

GSS2026



GLOBAL SPEAKERS SUMMIT | Cairns, Australia

VOICES

From
Courtroom to
Curtain Call

PSA

CUE THE APPLAUSE:
HOW TO PRIME THE AUDIENCE FOR SUCCESS

BEYOND “THE END”:
WHY FINISHING THE BOOK
IS JUST THE BEGINNING

JULY 2025
ISSUE 2/4

WWW.GSS2026.COM

INSIDE THIS EDITION

- 02 FROM THE EDITOR**
Dr. Wendy Lee, CSP
- 03 MESSAGE FROM PSA**
Sally Foley-Lewis, CSP
- 07 FEATURE INTERVIEW**
From Courtroom to Curtain Call
- 13 FEATURE ARTICLE**
The Emotional Signature of Your Voice
- 17 FEATURE ARTICLE**
WORDS MATTER!
- 22 AUTHOR SHOWCASE**
MOXIE
- 25 FROM KOALAS TO KEYNOTES**
Lindsay Adams, OAM
- 27 BEYOND “THE END”**
Sally Foley-Lewis, CSP
- 31 FEATURE ARTICLE**
The German Guide to Funny
- 37 FEATURE ARTICLE**
Cue the Applause
- 39 FEATURE INTERVIEW**
Behind the Mic
- 43 FEATURE ARTICLE**
Recipes Don’t Make the Chef
- 46 BEHIND THE SCENES**
GSS2026 Dream Team
- 48 FEATURE ARTICLE**
You’re Not Too Loud,
You’re Just Right
- 50 TROPICAL TIME-OUT**
Explore. Connect. Unwind
- 55 FEATURE ARTICLE**
Your Voice is Your Value
- 60 FEATURE INTERVIEW**
The Compliance Whisperer
- 64 FEATURE ARTICLE**
From Motivation to Movement



The German Guide to Funny

HOW FUNNY CAN / SHOULD / MUST MY VOICE BE?
AND HOW?

A German trying to explain humor to you? This should be, well: fun? interesting? complicated?

Especially since, according to my wife and teenage kids, I'm not funny at all. Of course, I see it differently. But I won't hold it against you if you turn the page right now. Well, not much anyway...

The Unlikely Humor Expert

We Germans have a certain reputation when it comes to humor. We're known for punctuality—not punchlines. Perhaps that's why I've spent years researching humor in positive psychology. I tried to engineer and think myself into a more funny person – with some success, some say (by the way: I find this funny!)

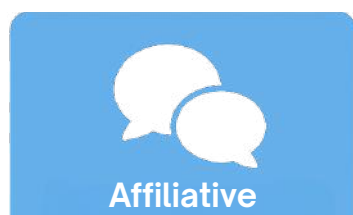
But you know about the irony: sometimes the people most fascinated by a subject are those who have to work hardest to master it. The accountant who becomes a salsa instructor, the introvert who studies charisma. So perhaps my "humor handicap" makes me uniquely qualified to help fellow speakers enhance their funny bone. Or muscle. Or sperm (not funny, I know...)

Why Bother Being Funny?

Always start with tie. Err: chai. No, bullshit: always start with why: So why should you care about humor in professional speaking at all? Isn't delivering solid content enough? Well, let me share what the research actually tells us (and I'll add some me-search):

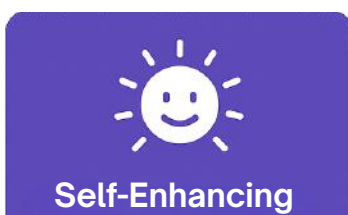
The Four Flavors of Funny

According to *Martin et al. (2003)*, there are four main humor styles, which I've learned to navigate through painful trial and error:



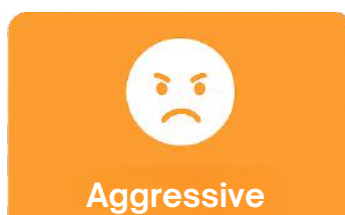
This connects people through shared laughter. It's inclusive, warm, and non-threatening.

Example: "I tried to implement a standing desk policy at home. Now my family just stands around watching me cook dinner."



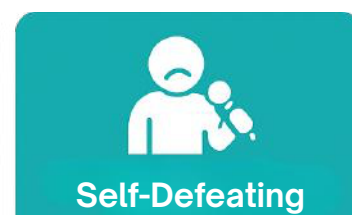
This helps you cope with life's challenges by finding the funny side.

Example: "My meditation app keeps telling me I've reached a seven-day streak, which is good to know since I always fall asleep before being able to track my practice."



This targets others with teasing, ridicule, or sarcasm.

Example: "Looking at the front row, I can tell who is divorced or actually should be divorced by the time my intro is over." (Note: Handle with extreme caution unless you reallllly know what you're doing)



This involves making yourself the butt of jokes in a way that undermines your status.

Example: "I'm such a terrible public speaker that my own PowerPoint presentations try to crash just to escape." (Not really funny, I know.)

Humor isn't just fun—it's functional. Studies show that humor as a character strength in the VIA framework correlates with greater overall wellbeing (*Buschor, Proyer, & Ruch, 2013*).

People with a strong sense of humor even appear to heal faster after physical illnesses (*Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006*) and age more healthily (Vaillant, 2000).

Meaning: the hours and hours the audience spends listening to you are generally well-spent (psychological science – just to let you know – is always about averages and huge data sets, not everything applies to everyone all of the time...)

When we laugh, we experience positive emotions that broaden our perspective and build psychological resources – for the next crisis or the next failed joke. In speaking terms, this means your audience becomes more receptive, retains more information, and—perhaps most importantly—likes you more.

But not all humor is created equal, which brings us to...

As speakers, we should primarily aim for affiliative and self-enhancing humor, with occasional, gentle self-deprecation. As a German, I naturally tried to systemize this into a simple flowchart of some 15 pages, but the otherwise charming editor Wendy wouldn't let me.



Size doesn't matter – Or: The Humor-Measuring Contest

How funny should your speaking voice be? That depends on your audience, topic, and personal style. There's no universal humor quotient you must or can reach.

Some topics require more gravitas, others more levity. Some audiences expect formality, others informality. The key is calibration and connection, not maximization.

I've found that even the most serious presentations can benefit from moments of lightness. These don't need to be hilarious—just human. A knowing smile, a playful analogy, or a brief anecdote can provide welcome cognitive rest during complex material.

As someone who has measured just about everything related to humor (there are actually psychological scales for this, because of course there are), I can tell you that quality trumps quantity every time. One authentic moment of shared mirth creates more connection than ten forced jokes.

The Self-Deprecation Manual (Use Responsibly)

Making fun of yourself is perhaps the safest and most endearing form of humor for speakers. But there's a crucial difference between humanizing yourself and undermining yourself.

Here's my tried-and-tested approach:

1. Target foibles, not competence:

Joke about your coffee addiction, not your lack of expertise.

"I've researched positive psychology for 15 years, which explains why my coffee mug says 'Optimist' on one side and 'But bring coffee first' on the other." (I first wanted to write something along the idea of "people rather forgive your incontinence than your incompetence", but I didn't find it funny enough. Do you?)

You Don't Have to BE Funny, But You Should Try to SEE Funny

Here's the liberating truth I wish someone had told me years ago: being a humorous speaker doesn't mean being a comedian. We can't all be Tim Gards – that's the sad thing! The good thing is: Tim Gard exists already! (once, as far as I can tell.)

Cultivating a humorous voice means developing what I call "humor vision"—the ability to spot and highlight the inherent absurdities, contradictions, and unexpected connections in our shared human experience.

As the positive psychology researchers Bincze and Cser so aptly put it (and yes, I'm quoting them directly because, as a German, I appreciate proper citation): "You don't have to BE funny. But you should try to SEE funny." (*European Positive Psychology Conference, Innsbruck, July 10, 2024, around 3.37 p.m. CET, room 104.*)

This shift in perspective changed everything for me. Instead of pressuring myself to write jokes, I started collecting funny observations. Instead of trying to be witty, I began noticing what genuinely made me laugh and bringing that authentic amusement to my talks.

2. Keep it relevant:

Choose self-deprecating stories that reinforce rather than distract from your message.

For a talk on resilience:

"My first book was rejected by 12 publishers."

"And your second?"

"There is no second. And no first."

3. Balance vulnerability with confidence:

Follow self-deprecation with demonstrated competence. "Despite my thick German accent that makes me sound like I'm always angry—which my international students have pointed out repeatedly—I've managed to teach positive psychology in seven different countries."

(Eight of them are German-speaking, by the way...)

4. Test before you try:

Practice your self-deprecating humor with trusted colleagues. What sounds charmingly humble to you might sound alarmingly insecure to others.

Remember:
The goal is to appear more human, not less capable.

Three Evidence-Based Ways to Boost Your Humor Skills

Now, let's get serious (sorry – German...).

Humor, like any other skill, can be deliberately practiced. Here are three research-backed exercises adapted from positive psychology interventions:

1. The "Three Funny Things" Exercise:

Each evening, write down three amusing things that happened that day, why they were funny, and your role in them. This trains your attention to spot humor in everyday life. And makes you realize how much your humorous moments are (at least co-)created by yourself!

2. The "Humor Reframe":

Take a stressful situation from your professional life and find three potentially funny aspects of it. This can help build cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience. (And it might help the audience connect with your sorry lot.)

3. The "Five Playful Minutes":

Schedule five minutes daily for something purely playful or silly. This cultivates the lighthearted mindset from which spontaneous humor springs. (I for example just told myself the same joke ten times in a row: "Beethoven's favorite fruit? Ba-na-na-naaa"...)

I've tested these with skeptics (including German engineering executives, possibly the toughest audience for humor exercises) and found they genuinely work—if practiced with rigor and dedication.



When Humor Backfires: Limiting Beliefs and Real Risks

Let's address the anxieties that may be running through your mind:

"Am I funny enough?"

Probably more than you think, especially if you focus on authentic observations rather than crafted jokes.

"Will my humor land with this audience?"

Not always, and that's perfectly okay. A humor attempt that falls flat can be recovered with a simple "Well, that sounded funnier in my head" and moving on.

"Could I offend someone?"

Yes, which is why we avoid humor that targets others or relies on stereotypes. When in doubt, make yourself the protagonist of any potentially embarrassing story.

"Will people take me seriously?"

Yes, if your humor enhances rather than replaces substance. Research shows that appropriate humor often increases perceived competence by demonstrating social intelligence.

The biggest risk isn't a joke falling flat—it's appearing inauthentic or formulaic. Your audience can tell when you're reciting memorized one-liners versus sharing genuine moments of wit or wonder.

The Serious Conclusion (With a hopefully funny Twist)

Humor in professional speaking isn't about getting laughs—it's about getting in sync with the audience. It's about introducing lightness so that your valuable message doesn't feel too heavy. It's about making yourself human so your expertise becomes accessible, connectible, digestible.

And here's the twist: the more seriously you take your message, the more you might benefit from not taking yourself too seriously. This tension—between significant content and light delivery—creates the perfect conditions for your voice to resonate.



So no, you don't need to be funny. But yes, your voice probably could be a little humorous than you initially think. Not because humor is essential to speaking success, but because it's fundamental to human connection.

And if all else fails, just mention that you got your humor advice from a German. That alone should be good for at least one sympathetic chuckle.



Christian Thiele [*pronounced: Tee-le*] is an expert in positive psychology and positive leadership at the German University for Health and Sports. He speaks, coaches, facilitates workshops, writes and podcasts on humor and other aspects of happiness and wellbeing – especially at work.

Despite being German, he occasionally makes people laugh. Sometimes even intentionally – at least he believes so. His wife and his kids have doubts...

Terrible, but passionate climber.
Passionate, but terrible lover.