



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



Using humor with customers

Used effectively, humor can bring people together. Used ineffectively, it can pull people apart.

"A sense of humor is the most important business survival skill a person can possess," says corporate laugh consultant Gavin Jerome, author of the *Comedy College How-To Handbook*. "You need to find ways to cope with stress and get rid of it so you can refocus on the task at hand. People can't work stressed-out day after day. You need to blow off a little steam or your body will break down."

Of course, there is a difference between using humor in the workplace and joking around with friends and family. So keep Jerome's Four Nots in mind. They are:

1. Do NOT joke about something that's important to your everyday wellbeing.

(i.e., don't joke about life and death matters or something of a deeply personal nature). Jerome offers this example: If you have a friend or coworker who's a sports fan, you can kid around if his or her team loses a few games. But, if you were speaking with the general manager of that team, it could be a touchy subject because it's important to his everyday well-being.

2. Do NOT joke about things that are work-related.

Let's say your coworker gets off the phone after dealing with a really uncontrollable customer. You say: "Whew! You must have been asleep during that anger-diffusion training class last week." Can you expect a laugh? Not very likely. "Anytime you kid someone about his or her inability to do their job — even if it's in jest — it can be taken poorly," Jerome says.

3. Do NOT joke about things that are considered a sensitive subject.

You know what those are: religion, politics or hot-button issues that force people to take a position, such as abortion, the death penalty, etc. "No matter what kind of joke you make under those circumstances, it will be misconstrued," Jerome says.

4. Do NOT joke about things that are obviously not true.

"I just flew in from Chicago and, boy, are my arms tired!" OK, maybe not so corny, but you get the drift.

