

Make The TAPE Your MATE

4 Foolproof Ways to Salt your Speeches with Humor

by Brian Woolf (3 August 2020)

Introduction

For many years I was the quintessential Non-Humorist - my speeches sprouted little humor. I suffered humor - envy when smiles and laughter flowed to the naturally - humorous speakers and others who had obviously discovered humor's secret. I finally decided I wanted to find the secret, too.

So, I viewed and/or listened to every recorded Toastmasters® World Championship Contest since the early 1980's together with a cross - section of TED speeches. My goal? To find what causes audiences to smile or laugh. I wrote out all the smile and laughter lines and, later, began looking for patterns or commonalities among them.

Four major smile - laughter triggers emerged - **Twists. Asides. Putdowns. Exaggeration.** Or **TAPE** for short. This discovery resulted in *The Non-Humorist's Handbook* (available at Amazon) where many of the examples I discovered are shared. The book also has an additional section containing humor to use when chairing or leading a meeting, an important humor area that has been long overlooked.

This article explains each of these four triggers which will make you a more humorous speaker.

Many of the examples shown are taken from Toastmasters® annual World Championship of Public Speaking (WCPS). WCPS is also used to denote the contest winner; for example, Darren LaCroix ^{WCPS-01} was the World Champion in 2001. The term SF indicates a Semifinal Contest.

Finally, one unwritten rule of humor. If you are using someone else's quip, you should name its source. However, acknowledgement is not necessary if you take a quip's idea but express it differently (eg, by personalizing it.)

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Twists

When you are speaking, the audience is usually anticipating what's coming next, *eg, Red, White, and - Blue*. But what if you twist what's anticipated and take your audience in another direction? The surprise of your twist will trigger smiles and laughter and often creates admiration for your cleverness in tricking them.

Darren LaCroix often uses this simple example to demonstrate what a Twist is:

I was feeling so nervous about my trip, I made sure to put in the car a flashlight, blankets and - my mother-in-law.

No doubt, you were thinking, of something quite different than a mother-in-law. Incidentally, using *mother-in-law* is an easy way to trigger a smile or laugh.

Twists can be short or long. The example above comprises four steps: The background (*I was ... in the car*), then a 3-step series, with the last step being the Twist.

Now, on to a variety of laughter-generating Twists. Note the simplicity of their construction. Choose one whose structure you like and then create your own Twist.

Gentlemen, you have no idea of the power of a love letter - until your wife intercepts one! J A Gamache WCPS-01 (3rd)

When I was 22, I got a job as a hydration specialist - a bartender. ~Josephine Lee WCPS-16 (3rd)

My New Year's resolution was to lose 10 pounds - I've only got 15 to go.

Do you know what's wrong with the world?

Do you know what's wrong with me?

Do you know what's wrong with you?

Who cares! Lance Miller WCPS-05

*The first time my wife and I had an explosive argument - my wife won.
The second time my wife and I had an explosive argument - my wife won.
Ah - but the third time my wife and I had an explosive argument -
Guess what happened? -*

I lost. Palaniappa Subramaniam WCPS-12 (2nd)

*Now I don't want to alarm you
But it's just come to my attention that
The person to your right - is a liar.
Also - the person to your left - is a liar.
Also - the person sitting in your seat -
Is a liar.*

We're all liars! Pamela Meyer - How to spot a liar (TEDx)

*I was riding a bike!
I was successful!
I was eight years old.
To celebrate
Mom and I took the training wheels off.
Don't get excited! -
We only took 'em off the front wheel.* David Nottage WCPS-96

*Speech Title: "Que Sera"
When I was just a little boy
I asked my mother
"What will I be?
Will I be handsome?
Will I be rich?"
Here's what she said to me.
She said -
'No.'* Jock Elliott WCPS-94 SF

Asides

An Aside is whispering out loud to the audience - sharing your private thoughts, one-to-one, with each audience member, as seen in this example:

Hospitality is the art of making guests feel like they're at home - and you wish they were. Various

The above clearly shows how the speaker's personal comment brings humor. Such Asides can be emotionally enhanced with appropriate body language and pausing. A simple structure is: Make a statement - Pause - Change your posture (eg, put your hand up so you can speak from behind it) - Pause - then give your one-on-one, tete-a-tete, insight to each audience member.

Many speakers open their Asides with the word "well." Why? It signals: *Here's something different*. The examples below all feature "well" as an Aside opener.

I enjoy going to Litchfield Beach where I just sit and think - well, mainly sit.

Even today, we're judged by the color of our hair - well, some of us! [Speaker was bald] Russ Dantu

I believe in practicing prudence - well, at least once every two or three years. ~Molly Ivins

I kept my good looks - well, most of them - well, that's what my mother said. Linus Chang
WCPS-10 (3rd)

The two secrets of success are a good wife and a steady job - well, that's what my wife keeps telling me. ~Howard Nemerov. US Poet Laureate

I've been working at home for the past few weeks. Never realized how much my wife buys from Amazon. There's a delivery every day. Well - that's not completely true. Some days there are two deliveries. Art Woo

Now, for people in society with too much time on their hands - which obviously includes you - well, why else would you be here? ~Christopher Myers

There we were, three macho teenagers, Taylor, Eric and - well - two macho teenagers and me. Ryan Avery WCPS-12

Mr. Bean smiled at the crowd of new friends. "Are you enjoying the cupcakes?" Everyone nodded and smiled - well - except for Erma - but they blamed her stiff expression on the Botox. Kelly Swanson. Storyteller & Humorist Speaker

I once met Wayne Newton in Las Vegas. We were playing Black Jack together - well, he was at the \$1,000 table - I was at the \$5 table. But we were rubbing shoulders - well, he was 35 feet away - but he looked at me - once - I think. ~Carrie Warren

Putdowns

A Putdown is a Roast aimed at oneself rather than someone else. Audiences love speakers who poke fun at themselves because, in so doing, the speakers come down off their pedestals and become *one of us* (with the audience). It makes you, the speaker, appear more human and having a sense of humor. And it strengthens your connection with the audience. Not just that, Putdowns are fun to create - and deliver.

Every part of your life - growing up, school, first date, first job, first boss, marriage, old age - provides opportunities for Putdowns (real but, more often, imaginary.) Let the following examples be ideas for you as you build your own repertoire of Putdowns:

I started out with nothing - and still have most of it.

I don't know about you, but at my age I'm really happy that my bathroom steams up.

I'm not a failure. I started at the bottom - and just happened to like it there. Justin Lee

I'm known for my bullock speeches - a point here and a point there - and a lot of bull in - between. Bob Herndon PID

I've started writing another book - Yep! Have all the pages numbered!

I'm the sort of guy who talks and talks and talks - until I say something.

After four years of Business School I went for the American dream. I bought a Subway sandwich shop - you're all impressed I can tell. I don't want to brag or anything, but in six short months I took a \$60,000 debt - and I doubled that debt. That's right - I turned my Subway sandwich shop into a non-profit organization! Darren LaCroix WCPS-01

I loved my first boss. He was always so positive about everything. One day he said, I just don't know how we could ever get along without you - but, beginning tomorrow, we're going to try.

I'm not overwhelming - nor underwhelming - just plain whelming.

Now, friends, here's a challenge for you: try to imagine me - with a personality.

I'm a man of many parts - unfortunately, it was a poor assembly job. Justin Lee

My brain works just like the Bermuda Triangle - information goes in - gets lost - and is never found again.

When I was born, the doctor came out to the waiting room and said to my father, "I'm very sorry. We did everything we could - but he pulled through." Rodney Dangerfield

I have a Masters in Economics. I chose that field at University. because it's the only profession where you can achieve eminence without ever being right.

Exaggeration

Exaggeration is just that - and the bigger the exaggeration, the more the audience enjoys your creativity. To help frame your horizons here are some ideas - he was so big/small; generous/tight; fast/slow; smart/dumb; old/dumb; beautiful/ugly. Enjoy their creativity and how they triggered laughter. Then challenge yourself to add Exaggeration to your speeches, triggering smiles and laughter.

Ships are so big these days, you can now board one in Florida and get off in Cuba.

I live in a small South Carolina town. I don't know about your town - but if it has a McDonalds, I am impressed. Will May, PDG

My hometown was so poor it finally had to close its zoo. The chicken died. Jay Nodine, PID

She was 14 months pregnant - and in imminent danger of giving birth to a football team. Jock Elliott WCPS-11

Compliments from our boss are truly treasured - they come about as often as Halley's Comet!

I was so sensitive as a kid, to avoid rejection I used to Trick or Treat via mail order. Eric Feinendegen, PIF

My wife and I have been married so long, we've just opened our 4th bottle of Tabasco!

I was an overnight success all right, but 30 years is a long, long night. Ray Kroc, Founder, McDonalds

It was raining so hard the animals started to pair up.

It was so cold his words froze as he spoke. I had to put them in a frying pan to see what he was saying.

*When I was sixteen - Fat Dad bought me a '63 Volkswagen Beetle...
I was driving one sunny afternoon
Singing with Simon and Garfunkel on my eight - track -
"Cecelia you're breaking my heart..."
A humungous horsefly shot through the window -
In my mouth - and down my throat.
It came back up! - Lodged in my right nostril! -
What would you do with a horsefly buzzing in your nose -
Taking bites the size of Texas? Randy Harvey WCPS-04*

*Enjoy, learn, share smiles and laughter.
Brian Woolf*

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