**Benefits of humor**

Humor has many benefits for communication and persuasion. Here are just a few...

**Better communication**

Studies by Fabio Sala at the Hay Group have shown that humor (used skillfully):

* Reduces hostility
* Deflects criticism
* Relieves tension
* Improves morale
* Helps communicate difficult messages

Executives who were ranked as outstanding used humor over twice as often those ranked average (17.8 times/hr vs. 7.5 times/hr). They used mostly positive or neutral humor, but also sometimes used negative humor (for example as a put-down). They also received greater bonuses.

Although humor may not be a necessary and sufficient factor to gain all these benefits, it is at least a marker, perhaps, of emotional intelligence.

Research by Clouse and Spurgeon has also shown that a good joke or playful laughter can boost creativity, initiate conversation and generally build a more trusting atmosphere.

Other research by Bettinghaus and Cody (1994) and Foot (1997) showed that humor:

* Builds rapport and liking of the humorist
* Makes the target person want to listen more
* Relaxes the person, making them more receptive to the message
* Makes the person feel good and hence not think so carefully about the proposition
* Makes the information more memorable
* Distracts the person from thinking about counter-arguments

**Getting concessions**

Playful joking also increases the likelihood of financial concessions during a negotiation. Relaxing the other person and building trust makes them see you more as a friend and hence deserving of a better deal.

**Better health**

Humor is also good for your health. Although this is not directly related to changing minds, people who are healthier are more likely to be able to pay attention and will want to listen to your ideas.

Some of the ways in which laughter makes you healthier include:

* It lowers your blood pressure.
* It exercises your muscles, including your abdomen and diaphragm as well as those in your thorax, neck, shoulders, face, and scalp.
* It strengthens your immune system, decreasing stress hormones and increasing infection-fighting antibodies.
* It deepens and so improves your breathing.

Other benefits of humor include:

* It distracts you from negative emotions.
* It changes your perspective, making things less overwhelming.
* It increases your energy.
* It connects you to others (we like happy people).
* It just makes you feel good.

**See also**

Fabio Sala, Laughing all the way to the bank, *Harvard Business Review*, September 2003, pp 16-17

R. W. Clouse and K. L. Spurgeon, Corporate Analysis of Humor*, Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior 32* (1995). pp 1-24

Bettinghaus, E. and Cody, M. (1994). *Persuasive communication*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace

Foot, H. (1997). 'Humor and laughter', in O. Hargie (ed) *The handbook of communication skills (2nd edn)*, London: Routledge

Source: Changing Minds.org (2010)