

Humor in Negotiation

- Humor plays a role at the relationship level
 - It can put negotiators at ease
 - It can strengthen the feeling of togetherness and team spirit
 - It can help dealing with aggressive feelings, releasing tension, etc.
 - It may minimize threatening interactions
 - It can help delivering bad news, accusing, etc.
 - It can help the other negotiator save face
- Humor influences the negotiation process
 - It enlivens communication (however, humorous communication is time-consuming)
 - It can be a way of being cooperative in spite of disagreement
 - It can bring forth a "change of reality" as it helps negotiators see the world in a different light; it can, therefore, foster creativity
 - It can be used to avoid difficult issues
 - Looking at the way it is being used can help diagnose the quality of the negotiation process
- Humor is linked to power
 - It is not always spontaneous. It is often used strategically (cooperatively or competitively)
 - Looking at who has the right to initiate and end joking shows who has power
 - Those who manage to make others laugh (or smile) win them over
 - It can be used for time-consuming purposes
 - Humor can be a non-threatening way of pursuing one's own goal (or to mask a threatening goal as an unthreatening one)
- Humor is risky (especially in a multicultural setting)
 - It can be misunderstood
 - It can trigger strategic reactions (laughing not because the joke was funny, but because it is "appropriate" to do so considering the circumstances – e.g. the power of the joking person)
 - It can offend the other party (e.g.: laughing at another's expense)

Source: Taina Vuorela, *Laughing Matters: A Case Study of Humor in Multicultural Business Negotiations*, *Negotiation Journal*, Vol. 21, Number 1, January 2005, pages 105 – 130