Permission Marketing*, and his ideas have been referenced, regurgitated, and repackaged by just about everyone. He says: "Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell. In the social media age, your company must build the best product you can because customers will talk about your products and services on social media platforms and in real life. Products need stories to provide context and human emotion. They provide the beginning, middle and end." Airbnb gave people a great story that clearly explained who they were, defined the values they held, and directly addressed the needs of those they were trying to serve. For their community of loyal users, Joe and Brian were striving to provide an experience, a home, and a sense of belonging that people don't get from traditional hotels. Their story also saved them a lot of marketing dollars as media and user attention spread their tale far and wide.

The hotel industry had a new competitor and this competitor had creativity, passion, hustle, and a story worth telling. People don't invest in your business or product. They invest in you and your story. If you want people to remember what you say, tell a compelling story.

As Barbara Corcoran from ABC-TV's Shark Tank says: "Storytelling is everything. Show me an MBA and your sales numbers, that's fine. But tell me a great story about how you got started and your vision, and we'll talk." The same logic could easily be applied to standup comedy. Jokes that tell a story, that immerse the audience into the scenario, are much more likely to get them to invest and laugh along.

So how do we craft a great story? Whether it's business or not, we always need a personal element. Make it your own. Audiences always respond better to a story that features the storyteller. Try and find stories to include from your own life experiences before referencing those of others. Nobody knows your stories better than you, which also makes telling them a lot easier. Remember better public speaking is the goal here and standup comedy is our means of achieving it. The best way to be more engaging, memorable, and funny quickly is to tell a story that contains a few essential elements.

"Who wants what and what stops them?"

This, according to Golden Globe-winning writer and three-time Emmy nominee Bill Grundfest, is the secret sauce of all stories in its most simplified form.

What makes stories great is the detail we add in. Essentially, we need to put meat on the bones of our story and make sure to do the following:

Have a hero/protagonist. Decide who will be the central character of the story. Often people remember the characters more than the story itself.

Describe what your hero is up against. What challenges does the character have to overcome? What do they want and what is stopping them from getting it? This is your story's source of tension.

Build in a specific transcending emotion. You need something that breaks down barriers; love, lust, greed, passion, and loss are perfect.

Include a clear lesson or transformation. Make sure your characters move towards their goal/objective/solving a problem.

Add twists and turns to the story. Try not to make it predictable for the listener. Introduce a question or challenge and don't be too quick to solve it.

Make it believable. It is essential that your story allows the listener to

suspend their disbelief, listening to what you are saying rather than questioning the truth of your words.

Have a clear incident that makes the story really take off. Often referred to as the Inciting Incident, it is a concept popularized by the master of story, Robert McKee, in his famed three-day “Story Seminar” given all over the world. It is described by Steven Pressfield, author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance* and *The War of Art*, here: “The inciting incident in a screenplay or novel is that event that gets the story rolling. In *The Hangover*, it’s the moment when the guys wake up in their trashed villa with no memory of what happened the night before—and realize that they’ve lost their friend Doug. With that, the story kicks into gear. Everything before that is just setup. Ask yourself of your project, “What is the inciting incident?” “When does the ‘story’ take off?” You’d be surprised how many would-be novels/screenplays/restaurants/startups don’t have inciting incidents. That’s why they don’t work”.

Know where you want to end up (the punch line) from the outset. The last line should be the first line you write. Then work backwards towards your inciting incident and set up.

Quickly build in a hook to grab your audience’s attention and draw them into the story. This is especially important in light of today’s ever-decreasing attention spans. You’re your audience’s reason to keep their phones in their pockets.

Reference your opening lines/setup in the conclusion of your story. This is referred to as the Bookend Technique and it will give your story a feeling of completion or symmetry. We will examine this technique further in Chapter 7.

Frame your story within a three-act structure: 1 Setup (Beginning), 2 Confrontation (Middle), and 3 Resolution (End). The hook and inciting incident usually happen within the first act. “People have forgotten how to tell a story,” said Steven Spielberg. “*Stories don’t have a middle or an end any more. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning.*” If one of the most awarded directors of all time says that’s a problem, it’s a problem. Make sure you don’t make the same mistake.

Build in entertainment. Modern day storytelling is joke telling. Today’s audiences expect some light-heartedness and entertainment. Airbnb gave it to them in the form of funky named cereals. A story should make people care by including personal experience that the audience can relate to themselves and to their own lives. The most powerful stories are not about the storyteller, they are about the person who is hearing the story. Most

marketers and presenters forget this.

Sometimes, building in entertainment doesn't even require you to tell jokes. In his book, *Talk Like TED: The 9 Public-Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds*, Carmine Gallo reminds us, "The funny thing about humor is that you don't need to tell a joke to get a laugh." It can be enough to simply not take yourself too seriously—or to be willing to be brutally honest.

I found this rung very true for my own attempts at being funny on stage. Often the biggest laughs came from real life stories and encounters I had in my own life rather than cleverly crafted witticisms or opinions—my vomitando story has served up more laughs than any alliterative quip I could come up with. The world is a funny place and your existence within it is probably funnier. Accepting that fact is a blessing that gives you everything you need to see humor and craft stories on a daily basis. All you have to do is document them and then tell someone.

* * *

On a windswept early San Francisco summer evening in May 2014, I went along to check out The Moth Storytelling series, founded by novelist George Dawes Green. Since its launch in 1997, the series has presented thousands of stories, each of them told live and without notes to standing-room-only crowds worldwide. It has a great mix of performers, authors, business speakers and everyday folks. In short, it is the perfect development ground for TED type talks. High-profile storytellers have included Malcolm Gladwell, Salman Rushdie, John Turturro, Annie Proulx, Gabriel Byrne and AJ Jacobs. Not so high profile storytellers include...some Irish guy who's definitely not Gabriel Byrne.

The format is quite harrowing for anyone afraid of public speaking the way I was. You can sign up but there is no guarantee you will be called to tell a story. There are ten spots available and most of the time more than ten storytellers signed up. Names are drawn at random live on stage. At the insistence of my friends, I put my name in the hat, figuring I would let fate decide my appearance on stage.

Names are called immediately before you are expected to take the stage so there is little to do but wait—you don't know the order or even if you will be called. I nearly laid an egg I was so nervous. The room was packed and although the air conditioning blew with an arctic chill, I was sweating uncontrollably. This, as I learned early on in my public speaking attempts, is just something that happens from time to time. You can manage your nerves with a number of techniques (which I will go into later in this book), but they will still occasionally get the better of you. With this in mind, I always wear

dark colors and fabrics that don't show sweat patches on stage. That way at least the audience can't tell I am as nervous as I really am. Steve Jobs was known for his black turtleneck uniform. It meant one less thing he had to worry about in life. I applied the same theory to public speaking. Knowing what to wear every time I took the stage (and knowing that the sweaty circles collecting over my body would stay my little secret) meant one less thing to worry about. Showing your humanity is important, of course, but that doesn't mean it needs to be sweaty.

Humanity, in fact, is one of the keys to great storytelling and great standup. One of the Moth's great storytellers, the New Yorker writer Adam Gopnik, makes a distinction between good storytellers and good stories in that same light: "A good storyteller is somebody who's comfortable on his or her feet and is enough of a ham to get a charge out of the response of a crowd, that surge of electricity that goes back and forth between you and an audience. If that does not turn you on you won't be a good storyteller. A good story has to be extremely particular and peculiar to your life. It has to have an element of singularity and yet—and this is the alchemy and paradox of storytelling—it has to be something immediately universal, part of something that we all experience."

As a good storyteller, you need to be totally human. Be vulnerable, embrace embarrassment and vocalize failure before success. This was something standup comedian (and Moth storyteller) Mike Birbiglia tapped into when he described his first impressions of "making-out" in high school: "It was like watching a dog eating spaghetti." He thought kissing seemed weird, so he never tried it. But he told all his friends that he had. When it finally did happen, "it was like eating the spaghetti and the fork." He later recounts how, after his first make-out, the girl told his friends that he was a terrible kisser—an embarrassing public rejection, a universal fear that everyone has probably felt at some point in their lives. Rather than admit his inexperience, the true reason why he was "the worst kisser she's ever kissed," he tried to save face in front of his buddies: "Yeah, that sounds about right. I'm a terrible kisser. That's kind of my thing." This is the essence of human nature and what people want to hear. They are quite happy to hear what a fool you have been before opening up to your success, and happier still if you never achieve it.

As I sat in the Moth audience, name after name was drawn from the hat and read aloud by the host, Dhaya, who looked every bit the consummate stage professional. My nerves were multiplying with every passing second. Focusing on someone else's story seems near impossible when fate has you on the clock. Storytellers came and went in agonizing slow motion. Maybe

tonight, I was off the hook. Nine speakers had taken the stage and told their stories in front of a packed audience of strangers, while I was left sitting nervously cycling uncontrollably between hot and cold. Then finally, “Next to the stage, please give a warm welcome to our final storyteller, David Nihill.” I was a bag of jelly by this point, but kept my nerves in check by remembering one of the greatest things about storytelling: the story is yours. You know it better than anyone. You don’t have to train yourself to remember it. You have told it before to friends, family or colleagues, at work, a dinner party or some informal setting. You have done this before.

I started to relax once I was on stage. The previously intimidating crowd seemed to blend into one friendly sea of faces. These people didn’t want to see me fail—most people don’t. Ultimately people want to see other people do well and will cheer them on, especially if they connect or relate to them. Starting with a story gives you the best chance of doing this. My story about my time living in Shanghai was my own. I knew it better than anyone because it happened to me. And as I settled into my storytelling, I could feel my connection with my audience. My laugh lines hit and people were nodding their heads in recognition as my little slice of the human experience connected to theirs. When the crowd applauded loudly, I knew it was over. Outscoring all the others, I had won.

The Moth are true experts in the art of the story. Below are some of their best tips for storytellers, from novice to expert. I made sure my story followed these:

Be forewarned: Stories are told, not read. We love how the storyteller connects with the audience when there is no PAGE between them! Please know your story “by heart” but not by rote memorization. No notes, paper or cheat sheets allowed on stage.

Have some stakes. Stakes are essential in live storytelling. What do you stand to gain or lose? Why is what happens in the story important to you? If you can’t answer this, then think of a different story. A story without stakes is an essay and is best experienced on the page, not the stage.

Start in the action. Have a great first line that sets up the stakes or grabs attention.

No: “So I was thinking about climbing this mountain. But then I watched a little TV and made a snack and took a nap and my mom called and vented about her psoriasis then I did a little laundry (a whites load) (I lost another sock, darn it!) and then I thought about it again and decided I’d climb the mountain the next morning.”

Yes: “The mountain loomed before me. I had my hunting knife, some trail

mix, and snow boots. I had to make it to the little cabin and start a fire before sundown or freeze to death for sure.”

Steer clear of meandering endings. They kill a story! Your last line should be clear in your head before you start. Yes, bring the audience along with you as you contemplate what transpires in your story, but remember, you are driving the story, and must know the final destination. Keep your hands on the wheel!

Know your story well enough so you can have fun! Watching you panic to think of the next memorized line is harrowing for the audience. Make an outline, memorize your bullet points and play with the details. Enjoy yourself. Imagine you are at a dinner party, not a deposition.

My story still had one big advantage over the other nine on that windy San Francisco night. It was funnier. The Moth won't tell you that your story has to be funny, but those that incorporate some humor always do very well. I have now won a number of storytelling nights and performed alongside some of the biggest names nationally, and humor always plays as big a part in my stories as it does in my victories.

Whether you're a standup comedian, budding storyteller, or a sub-standard Spanish language student involuntarily destroying a Guatemalan home, your story matters and how you tell it makes all the difference in how it will be received. Combining storytelling, humanity, and laughter will give you a huge advantage in your public speaking and the odds are good that you already have all the raw material you need. After all, we all have had something funny happen to us at some stage in life, now it's just a matter of making it funny on an actual stage.



Exercise: Start Your Funny Story File

Think back through your experiences and make a bullet point list of funny stories that have happened to you or your friends. Travel, school, college, parties, work, interaction with parents/in-laws, embarrassing situations, etc. Looking at old photos will help to jog memories. We all have had something funny or embarrassing happen to us at some point and, as Birbiglia showed us, even it wasn't funny then, it might be funny now.

These are the beginnings of our story list, which we will edit as we go forward through the book.

Often listening to other people's funny stories will jog your own memory. With this in mind, buy tickets to a comedy or storytelling show and go see it this week. Remember, great stories often come from seemingly mundane topics.

#2 Add Humor — Find the Funny

“The end of laughter is followed by the height of listening.” — Jeffrey Gitomer

New Hampshire, USA. In 2000, I was lucky enough to spend a summer on a work and travel program in the U.S. The original plan was to live in Boston but, faced with a shortage of temporary housing at the time, we ended up in Hampton Beach, NH. Not quite the intellectual landscape of MIT and Harvard, but that wasn't going to stop our good time. We quickly embraced their state motto, “Live free or die,” and set about having as much fun as possible in our new surroundings, freely living it up, pushing our boundaries, and hoping that we didn't die.

Then one day my neighbor handed me a beer bong. It had never before occurred to me to drink beer through a funnel. Frankly, I didn't see the point. As a culture, we Irish love a drink way too much to shoot it down our throats through a tube. Plus, Ireland only has one drinking game—it's called life. “Call me old-fashioned,” I said to my neighbor, looking at the outstretched funnel in his hands, “but a pint glass works just fine.”

“That's fine. If you're not up for it, you don't have to.”

My eyes narrowed as my competitive streak kicked in. Ireland doesn't win an awful lot in sport but we are undefeated in the pursuit of pyrrhic victories.

“Give me the funnel.”

Twelve funneled beers later, I finally bowed out. Now, anyone familiar with drinking beer from a funnel knows exactly what I looked like at this point and exactly where I was heading. It wasn't long before the shout came: “Hampton Police, open the door,” as a fist on the other side of our apartment door knocked loudly. I'd seen the cultural masterpiece that is *Cops*, which even ran in Ireland. I knew they needed a warrant to come in, so with a funnel in one hand, I politely pulled back the curtain that covered the door and gave them a friendly wave. The door flies open abruptly. Turns out, *Cops* was not an accurate representation of police protocol. “Where's the guy in the grey shirt?” the officer shouts as he steps forward menacingly. Oh shit, I thought, that guy is screwed. Looking down I realize that I am the guy in the grey shirt. *Oh shit.*

And that's when the audience really laughs. The moment I realize that I'm the one the cops are looking for is one of my proven laugh lines. It's a story I have told many times to friends and family and I know where they will likely laugh.

Now that we understand the importance of crafting a good story and understand the ingredients involved in doing so, we need to look at adding humor. My story at the Moth had one big advantage. It was funnier than all the others. Why? I had told it before on a standup comedy stage in front of the most difficult kind of audience there is. As Jerry Seinfeld says, "*No one is more judged in civilized society than a standup comedian. Every 12 seconds you're rated.*" When you first tell a story at an open mic or on a comedy stage you are forced to cut out the unnecessary pieces and tighten it up. You rapidly learn where the laugh lines are and how to get to them as quickly as possible. Great business speakers do the same thing. The only way to learn where your laugh lines are is through trial and error, but when you hit upon one you will remember it. Your audience's laughter burns a mental post-it note in your mind because it feels good to make people laugh.

When asked whether they would like to be funnier, most people say they would. Who wouldn't? Everybody loves a good joke. It helps us in every walk of life:

"A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, or getting along with people, of getting things done," said Dwight D. Eisenhower. "People who use [humor], particularly in stressful or seemingly one-down positions, are viewed as being on top of things, being in charge and in control, whether they are in fact or not."

In their best-selling book, *Multipliers*, Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown found that nearly every great manager has a great sense of humor. A good salesperson, marketer, community manager, leader, or business development manager needs to know how to create a connection and the fastest way of doing that is by making someone laugh.

It also makes you look more attractive to employers and in the dating pool. Ninety-eight percent of CEOs prefer job candidates with a sense of humor. Eighty-four percent of those CEOs think that candidates with a sense of humor do better work. Recent data from online dating site eHarmony found that both men and women aren't interested in boring people. Site users listed "I must have someone who is sharp and can enjoy the humorous side of life" as their most important Must Have. If you are single, unemployed, and reading this, then a bulb should be going off around now.

Andrew Tarvin is an international project manager turned humor engineer

and TEDx speaker. Through his company, Humor That Works, Andrew teaches people how to be more productive, less stressed, and happier using humor. In his words, “Humor is a competitive advantage. All of the companies stuck in the old mindset that work is work and shouldn’t be fun are getting left in the dust by the companies who embrace a fundamental truth: their employees are humans, and humans respond to humor”.

Those who use humor connect deeper, build better relationships, increase personal productivity, earn more, motivate more effectively, get referred more, are more memorable, stand out, and have more fun!

How far can a good collection of funny stories and humor get you?

“I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and inexperience,” Ronald Reagan said during the 1984 presidential debates when asked if, at 73, he was too old to be President. The line, a timeless example of Reagan’s sense of humor, even roused a laugh from Democratic opponent, Walter Mondale. The Republican actor-turned-statesman and famed storyteller won re-election in the most lopsided victory in the history of American presidential politics.

People love a funny story. As our good friend Science tells us, we are wired to appreciate it. We are wired to love laughter. Our brains make this so by releasing dopamine. Dopamine feels awesome, so by making your audience laugh during your presentation or speaking event, you can actually make your audience feel good, giving your speech a natural endorphin-fueled evolutionary advantage over those who opted for a typical, boring business presentation.

* * *

“The human race has only one really effective weapon and that is laughter.” — Mark Twain

According to comedian Ricky Gervais, “You should write about what you know because people can connect to it more easily.” The most powerful thing you can do in comedy and in public speaking is deliver material that your audience can connect to. What stories do you like to tell? What embarrassing and funny things do you typically talk about when in relaxed company? Go back and complete the exercise at the end of the last chapter now if you have not done so. You need to build a story list to work with. Remember this is not a magic book. It requires action. The laughs will be worth the work.

In a storytelling night, social event or written long form piece, there are time and space for lots of details and really painting a picture. At a business event or presentation there are not. As speakers and presenters, we are on the

clock and the stories we tell can't take precedent over the information we are there to deliver. Stories are the method with which we deliver the important stuff. The more entertaining you can be, the more time you earn from your audience to be serious.

Jeanne Robertson stands 6'2" but she is anything but intimidating. Specializing in hilarious stories based on her life experiences, Jeanne is an award-winning humorist, member of the Speakers Hall of Fame and recipient of Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel award (a big deal in the world of public speaking).

According to Jeanne, "Humor is not about one-liners or being able to tell jokes. It's about accepting things about yourself that can't be changed and finding the humor in situations around you. Things happen on a daily basis that are really funny, but people often let the funny stuff get away, either because they don't notice it as funny, or they don't make it a priority to look for it."

We are going to prioritize looking for it, then hone it down and punch it up.

Just like my unfortunate drinking challenge in New Hampshire, the process of adding humor to your stories involves a funnel. Thankfully, this one brings much less potential for getting arrested.

The Joke Funnel means we start as wide as we can to make it relatable and relevant to the audience, then we get specific. In other words, we make the story relevant to everybody with a general topic, and then we make it relevant to us by connecting it to our own personal story. The funny in comedy is always in the details. We want to narrow it down as much as we can to draw out the funny. We want to pick out the funny details in the story and cut out every unnecessary thing that gets in the way of it. Keep the following rule of thumb in mind when you are telling a story in front of an audience: a three-line span with no funny is too much.



Once you have identified a personal story that connects to your general topic, it's time to start cutting out words. Identify the key details and funny parts of the story and begin to trim out unnecessary information or details.

The point is to not drag the story out on your way to the funny part the way, say, my aunt does: "I went up to visit Mary, and she was fine. It was a warm day. I like warm days. They are much better than cold days. Do you remember that really cold day last year? It was freezing. I had to wear two jackets. One was the pink one. And I couldn't find my gloves. I like gloves"...Ten minutes later, "And then I found Mary, she was drunk out of her mind singing Madonna's 'Like a Virgin' to a cow!"

I don't usually realize that I've nodded off until I snore audibly. "...Wait, what? ...Me? I'm very much awake."

Entertaining or not, if a speaker finds himself muddled in the details, he'll likely have lost his audience by the time he gets to the funny part. Just like my aunt. Take too long to introduce a laugh or reach the point of your story and you'll probably find your laugh lines get met with a few chuckles in a sea of iPhone screens.

"Brevity is the soul of wit." — William Shakespeare

We need to identify the key funny part in our stories and get there as quickly and effectively as possible. We can do this without losing the story

format by using the joke structure, which will allow us to deliver the same story in its shortest, most effective form. Let's look at my aunt's example.

Once we identify the key funny part—my aunt finding Mary drunkenly singing to a cow (hopefully not a regular pastime for Mary's sake)—we need to get there as quickly as possible. Standup comedians, top TED speakers, and even Presidents tend to follow the same joke format for this: 1) Set-up, 2) Punch line, and then 3) Taglines.

The Setup establishes the premise of the joke by providing the audience with the necessary background information. It should use as few words as possible.

The punch line, this is essentially the laugh line. The set-up leads the audience in one direction and the punch line surprises them by suddenly going off in a different direction. That twist, that element of surprise, is a punch line's chief ingredient.

Taglines are optional. They are essentially additional punch lines delivered after the initial punch line. Sometimes they build on the original joke and sometimes they add a twist and surprising new direction.

Remember: Always keep the punch line in mind.

Beginning with the set-up, determine which details are essential for introducing your story. If it doesn't directly set up your punch line, cut it. In my aunt's story, the only relevant introductory information is, "I went up to visit Mary and she was fine." Be ruthless as you edit. Treat it like an irrelevant detail fire sale; every worthless piece of information must go!

Joke Structure is the key to getting to the funny as quickly as possible. The root of every good joke really is the surprise element, the punch line. And the punch line often releases an intentionally built-up tension.

A great example of this tension comes from the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. In this book, Jim details a speech delivered by the ex-CEO of Kimberly-Clark, Darwin Smith, a man described by CNN as one of the 10 greatest company leaders of all time. Smith stood up and commenced his talk by saying, "Okay. I want everybody to rise and give a moment of silence." Everybody looked around confused, wondering who had died. They looked down uncomfortably and stared at their shoes in silence. Darwin allowed this process to continue for a period of time. Then he looked down at the group and said in the somber tone, "That was a moment of silence for Procter and Gamble." The place went bananas. At the time, Procter and Gamble was Kimberly-Clark's biggest competitor. Intentionally building up the tension created the laughter that followed, which was essentially a nervous release of

energy.

The punch line shatters the intentionally built-up interest and expectation. According to Corporate Humorist John Kindle, “A funny line is sometimes said to be like a train wreck. You know where the train (your train of thought) has been, you think you know where it’s going, but then you’re surprised when it goes off track.”

As outlined by Mel Helitzer and Mark Shartz in their best-selling book, *Comedy Writing Secrets*, this can be summarized as:

P = Preparation (the situation setup)

A = Anticipation (TRIPLE and can be often achieved with just a timely pause)

P = Punch line (story/joke payoff)

The importance of holding the surprise phrasing to the last possible moment cannot be overemphasized. When President Obama stood before Congress in 2011, he gave his “favorite example” of how messy the government can be (the setup/introduction). “The Interior Department is in charge of salmon while they’re in fresh water, but the Commerce Department handles them when they’re in saltwater,” Obama said. “I hear it gets even more complicated once they’re smoked.”

At the time of writing, creativity expert Ken Robinson has the most viewed talk on TED with over 28 million views. His talk challenges the way we’re educating our children and champions a radical rethink of our school systems, cultivating creativity and acknowledging multiple types of intelligence. Make no doubt about it, it is a serious topic but its masterful delivery is laced with humorous stories and anecdotes. Here is an example of one of them.

“We moved from Stratford to Los Angeles. I just wanted to say a word about the transition actually. My son didn’t want to come, I’ve got two kids, he’s 21 now, and my daughter is 16. He didn’t want to come to L.A. He loved it, but he had a girlfriend in England. This was the love of his life. Sarah. He had known her for a month. (Laugh). Mind you they had had their fourth anniversary. It’s a long time when you are 16. Anyway. He was really upset on the plane. He said I will never find another girl like Sarah. We were rather pleased about that frankly. She was the main reason we were leaving the country.”

This is a great funny short story. The only thing a comedian may do is flip the intro with the aim of making it as relevant to everyone as possible before getting more specific (e.g., Moving to a new place can be challenging. We

moved from Stratford to L.A.), then cue the rest of the story.

The daunting feeling that comes with arriving in a new place is a very common one. It's a feeling I know all too well. I went to China for the first time last year. I was worried because the colleague who was looking after me there had previously come to visit me in San Francisco and endured quite a shock. A very conservative man, he asked me, "David, could you recommend activity most enjoyable for Chinese man in San Francisco?" I sent him to the Folsom Street Fair (the world's biggest leather and fetish event). Not quite what he had in mind. When I went to China he went out of his way to repay the joke.

This is my story from the Moth Storytelling Competition in short form. The first laugh line is "I sent him to the Folsom St. fair." I know where this laugh line is from telling it to friends and colleagues alike and I suspect it is the same with Ken's TED talk. Knowing where the laugh will likely come improves your timing and delivery. You know to pause to allow the audience to laugh. In my story, it's a twist in their expectations while their mind scans through traditional tourist activities they would expect to recommend to a conservative visitor. The laugh occurs because we derail their expectations and this causes a shock to their thoughts. This is the essence of joke structure.

"As a creator, it's your job to make an audience as excited and fascinated about a subject as you are, and real life tends to do that."

— Ricky Gervais

There's always a funny or a humorous relatable element in real life stories. The key is to tie them to your overall micro concept and get to laugh lines as quickly and effectively as possible. Keep it relevant to everybody on a macro level before going micro and adding detail. Start general, and then, go to something more specific. Try and aim to write 10 new jokes a week. This sounds like a lot to start with, but as you begin to take notes and observe the world around you while looking for humor, you'll find it gives you plenty of opportunities to find it. Every time you think of something funny or you have an observation or something that you think will be useful, make sure you write it down. If you have a smartphone, use your note section or an app like Evernote. Otherwise, use a small pad and a pen. You'll be surprised just how quickly you forget these thoughts so make sure you keep tracking them. We're hoping to essentially build a file of jokes that we can tap into that can be made relevant to every topic we're going to be presenting with.

The following example was used consistently by a top business executive and can be found online. It's an early version of a talk that became more polished as it was given more often and had a big impact on the speaker's career. It contains a good humorous example and by using it he has become

known as a funny and popular speaker. In written form, it's painful to read, but it highlights just how many unnecessary filler words are in there.

Setup/Introduction:

“You know like, as Global VP for Unilever, I end up travelling a hell of a lot, you know like, I'm based in London but travel to the U.S. every 6 weeks or so, and eh, it can be kind of tedious at times, like, going to always like the same place but one of the things I really enjoy are kind of like the conversations, that happen along the way, eh, and I must say that coming to JFK I always have like a story to tell about the customs, eh, officer, eh when I hand over my blue Brazilian passport, eh, it's always like, eh, a fun story. And there was one that happened I think, it was like April, May this year. People who follow me on Twitter, Facebook, I even posted that back then. So I arrived there, eh, gave my passport, got the classic. ‘So what brings you here?’...And I said ‘work’. I come here a lot for work. And then the guy said and, ‘what do you do,’ and I said eh I work in Marketing at Unilever. And he said Uni what, and I said I work for Dove. And then he said Marketing? And I said yes. And then he asked something that really surprised me. He asked me, but why does Dove need marketing. Everyone knows Dove. Seriously, he did really say that.”

Laugh Line:

“And eh, I laughed at first, it was kind of like a nervous laugh because I was afraid I was going to lose my job like...right there...(audience laugh here every time)...for the guy, arriving in JFK”.

He knows well the laugh line as he has delivered the talk before. His downfall is in the excessive words he uses to get to it. Over time, he has shortened the number of words it takes to get to the laugh line but this process, like that encountered by most business speakers and those presenting infrequently, took him too long to realize. It happens all too often by trial and error. We want to make it a strategic process.

Now let's rework this example using comedy writing techniques:

Setup (relevant to everyone):

Work often leads to business travel.

Specific to him:

Because I have a Brazilian passport, immigration always gives some interesting interactions.

Main part of story:

Last time the conversation went like this:

What brings you here? (Ideally use a different voice for the officer to differentiate the characters)

I come here a lot for work.

What do you do?

I work in Marketing at Unilever.

Uni what?

I work for Dove.

Marketing?

Yes

Does Dove need marketing? Everybody knows Dove.

Punch line:

I laughed, but it was a nervous laugh as I thought I was going to, right then and there, lose my job. (End on the laugh line. Allow the audience time to laugh. The only additional words should be extra jokes/taglines)

Introduction: 156 vs. 26 words.

Main Conversation: 103 vs. 58 words.

It took our speaker about 1:30 to get to the funny when it could have taken approximately 40 seconds or less. In a world where you are competing with hyper connectivity, ever-decreasing attention spans and reducing time slots, this is a lot. Don't get me wrong. I like him a lot as a presenter (as do the audiences), I recognize that he is an ESL speaker and I am amazed by his talk overall. But it could be funnier and more efficient using techniques that comedians know only too well. Get to the laugh lines as quickly as you can and cut out all the unnecessary words along the way.

The main takeaways from this section are that we need to take our stories, work to extract the main funny item and feed that into a joke structure. This is going to be a process we're going to repeat over and over again as we prepare to build humor items into our presentations and speaking.

Ask yourself, what is the funny twist or part of your story and how can you get there as quickly as possible without getting lost in unnecessary elements? If this story involves the police force of Hampton Beach, N.H., my

advice would be to open the door.



Exercise: Link Stories to Topics and Identify the Funny

Look at what problem your product, service, or research area solves on both the micro and macro level. What problem exists, and what are you trying to solve? Feed this into the joke structure and the problem essentially becomes the setup. The solution becomes your opportunity to deliver a punch line within your stories.

When you are in the company of your friends and family, what stories do you like to tell? List your favorite stories. It is not important if they are funny at this stage. You can also pull material from your favorite books—the odds are in your favor that most people have not even read the biggest bestsellers so this is an easy source. Take your favorite ones and write about them for 30 minutes. Don't stop to add structure, just let the words flow as much as possible. It can be a life lesson, a cool product, insightful information from a book you are reading, etc. Don't focus too much on the content at this point; this is simply a writing exercise.

Review what you've written and cross-check them with your original list of funny stories. These should be two separate lists although some stories, experiences, and funny anecdotes will hopefully overlap. Here, we want to identify what you like best, are already comfortable talking about, and are excited to tell people. We want to identify topics you already know well and already like to talk about. This will make your on-stage delivery much more engaging.

Imagine your best friend, partner, or co-worker completing this sentence:

(Your Name here) is always talking about...

For example, my list looked like this:

Funny Stories	Topics
Dad with iPhone	Technology
Bus in China	Travel
Mother visiting me	Psychology
Business trip to Dubai	Irish Culture
Trying to learn Spanish	80/20 Principle Book
Guy at Safeway	Work/Life Balance

Now work to find the key point to each story. Where is the funny anecdote, interesting bit of knowledge, or the entertaining part? Work to cut out unnecessary words and re-tell the best stories following the Joke Structure (i.e. Setup, Punch line, and Taglines if you have any). Don't worry if you can't come up with anything immediately. Often this process can take a few days or even weeks. The important thing is that you begin to think about the joke/story. Most of my best jokes come to me when I am out running—letting my subconscious do the work—rather than when I am sitting at a desk.

#3 Write Funny

“A sense of humor is an attitude in how you approach your work and life. It is a skill that can be developed.” — Jeanne Robertson

Ryan is a socially awkward guy. He is long and narrow, walks lazily with the grace of a drunken penguin and speaks with a hint of insanity. He doesn't maintain eye contact, looks disheveled, and comes across as a bag of nerves. He has a comb-over about 20 years premature and rides a skateboard that makes him look about 20 years immature. In conversation, he is shy and struggles to converse with anyone. It was hard to believe he was about to take the stage as a comedian.

I met Ryan in the little known intellectual capital of California, a small city called Stockton. I was there for another comedy show. In most places, when I start to speak with my Irish accent, I'm met with the same question: Where in Ireland are you from? In most dumb places, I hear, "Where is Ireland?" Not in Stockton. In Stockton, I was asked, "*What is Ireland?*" A rich source of material at least. Ryan was to this point the least funny person I had met. When his time came to go on stage he suddenly looked quietly confident. He abandoned the skateboard and suddenly gained a spring in his step. His eyes, previously easily distracted, were now laser-focused on the microphone and the eagerly awaiting crowd baying for entertainment. The stage rose five feet above the audience, but he moved with such intention that he made the steep steps to reach it seem like they weren't even there. He took the microphone in one hand and used his other to move the supporting stand to one side, removing the only obstacle that stood between him and the audience. He stood with a newfound poise and confidence before a packed house and took a moment to survey those about to judge him. The guy whom I would have bet my house on not being funny was about to prove me wrong. *Very wrong.*

Ryan wasted no time whipping the audience into a frenzy of loud, often uncontrollable laughter and he kept this going for a full ten minutes. He put the microphone back in the stand after delivering his last, best joke to huge applause and appreciation as the room pulsated with a new energy. He exited the stage like a king and quickly went back to being really unfunny. The laser-focused eyes returned to easy distractions, but he now had a spring in his step,

and a wry smile on his face. What he just did felt really good. Like a baseball player hitting a home run with the bases loaded or a soccer player scoring a winning goal in a final, Ryan had just done what he had trained to do, and done it to perfection. Then he did his best to ruin the moment by vomiting into a garbage can, snorting up a piece of pizza, and exiting the building Tony Hawk-style without another word. What just happened?

Very few comedians I met over the last year were what I would describe as naturally funny. Many were in fact the complete opposite, like Ryan. The natural gifts weren't there but the skill certainly was—and it was clear that they developed their skill through practice, particularly in writing. Over time, these unfunny people learned how to write better and better.

“Good writing helps good marketers become great marketers. If you have a website, you are a publisher. If you are on social media, you are in marketing. And that means we are all writers. Our writing can make us look smart or it can make us look stupid. It can make us seem fun, or warm, or competent, or trustworthy—or it can make us seem humdrum or discombobulated or flat-out boring.” — Ann Handley

Don't get me wrong. Some comedians are naturally hilarious people. They seem to have an innate talent for being funny. From what I have seen over the last year, these comedians tend to rise to the top of their industry quicker than those who just rely on writing alone. We are not trying to be comedians, however. We are trying to become funnier speakers and what we learn from those who are not naturally funny will do just fine.

Everyone knows that comedy is essentially a combination of what you say and how you say it, your material and your delivery. The often-unmentioned third element is how you write it. The same can be said for public speaking. Every great presentation, like every great joke, is first crafted with a pen, pencil or keypad. Mastering the skill of writing, therefore, will improve your public speaking ability no matter how naturally ungifted you are.

Good comedians are good writers too. As their writing gets better, they get funnier. Few admit it but they all demonstrate that a sense of humor can be developed and further refined with practice. Practicing your delivery is important, of course, but by learning the skills that go with good comedy writing you can be funnier quickly and ultimately a better and more entertaining public speaker.

In this chapter, we're going to go through a number of ways that you can quickly and effectively bring additional humor elements to your presentation using comedy-writing techniques. These techniques are often widely used by copywriters and learned the hard way by aspiring comedians. All are utilized

by great public speakers.

Work in references to the local area where possible:

On a very hot summer's day in 1962, President John F. Kennedy visited Rice University in Houston, Texas, and gave a speech in the football stadium. One of his more famous quotes from that day is a joke mocking the university's football team: "But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?"

The University of Texas was undefeated and Rice University was winless at that point in the year. The line got a huge laugh.

By adding a local reference, like JFK does above, you're showing the attendees at your conference or presentation that you have an understanding of that area. Generally, at least 60% of people in attendance at any presentation or seminar, if not more, will be from that local catchment area. By working in local references—whether it's simply referencing certain affluent areas, calling upon local sporting rivalries, or recognizing challenges or issues pertaining to specific parts of town—you demonstrate that you have a special understanding and interest in their location. When I talk to an audience in San Francisco about the collective intellect of Stockton, it's a joke specifically for them and they know it. This is a chance to add really quick and easy jokes and win over the crowd.

Make sure you set the scene:

Every good comedian makes sure he or she sets set up a joke by painting a picture so the audience can relate to the experience. A great piece of advice given to me by one of the San Francisco Bay Area's top comedians, Reggie Steele, is to write as if you are describing something to a blind person. It's a piece of advice he learned literally when a number of blind people came to one of his shows. He wanted to make sure they could relate to his story and follow every aspect of it from the words alone and not just his usual animated style.

Add attitude to your writing and presentations:

You want to use words like weird, amazing, scary, hard, stupid, crazy, or nuts. Try to incorporate these words into your opening setup or statement. This will help people focus on you and pay attention quickly. If you want people to be passionate about your topic, show them some passion.

Make sure you give clear takeaways:

When you're crafting a story or a joke, you want to leave people with something to remember. In our presentations, we'll do exactly the same thing. When you see "a thousand songs in your pocket," you'll immediately think about Steve Jobs and the launch of the iPod. This was the key takeaway, 1,000 songs in your pocket. He repeated it over and over again throughout the presentation. Also, "I have a dream," the key line for Martin Luther King's famous speech. He said this over and over again to emphasize it as the clear takeaway. The 3rd most popular TED talk at the time of writing is Simon Sinek's: How great leaders inspire action. He repeatedly states the main point of the talk: "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it." Chris Rock is also known for doing this. He will emphasize exactly what he wants you to take away from the joke continuously throughout the performance, making sure it's firmly planted in your mind.

Use callbacks:

Callbacks bring together everything in the end. This is where you go back (call back) and reference items that have had a good reaction or response from the crowd. This can be one of your jokes that worked, or a joke from a previous presenter that got a big laugh. Callbacks are a great technique to use to link your topic together and really build the audience into an in-joke between you and them. The callback works best if you have moved on to another topic and then use the callback to create an element of surprise.

In JFK's example above, a callback would involve referencing his initial Rice/Texas joke again later in his presentation. Chris Guillebeau is a best-selling nonfiction author who visited every country in the world over a 10-year period. Chris has been known to tour more than 50 cities to promote the release of a new book. He's a really great presenter and always includes humor in his speaking engagements.

On answering a question from an audience member who looked very youthful, Chris asked, "How old are you, 14?"

"22," the kid responded.

"Oops."

Everyone laughed.

At the close of his talk Chris directed the gathered audience to seek advice not just from him, but also fellow travelers in the room, including "the 14-year-old." Another laugh. This was a classic callback and reference to a joke between Chris and the audience that already worked.

Callbacks are rarely funny to read but always effective in the moment as they are all about a shared experience between the audience and the speaker. As a rule of thumb, don't callback to a joke more than three times and definitely don't callback to something that wasn't funny in the first place.

Use current media references where possible:

Creating material that relates to topics that are current in the mind of those in our audience is another easy way to get a laugh. Nighttime television hosts like Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are masters of this and their popularity heightens the chance that your crowd will be already be familiar with poking fun at fresh topics. Celebrities, politicians and sporting teams are normally easy and acceptable targets. This also gives the illusion of spontaneity due to the short preparation time-scale if something just happened. Don't go overboard though. Keep media references to less than 10% of your total content. Also, be sensible here. If a plane just crashed, taking 100 souls with it, this is not the time to reference it.

Try to incorporate act outs or use of different voices where possible:

Conversational interaction between two characters gives us the chance to bring the scene to life on stage and put the audience directly into the action. If you can do different voices or different accents or speak another language, it's a great way to incorporate your skills and show them off while writing them into your stories. Even taking an accent your ears are very accustomed to, like your partner or parents, will work better than just playing both characters in your own voice. But be mindful of how you sound. It's always safer to change your voice slightly rather than take on a whole new nationality. Be careful to stay away from impersonations that may be seen as politically incorrect. I have been subject to way too many dodgy Irish impersonations in my life and the same can be said for many other groups. Unless you are really, really good at it, keep it simple. As a guiding principle, think family members before foreigners!

Don't create these act outs on paper. Make sure you say them aloud and record how you sound. Then review your recording, take notes, and refine your writing.

Always write in the present tense:

You never want to write, "I was walking and I saw." It should be "I'm walking and I see." Even if the event happened many, many years ago, you

want the audience to be living that moment with you as if it's happening right now. Write the scene for the audience as if it's unfolding in front of their very eyes. Again, your writing will be much more engaging if the audience feels like they're a part of the action.

Use inherently funny words:

Believe it or not, some words are funnier than others and can be amusing without any given context. In an interview with the New York Times, Jerry Seinfeld talked about how he wrote his bit about Pop Tarts. He took foods from the '60s in all their strange, frozen, unhealthy forms and narrowed his focus on Pop Tarts. Why Pop Tarts? Because Pop Tarts sound funny. "The Pop Tart suddenly appeared in the supermarket...and we were like chimps in the dirt playing with sticks". According to Seinfeld, what makes the joke, "Is you have got chimps, dirt, playing and sticks. In seven words, four of them are funny. Chimps, chimps are funny." In one *Seinfeld* episode, *The Apology*, Jerry has a naked lady wanting to snack on pickles. Why pickles? Because pickles are funny.

In *The Sunshine Boys*, Neil Simon quips, "Words with a 'K' in it are funny. Alka-Seltzer is funny. Chicken is funny. Pickle is funny. All with a 'K.' L's are not funny. M's are not funny." *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening proclaimed the word "underpants" to be at least 15% funnier than the word underwear. Pants are funny. One of Groening's characters Krusty the Clown's name, like many others, was not created by chance. Words with K sounds are just funnier. Comedians and comedy writers know this and use these funny sounding words consciously. So should you.

Remember, "brevity is levity":

We want to get to the funny or punch line as quickly as possible. Copywriter Henneke Duistermaat lists some great words to watch out for that can usually be cut out: ought, in my opinion, that just actually, truly, and very. These are all words that can be stripped out to get to the punch line quicker. Watch out for them in your writing. Scott Adams, the writer of Dilbert comics notes, "Keep your writing simple, as if you were sending a witty email to a friend. Be smart, but not academic. Prune words that don't make a difference."

Use the rule of 3:

According to Greek philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, 3, which he called triad, is the noblest of all digits. The number 3 has held sway over math, science, astronomy, arts, and literature for millennia until, finally, it reached its apex in 1973 with the pilot episode of *Schoolhouse Rock*:

*Three is a magic number.
Yes it is, it's a magic number.
Somewhere in the ancient, mystic trinity
You get three as a magic number.
The past and the present and the future,
Faith and hope and charity,
The heart and the brain and the body
Give you three.
That's a magic number.*

Not quite Greek philosophy, but its magic is widely known and used by writers, marketers and comedians alike. If you want to write in a more entertaining and memorable manner, write with the Rule of 3. This rule is a basic structure for jokes and ideas that capitalize on the way we process information. We have become proficient at pattern recognition by necessity. Three is the smallest number of elements required to create a pattern. This combination of pattern and brevity results in memorable content. And that's why the Rule of 3 will make you a more engaging writer.

This rule is one that has existed for a long time but I had to figure it out through trial and error. When I told jokes in certain sequences, I noticed they were always most effective when I reworked them into groups of 3. It seemed that audiences were trained to laugh on the third item. So, if I made one quick joke, and a second quick joke, the laugh would always be biggest on the third one. If I remove any of these elements (leaving only two) or added extra ones (creating 4 or 5) the bit is never as effective. It's strange, but true.

The Rule of 3 at its most basic, establishes a pattern then ends with something unexpected. This derailment, a break away from the pattern created by the first two items, builds tension, and creates surprise usually resulting in loud laughter.

Information presented in groups of 3 also sticks in our head better than other clusters of items. For example: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" "blood, sweat, and tears;" "sex, lies, and videotape." When the iPhone was launched, it was launched as 3 products (Pod, Phone, Internet Communicator Device) all in one new cool product. It was no coincidence that it was pitched in this way. It automatically became more memorable. Examples are seemingly endless: NFL, NBA, NHL, CNN, NBC, BBC, TED, UPS, SAS, SAP, You can do it, Yes we can, get the idea?

Let's have a look at the Rule of 3 in action with a couple of jokes. Written out and analyzed like this they don't sound that exciting, but when delivered to a live audience they generate big laughs.

The first one comes from Jon Stewart. *"I celebrated Thanksgiving in an old-fashioned way. I invited everybody in my neighborhood to my house, we had an enormous feast, and then I killed them and took their land."*

The twist here is obviously the last part. The triplet in the set, "I killed them and took their land," comes as a shock because he used the first two parts of the joke to create an event in your mind that is very familiar; this way, you think you know where you're going to end up. He starts with a broad picture and something everyone will understand: "Thanksgiving in an old-fashioned way." Then he begins to narrow the vision in a way that his audience will relate to and personalize: "I invited everyone in the neighborhood, we had an enormous feast." These lines allow you to recreate your own Thanksgiving memories in your mind, thus making you feel like you know where he's heading. Then, the twist, the derailment, the laugh line, always third in the set: "and then I killed them and took their land."

This next joke is one I wrote when I was starting out in comedy. I wrote it when I learned of this pattern. To be honest, I hate telling it, but it follows the structure and sequence, uses the Rule of 3, and always produces a big laugh every time.

"My girlfriend is always driving me crazy about going to Napa. I gave in and brought her. It turns out she doesn't even like auto parts." With the first two parts of this joke I am creating the image of California's wine country, conjuring up images of couples spending time drinking wine in this famous wine region. Napa, of course, is also a chain of automotive service centers—the last place in the world my girlfriend would want to go.

That is the third item in the sequence. That is where the pattern breaks. Due to this twist, the punch line, this joke gets a big laugh every time I'm on stage. By following the Rule of 3, whether it is in your joke writing or even just in the way you deliver important information, your words are far more likely to be memorable. Your audience's minds are ready to receive information in groups of three. You should use that to your advantage.

Use funny images and video:

While you should prioritize the time to write some humor into your presentations, sometimes that's easier said than done. If you feel too busy to step back for a moment and look at simple ways to add some creativity, in our case, aimed at generating laughs and lightening the mood, then you can rely

on funny images and video to do that for you. This image was used to great laughter in a TED talk to make the point: “Entrepreneurs: We are the rule breakers.”



It's great if these images or videos are your own but they do not have to be. Go on Google images and type “funny” and then your topic area. More often than not you will come up with a usable image that most of your audience will not have seen before. The key is tying this image to your topic and using it to reinforce a point. Search sites like Reddit and Pinterest are another great source of content that is already socially proven. Often you just need to change one word, the setup or overlay some text to integrate it into your speech.

Seth Godin is an entrepreneur, blogger and marketer known for his engaging and entertaining presentations. His talk titled “Broken” is always referred to, even by TED themselves as hilarious. And it is. To put it into perspective, he makes people laugh approximately 3.4 times per minute through his 20-minute talk. If you apply the same loose metric (more on this in Chapter 7) to Hollywood's top comedy movies, he actually makes people laugh more times than such comedy classics as *Airplane*, *The Hangover* and *The Naked Gun*. As presenters go, Seth is excellent and always funny. However, when we analyze his talks, we realize they are considerably funnier the more funny images he includes. In this talk, over half of the laughs stem from jokes linked to images he included.

Use the same joke structure with images and videos as you would with written material. Set up your image with an introduction that builds anticipation. The image becomes the punch line and should be enough to solicit a laugh, and then you have a chance to keep people laughing through taglines, your additional comments on the image or video. Seth is by no means alone in his use of images. Keep an eye out for just how many laughs

occur in presentations with the use of funny images.

Remember: There is always a more creative way to introduce your idea. If you are worried about clever writing or your delivery, using videos and images can be a great way of taking the pressure off while bringing the laugh levels up. A little effort here can go a long way.

These quick comedy tips when taken together and added to your presentation can make a big impact in generating humor every time. They will not make you a funnier person in life but, like Ryan, they will make you funnier on stage. And if you want to make it especially easy, my advice is to head out to Stockton. It doesn't take much to impress the rocket surgeons out there.



Exercise: Linking Stories to Your Presentation

List what problem your product, service, or research solves on a general and specific level. This should be based on the next presentation topic you intend to speak on or your most recently given one. Now aim to link your presentation topic to your life stories, observations and experiences as listed previously. Search sites like Reddit and Pinterest for socially proven funny images that you can link to your topic.

How can you write your story into your presentation? Are there any correlations between your topics and your stories? If you are struggling for links don't worry. There is always a way to work funny items in. Remember crafting a funny story involves knowing the ending and working backwards. You want to find that funny punch line and design your talk to build it in.

For example, say your company has a more user-friendly touch screen with bigger characters/buttons. This makes it easier for older people and those with vision problems to use. Cue stories about your parents or grandparents trying to use technology.

Macro/Wider topic: It makes it easier for older people to use technology.

Micro/Specific problem my product solves: It makes it easier for older people to type and use smart phones/tablets.

Key funny to my story: My Dad's struggles with technology and specifically what he does by writing emails in the subject line.

Set/Up intro here becomes the challenges older people have adapting to and using technology, specifically email in my case. This should be delivered in as few words as possible.

This example is far from a classic but it is a quick and easy joke that gets laughs:

It's hard for old people to get to grips with technology. (Relatable setup)

My Dad (specific to me) finally tried sending email last year. He wrote me a fine long one....

All in the subject box. (Punch line)

He continues to do this. (Tagline)

Show staged image of my Dad looking confused.

Following the joke structure and the above example, try and create one joke with the fewest words possible from your favorite story that can be linked to your company/product/service/research. Use the Rule of 3 and as many as the tips above as you can. Remember you are not trying to be the next Jerry Seinfeld. A little laughter is better than 90% of the business speakers out there.

#4 Rehearsed Spontaneity: Learning Comedy by Playing Banjo for an Empty Room

“Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation.” — Robert H. Schuller

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” — Abraham Lincoln

San Francisco. When Steve Martin was getting started in comedy, he would do whatever he could simply to get himself on stage. In his autobiography, *Born Standing Up*, he recounts the regular opening act gig he had at the Coffee and Confusion in 1965. His act at the time consisted of material that he refers to as, “strictly Monday-night quality the night when, traditionally, anyone could get up to perform.”

The Coffee and Confusion was essentially a bare room with some chairs and some light bulbs, hardly the ideal performance space even on a good day. And on a bad day, the room was 100% empty. Even when there wasn’t a soul there, Martin had to start his act on time—just in case passersby outside noticed him through the window and were drawn in. “So,” he says, “I went on stage and started talking. Talking to no one.”

As if that weren’t difficult enough, Martin was expected to perform a 25-minute set every night. At the time, he only had about 10 minutes of decent comedy material. So he fell back on everything he had: he played banjo, he did magic tricks, he put on costumes and props before settling in to address his audience in a serious manner: “I know what you’re thinking, ‘Oh, this is just another banjo-magic act’.” If he had an obliging audience, he could make it through the full 25 minutes; if not, he’d have to fight not to be dead in the water after 12.

“Afraid of falling short, I ad-libbed, wandered around the audience, talked to patrons, joked with waitresses, and took note of anything unusual that was happening in the crowd and addressed it for laughs, in the hope of keeping my written material in reserve so I could fill my time quota.” As excruciating as that might sound (I know it does to me), it was the ideal practice setting. Steve Martin was getting “stage time, stage time, and stage

time” in adverse conditions almost every night. He treated every set like it was important even if the bouncers were the only other people in the room; he learned what he could fall back on when his audience was tough; and he built a repertoire of fallback jokes and a few in-case-of-emergency jokes. Over time, he was ready for whatever came his way. Years later, he was still using this format—the “*unstructured and modern*” element of his shows were the defining element of his standup career. That success, generally, can be traced back to comedic habit #4: Rehearsed Spontaneity.

Ironically the objective of comedians as they put almost 22 hours of work into every minute of their performance each year is to make every one of those minutes look spontaneous and effortless. They work to craft a collection of tried and trusted material that flows so well together, in and out between audience interactions, that it appears the comedian just created it all off the top of his head in the moment. They are so well practiced by the time it comes to the big event they could do it in the dark. Martin was no different; he took notes after every performance, recording what worked, what didn’t, and why. Billy Connolly is one of my favorite comedians and a storyteller by nature. He tells a six-minute story about an elderly lady taking a bus. When I saw this bit live, it appeared that every bit of the story may have unfolded the day before and Billy just happened to be sharing it with me. Never did it occur to me that every line and word was carefully selected and that every part was a well-rehearsed component.

The reality is, you can’t wing it. If you don’t prepare, you may do okay some of the time, bad all too often, and good occasionally. You have to practice. Practice breeds consistency, good habits, and success. This is something that every comedian, performer, and athlete knows. The work comes prior to the big day, not on the big day. I said at the start of this book that this is not a magic book. Application of these principles won’t make you instantly funnier, more successful, or more attractive to the opposite sex. Add a little practice, however, and it just might. It’s time for a little practice.

The harder you work, the more natural you will be on stage. Remember the words of world public speaking champion Darren LaCroix, “The three keys are stage time, stage time and stage time.” The problem is busy professionals are not able to dedicate time to developing their performance ability every day like aspiring comedians. Don’t worry—you don’t have to. One practice session every second week combined with some 80/20 Principle tips should be enough to quickly make a big difference. Remember work presentations count. Use every chance you can get to speak publicly.

*“All things are ready, if our mind be so.” — William Shakespeare,
Henry V*

Practice speaking within shorter and shorter timeframes and keep cutting your presentation, speech, or story until someone complains that it's too short. Recognize that modern day audiences have ever-decreasing attention spans. These short attention spans have led many companies and conferences to shorten their speaking slots as well. Keynotes are becoming TED talks. Short, funny and information packed. Being concise forces you to only include your best points, jokes and stories. Where there is no time limit, impose one on yourself. Will people complain that your talk should have been longer? Unlikely, and if they do, leaving them wanting more is never a bad thing.

Once you feel comfortable with telling your material and stories to your friends, family, and colleagues, move on to strangers. Don't just run up to people on the street and start your stories—that never ends well. Don't force your opinions on your audience either; people don't like being told how to think. Keep the focus on telling stories. It will make you so much more likeable on stage and, as I've found in my own experience, will make you bomb next to never. The best ways to practice this are via open mics, storytelling nights, and public speaking groups like Toastmasters.

These nights should be viewed as a learning experience as they will highlight areas you need to work on. Your story and humorous bit list will always be in Permanent Beta. Remember, a small laugh at an open mic night often translates to huge laughs at a conference or in a presentation. Stage time is at a premium these days and, with more and more professionals crossing the line, you'll meet some great and interesting people at these nights. Over the last year I have met TED speakers, startup founders, Emmy-nominated writers, lawyers, sales and software professionals, many great comedians, many terrible comedians, and a huge collection of lunatics all trying to build their public speaking skill set in the same unconventional way.

“To improve, we must watch ourselves fail, and learn from our mistakes.” —Joshua Foer

Know what to do with your hands:

You need to practice your material exactly as you wish to deliver it. If you practice at home in a seated position it's going to feel strange when you go on stage and have to perform standing. Hold something to mimic the microphone that will be in your hand. A great tip given to me by a comedian was to practice with a bottle in each hand. And whatever you do, don't look at your feet. Focus on something right in front of you as if you're talking to the audience. You want to build the habit of looking ahead with your face up and smiling as you're presenting. These little things can make a big difference in building the right habits.

Once you've practiced your material in your home, it's time to get out and test your jokes and stories in the real world. Like Darren LeCroix says: stage time, stage time, stage time. It is the perfect opportunity to identify patterns, jokes, and stories that really hold an audience's attention and hopefully generate some laughs. The best way to do this is in front of live audiences at open-mic nights.

Your material and collection of stories are always a work in progress. Record, study and evaluate each performance continuously. By doing this, you're able to look back and cut out the *ahhhs*, *uhmms*, *ehhhs*, unnecessary words, and gaps in your performance that can be improved. Record it, realize it and then cut it out. Identifying these areas helps you create a more polished and effortless-looking talk. You'll also be doing this to find material we know always gets laughs.

Over-preparation is the best way (if not the only way) to be able to overcome anything that may go haywire during your presentation. Murphy's Law states that what can go wrong will go wrong. Murphy's Law of Public Speaking states that what can go wrong will be 10x worse and go viral. Make sure you have your notes with you and make sure you're familiar with the concepts. Make sure you have additional copies of your presentation. A great piece of advice is to make sure you're already familiar with the stage and the setup. Try to get on stage before you present. Go a little bit earlier that day or earlier in the evening just to stand up there when no one's around and get comfortable with that particular venue.

Video/Audio record and review every performance. You will be surprised just how much your time on stage can fly by and how little your mind will remember of the experience. We do this to pick up on items we can improve and make sure we catch any bits that worked well. It feels really awkward at first, as most people hate the sound of their own voice. "We hate it because it is so foreign," said Dr. William Cullinan, Dean of the College of Health Sciences at Marquette University in Wisconsin. When you hear your own voice you are not hearing it as others do due to the internal bones and conduits it must pass through to make it to your ears. This is why all of a sudden it seems alien.

Jordan Gaines, a neuroscience grad student at Penn State College of Medicine and a science writer, explains in an NBC article: "It's kind of the same way we like what we see in the mirror, but not what we see in photographs." Earlier this year, I was working on writing jokes for a very famous and talented international public figure and speaker. I was amazed to find out he had never once reviewed his own talks. Like the rest of us, he was uncomfortable listening to his own voice and watching himself on screen but

once he tried it a few times it became habit and his talks got much better and funnier faster. By recording and reviewing his speaking, he could quickly see the areas he could improve on and discern what jokes were working from those that were not.

Based on just my gut feeling, I thought my first three times on stage went pretty well. I thought I carried myself well, projected a fairly steady confidence, and moved fluidly from joke to joke. It was only when I looked back to the video I noticed that I was waving the microphone like I was trying to draw on my face, was nervously pacing around the stage like a drunken madman, and was getting more groans than laughs. It was pretty terrible. However, I did make one joke that got a small laugh. I reworked this bit to fit it into the joke structure and I still use it (in its improved form) a year later. It's the same basic short story but the small laugh is now a huge laugh rippling through a large audience.

Don't forget your lines:

Then there is the big fear: going blank on stage. Standing in front of an audience with no memory of what you're supposed to say is anxiety-inducing for even seasoned pros. We're going to be able to avoid this using a technique called the Memory Palace.

"How we perceive the world and how we act in it are products of how and what we remember...No lasting joke, invention, insight, or work of art was ever produced by an external memory...Our ability to find humor in the world, to make connections between previously unconnected notions, to create new ideas, to share in a common culture: All these essentially human acts depend on memory."

The above extract is taken from *Moonwalking with Einstein*, which recounts Joshua Foer's year-long quest to improve his memory under the tutelage of top "mental athletes". He started that year with a memory just like everybody else. He finished that year as the 2006 U.S.A. Memory Champion.

One of the most useful and widely used mnemonic or memory aids Joshua learned to utilize is the Memory Palace, originally introduced in ancient Greek and Roman treatises. The idea is to create a place or a series of places in your mind where you can store information that you need to remember. In basic terms, it's a form of memory enhancement that uses visualization to organize and recall information. Many memory contest champions claimed to use this technique in order to recall faces, digits, and listed words. These champions' successes have little to do with brain structure or intelligence, but more to do with the technique of using regions of their brain for specific

learning. Or, in our case, remembering our material and avoiding the dreaded stage blank.

I was introduced to the power of the Memory Palace by San Francisco-based comedian, Richard Sarvate. By night a very funny man, by day a more formal computer programmer at Yahoo. He applies the same logic and rigor from his corporate office to his nightly adventures in comedy. When creating an image to put in your memory palace he says, “it is useful to have the image interact with the environment. For my sushi joke I picture a sushi chef. If I put him in the elevator in the lobby of my apartment, I picture him mashing the buttons on the elevator in frustration. Now that he is interacting with the environment, it’s a lot easier to visualize and recall. It’s useful to make the image bizarre in order to make it more memorable. For my Mexican Indian joke I picture Krishna wearing a sombrero. A ridiculous image, which is almost tougher to forget.”

The techniques Richard cites date back to sometime between 86 and 82 B.C with the first Latin rhetoric textbook, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, often referred to as the bible of mental athletes. The *Ad Herennium*, Joshua outlines in his book, “Advises readers at length about creating images for one’s own memory palace: the funnier, lewder, and more bizarre, the better.” We have known to use humor to be more memorable since before the Roman Empire, yet somewhere along the way, we forgot how. I guess someone in the Dark Ages forgot to picture Julius Caesar in his funny sheet toga.

How to craft your memory palace:

- 1. Decide on a blueprint for your palace.** A memory palace can be a purely imagined place but it’s often easier to base it upon a place that exists in the real world, one that you are familiar with. The house you grew up in, the apartment you’re currently living in, and your office are all great examples.
- 2. Define a route through this palace.** It’s essential that you follow a specific route and a specific order through your palace so you’ll log items in the order you want to speak about them.
- 3. Identify specific storage locations in your palace and along your route.** This will give you defined places to store your information.
- 4. Memorize the memory palace.** The best way to do this is by drawing out a blueprint so you can visualize it brought to life on paper and then, create a memory in your mind.
- 5. Place things to be remembered in your palace.** For example, if part of your presentation consists of talking about Ireland or a particular Irish

guy you met (like me), do your best to create this person in as much detail as you can. This essentially, burns an image in your mind that makes it easy to recall that element. The more humorous and absurd the better.

6. Explore your palace and see everything you have created. Visualize everything you have created and commit it to memory in your mind. Take a few moments to do this. These essentially become your practice run-throughs, in which you walk through the house and, along the way, encounter all the different memory points or key item topics for your presentation that you want to remember. If you go blank at any moment stop, and picture where you are in your memory palace.

For me, this is the lower floor of my house with a path that takes in each room I enter from the main door (the start of my talk), past key topic areas in each room, on the sofas, on the chairs, at the table, and then exit through the door (the conclusion of my talk). Using this technique, I have never gone blank on stage.

Remember, comedy and public speaking are a combination of what you say and how you say it. To say it best, you need to practice. Don't just turn up on the day and expect it to go well. Practice makes all the difference. And don't worry if the thought of going to an open mic or testing your material speaking in public scares you. There are plenty of ways to deal with stage fright.

Avoid stage fright:

Public speaking is generally listed as one of people's biggest fears. Stage fright is so common, it's easy to conjure up the image of what it looks like whether you have experienced it for yourself or not: a furiously pounding heart, shaking hands, sweaty palms, and all other manner of anxious, terrible, why-am-I-shivering, nervousness. As I said earlier it was my biggest fear. I thought it was a bad thing when I encountered all these involuntary reactions before speaking to an audience, but the more I looked into the psychology and science behind it and the more I spoke to other comedians, performers, and presenters, the more I began to realize that this was perfectly normal.

This is my body's way of telling me that it is ready. The thought of negative consequences triggers glands to secrete the hormone ACTH. This hormone results in the release of adrenaline into your blood and that's what causes these uncomfortable feelings. This is essentially your body's most alert and heightened state. It means you're ready. You want to focus on embracing this feeling. When you feel it, be happy. It means your body is in its peak condition to face a challenging or worrying situation.

Never seek to suppress this heightened state. One or two drinks or other substances before you publicly speak are never a good idea. (A six-pack of Corona is even worse.) Even one or two drinks can greatly suppress your body's reaction times and override a lot of these mechanisms designed to make us alert and perform better. Imagine you were a nervous racing car driver about to drive in a championship final decider. Naturally, you would feel very nervous. A shot of whiskey may seem like it could temporarily suppress those nerves, but would it be a good idea? Not unless you like crashes.

When faced with stage fright, it's helpful to pull a tip from the world of business—the 5 Ps: Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. When it comes time to take the stage, trust your training. You have put in the work and you are ready. Chances are, it's going to go really well. Close your eyes and try and hear your own heart beat before you go on stage. Breathe and relax. Stretching is also a great and widely used technique. Stretching sends out hormones to trigger a relaxation response in your body. I hate stretching and yoga to be honest. I am far too ADD. The one time you will find me doing it, however, is just before I walk on stage. It makes a huge difference!

Steve Martin knew all too well how many things could go wrong in a single performance: “Stand-up is seldom performed in ideal circumstances. Comedy's enemy is distraction, and rarely do comedians get a pristine performing environment. I worried about the sound system, ambient noise, hecklers, drunks, lighting, sudden clangs, latecomers, and loud talkers, not to mention the nagging concern ‘Is this funny?’”

He also knew that his fears could be put to his advantage: “I suppose these worries keep the mind sharp and the senses active. I can remember instantly retiming a punch line to fit around the crash of a dropped glass of wine, or raising my voice to cover a patron's ill-timed sneeze, seemingly microseconds before the interruption happened.”

For Martin, it was practice and stage time (no matter how excruciating) that made all the difference as he improved his comedic performance. Practice is the key to a strong performance in both the best and worst-case scenarios. Over-preparation will help you be ready for anything and the knowledge and confidence that you can handle whatever comes your way on stage will assuage some of the fear you might be feeling. All of the practice will be well worth it. With calm nerves, rehearsed delivery, and material you know through and through, you will look better on stage than you could ever hope to without consistent practice. After all, as Steve Martin says, “*Persistence is a great substitute for talent.*”



Exercise: Hone Your Stories and Build a Set List

Find a space at home or work and tell your stories while recording them. This can be audio or video recorded. Video is better, if possible. Don't stop to make corrections. This is where you vocalize thoughts and let your mind wander. You'll be surprised what little additions you tend to make compared to your writing.

Listen back to see if you made any additions worth keeping and also identify where you can cut words. If your story makes you laugh even a little on listening back then you have something good to work with. If you love telling a story, it's likely others will love to listen.

Now rewrite what you like best, following the joke structure outlined earlier.

Take your favorite stories and cut them down to the fewest possible words to compile a five-minute set list. This is likely the amount of time you will get initially at an open mic night (three to seven minutes is the range you get as a beginner with five the most common). Your set list is simply a list of topics/stories you intend to try out on stage, usually listed by key words. (No need to write out every word. Think more along the lines of a postcard with bullet points.) Work from these bullet points to create your own memory palace.

As you attend more open mics and public speaking events, your set list should get longer as you continuously add new material that you know works. Typically, a new comedian can produce five to seven strong minutes within the first few months, a professional comedian sixty new minutes a year. Remember, you only need a few strong jokes and not a full five to seven minutes to liven up your presentation. However the longer your standup comedy set (should you be brave enough to try it) becomes, the more tried and trusted jokes you will have to build into your public speaking/presentations.

#5 Delivery

*“I never memorize a speech verbatim, but I do ensure that I have memorized the starting and closing 2-3 sentences for each portion.” —
Tim Ferriss*

“Alright, who’s next?” The open mic host stood at the foot of the stage, shading his eyes against the light as he looked toward some unseen list-keeper. My heart starts to pound because I already know the answer.

“Dave,” a voice from the crowd says. “That’s all it says though.... Dave.”

Was I supposed to write my last name? The sheet wasn’t specific. I stood up from my seat and raised my hand up. What are you doing? You’re not a child answering roll call. I lowered my hand down in what I hoped was a casual move. A cool, calm, relaxed, casual move. Better add a flick of the wrist for good measure. A cool, calm, relaxed, casual fly swat.

“What’s your last name, Dave?” the host asked, motioning me to step forward.

“Ehhh...Nihill.” That was my name, right? As I walked toward him I was at least 72% sure that it was.

“Do you want to use it in your introduction? Or do you prefer to be a mystery Dave?”

“Thanks very much, I’ll take it.” I stepped up the small rise of the stage.

“Do you want me to introduce you as Dave Michael or just Dave?”

“David Nihill,” I say as I step to the mic, “Michael is a whole new name.”

“Please give it up for George Michael!”

Great.

This was my very first attempt at standup and that awkward conversation played out live on stage. The joke at my expense got me off to the worst possible start. I had already sweated out my t-shirt and began to fumble with my notes. Shakin’ Stevens was well and truly in the house as my struggles to control my adrenaline greatly reduced my ability to do something as simple as take the microphone out of the stand. Within seconds, my mind went blank

and I was reading from a sheet of paper I struggled to hold steady. As I paced the stage nervously, I completely forgot to keep the mic near my mouth and waved it around like an extension of my arm. The audience probably became concerned that my windmill arms would eventually whip the mic into my head, dropping me into merciful unconsciousness. Every gesticulation increased that possibility; thereby greatly reducing the likelihood I would get any laughs, as the audience waited for the telltale thud that would put an end to my miserable state.

It never got any better that night. I didn't bounce back. And here's the crazy thing: this was not a grand theatre stage, a large conference, or a new product launch. This was the half-completed basement of an Irish bar, the state of which appeared like there was a breakdown in communications between Irish contractors and Mexican laborers (or vice versa). There must have been no more than eight people there. EIGHT people! What was happening to me?

As I have learned the hard way, your behavior on stage will impact greatly your performance. Comedians are the true masters of public speaking delivery and a lot can be learned from things they do quite naturally but have often learned in rather painful ways. In this chapter, we are going to look at a number of key techniques to be aware of when it comes time to pick up the mic and speak real words into it. Needless to say I really wish I knew all these prior to my spectacular debut.

Start strong / first 30:

As any 100-meter sprinter knows, it's much harder to win if you get off to a weak start. As I've learned, the first 30 seconds of your presentation can determine the rest of the duration as easily as the sprinter's time off the block. If the first 30 seconds will set the tone for the rest of your talk, then rehearse this 30 seconds the most. This is your time to grab the audience's attention. Tell them who you are, why they must listen to you, and do it in a manner that makes them like you. I have had nights where I have told the exact same jokes and stories but with very different reactions. The nights that did not go as well were the ones in which I experimented with or messed up the first 30 seconds.

The structure of this First 30 is important. Steve Jobs always saved the best for last with "One more thing..." and you should too. Include your second best joke at the start and leave your best until the end to go out on the strongest impression possible. I will show you later on in the book how to identify and evaluate your best bits, jokes, and stories.

As I learned the hard way, don't leave your introduction to chance. Always supply one in advance. And for the love of breathing, don't forget to include your last name. Many hosts or emcees try to improvise humorous interludes themselves. Don't let their laughs be at your expense. George Michael wouldn't...or would he?

Get on stage fast. As soon as the host introduces you (hopefully with a round of applause), quickly make your way onto the stage. You should be in position to commence speaking as soon as the applause begins to dwindle down. If, for any reason, you need to set up or adjust some items at this point in time, it's a great moment to ask the audience for a round of applause for your host or previous speaker.

Applause also follows the Rule of 3. It essentially gets the audience into the habit of applauding and laughing. If the host didn't introduce you with a strong round of applause, this is a good time for you to ask the audience to offer a round of applause. If you do this in groups of 3, it's more likely that their applause will spill over and become a habit that stays evident for the rest of your presentation and for others to follow. Feel free to ask for a round of applause for the presenter, the host, for some of the presenters before you, for the sponsor or organizers of the show/conference/talk.

Smile and make eye contact. Connect with as many people as you can in the front rows for the duration of this first 30 seconds and as much as you can throughout the rest of your talk. This helps you to engage as many members of the audience as you can on a personal level. If you look like you're enjoying it and you look happy, chances are other people will start to as well.

Try and get a quick laugh. There is always a tension in the room as the audience tries to figure out a little bit about you and decides if they want to listen to you. Getting a quick laugh can be a great way to lighten the mood. Move forward from there with an anecdote or a personal story. This should establish affinity with your audience. It should tell them who you are, what your passion is, and why they should have your passion too, whether it's about a product or research area or a topic in general. This should be relevant and engaging and have the key elements of a good story as outlined in Comedic Habit #1: Crafting a Good Story. The dopamine released with those early laughs will immediately put the audience and you more at ease; this will further drive engagement and break down barriers. Picturing the room naked is useful if you're so inclined, but making the naked people laugh is a lot more interesting.

Nudity aside, acknowledging the obvious often provides an opportunity to get a quick and early laugh. If you're visibly nervous, have a fresh stain on your shirt, or if there's anything unusual about you physically—anything that

the audience might fixate on at the start—now is the time to address it, get a laugh, and move on so the audience can focus. In my case, I have an Irish accent that stands out because I live in the U.S. I will work to quickly address this and tell them that I’m Irish and try building a joke about it. That way, I can get the audience to focus on what I’m saying rather than spend the first 30 seconds trying to figure out where I’m from.

Acknowledging the obvious is known in comedy as “calling the room.” It means vocalizing exactly what’s going on in the room or what people are likely thinking. When Twitter launched, co-founder Biz Stone was keen for the company to own its many early stage imperfections—most notably the fact that the system was completely unreliable. When you sent a message on most websites a success screen came up and that screen would have read “Thank you. Your message was sent”. Twitter merely left you with a message that said, “Great, that might have worked.” Acknowledging the feelings of a room of people you can see is a lot easier than predicting those on the other side of a screen. We get real time visual feedback and the best speakers capitalize on it. Vocalize everything that’s happening in that moment, everything that is being shared between you and the audience. It can be comments on lunch, the setup, the room temperature, someone arriving late or leaving early, a loud noise, someone sneezing, a fire alarm going off in the background, etc. Comedians never ignore these moments, as they often generate spontaneous laughs. The more you try calling the room, the better you get at it, the more you know what works well; the more potential occurrences you address and the more this becomes rehearsed spontaneity.

One of my clients opened his keynotes by playing a video for the audience highlighting his considerable list of business and personal achievements; all of the things that earned him a net worth of over \$400M. The video, although hugely impressive and very well made, really put him up on a pedestal. It made people find him hard to instantly relate to and not very likeable. Then he tried to tell some jokes and the reception was exactly what you would expect. If you don’t like someone, you are unlikely to laugh at their jokes no matter how funny they may be. It was time for some damage control. I asked him to come out on stage after the video and say, “Does it show my mother made that video? If my wife had made it, it would look very different!” He had to laugh at himself so the audience would laugh with him. With this use of self-deprecating humor, he was suddenly very human again. His presentation jokes now got bigger laughs.

This is an example of self-deprecating humor, which can be one of the quickest ways to get an audience on your side. According to a recent *Financial Times* article by Lucy Kellaway, self-deprecation can “disarm

others, make them forget you are scarily powerful, and lull them into liking you,” but it only works if you’re already in a position of power and authority. Self-deprecating humor is a great tool to have in your back pocket, but be sure not to undermine your own credibility with too many wise cracks or too many humorous comments at your own expense.

As Jerry Seinfeld described and we mentioned earlier: “No one is more judged in civilized society than a stand-up comedian. Every 12 seconds, you’re rated.” It’s not as bad for us in this context for presentations, but it’s not something we want to be worrying about during our first 30 seconds either. Practice this part the most. Make no bones about it, this opening period is a popularity contest and one you need to win.

Helpful Tip: Try and introduce yourself to as many people in the room as possible before you start to speak. It helps break down that initial barrier that a stage can create. Don’t wait until you have already addressed the audience to start working the room.

On Stage Delivery:

Speak up. It sounds straight forward enough, but make sure you speak loud enough for people to hear you. You need to reach everybody in the room.

Don’t eat the microphone. This should fall under the “instinct” category, but you can’t be sure with people these days. Don’t underestimate what your nerves might drive you to do. New comics and new presenters tend to keep it a little bit too close to their mouth. Keep it a good distance away from your mouth; ideally, keep it down by your chin. When I am really nervous, I leave the mic in the stand until I get a few early laughs and feel more confident. Then once the nerves have calmed, I move the stand out of the way.

Trust yourself and your material. If you look like you know what you’re doing, people will believe it and that confidence is infectious. Remember people are fundamentally good at heart. Nobody wants to see a speaker or performer doing badly. They want to see you succeed. Give them reason to think you will.

Speak instead of preach. Try as much as you can to be conversational on stage and avoid preaching. This relaxes the audience and makes it seem more of a spontaneous discussion.

Make sure you are fully visible. If there’s a podium try to get out from behind it. If there’s a mic stand, once you’re comfortable, take the mic out and move the stand to one side. Often the audience needs to see you to

fully trust you.

Mind your face. Your expression is incredibly important from the moment you step on stage to the moment you walk off. Remember to smile. Make eye contact with as many people as you can. Try and build connections.

Use your hands. How you use your hands when you're speaking is extremely important. You want to engage them as much as you can. Don't stand there with your hands in your pockets. Practice your presentation with a bottle in each hand. This gets you accustomed to speaking with your hands out in front of you, which looks really natural but initially will make you feel like a zombie robot.

Use the stage. If you have a large stage area to work with, use it to reach people. Connect with them by walking towards them and covering as much of the stage area as you can. Be careful not to nervously sprint around the place. You don't want to distract them or take away from what you're saying.

Amp up your punch line. When you come to the punch line of your joke or the important laugh line, step forward and raise your voice. This combination really emphasizes a point and will further engage the audiences. It also gives them their cue to laugh.

Don't bring visible notes on stage with you. Podiums are becoming a thing of the past as most organizers realize it creates a barrier between the speaker and audience, so sooner or later you'll have nowhere to put them. It's best not to rely on them at all, but if you must have something be sneaky about it. Write a few notes on a water bottle label or a napkin. Notes should stay in your back pocket throughout. If you don't have a back pocket, get creative. Visible notes show the audience that you're not fully prepared and also force you to break flow and eye contact.

Don't forget to pause. Timing, rhythm, and pauses become really important. While delivery is how you say a joke, timing is *when* you say it. A proper pause can help create curiosity within an audience. Give them a chance to catch their breath, build tension, and then, BANG! You burst into the laugh line. These pauses and rhythms essentially give the audience entrance into your train of thought, allowing a true reaction to build. Small changes in delivery like raising your voice at the end of a sentence have a big, big impact. Comedians say there is no substitute for stage time to improve timing. While this is true in part, what mainly happens over time is that one masters the delivery of tested stories and laugh lines. When I identified my best stories and bits to include and the

exact parts that generally get laughs, I was more confident to adjust my delivery to allow time for the audience to laugh. I am expecting them to laugh and, in facilitating this laugh, my timing improves.

Improvisation:

“You can’t plan a script. The beauty of improvisation is you’re experiencing it in the moment,” says Twitter CEO Dick Costolo who, long before his role at Twitter, performed for years as an improv comedian in Chicago alongside the likes of Steve Carrell as part of the famous improv group, Second City.

Riffing is when a comedian interacts with an audience by asking them questions, either to the group as a whole or an individual, making stuff up on the spot and appearing as spontaneous as can be. This is essentially improv comedy, which in the context of performing arts is spontaneous performance without specific preparation. Improv often gets the biggest laughs as it appears to occur truly in the moment and creates an in-joke between the speaker and the audience. It can often also add an element of magic or creativity that didn’t seem apparent in preparation. The most effective comedians combine standup, storytelling, and improv techniques. The best business presenters should too. Don’t be afraid to go off script once you have gotten off to a good, scripted start.

“Real laughter is spontaneous. Like water from the spring it bubbles forth a creation of mingled action and spontaneity — two magic potions in themselves — the very essence of laughter — the unrestrained emotion within us!” — Douglas Fairbanks

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, improv led to one of the movie’s most memorable scenes, in which Indiana Jones, played by Harrison Ford, engages in a fight scene with a skilled swordsman. The scene is famous and became the movie’s biggest laugh line, but it wasn’t planned that way. Harrison Ford was defeated by the local cuisine (like me in Guatemala). Lacking the energy for the fight scene shot in Tunisia’s intense heat, he improvised. Rather than use his sword as scripted by Stephen Spielberg, he took out his gun and simply shot the would-be assassin. The unplanned scene became an instant classic. Improv has the power to do that.

“Improv teaches you to think on your feet and how to react and adapt very quickly to unexpected events.” — Lakshmi Balachandra, MIT Management School

Knowing the room and the audience can really help you tailor material and certain jokes to that particular crowd’s interest. It can be advantageous if you can get a list of attendees before your conference or presentation and

determine where the majority has come from, their average age, job titles, etc. If a lot are travelling, come from a specific company, or hail from a specific country, it's good to reference this in your presentation and work in some jokes when you can.

Watch speakers that go on before you so you can build on their jokes or find spontaneous ways to reference them if you can. This will also help you make sure you're not overlapping with any of your material or main points. It always amazes me how many business speakers and comedians don't do this. Their rationale is often that they don't want their own planned talk affected by what they see before them, but if someone goes on before you and covers very similar topics and makes similar jokes, the benefits outweigh the costs. Audiences often get an overload of information in a short time span. With this in mind, don't call back too far. A good rule is to keep your references within the last three performers (i.e., if you are the sixth to speak, only work back to the third act). If you reference something that was said a day earlier, the audience will likely not recall it fast enough.

What if a joke falls flat? This is going to happen sometimes. No matter how good the joke. It's great to call attention to it if it does. Vocalize what the audience members are thinking. If a joke didn't go well, acknowledge it and quickly move on, saying, "Oh, boy, that one didn't go too well. Just as well, I've got a better one," and move on to it. Or, "You guys didn't like that one? My cat loved it! I've been practicing on him," and tell something else. Always acknowledge what seems to be the mood of the audience. If something didn't work, show that audience that you realize it and they will forgive you.

If you do happen to forget your next line, even though you've used the memory palace technique, don't worry. Just be honest and say, "I forgot my next line," if you have. Take your time and it will come to you. Try and bring a bottle or a glass of water on stage with you. This will allow you to take a drink and take a break if at any moment, you forget exactly where you are in your talk or memory palace. Remember, you can always have fun with the situation. You can always say something humorous and sarcastic to acknowledge that it's not going so well: "You guys may think I'm doing badly. Not true. You're doing badly. Go home and study and really prepare for these audience appearances."

By working out your rescue lines ahead of time, you can step over these small issues without missing a beat in your delivery.

Even when you're improvising it's important to remember your comic writing tips: keep to the present tense and bring this to life in your delivery. The present tense will help you improvise if you get stuck. Your attitude can

be a great help as well. Use attitude words and deliver with attitude. Really sell your topic, stories and jokes like they're important to you. Remember to incorporate words like weird, scary, amazing, hard, stupid, crazy, and nuts. It's easy to forget them in the moment.

Delivery is the part where you will improve the most in the shortest period of time. Some lessons may be temporarily painful but they will be easily remembered and likely avoided in the future. Like when I was seven years old, I was fishing for tadpoles down next to a river. I took a break to urinate without surveying my surroundings. When the electrical current from the fence made its way to my private parts, I learned a very good lesson. Check before you spray. It was a lesson I only needed to learn once. The lessons ingrained from experience, much like those that come through storytelling, are always easily recalled to guide our future behavior.

Outside of checking before you urinate on electrically charged devices, the items I've described may sound like a lot to remember. That's because they are. Just like a soccer player coming back from injury or a boxer who has gone awhile without a fight, there is a noticeable difference in combining all these items when you haven't been on stage for too long.

Delivery needs to be practiced. When I have a big show or I am hosting a conference, I make sure to put in some practice time a few days before to iron out the kinks. Even the best, most veteran comedians still do this. Jerry Seinfeld still travels around the U.S. to perform regularly at smaller venues. "If I don't do a set in two weeks I feel it," Seinfeld told the *New York Times*. "I read an article a few years ago that said when you practice a sport a lot, you literally become a broadband: the nerve pathway in your brain contains a lot more information. As soon as you stop practicing, the pathway begins shrinking back down. Reading that changed my life. I used to wonder, 'Why am I doing these sets, getting on a stage? Don't I know how to do this already?' The answer is no. You must keep doing it. The broadband starts to narrow the moment you stop." Just like Steve Martin and Jerry Seinfeld do, the best business speakers take every opportunity to build muscle memory and keep the nerve pathways at their most effective by practicing their delivery. You should too.

Just one more thing...

Have fun with this. It's a creative process and just like learning any creative process, you'll only get better from here. The more you enjoy it—and look like you are enjoying it—the more the crowd will too. They look to you to craft their behaviors, like an orchestra taking their cues from a conductor. Think less Shakin' Stevens and more Steve Jobs. Always save the best for last.



Exercise: Practice Time

Try and develop an opening line, bearing in mind the importance of the first 30 seconds of a talk. This exercise is taken from an article by best-selling author and comedy coach Judy Carter:

Make a list of your ethnicity, parents' nationalities, your hobbies, and your current and past professions.

Pick two of the items you wrote and insert them into the following formula:

“You may not know this, but I’m _____ and _____ (or “I’m part this and part that”), so that means I _____.”

By doing this you are seeking to identify key attributes about yourself and communicate them to the audience in a humorous manner. Much in the same way I reference my Irish accent in my opening line and acknowledge folks may be having a hard time understanding me.

Get on stage this week. Find an open mic night or storytelling night (like the Moth) near you. Prior to going, select and make plans to attend a second one within two weeks if possible. This serves to commit you to going again regardless of how you do at your first one. If you really, really don't want to try an open mic to start with, look up your local Toastmasters group or find a public speaking meet up. If even that sounds too much, practice on friends and family until you know you have the makings of a good story; then progress to open mics as soon as you can. There really is no substitute for testing stories and humorous anecdotes on a live audience.

Get into the habit of going to these as soon as you can. You don't have to go all the time. The more serious your aspirations as a speaker, the higher your time commitment. Once every two weeks is a good start.

Reward yourself after each talk, not before. This can be as simple as watching TV, going for a run, or eating a piece of chocolate. Positive reinforcement helps you establish a habit as well as it helped teach your dog that rollover trick you're so proud of.

No drinking or other substances prior to your performance. You want to fully embrace your heightened state of alertness.

Keep most material and stories clean. It needs to be usable in a business

context. As a rule of thumb, if it's below the waist, leave it out.

Try to incorporate one act out into your story

Practice, Practice and Practice and remember to record by audio or video.

Watch and listen to your recorded performances.

Highlight:

What got a reaction from the crowd?

What held people's attention?

What got laughs?

Identify areas that you can take out or rewrite.

How was your body language and delivery on stage?

What areas do you need to work on?

Remember that at open mics, some jokes and stories can get a good reaction one night and little reaction the next. Sometimes this can be due to other factors like how attentive the crowd was, the mood/setup in the venue, the performer before you, your opening 30 seconds, etc.

Before you cut out a joke or story from your planned set, make sure that you test it at least three times, especially if you really like telling it. Remember it can be tough to get laughs at some open mics. Even a small chuckle can translate to big laughs in your final presentation to a larger, more attentive audience (and especially a business audience).

Look into taking an improv class near you. Twitter holds up to four a week at their corporate headquarters. There's a good reason why they do and it's a great excuse to give your boss if you need to. You'll even get extra points for quoting MIT: a study there found a group of improv comedians generated 20% more ideas than professional product designers did. Practicing improv comedy develops your ability to create, just as practice improves your writing or speaking ability. It's a genuinely valuable exercise.

Be aware of body language. Watch Amy Cuddy's TED talk on the subject if you have not seen it before.

#6 Control the Audience

“The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum.” — Noam Chomsky

What Stanford is to universities, a perfectly set-up room in downtown San Francisco is to comedy. The Punchline Comedy Club has low ceilings that help laughter bounce around the room, lots of red coloring which scientists say is more conducive to laughter, tightly packed seating which helps spread emotions, and a stage that sits low and almost within the crowd. A joke here will get a bigger laugh than most other venues. Comedians love performing here and, just like Stanford, only the better ones get in. For a new comedian, the best chance of taking the stage is their Sunday night showcase. The rules for the showcase are unwritten but generally you are expected to have been doing comedy for at least two years, come to the show most Sundays for nine months, and patiently wait to be called upon to deliver your best seven minutes to a packed house. Patience is not my strong suit and shortcuts are my specialty. In the last year, I have managed to get on stage at the Punchline seven times. But tonight it's not someone developing his craft and trying his luck as a comedian. Tonight it's Andrew. He has honed his craft over ten years as a full time touring comedian and he is incredibly good at making audiences double over in laughter while dominating a room. Andrew finds a couple in the audience.

“Now here's a good looking couple. How long have you two been together?”

“Two years,” the man answers while his lady friend leans in affectionately.

“What's your name?”

“John.”

“Is it serious John?”

“Yes.”

John's girlfriend is blushing. She's also extremely pleased. She glances at him affectionately and she's not the only one. This room full of strangers is now getting to know and like John and his pretty girlfriend.

“Good looking girl. You probably know after a year together. Do you love her?”

“Yes,” John answers quickly. Smartly.

“Well done John. He knows the rules. No matter what the question, never hesitate. Do you love her? Yes. Is she fat? No. Bang...Never hesitate. Good work. You are getting the good loving tonight.”

The audience laughs, the girl laughs, and John laughs, knowing he nailed this impromptu test.

“So it’s a serious relationship. Are you engaged?”

“No.” John looks like he has swallowed something sharp.

“So it’s serious, she is amazing, you’re very happy. You love her. It’s a great relationship. You can tell. Serious. Some people would say very serious. But... it’s not engagement serious John... Not engagement serious. Look at all the ladies. They loved you before when you said you love her but now they are asking, ‘Why not John? Why not engaged?’ Do you know what would make this an amazing night John? Do you know what would make this extremely memorable for both of you?”

The anticipation and tension builds and becomes nervous laughter. Is Andrew really going to ask him to propose to his girlfriend in front of a room of strangers?

“Look at John’s face. You should see it. He’s like, ‘Joke’s over asshole. Move on now.’

Don’t worry John. We wouldn’t do that. I wouldn’t make you ask in front of all these people.” Andrew turns to the girl, “But, if he did ask, what would you say John’s girlfriend?”

“Yes...” the girl says softly.

“Wow.” Andrew looks up, “Oh, sorry John. I have just ruined your life.”

This joke looks every bit spontaneous and in the moment. And it is, but it was very much in the moment with a different couple the previous night as well, and the night before that. This is the essence of rehearsed spontaneity combined with controlling the audience. Andrew has put in a lot of work and analysis behind the scenes to test out various formats and wording to lead into this core joke premise. This moment that seems so spontaneous is mostly anything but.

The best comedians and presenters have topics in mind that they are well prepared on and wish to discuss. The mastery in their delivery comes from

steering the audience in the right direction to arrive at just what they had planned to talk about. Can this be done regularly? It can. Remember you have the microphone. You control the room. This also applies to interviews and all social interactions. As a speaker, you can control how much the audience member speaks with the type of questions you ask. If you're trying to engage the audience members and you want them to talk for a longer periods of time, ask open leading questions. Use words like How, Who, When, What, Why, and Where in order to elicit a response greater than one word. They generally require some further explanation. If you want to appear to be engaging an audience member, but don't want them to speak that much, ask a closed question, questions that tend to solicit Yes or No or one-word answers.

Something strange happens when you put a group of people who previously didn't know each other together in a room. They begin to react together, to laugh together, and to applaud together. They essentially begin to behave as one. You need to present to them like you're constantly seeking their approval. This goes back to the previous comedy lesson. You need to make the audience like you, but you also need to be able to control them collectively, as they will decide collectively if they want to listen to you.

Command attention:

So many times I have seen a business speaker take the stage and begin to talk while the audience is still chatting or not quite settled. Sometimes it's the result of the host not doing his or her job and sometimes it's due to a range of other factors, but one thing is certain, you need to stop the noise. The speaker all too often tolerates the crowd's chatter, puts their head down and seeks to plough through their presentation as fast as they can. What happens? The noise level gets higher and higher. Next time this happens, stop and ask the audience to clap if they can hear you. Once a few begin to clap, then keep it going until those who were talking shut up and join in. They will. Like birds flocking together, people naturally behave as a group. They will assume you said something interesting worthy of applause, fear they missed something awesome and join in. Now you reset and start again. I run a conference series and this is how I commence every time. It never fails. "Clap if you can hear me."

Never ignore interruptions, always manage disruptions:

Sooner or later you'll be interrupted in a talk or presentation. In a comedy show this is referred to as heckling. These unwanted interruptions will disrupt your flow, but should be endured until it's clear that the audience is also

annoyed. You'll begin to feel this. When you do, then you can close off the intruder with the audience's implicit approval. We can all recall times presenting, when somebody kept going on and on without really getting to the point of the question. If this was annoying you, it was probably annoying the audience as well. Just make sure it's actually happening before closing them off. Always be polite unless you really, really have no other option. Remember, you control the audience. You have the microphone and your voice will be considerably louder than anybody else in the room no matter how much they shout.

Few comebacks from the comedy stage are appropriate for use in a business context, but there is no harm in learning from some more extreme examples then adapting a more light-hearted version.

Ricky Gervais: *"This is a big venue, I can't really get into one-to-ones. In a smaller room I'd still ignore you—Shut Up!"*

Arthur Smith: *"Look, it's all right to donate your brain to science but shouldn't you have waited til you died?"*

Rufus Hound (to wait staff) *"Can we get some crayons and a menu for this guy to color in, please?"*

Often the best way to deal with an intrusion or comment is simply to repeat that comment. If it was an obviously stupid question, by simply repeating it and pausing for effect the audience will likely spontaneously laugh. This repeat serves a number of purposes. First and most importantly, it buys you time to think. This extra time to think allows you to come up with something witty and spontaneous or the best answer to their question, comment, or concern. Additionally you want to make sure that everybody in the room heard the question. Repeat the question. You can always add, "That's a great question," if you need more time. Constantly seek to buy time to think on your feet. There's no hurry to give an answer. Don't be afraid of silence. Silence means the audience is listening to you.

A geeky looking comedian says, "This is how bad I was at sex the first time. The first time I ever had sex..."

"Yesterday?" yells a heckler. The audience responds with huge laughter.

The comedian visibly struggles to find words as the audience continues to laugh for a full 29 seconds. Finally, he looks at his heckler and says, "Glad you remember." The room swells with even bigger laughs as the audience goes wild in approval.

There's no rush to craft your response. The best answer or comeback is worth taking the time to put together. Remember the words of Jeffrey

Gitomer, “The end of laughter is followed by the height of listening.”

Never run the clock:

The easiest way to lose an audience is to run the clock. Comedians are better at respecting this than anyone else. Why? Because in comedy, if you run the light you will not be allowed on stage again at that location. In no club or venue will it be tolerated unless you're an A-list headliner. There are more than 50,000 people who call themselves comedians in the United States. All of them over time become pretty funny. Not all will be hilarious and make the big time. In fact, very few will. All, however, will learn this one great lesson along the way. Never run the clock.

Practice your timing and aim to never ever go over the allocated time limit. If there isn't a set time limit to go by, make sure that you impose one on yourself. This forces you to go back and strip out any unnecessary words or information and be a minimalist. Use the fewest words with the greatest impact.

If you're due to speak for 10 minutes, this time period becomes essentially a non-verbal agreement with the audience. In their mind, if they expect you to speak for 10 minutes, then they're already planning on doing something else in 10 minutes' time, whether that's catching up on some work email, going to the bathroom, or grabbing some lunch. It'll be much harder for you to hold their attention if you go over the agreed time limit.

Also, keep in mind, this time has to come from somewhere, especially if you're part of a busy presentation conference schedule or show. If you go over your time, then somebody else will lose some of theirs; whether it's taken from the next speaker or from your audience's lunch break, you're not making friends. Be respectful. Finish on time. Will anyone ever complain that your talk was too short? Wouldn't you rather not find out? Always leave your audience wanting more.

If you've crafted a memorable story, used the joke structures, and have tested your material, then you're going to get some great laughs from the crowd. Make sure you allow them time to laugh. Also, remember your planning: “A tight five is much better than a sloppy fifteen.” Aim to be consistently high (not that kind of high!), consistently funny, and consistently good. To do this, you're better off squeezing your time into a more compact timeframe than allowing yourself to ramble around the clock.

The best way to do this is to ask for a signal light. This is where somebody in the audience, a friend or the organizer you have asked, will shine a light in your direction or give you a signal to let you know that your completion time

is approaching. Some stages and conferences like TED have countdown clocks at the foot of the stage, but many still do not. It makes so much sense to have a clock on stage that it will become the accepted norm very quickly. Trust me, I know these things. Best prepare for it now.

Ideally, this signal will come with one or two minutes remaining, the exact amount of time necessary for your planned conclusion. The signal light can be something as simple as a smartphone, a laser pointer, or somebody waving a hand. Make sure you acknowledge that you saw the signal when preparing. Aim to finish a minute or more under at least. This will allow you time to incorporate elements we discussed in the last section like riffing or calling the room or reacting to something unexpected. Always plan to finish at least a minute under the imposed time limit.

Finally, make sure to soak up any applause. Stop talking and enjoy the moment. Only start speaking again when the applause begins to dwindle, and sometimes not even then. As Jerry told George in the classic 1998 *Seinfeld* episode, *The Burning*: “Showmanship, George. When you hit that high note, you say goodnight and walk off.”



Exercise: Timing and Delivery

Talk to the audience during your next performance. Remember you are not there to give a theatre performance. Engage the audience. They are more likely to pay attention if they think you may call upon them at any moment.

Practice riffing and calling the room as you get more comfortable. Try and do this for at least one minute of your stage time allocation.

Practice making sure your talk comes in under the time limit. See what parts generate the biggest laughs and allow time for this and also riffing/calling the room. Ask for a signal light and get used to delivering a strong closing within the remaining time limit. One minute light, one minute closing, two minute light, two minute closing etc. Know how long it takes you to make your closing remarks.

Run through your presentation in fast forward. Saying the words out loud as quickly as possible is a great technique to identify words and parts of your talk that may trip you up the day of your talk.

Break down each story you intend to tell, each section, record it and know how long it takes to tell (e.g., intro, pitch, numbers component, lessons, and main takeaways). Knowing the associated times for each part will help you craft the perfect performance.

#7 Close the Book, But Not Fully — Permanent Beta

“The end of a melody is not its goal: but nonetheless, had the melody not reached its end it would not have reached its goal either.” —

Friedrich Nietzsche

So what happened to Ryan, the comedian who crushed his set, puked, snorted a pizza, and left the building in a blaze of glory? To be honest, I have no idea, but if I did, now would be the time to tell you.

Comedians will use what’s known as a Bookend Technique. This is where they reference opening jokes at the conclusion of their show. This gives their performance a feeling of completion and symmetry. They are far from alone in using this technique; the best writers, movie producers, and presenters all do the same thing. It can be found just about everywhere we look. It caters to our natural curiosity and search for completion. The bookend technique can connect everything together—an essential element to a great talk or presentation. You have the chance to captivate an audience with your words and have them stuck in your story until its natural conclusion. There is no more powerful end to a story than when the audience knows it’s over. They know where to applaud. Their cue delivered by the story’s sequence. This is the essence of the Bookend technique. Make sure you provide a natural conclusion to a well-glued sequence that keeps people stuck attentive until you are ready to close the book on your topic. Start with a story and close it off at the end.

Business speakers and other presenters can utilize this approach by referring to their opening personal story in their closing remarks. This is essentially where you tie the start of your story to the end.

In comedic habit #1, we learned that crafting a good story means knowing where you want to take the audience. By writing the story with the punch line in mind, you will make it easy to tie the initial opening to your ultimate conclusion. Whatever closing technique you’d deploy, remember, to call upon your inner comic and end your talk on an applause line that underscores a clear call to action.

This closing of the book should be your highest rated joke and give a natural feeling of conclusion. Remember, it's not just about the comedy. You need to follow the examples of Martin Luther King, Steve Jobs, and Simon Sinek by incorporating a clear takeaway, be it a reinforced statement, a laugh line, or "one more thing."

Once you've closed the book on your story, say "Thank you". Nothing more. "You have been wonderful," "thanks for having me," "great to be here," "that's my time," are all unnecessary.

Now, that we've closed the book in our story, we're going to move on to a process of Evaluation.

* * *

Professional comedians will continuously evaluate every performance, seeking to move from Good to Very Good to Excellent, and so should you. They keep practicing even when they're already performing at a very high level, just like Jerry Seinfeld. Never do they say, "That's it, I'm awesome, no point or need to prepare anymore." They're always seeking to develop and improve. They need to be pleased, but are never satisfied with every performance. The idea of being in continuous Beta, that there's always room for improvement, is a perspective that will set you up for success as a speaker.

It's estimated that new comedians put together between five and eight new minutes of really strong material in their first year. When we say really strong material, we mean consistently high laughs all the time. Again, here, we only need a fraction of that. For our purposes, a couple of key jokes and consistently funny stories that can be inserted into our presentations is more than enough.

The value of testing:

Thomas Edison evaluated 6,000 plants before deciding to use bamboo for the filament in his exciting new invention, the electric light bulb. The lesson here? *You need to test!*

To do this, we're going to continuously evaluate every performance with this scoring system taken from the book *The Comedy Bible* by Judy Carter. Using this system, we'll be evaluating each bit based on laughs per minute. We'll award:

5 points for every time everybody laughs out loud and applauds

4 points when there's laughter and 1 or 2 claps

3 points when there's laughter but no applause

2 points when there's medium laughs

1 point for very few laughs

Using this system, we'll be able to eliminate personal bias (i.e., jokes or stories that we like to tell, but did not generate a favorable reaction every time). Our presentation material is always going to be a work in progress that can be improved, and we want to use this scoring system to highlight those jokes that work every time regardless of the audience we use them with. When I applied this to my own stories, it made a huge difference. Patterns quickly emerged as stories I thought worked well were outscored by bits I was not as attached to. The numbers don't lie.

Sammy Obeid is the first comedian to ever perform for 1,000 days (1,001 nights) consecutively, which he completed in September 2013, capping off his progression with an appearance on Conan. I was lucky enough to share the stage with him at Cobb's Comedy Club in San Francisco recently. Sammy has long been a driven, goal-oriented perfectionist. He earned a 3.9 grade point average at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in applied mathematics and business administration, before trying comedy, which he approached with the same rigor.

"Jokes can be very systematic," he said "What is the right word that fits in this blank to make this equation work?" Similar to Judy's system, as outlined above, Sammy rates jokes from D to A+.

"Bs can one day turn to A's, which can turn to A+'s. I've seen it happen many times. Some of my best bits have started off as a B, and then I added, trimmed, and structured and now they are at A+. My belief actually, is that any B can be an A if you find a way. Yeah, that rhymes for a reason. Work out your B's, but make sure you choose a show that's low pressure, in front of a crowd that isn't too big or is at least very merciful. And have backup plans. Intersperse with As. I've been doing this for so long, so I take greater risks. I'll do Cs interspersed with Bs, and then if I'm really losing them, throw in the A's. How do you know if a joke is a B or an A or a C? It depends on your standards. For me, As kill, most of the time. B's get some laughs, but don't really kill. Cs seem funny, but don't really get that many laughs. Ds suck."

What we see as funny in life is often tried and tested. This includes movies, advertisements, and comedy shows. They tend to leave little to chance and borrow a lot from structure and testing. With this in mind, we need to review our jokes and stories and allocate the relevant score to each. This will be taken from every performance and not just one night. We want to add up the total and divide by the total minutes on stage. This will give us a laughs per minute score. For reference, 12 – 20 LPM is good for any

professional comedian; 9–12 means you would be ready to get paid as a comedian but need to shorten your setups. And by shortening your setup, we mean cut out the amount of words it takes to get to the punch line. (“Brevity is Levity.”) Remember, this system was designed for comedians performing in comedy venues where everybody is trying to be funny. 4-9 means you will be very funny presenting in a business context and anything over 0 means you will be funnier than most other business speakers, who for the most part are not funny!

If we apply this scoring system to Ken Robinson’s talk, the most viewed on TED at the time of writing, we get (give or take a few for personal opinion) nearly 7 laughs per minute—enough to rival an up and coming comedian. If we take a weighted score away from how much they laugh and just record how many times they laughed as a group we get (give or take a few for personal bad math) approximately 2.8 laughs per minute. For comparison, when the same system was reported in Forbes Magazine as applied by Lovefilm, the London-based video streaming and DVD subscription service these were the top funniest movies of all time. Importantly this does not take into account how big the laughs were but just the frequency.

Rank	Title	Laughs per Minute
1	Airplane!	3
2	The Hangover	2.4
3	Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!	2.3
4	Superbad	1.9
5	Borat	1.7
6	Anchorman: the Legend of Ron Burgundy	1.6
7	American Pie	1.5
8	Bridesmaids	1.4
9	Shaun of the Dead	1.3
10	Life of Brian	1.2

On a laughs per minute basis, Ken is funnier than *The Hangover* and a hell of a lot more informative! Combine his high amount of laughter with passion and insightful, inspirational information and we have the ingredients of something really powerful. Is it any wonder we all love it? And he is not alone:

Top 10 general TED Talks (not the top 10 funniest, importantly):

Rank	Title	Laughs per Minute
1	Ken Robinson: How schools kill creativity	2.8
2	Amy Cuddy: Your body language shapes who you are	0.9
3	Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action	0.27
4	Brené Brown: The power of vulnerability	2.1
5	Jill Bolte Taylor: My stroke of insight	1.1
6	Pranav Mistry: The thrilling potential of SixthSense technology	0.44
7	Mary Roach: 10 things you didn't know about orgasm	3.4
8	Tony Robbins: Why we do what we do	1.3
9	Dan Pink: The puzzle of motivation	0.82
10	David Gallo: Underwater astonishments	1.1
17	Shawn Achor: The happy secret to better work (My own personal favorite)	2.9

Mary Roach's talk about female orgasm generated more laughs per minute than the funniest movie ever made. The power of vulnerability delivered by a researcher generates more laughs per minute than all but three of the world's funniest movies. *Body Language* with Amy Cuddy is not far off *Life of Brian*, a timeless 1979 British comedy film starring and written by a whole comedy group. Yes these numbers are loose and are meant to be tongue-in-cheek, don't factor in an allowance for the varied running times, do not allow for the level of laughter generated (and I am sure the movies generate bigger, more laugh out loud lines), but the underlying point is there for all to see. Top TED speakers are using humor and some extremely well.

Our new top 5 (where Hollywood meets TED):

Rank	Title	Laughs per Minute
1	Mary Roach: 10 things you didn't know about orgasm	3.4
2	Airplane! What crazy people do on a plane	3
3	Shawn Achor: The happy secret to better work	2.9
4	Ken Robinson: How schools kill creativity	2.8
5	The Hangover: How drunk guys do wacky stuff	2.4

Expect *TED the Movie: Information for an ADD nation*, featuring a host of star speakers. Coming soon to a theatre near you!

Most business speakers are completely boring so by incorporating even a few laughs, your presentation will stand out from the crowd like many of the best TED talks do. High laugh per minute accounts will translate into an entertaining and engaging presentation.

By looking through multiple nights performances, you will be able to quickly identify the jokes and stories and patterns that work every time regardless of the venue. The goal is to look at jokes that score 3 (B), 4 (A), and 5 (A+) consistently. The other ones we're going to leave to one side. If your joke is scoring a 3 for example, you need to rework it a bit. There's something funny in there, but you haven't quite developed to its maximum efficiency yet. If something is scoring 4 and 5, you have a really great joke that you can take out and incorporate into a presentation, knowing it will get a great response almost every time. Get systematic. The best speakers, like Ken, Mary and Sammy, always are.

Remember, as you practice and perform, continuously evaluate since there's always room for improvement. This is Permanent Beta. Close the book on your story but never fully on your performance.

If you happen to see a man along the way fitting Ryan's description, do drop me a note.



Exercise: Evaluation and Permanent Beta

Watch this TED talk: *Shawn Achor and The Happy Secret to Better Work*. It is one of my favorites and like Ken Robinson's, a great example of the power of a well-crafted story and laugh lines. Apply the scoring system to it to get a feel for the process and calculate the laughs per minute.

Work back through your own evaluated joke scores. This is where we aim to link what worked in standup with what you hope to present.

List each public speaking performance in a series of columns side-by-side, filling in each joke/story you told and its allocated score.

Identify which parts led to the best reactions. This also works well for identifying interest levels. Which parts led to confused looks, led to questions, had people on the edge of their seats, etc.

Find the ones that get the highest ratings consistently.

Also note any jokes/stories that seem to work well in a certain order, or where you're able to incorporate callbacks successfully.

Highlight Jokes That:

Rate 3, 4 or 5 in busy venues or that always get at least some laughs out of a tough/quiet open mic venue.

You will likely find that your highest rating material follows the joke structure and often also has the fewest words.

Test different order opening and closing variations of these jokes in live venues.

Try and work these lines into your stories and overall presentations where possible.

Look to extract your most engaging stories, best opening lines, and best closing jokes.

Conclusion

“People want a thrill, people want a spectacle, and people love to be entertained.” — Paul Stanley

Modern day speakers and presenters face competition like never before. Modern day distractions and the ringtones and vibrations are the hallmark of our cultural attention deficit. Presenters are expected to be entertainers. Those who do, do much better. Those who grab attention are more likely to hold it. Top speakers are already using one of the most powerful tools available to mankind to do this—laughter. Nothing will put you more at ease when speaking publicly than knowing you can make an audience laugh at a point of your choosing. Better still when doing just that will make you a standout.

Too many speakers present information in a boring manner. Choose not to. Never do what everyone else is doing. Find the few most successful people and do what they are doing differently. My argument in this book is that the most successful speakers are using humor, storytelling, and improv techniques, even if many are unaware of it. This awareness could save you precious time when focusing on 20% of the inputs that generate 80% of the results.

James Altucher says that 90% of success is showing up, so take the first step and get started. Have fun, play, and be creative. If you're having fun, others will too.

Born on a comedy stage, laugh lines are equally at home on a TED stage. I hope you get to share yours, however big or small your goals. If, like me, you're afraid of public speaking, don't worry, the process will become manageable. With increased stage time comes higher levels of comfort. Make it a habit and you'll make Shakin' Stevens disappear.

The whole audience won't always like what you say. Wise words from Gabrielle Reese, Sports Illustrated model, mother, and wife of Surf God Laird Hamilton, ring very true here. When asked how she deals with the pressures of being a pro athlete, she said, “In life, you will always have 30% of people who love you, 30% who hate you and 30% who couldn't care less.” Who knows what happened to the other 10%, but the point is still very true. Don't worry about trying to please everyone. You don't need all of the audience on your side to be a good speaker; 30% is plenty. Laughter is contagious. You might find it starts to spread quickly if you give it time. Ten percent of life is

what happens to you, while 90% is what you make happen. Make a point of adding humor.

The Comedy Fundraiser for Arash that got me into all this in the first place went so well that it's now an ongoing quarterly event bringing together top comedians and local communities, with the goal of raising funds and awareness to assist incredible individuals on their road to spinal cord injury recovery. I host it a lot less reluctantly now. Arash is pretty close to getting back on his feet despite being told he would never walk again. At the time of writing, we have helped raise over \$34,000 for people with spinal cord injuries—just a drop in the ocean of what is needed, but enough to make a difference. Why was I not my usual bag of nerves when it came to hosting the event? Because I had prepared, practiced, and put in the stage time. I put together a tried and tested collection of stories I knew would make people laugh by using the techniques I have outlined in this book. You will too. And you will be able to do it quickly.

Along the way, I met a host of business people struggling to create good content, whether it was verbal, written, or in marketing materials. There is no magic bullet for viral content but it was obvious business also had strayed from the building blocks of spreadable engaging content, story, and humor.

Born to solve this problem and bridge the gap between business and comedy, I founded FunnyBizz Conferences. All our speakers come from the world of business, TED, and comedy, and are always funny. They often have a sneaky background in standup, improv, storytelling, or a deep love of humor. Talks are limited to short periods and we have no keynote speakers. Just like a standup set, we seek to start strong and finish even stronger. There is always a clock on stage and speakers never run it (well, for the most part; old habits die hard). The conferences are pretty cool and like none I have ever been to before. I guess that was the point. See what everyone else is doing and don't do it. Unsolicited testimonials like this one make me think others agree and I feel privileged to be involved:

“Most conferences are like swimming in a nice comfy bowl of familiar oatmeal. This one was more like putting on a cape and diving off a building. FunnyBizz delivered more than take-aways and actionable ideas. FunnyBizz delivered a mode-changing experience right into my brain. If you can only go to one conference a year, it should be this one.”

Just like with the charity fundraiser, I am now fully confident in my ability to host a great conference without the crippling fear of failure that once turned me into a puddle of jelly, even when things go wrong and the shit nearly—and very literally—hit the fan.

At a recent event in New York City, we temporarily ran out of toilet paper. This is not uncommon at big events where the venue provides the janitorial support stuff. They can only do so much, so quickly. Well, on this occasion they needed to go *mas rapido* because we had just fed the crowd a delicious Mexican buffet for lunch and were just about to give them a bunch of free alcohol. Not exactly a winning combination. What did we do? Just like comedians do, just like the best speakers do, and just like Biz Stone did at Twitter, we called attention to the obvious and acknowledged the likely feelings of the audience to defuse the situation.

“Guys, sincere apologies. We are a conference on humor and maybe we went too far. Feeding you Mexican food, giving you free alcohol, and hiding the toilet paper. Not funny guys. Not funny at all.” (Note the Rule of 3 here as well as the joke structure: setup-punch line-tagline.) The incident was addressed in a positive way, in the moment and with a humorous nature that meant that was the last we heard of it.

As I write this, I am on tour with two of Ireland’s most famous comedians in L.A. How this came to be I am not certain, but I do know it was a sequence of events I started with the aim of overcoming a fear. I may or may not keep doing comedy and storytelling nights. Like most people, I find the demands of business all too often get in the way of fun, but now like you, I have a way of often combining the two.

Just like my home in California at the time of writing, we are in the midst of a drought. It is, however, a different kind of drought I refer to: A laughter drought. Babies laugh, on average, 300 times a day; people over 35 years old, ONLY 15!* Safe to say anyone who can bring back some of these lost laughter moments can quickly affirm themselves as a hero. Your newfound elevated status may be limited to your time on stage. However, when combined with some real information, concrete learning points and crafted amid a memorable and humorous story, you may find your star burns brighter for longer. I truly hope it does. Let us rid the world of boring content one presentation at a time! The world is waiting for your funny stories. Only you are qualified to tell them and you never know what may happen when you do.

Where you can, ADD COMEDY. We all need more of it.

* This number is often reported also as children laugh as much as 400 times a day, adults only 5, 15, or 20 depending on source.

7 Comedy Habits



Start with a Story



Add Humor - Find the Funny



Write Funny



Rehearsed Spontaneity



Delivery - Start Strong,
Finish Stronger



Control the Audience



Close The Book, But Not Fully. Permanent Beta

Further Material

The idea for this book was conceived and then tested interactively initially as an online course. I have never written a book before so this allowed me to test how best to structure the material and teach it based on student feedback. The chapters as outlined and the key learning points included are based on interactions with students on what worked best for them. I hope it also worked for you.

Not all items and examples made this book. It is a short read and I wanted to keep it so. Trust me, being Irish, I had plenty more words in me but had to remind myself that brevity is levity.

For additional book resources including video links to many of the examples described, supporting images and further reading visit:

7comedyhabits.com/book-resources/

If you would like to take the course in its entirety use the code ***morefunny*** via Udemy to get 60% off.

If you need help adding the funny, drop us a line via help@funnybizz.co. Through FunnyBizz Writer, you can access a team of top comedic talent.

Acknowledgements

Overcoming this fear and all the fun had along the way could not have been possible without the following fine folks:

My parents Patrick and Marita Nihill who always support me no matter how wacky my plans may be. My Editor Nils Parker who brought the funny and legibility when I could not. Tom Morkes for all his wisdom and support in getting this book in front of you. Inanc Karacaylak for helping open many comedy doors that often do their best to stay firmly closed. Ana Carolina Fujihara for never telling me this experiment was a bad idea amongst many, many other wonderful things. Arash Bayatmakou for continually inspiring through his amazing achievements and his continuous feedback throughout. So many others have lent their wisdom and support along the way: Philip Madden, David Howley, Matt Ellsworth, Max Altschuler, Mauricio Vergara, Rachman Blake, Debbie Dowling, Tim Lee, William McCarthy, Aram Fischer, Peter McGraw, Alex McClafferty, David Ryan, Eve Grenon-LaFontaine, Darragh Flynn, Sal Calanni, Ronan Collins, Kabir Singh, Matt Morales, Guy Vincent, Maria Gagliano, Bill Grundfest, Jeff Zamaria, Michael Margolis, Chris Lindland, Richard Sarvate, Andrew Stanley, Laura Montini, Andrew Tarvin, Tiffany Richeson, Mark McMillian, James Dilworth, Jason Steinberg, David Spinks, Gil Zeimer, and many more.

Stage time, stage time stage time: A huge thanks to all those who gave me the time to stand on theirs. Doors that were hard to open kept on opening due to you.

A massive thanks to all hilarious comedians who gave up their time and talents to be part of Comedy for a Spinal Cause: Tim Lee, Scott Capurro, Kellin Erskine, Sal Calanni, Reggie Steele, Matt Morales, Kabir Singh, Brendan Lynch, Daymon Ferguson, Drennon Davis, Nick Stargu, Josef Anolin, Joe Tobin, Kevin Munroe, Cody Woods, Ben Feldman, Red Scott, Iris Benson, Kaseem Bentley, Sandra Risser, Clay Newman, Dan St. Paul, Juan Medina, Jonny Ellar, Dhaya Lakshminarayanan and Matt Gubser. Laughter never did so much good.

There is no reason these nights cannot be run in every major city. Comedians need new audiences and stage time; people with spinal cord injuries need the funds raised for much needed therapy. We all need laughter. If you can help make this a reality please get in touch.

Finally to all those who want to add humor and help rid the world of boring content: thanks for reading! Go forth and multiply. The world needs more fine specimens like you.

About the Author

David was born in Dublin, Ireland. After graduating with a Master's Degree in Business in 2003, he moved to San Francisco where he worked for the Irish government helping startups expand rapidly. He has been involved with startup companies ever since. David is the Founder of FunnyBizz, a community and conference series helping content creators tap into the power of storytelling, comedy, and improv to create better content. He has performed standup comedy at California's leading clubs including Cobbs, the Comedy Store, the Improv and the Punchline even though he strongly denies being a comedian and is well aware most people don't understand his accent. His learning, taken from one year's intensive experiments in comedy, performed on someone from the business community with a huge initial fear of public speaking (i.e. him!) have been featured in Inc. and Forbes amongst others. He loves sharks, still dislikes public speaking, and calls San Francisco home when immigration officials permit.