

EPISODE 46: HOW TO USE HUMOR IN BUSINESS TO BE LESS STRESSED AND LAUGH MORE

with Andrew Tarvin

Marketing for Creatives Show
at IntNetworkPlus.com

Announcer:

Turn your hobby and freelance work into a profitable business! Make your marketing easier by applying the strategies of experienced entrepreneurs and have more time to do the work you love. You are listening to the Marketing for Creatives show with your host Marina Barayeva.

Marina Barayeva:

I'm sure you know those people who are easy going, make jokes and just so fun to be around with. Maybe you're one of those people too or you wish to be one of them. In any way, let's see how you can use humor in your life and business and how it may benefit you. And don't tell me you're not really funny person.

In this episode, Andrew Tarvin shares how to use humor in business to be less stressed, laugh more and manage your business with the enthusiasm.

Andrew is the world's first Humor Engineer teaching people how to get better results while having more fun.

Through his company, Humor That Works, Andrew has helped more than 25,000 people at more than 250 organizations.

Prior to starting his company, Andrew was a top-rated project manager at Procter & Gamble, managing million dollar projects for a \$350 million business. He is also an accomplished comedian, having performed in more than 1,000 shows all around the world.

Hi Andrew. Welcome to the show. How are you doing today?

Andrew Tarvin:

I'm doing well. Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be on.

Marina Barayeva:

So great to have you here. Andrew, please share with us your entrepreneurial story. Why do you specialize in humor? How come?

Andrew Tarvin:

Yeah, that's a great question, especially given my background. People are often surprised that though I speak and talk a lot about humor, that my background starts in engineering.

I have always been engineering-minded. I joke that I've always been obsessed with efficiency ever since I can remember really since before I can remember because I was born three weeks earlier.

Apparently even in the womb, I was like, "I don't need a full nine months. I'm ready to go right now. Let's do this mom." So, I've always been obsessed with efficiency.

I went to the Ohio State University in the United States and got a degree in computer science and engineering. After I graduated I started working at Procter and Gamble as an IT project manager.

It was at P&G that I started to realize that you can't be efficient with people because people have emotions and feelings and they get sick and tired and have to eat and sleep and all these other things. Instead, you have to be effective.

But as a stereotypical engineer, I didn't necessarily have the skills that I needed to be effective with people. Luckily for me in school, I started doing Improv and stand-up comedy and realized that some of the same skills I was learning and Improv and stand-up were actually the same skills that we're helping me be more effective with people.

I started to explore that intersection of humor in the workplace and Improv and business, happiness and productivity and was getting better results as a result of it.

I started to do some research and discovered that I wasn't the only one that had seen those benefits of humor. So I started to teach other people, not only teach myself but teach other people about the value of humor.

Partially because I was tired of sitting in terrible meetings and I was like, "All right, well, if I can help educate them to make your meetings better, make their emails better than work isn't as bad for me."

So, I wanted them to use humor as much as I was using humor. That kind of started my journey in 2012. I left P&G to focus on a business full time where I work with organizations on how to be more effective using humor

Marina Barayeva:

That's so crazy. Like you were an engineer and now specialize in humor. It's like something out of mind that someone could specialize in humor. Fantastic. Anyway.

And you know, a lot of people like you engineers or other boring professions and they don't think about themselves that they can make a good joke. But in one of your talks, you say that anyone can learn to be funnier and now you teach people to use humor everywhere. So how to learn that?

Andrew Tarvin:

Yeah. Well, that's my belief is that humor is a skill. And if it's a skill that means it can be learned. Just as networking is a skill. As an introvert, things like networking conversations were always a little bit harder for me and just like any skill, you learn it through practice, repetition, and understanding some basic structures and frameworks.

I know it can be learned because I'm someone who has had to learn how to use humor. Like I said, my personality assessment I am a type A blue square conscientious INTJ with the sign of Aquarius, which means I am a stubborn, ambitious introvert who likes long walks on the beach by myself.

It's something that I did learn through Improv and stand-up. When you learn some of these basic skills and then you actually get a chance to practice.

That's why a lot of my programs have applied improvisation as part of their programs as it gives you practice, gives you an opportunity to try out some other things that we're talking about, to learn what works and what doesn't work. And then as you do that over a period of time, you'd get better and better at it.

Marina Barayeva:

How can we use this as entrepreneurs? Because there was so much stress in work, you're dealing with people, catching up with all of those deadlines and projects. How can we use humor to get stressed less laugh more, be more happy?

Andrew Tarvin:

I would say there are five primary benefits to using humor in the workplace or with your work.

The first is to improve communication skills. When you use humor, like say you add a little bit of integrity or a different way of saying things in the email subject headline, people are more likely to click into the email because we're like, "Oh, OK, that's interesting. I like that."

Or you can help people remember things longer. Like things like mnemonics. I don't know if you've heard "Spring Forward, Fall Back"? It is a mnemonic to remember daylight savings time in the United States.

There are also 31 days on the knuckles. If you count January, February, March, April, May on your knuckles, it's like all the bumps of the knuckles have 31 days. Everyone else doesn't. Every other month doesn't.

These are just small mnemonics tools at least in English to remember things a little bit longer. Like SOHCAHTOA. If you remember SOHCAHTOA for trigonometry.

Marina Barayeva:

What is that?

Andrew Tarvin:

We learned SOHCAHTOA: S-O-H-C-A-H-T-O-A. Sine equals opposite over hypotenuse. Cosine equals adjacent over hypotenuse. Tangent equals opposite over adjacent. And there was just a word that we learned in school as a way to help us remember trigonometry.

I haven't used trigonometry in years, but I still remember how to calculate sine, cosine, and tangent because it was a fun word to say.

By adding that type of fun to something, you will remember it longer. As entrepreneurs when we're explaining our business or we're explaining our project and what we do or how something works, if we can connect that maybe through a metaphor, an interesting idea and it's going to stick with the audience or potential clients a lot, a lot longer, a lot easier.

We can also use humor as a way to build relationships with people. When we laugh together, we feel like we're on the same side and we feel a little bit closer together through a shared positive experience.

So when we're working with new clients or we're trying to build a relationship with a potential client, when we can make them laugh or say a story or an interesting example or funny presentation we start to become closer together and they're more likely than want to continue working with us.

If you enjoy working with someone or enjoyed the interactions. Like, "How do I do more of that?" Humor is great for that.

It can help us in and hands problem-solving. Humor and creativity are very closely linked because they're about finding unique connections. In one study, they found that students who watched a 30-minute comedy video before trying to solve a problem were nearly four times more likely to solve that problem.

Kind of simply with entrepreneurs, like if there's a challenge that you're going to be working on or if you're going into a hackathon or if you're doing something where it's like, "OK, I'm going to need to do a lot of problem-solving skills," using humor as a warm up watch, a funny YouTube video or series of videos or listen to a comedy podcast or something like that. Just kind of get into that mindset of laughing and seeing these you make connections.

Then what are maybe the most important ones is humor can help us increase productivity, particularly kind of what you talked about is that stress management.

Because we started to get so stressed that we think of the negative effects of stress and muscle tension, decreased blood flow and higher blood pressure and all those things. Laughter kind of counteracts all those effects.

So one of the things that I really help with people understanding about stress is a term called strategic renewal. That is basically the concept or a corporate word to say, take a break.

Sometimes as entrepreneurs we wake up and immediately go into something right away. Then we work the entire day. Then we go to sleep. Then we do the same thing the next day.

What they can do is it can lead to burnout, is that maybe we can do that well for a couple of days or maybe we can do that for a week, but we're going to get burned out over time.

Instead, we've found what's more effective is to strategically take breaks throughout the day so that you stay energized and recharged. So that you never hit that kind of dip. That can be something as simple as... I don't know. Have you ever heard of the **Pomodoro Technique**?

Marina Barayeva:

Is it the one which counts 25 minutes and then you take a break?

Andrew Tarvin:

Yep, exactly. You set a timer. The name comes from setting a Pomodoro timer, so one of those kitchen tomato timers, but it can be any timer, but you set a timer for 25 minutes and you work for those 25 minutes.

You don't do anything else. You don't check Facebook or email or anything like that. Then when the timer goes off, you set a timer for five minutes and in that five minutes, you take a break. That's when you can check Facebook if you want to. You can go for a walk, grab some water, watch a YouTube video, whatever you want, and then when that timer goes off, you go back to working for 25 minutes.

You just kind of alternate between 25 minutes working five minutes off. At any given point, it's helpful for focus because at any given point you're only 25 minutes away from taking a break.

It doesn't feel like, "Oh man, I have an entire day of work ahead of me." It's like, "Nope, just get through this 25 minutes." Then those five-minute breaks actually helped you to be more productive because it helps to keep your energy up.

That's where you can add humor. You can relieve stress because you're not doing anything for an extended period of time. You're actually taking a break.

That has been... at least I've done studies that show that increases productivity, so things like that can be helpful.

Also, things like using humor to relieve stress. We can use humor as a way to kind of reframe how we think about something.

So, if you have a stressful situation and you can find ways to make it more fun, if you can gamify the process, if you can listen to music while you're doing data entry type stuff or if you're going through emails. One of the things that all sometimes do is read different emails in a different accident in my head. Just to keep it more fun.

You can reframe things so that they seem less stressful. And then you can also kind of... maybe you have a stressful event, maybe you had a presentation and it was stressful or you had a client call that didn't go as well as you want it and you're kind of stressed out about it a little bit, you can be intentional about using humor so that you laugh and release that stress so that you don't keep it and hold on to it.

That again is finding someone fun to kind of talk to calling up a friend or watching a special comedy or whatever it is, just some type of excuse to laugh and that long-term will help us to increase our productivity. That's number four.

And then the fifth kind of way that we can use humor is to strengthen leadership. We can do that when we use humor in difficult situations, we're seen as being on top of things and then control whether or not we actually are.

That's just kind of having a kind of a playful mentality. Also, kind of combining all the other things that we do or that we talked about before about communication and relationships and stuff together too to help lead people around us.

That might be starting your presentation off with a funny story or a client call with a story or some images in your slides and stuff like that. All of these things kind of come together and people are like, "Oh, this person is great. They've got it there. They wouldn't know what's going on. I want to work with them" And hopefully the goal that comes out of that.

Marina Barayeva:

That's all sounds really good. People like those people who make jokes and they are funny and it's very energized to be around them. But a lot of people think that "I cannot make a good joke. I'm not funny. I'm not interesting."

How can they learn to be funny? How can they learn to use humor if they didn't know what to do?

Andrew Tarvin:

I think a couple of things that can help. One, I would say that for me the definition of humor is important. Because a lot of times when we think humor, we do think jokes, we think comedy and we think laughter, but humor is defined as a comic, absurd, or incongruous quality causing amusement.

What that means is that comedy is definitely part of the humor, but it's also a little bit more broad than that. It's something that is maybe a little bit silly or a little bit different that causes amusement. Maybe a smile instead of laughter. What that means is that not about making work funny. It's not about constantly telling jokes. It's about making our work a little bit more fun.

People tend to naturally have different styles that they're naturally good at. Maybe some people can't tell a joke at all, but they're good at telling stories. In which case, you can start to add stories more into your presentations or your conversations.

Or maybe you're not good at storytelling, but you're a really good artist. So if you're doing a pitch deck then maybe you draw some of your slides as a way to keep that more engaging. Like one of my... I remember my review board presentation for P&G.

I was an intern at P&G and then in order to get hired full time at P&G, I had to give a review board presentation and my first slide for my presentation for them was hand-drawn in Microsoft paint and it was a terrible looking drawing. It wasn't nearly as good as if I use kind

of regular text or a picture, but it was something different and they got them to pay attention.

You can find things like that. I think the other thing is that you can take an Improv class. I started an Improv. You can take an Improv class if you can find any local around you and that will teach you "yes and..." It will teach you how to build off of ideas kind of in a positive way.

Or you can start trying to do stand up. You can take... you know, **Steve Martin** has an online masterclass to start learning about comedy.

I have an online course that people can take like if people were like one, I would just say just encourage people to have a little bit more fun and find ways to make things more enjoyable for themselves is a great starting point.

But if people want very specific things they can do to improve their humor, there are various resources out there that they can do that.

Marina Barayeva:

In one of your sources, you mentioned something like to be the shepherd of humor or something like this. Can you tell more about this?

Andrew Tarvin:

Exactly. If as the starting point that you don't feel comfortable kind of creating your own humor, that doesn't mean that you can't use humor in the workplace.

Instead, I joke that you can be the shepherd of humor. You can share humor. Presentations are a very easy one where you can take images that you find through a **Creative Commons** license. That is as a great way to search for that. A lot of presentation tools now have the ability to search for images that you can use without paying for them.

And you can take a funny picture that someone else has done. For example, I have a picture in my presentation that I share a lot that is a picture of a dog that looks like has a big grin on his face.

I didn't take the picture but I can still use it in presentations and it gets people to laugh or get people to smile. It's something that I'm sharing.

Or you know, if there's a funny YouTube video. There's a great YouTube video and maybe we can kind of share this in the link with people, but it's called **Expert in a Meeting**. Or what it's basically the premise of the video is what it's like to be an expert in a meeting.

It's a very funny take on a client coming in and saying, "Hey, we want you to draw three red lines, but we won't want it aligns to be blue." The experts like, "Oh, so you want two red lines and one blue line? And like, "No, no, no, no. We want three red lines about one of them to be blue."

It's like a comedic, kind of a satire of sometimes how terrible these meetings are and you can send that to a client.

Like I'll sometimes send that to people who are reaching out and be like, "Hey, it was great having a conversation with you earlier. You know, I know that you're an expert so I imagine that this might hit home, right?"

So I send them the link. I didn't create the video, but now I get kind of some social credit because I've shared something funny with them.

Marina Barayeva:

Interesting. Let's practice, what you just shared with us. And I'll tell the story. I'll tell the story how we get together with you.

I sent you an email and I sent an email with a little sensitive joke. Then you didn't reply me. When a friend introduced us you replied right away, but after my email with the joke, you didn't reply me.

I was like, "OK, I will wait a little more." In a few days, I posted a post on Instagram and mentioned you there. I shared your joke. You 'liked' the picture. And you didn't reply me again.

I was like, "OK, I sent an email with a joke to the guy who specializes in humor and he did reply me. What I have to do now?"

Sometimes people get to the situation when they make a joke and they didn't know what to do after. Do people understand that or like wasn't the appropriate situation? How can they deal with that?

Andrew Tarvin:

Well, I will say and apologize to you that the late reply just came with had nothing to do with the joke. It was just that I was busy traveling a lot and I'm not great at email.

Marina Barayeva:

That's ok.

Andrew Tarvin:

I'm one of those people that most of my emails start with, "Hey, sorry for the late reply." That's just like... I don't know, maybe that's something that I needed to improve my productivity on, that I need to improve.

But I think you're right. One, I think that sometimes you are worried about the awkwardness of a joke. The reality is that if we try a joke or if we tell a story and no one laughs, a lot of times it's only awkward if we feel like it's awkward if we spend time if we dwell on it.

Like if I tell a joke now, for example, there's a joke that I sometimes do, which is Humor is like the salt of a meal. What I mean by that is like you wouldn't eat an entire meal of salt because that would make you a horse. Do you want to be a horse? I say Neigh.

That's a very bad joke, but it's one of my favorite jokes. I love it, but if I say Neigh and then no one laughs, I just kind of look at them. Then like my demeanor changes and I'm not confident or anything like that, then people are like, "Oh my God, this is awkward now."

But a lot of times in my presentations what I'll say is when people won't laugh, I'll be like, "That's OK. That joke is just for me." That's for me because I want it.

Or if I say nothing at all and just move past it, people aren't going to dwell on it. If I dwell on it, people will. But if I just move past it, other people will as well.

I think the other thing is that people have this fear that they're going to get reprimanded because of a bad joke. And I will say that in my experience, I don't know anyone who has ever been fired because of a bad joke. I know people who have been fired because of an inappropriate joke but not a bad joke.

So a bad joke is kind of like that horse joke, I say Neigh and the inappropriate joke is one that has an inappropriate subject or inappropriate targeting or comes out at an inappropriate time.

As long as we keep our humor relatively positive inclusive, then I think it's going to be OK because then if no one laughs it just the positive inclusive joke just becomes a positive inclusive statement.

I think that can sometimes help people get kind of past this fear of like what if no one laughs or what if it's awkward.

Then the other thing is that with practice and repetition you're going to get better. Any skill that you learned you had to adjust and you weren't always perfect that.

That's where something like taking an Improv class can be helpful because you're learning and you do that in the comfort of say, a classroom where the stakes are lower. Then when you go out and do it in a presentation or in a conversation, you feel more comfortable and competent and confident because you've done it before.

Marina Barayeva:

Can you share with us a little bit more, how can we use humor in marketing copy when we write something?

Andrew Tarvin:

There's a great opportunity for humor in writing. What I teach a lot is the way that I think about things, so what I did with humor as I look through like what did comedians do and what are some of the tools or shortcuts that they use to create humor in different ways.

For example, there's something called a **Comic Triple**. Comic Triple is where you basically give a normal list. And then the third thing in that list is kind of a joke or a punchline or something unexpected.

For example, I joke that I've always been an engineer. As a kid, I used to take things apart and then put them back together again. Things like clocks and radios. And my parents' marriage.

That was just a joke. But the first few things, clocks, radios that are normal people expect you to kind of take those apart and putting them back together again as an engineer. Then the third thing, my parents' marriage was something unexpected that gets people to laugh.

What that means is anytime you're writing marketing copy, if you see that you're building a list of something you can create, the first two is normal and then maybe try to think of something a little bit different, something a little bit unexpected for the third thing.

That's one easy way to do it. Incongruence is another way. Incongruence is simply doing things and saying things that are a little bit different.

So again, I kind of mentioned a little earlier that this could be good for like, say, email subject line. For example, when I was a project manager, I used to send out a weekly status update and so you could say, Project Manager Weekly Status Update and then give the date. But that's like a boring subject line.

What I started joining, because I worked with a bunch of other nerds, was I used to do a Project Manager's Log stardate and then give the actual calculate it star trek stardate from that. That's something different, right?

It's an incongruence. People aren't expecting to see that in their inbox so they're more likely to click on it because it is framing something in a slightly different way.

You can do those types of things as a way to start Improv copy to add Mike Roach humor to add a smaller piece of humor where it's again, not necessarily like laugh out loud, but it's definitely more playful. More fun.

Marina Barayeva:

Where would you look for those little jokes or funny pictures or funny videos so you can use in your business materials, marketing copies or just share with the friends?

Andrew Tarvin:

I think you can do all the above and it. It partially becomes... If you started to use humor, you want it to partially become part of your voice. You don't want it to be like once a year I use humor. That it becomes that Yeah.

So each of your presentations, maybe even as a simple thing, in each presentation I started to add a picture of me in every single presentation that I do because I learned that **Alfred Hitchcock** did that with his movies.

Alfred Hitchcock is in the background or somewhere in pretty much every single one of his movies. And I was like, "Oh, that'll be fun if I do that for myself."

Then every presentation I have has a picture of me usually as a kid or going something awkward. But that becomes kind of a fun thing that I do for myself and I do it every single time.

Every presentation you do, you can add images to it or every email that you send, you can add a GIFs or GIFs depending on how you pronounce it. And there is a funny way to add humor.

Or at the end of every email, you can add a PS. At the end of most of my kind of like weekly newsletter emails. I had a PS and then add some type of joke or a link to something funny. You can do it.

You want it to become more of a habit so you do it kind of continually. Then it gets easier. It is something that you just naturally do. You kind of naturally think of it. You build a repository of stuff that you can use. And the whole time you're learning as well.

So if you're telling a story and you get someone to laugh while telling him this story. You want to kind of make a mental note of that to say, "Oh, OK, the next time I tell that story, if it in this way, I'll get a laugh."

Or if you're hanging out with friends, anytime you kind of make them laugh. Just take a second to review what was it that you said, why did they laugh? And as you just become a little bit more aware of it it becomes easier to create and to build humor in the future.

Marina Barayeva:

What is your source of humor, Andrew? Where do you find all of these situations?

Andrew Tarvin:

It's everyday life. It's not that funny things happen to funny people. It's funny people see the world in a funny way. It's kind of just everyday life that you see.

I joke when I do stand-up or in my speaking engagements, I joke about being a nerd. I think I'm a stereotypical nerd that I meet one of the stereotypes in the way of like very skinny body, nasally voice, allergy to the sun. I'm like, I can't go outside all that often. I joke that I use SPF building. I stay indoors so that I avoid the sun. Sometimes.

Like everyday life, yourself, your passions, your fears, your likes, dislikes. Sometimes just joke that like I love milkshakes because they're the most efficient form of dessert.

I do not like mint chocolate because I've never been eating mint chocolate or I've never been eating chocolate or other dessert and thought, "Hey, you know, what would make this better toothpaste?" So it's just like.

Marina Barayeva:

Have you tried a pepper chocolate?

Andrew Tarvin:

What kind of chocolate?

Marina Barayeva:

Pepper chocolate.

Andrew Tarvin:

Pepper chocolate? I don't know what that is.

Marina Barayeva:

Oh, you should try and compare it with something.

Andrew Tarvin:

I know I want to try it now. I'm on board with all kinds of chocolate. Or like, do you have any rational fears? Irrational fears?

Marina Barayeva:

I don't know. Like what? I hate bugs.

Andrew Tarvin:

Bugs?

Marina Barayeva:

Mhmm (Agreement)

Andrew Tarvin:

What is it about bugs that you don't like? Is it because they're small?

Marina Barayeva:

Because they have so many legs and so hairy and so small and just moving everywhere.

Andrew Tarvin:

Yes. (Laughter)

Marina Barayeva:

Especially when I go to the US. Huge cockroaches on the streets!

Andrew Tarvin:

To me that's funny. That's an area that you can explore. Because the reason why things tend to be funny is not just that you're scared of bugs, but your reaction and your emotion to "They have so many legs!"

That's really funny to me that part of the reason why you don't like bugs is that they have too many legs. You like two or four legs and they have six or eight or 100 like, nope, get them out of here.

You can start to explore that as a way for humor. It comes from your own kind of personal life. And I think that's why humor is so good at building relationships with people, especially like clients or people that were meeting for the first time.

If we're at a networking event because it's a kind of a personal expression in that we're sharing and we become closer together when we know more about each other when we laugh with each other.

Marina Barayeva:

Thank you, Andrew. A lot of great tips here and good energy from you. Please share with us how can we learn more about you, what you're working on, how can we find you?

Andrew Tarvin:

Probably the starting point for a lot of things if people are interested and they want some resources on how to use humor or how to get started or some of the things that we kind of talked about today, then the best spot to start there is my website www.humorthatworks.com.

Like I said on there are various resources for individuals and organizations on a weekly newsletter where I break down different types of humor and give examples and help people practice it. All that kind of stuff.

If you want to follow me on social media interwebs everything is @drewtarvin. So twitter.com/drewtarvin where I try to write upon a pretty much every single day. [Instagram.com/drewtarvin](https://www.instagram.com/drewtarvin) where I post a picture pretty much every single day. [YouTube.com/drewtarvin](https://www.youtube.com/drewtarvin) where I post videos. All that kind of stuff.

A lot of different resources out there. If people have questions, if they want to know how to get started or anything like that, certainly they can reach out on any of those social media so they can hit me up via email at andrew@humorthatworks.com.

There's a lot of different ways. I'm very passionate about helping the world be funnier and so more than happy to try to help people as much as I can.

Marina Barayeva:

That's fantastic. I'll put all of those links below the post. Thank you so much, Andrew. It was so much pleasure to have you on the show today.

Andrew Tarvin:

Yeah, thank you for having me. I had a great time.

Marina Barayeva:

That's all for today on Marketing for Creatives show. For the show notes and the full transcript please go to intnetworkplus.com.

And if you find that this content brings value to you and you'd like to hear more of it, please support us by leaving us a review and subscribe to the podcast as well. Thank you so much.

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- Take [Steve Martin's](#) online masterclass to start learning about comedy
- Use images under [Creative Commons](#) license for your presentations
- Watch funny video [Expert in a Meeting](#) about business life
- Apply [Comic Triple](#) principle to your marketing copy
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