BUT I'M NOT Funny

Proven tactics, **tips and tools for speakers** to amuse, **engage** and entertain any audience.

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PREFACE

It haunted me.

My wife, my best friend and 200 other people were smiling and clapping, but I knew the truth.

I had just walked off stage in the semi-final rounds of a comedy competition and I knew I had lost.

It was my fourth speech. I had entered the first round by accident, thinking it was a normal day at my Toastmasters club. But I won and was told I would be representing my club in the next round.

I went to the next round and won and reached the semi-finals. I knew nothing about humour and here I was—in my first ever speech contest semi-final in front of two hundred people.

I left the stage, but the feeling of defeat didn't leave me. My only consolation was that the guy who won on that day won

in the finals as well. But I felt like a loser. Even when I went on to become the UK and Ireland speaking champion months later, I couldn't shake off the feeling of defeat.

I knew I had to enter the comedy competition again; I couldn't let it go. A little voice in my head would say, *You couldn't have done better. You are good enough to win or at least do better and reach the final. You just don't know anything about humour.*

Three years later I took a deep dive into humour. I read books and re-watched my old footage. I realised that people would laugh during my speeches, but I didn't know why!

Over the months I became like Indiana Jones, looking for lost treasure. I started to find hacks, tricks and patterns. It was strange, but I noticed that different audiences would laugh in all the same places.

It was then that I realised I didn't need to be funny. I just needed to know what made people laugh. My second crack at the contest was different. I was confident; I had cracked the code and round by round I heard the familiar sound: *And the winner is . . . Malachi Talabi.*

In the final, I gave my best speech, and this was the day I was going be crowned UK humour champ. The announcer stepped forward and said, "In second place . . . Malachi Talabi."

The pain was real. I was the first-placed runner-up. But here is the thing with study, focus and tools—I went from not even hitting the podium in a semi-final to becoming the second funniest speaker in the UK in Toastmasters International.

All the tools in this book made the difference! They are simple and easy to use. I've used them in church, at after-dinner speeches, in speech competitions and keynotes. If you use them too, you will connect more deeply with every audience you speak to, and you'll give unforgettable speeches.

A GIFT FOR YOU!

Are you tired of sitting in the audience and admiring a speaker, wishing it was ***you*** on stage? Do you want to turn your speaking dreams into reality and give unforgettable speeches?

Most emerging speakers think it will take years to get better, but that's simply not true. You don't need time, you don't need talent—you need tools!

"Speaking is 10% talent and 90% tools."

I heard that line from my soon-to-be mentor while I sat in the audience in Las Vegas, watching him and other world champions give their speeches and secretly wishing it was ***me*** on stage.

I knew I had talent, but I didn't have tools!

Now, years later, I've delivered keynotes and workshops, trained lawyers and other professionals, and spoken in front

of hundreds of people while watching my audience nod in agreement, lean forward, and smile as I speak!

This is all down to a few simple tools I picked up on my journey.

I've put a few of these tools into the **Nail Your Next Speech Toolbox** – available to you for FREE!



Go to www.publicspeakinghacks.com to get your free toolbox.

Use these tools, and you'll start giving the type of speeches that cause your audience to remember you long after you've spoken.

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INTRODUCTION

But I'm not funny!

Have you ever thought that? If you think you're not funny, you just might be right. And guess what? It doesn't matter! You don't have to be.

The biggest shift you can make is in understanding that you don't have to be funny to make people laugh. You just have to start thinking about what's funny! You see that, at its essence, humour is a way of thinking! And it's important to understand that way of thinking.

I know this because after lots of studying and watching others I started to understand ***why*** people laugh; then I started to craft my own content, and everything changed.

During and after my presentations:

- The audience laughed and were extremely engaged.
- People started to approach me after my speeches and tell me I was down-to-earth and natural.
- People bought my products.
- I got rebooked.
- I had great footage to post online (which showed the audience enjoying themselves).

This wasn't the result of me ***being funny***—it was the result of me 'thinking about the funny'.

HUMOUR IS A SCIENCE

Too many people think that you have to be born funny to be funny but nothing's further from the truth. I remember coaching a client and telling her she could 'funny up' her speech. She didn't know where to start, so I said, "If you change the start of your speech, your audience will laugh. Just use the rule of three."

After her event, she sent me a text message. "Malachi, I smashed it; they loved me. Thank you!" It wasn't until I saw the video of her speech that I knew she really did captivate her

audience. What I noticed was that the audience laughed in all the places that *I told her* they would. It's not because I am funny—it's because I now think about the funny!

> "You don't have to be funny. You just need to know what makes people laugh!"

You don't have to be funny. You just need to know what makes people laugh! Thinking about funny is all about understanding ***why*** people laugh. Once you understand why people laugh, you can start to craft humorous speeches.

That's why I say that you don't have to be funny, but you must learn to think about the funny. If you knew the hours and effort that comedians agonise through to craft their 15-minute set, you wouldn't think anyone is 'just' funny. It takes work – lots of it – for comedians to create 15 minutes of laughter. You just think they are natural because you don't see behind the scenes. Like many things, what people now do naturally they once did mechanically. It takes effort to do things effortlessly!

This book will teach you why people laugh and how to create content that gets laughs and entertains an audience. This book will lay a foundation. I won't lie—there are more in-depth books out there, but you don't need them.

In his book *Do You Talk Funny?* David Nihill mentions that the expectations for a business speaker are different from those for a stand-up comedian, and just having a few laughs in your presentations will make you better than 90% of speakers out there.

JUST CHILL

You don't have to worry if you've told jokes and they haven't worked before, if you've been told you are not funny, if you don't know where to start when it comes to humour, and if you think you are not funny...because you don't ***have*** to be funny.

I am not a stand-up comedian, yet I might try that when I am older. For now, I am a normal guy; my parents aren't comedians. Neither were their parents and neither is my wife! But I went from getting accidental laughs in my presentations to getting strategic laughs!

If you don't think you're funny but are willing to think about the funny, then this book will work for you. Thinking about the funny means:

- You deliberately become **more aware** of what makes **you laugh**.
- You deliberately become analytical about why other people are laughing.

- You deconstruct **both** these situations to construct humorous content.

Most people don't do that. They wonder why they can't entertain their audience consistently and why they only get accidental laughs. When you start thinking about the funny, you'll start to pick up patterns and see just how easy it is to make people laugh. You'll be able to create your own moments of laughter in your speeches, time and time again.

"When you start thinking about the funny, you'll start to pick up patterns and see just how easy it is to make people laugh."

I'm excited for you because I know there is no better feeling than standing on stage, looking out into the audience, watching people enjoying themselves because you entertained them. If you do this, you will blow away other speakers and develop a reputation as a speaker that brings something fresh.

Are you up for it? OK, let's go! This book is divided into two sections of the comedy structure—the setup and the punch line. In the setup section (Part 1) you will come to understand why people laugh and what humour does for you as a speaker in relation to your audience. Part 2 concerns the punch line, where you will learn tips, tricks and hacks to get your audience laughing.

"Humour helps to create pleasure before you deliver your point."

PART ONE

THE SETUP

CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT LAUGHING?

Picture this—a room packed with people; the audience is laughing and smiling, and every ten seconds there is an eruption of laughter. Everyone is enjoying the speech. The whole room is hooked, they just can't get enough, and it's plain they want more. The only problem is, you're not on stage. You're a part of the audience!

That's how I felt when sitting in Las Vegas at the world championship of public speaking semi-final and listening to Scott Pritchard's speech. He had us in the palm of his hand—from the very first minute! I sat in Bally's hotel in Las Vegas, listening to Scott and thinking, *Don't laugh, don't laugh.* I was a contestant too, so laughing would have increased his chances of winning. It was too late; he had me. I shifted from being in contestant mode to enjoying a great speech.

Scott did win that contest and ended up being crowned the third-best speaker in the world. He had something that you

can take into your own speeches so you can connect with any audience, every time. Scott had . . . humour. I know very few speakers who stand out and connect deeply without using humour. This isn't a humble brag, but check out what an audience member had to say after a presentation I gave.

> *Malachi was the last speaker in a packed, long afternoon with at least ten previous speeches in a recent event that I attended (as the official photographer). However, he turned out to be the most energetic and probably the funniest and most honest too. What did I like? Malachi was not afraid to speak about a taboo subject: money.*
>
> *He was also refreshingly honest when he mentioned a few personal disappointments. (Don't you hate it when a speaker is a perfect, infallible person?) The characteristic of any great speaker is not just content, vocal variety and audience engagement, but did I genuinely like him? Yes, I did. He's welcome to my home for a home-cooked Chinese dinner any day.*
>
> *Even my static photographs show Malachi's energy and his enjoyment at being there as a speaker. Conclusion: book Malachi as a speaker to lighten the atmosphere and energise your audience.*

I did go to his house and eat! The cool thing is, the connection started on stage! After hearing Scott, coupled with my previous semi-final disappointment I had a new mission, to give my audience the gift of laughter. It's something I focused on. I always had bits of humour in my speeches, but I intentionally decided to take things to the next level after hearing the best speakers in the world.

What's the big deal about laughing? Humour is a great tool. It will help you lift a dull and lifeless atmosphere in any conference or meeting (you'll face this in your speaking career). If you want to be the best or most memorable speaker in a crowd of ***good*** speakers, then injecting humour into your speech is a must.

HUMOUR CONNECTS YOU WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Humour humanizes you; it makes you appear more human to the audience. When your audience is laughing, people become more open and they are more likely to learn because they like you. You'll build rapport. I use to think that if I was too funny I wouldn't be taken seriously, until I discovered that humor activates the brain's dopamine reward system, stimulating goal-oriented motivation and long-term memory,

which means that humor can improve retention in listeners of all ages. **(https://www.edutopia.org/blog/laughter-learning-humor-boosts-retention-sarah-henderson)/**

Here a few other gifts a humour-packed presentation gives to your audience. Laughter . . .

- Lowers blood pressure. People who lower their blood pressure, even those who start at normal levels, will reduce their risk of stroke and heart attack.
- Reduces stress hormone levels.
- Works your abs.
- Improves cardiac health.
- Boosts T-cells.
- Triggers the release of endorphins.
- Produces a general sense of well-being.

Those are just a few of the many gifts you are giving to your audience when you help them to laugh. You are actually blessing your audience when you use humour, and you'll receive great rewards. When you give your audience the gift of laughter, you're more likely to get booked, to connect with your audience, to sell products and to be the type of speaker that audiences don't get tired of hearing.

If you haven't been using humour in your presentations, it's not too late, and I am not asking you to become a stand-up comedian. Just knowing the basics is enough. I'll show you the foundation of humour so you can use the 'funny up' for any story you tell or speech you give.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS HUMOUR?

The Talabi definition of humour is simple. Humour is Truth Exaggerated. You simply take the truth (probably your truth) and exaggerate it. Humour is not about jokes—jokes are old technology and the game has changed! Jokes don't work.

The most irritating thing for an audience is when they think you're *trying* to make them laugh. The problem is that most speakers actually get jokes from the internet. To read them out on stage is dangerous for a few reasons:

- The audience may have heard that joke.
- You don't know if the audience will laugh and, if they don't, you're in trouble (you lose them instantly).
- Most jokes are detached from your speech, which isn't good.
- You can come across as cheesy, corny and desperate.

Don't feel bad if you have been using jokes. After reading this book you'll be able to create your own entertaining content.

ENTERTAIN WITH LESS STRAIN

The biggest thing that most speakers struggle with when it comes to humour is that they think they aren't funny. Here's my answer to that struggle: You don't have to be funny, you just need to know what makes people laugh. There is a science to it. You hear me say that throughout this book! It's my philosophy.

WHAT MAKES THEM LAUGH?

Humour is rooted in misdirection. You create an expectation and take the audience in a totally different direction and that's it. Yes, that's it. Misdirection in humour is when you use your words to lead a person's thought pattern in one direction and then suddenly change the direction of that thought pattern. When this happens, the response in the human mind is laughter.

Are there other tools you can use? Yes, lots more. However, you aren't doing stand-up comedy. I am giving you tools you can pick up and use in your next speech; not some long 3-6 month coaching/ learning process that will take you ages to implement. Remember this formula:

Expectation + Misdirection = Laughter

Earlier, I spoke about being in Las Vegas and listening to Scott Pritchard's speech. Well, when he was delivering his speech I didn't see his humour coming. He was original. He was a pro. If you are going to get/give laughs, creating original content will help. Scott did this in his speech at one point. He said, "I look up to my older brother... ***because*** ... he's taller!" Did you see that? He used misdirection.

He took us in one direction by saying "I look up to my older brother". That is a common statement; it is natural and it makes sense emotionally. Parents always tell you to look up to your older siblings. That's the direction he's taking us in, and he has set up an expectation. He has pulled on our assumptions. Then he takes us in another direction by saying "because he's taller!" No one was expecting that (I certainly wasn't) and the whole audience laughed. Remember the formula:

Expectation + Misdirection = Laughter

Here is a secret. ***Humour reaches the heart, but crafting it starts in the head.*** You've got to think! You've got to get into the heads of your audience so that you can reach the hearts of your audience. It's all about getting into their heads so that you can reach their hearts.

LISTS LEAD TO LAUGHS

Try this exercise with any phrase:

I'll use the phrase 'washing the dishes'. Make a list of things that go in the natural direction and set up an expectation. For example, washing dishes is:

- fun
- easy
- relaxing
- therapeutic

I've underlined my favourite word from the list. So let's construct a line: 'Washing the dishes is fun'. (This line isn't funny yet! It's just the setup.) Now we'll create a list to mis-direct the audience by taking them in a new direction. But first, let's look at a few things your audience will be thinking/expecting/assuming.

I've said that washing up is fun, so here are few things I think the audience is thinking, expecting or assuming:

- I am washing the dishes.
- I like washing dishes.
- I am talking about me washing the dishes.

So now let's misdirect. I'll start to think outside of the box and write down anything that comes to mind, based on the knowledge of what the audience is assuming.

- That's why I let the kids do it!
- I really enjoy watching my wife do it.
- It would be a crime if I took the fun away from my wife.
- When the sink is empty
- For about 30 seconds
- When your parents say it's that or the cane
- For my wife

This list is a brainstorm—I just let my mind flow even if things don't make sense. I've underlined my favourite line, so now let's add both lines together:

"Washing the dishes is fun; I really enjoy watching my wife do it."

There you have it! Did you laugh? Good.

Misdirection is the foundation of humour. If you master the use of misdirection and the other tools coming up later in this book, you'll feel fulfilled when you look out into the audience and watch them laugh, smile and engage. There is

no better evidence of whether an audience is with you than hearing their laugher. Now you are going to give that gift to your audience through every story!

Remember, you've got to start in the head! Sometimes your accent, your appearance, or a scenario in a story is funny, but that's all by chance. I want you to know what you're doing and to entertain without any strain.

Here is a resource that really changed the game for me when it comes to humour. It's a book called ***Stand Up Comedy*** by Judy Carter. Buy it, use it, and worship me later!

PART TWO

THE PUNCHLINE

CHAPTER 3

10 TOOLS TO HELP YOU ENTERTAIN WITH LESS STRAIN

Most speakers struggle to entertain an audience. They mistakenly think that they must be stand-up comedians and they mistakenly think that the must be naturally funny. Hopefully, by now, I've already convinced you that that's not true.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a set of tools to uncover, create or refine entertaining moments for your audience? The 10 tools in this section will help you identify potential humour to help keep your audience engaged and entertained while you speak.

Are there are more than 10 methods that can make your audience laugh? Yes, many more than even that. But these 10 items are simple and easy to use and have worked for me and many other speakers. Using just one or two of these tools will make all the difference in your speeches.

If you listen to or watch a presentation, chances are you'll find that stories are the most entertaining parts of a speech. There's a reason for that. Stories can be intrinsically funny. There are so many funny scenarios that happen to us all. Hidden in many stories are moments that will really entertain an audience. It's all about tapping into them.

For speakers, stories are the birthing centre of humour! Most of your funniest content will come from your stories because people say funny things and funny things happen to us all of the time. Audiences relate to our experiences because they have had similar experiences.

Value your stories and respect them—they contain everything you need to make an audience laugh, so you don't have to go online and steal someone's jokes! You can discover the humour in your story.

I mention storytelling because these tools will be mostly applied to storytelling. If you are trying to entertain in a speech, stories are the best way to do it because stories are a great vehicle for making memorable points. If you just jump on stage and start pushing out one-liners, the audience will think you are a comedian. There's nothing wrong with that—if you ***are*** a comedian. But if you aren't and you're being paid to train, inspire or motivate, yet you're just delivering random

one-liners, you will confuse your audience. I want you to apply these 10 tools to storytelling because that's the foundation to build your humour on.

Let's funny up your stories so that you can connect deeper and give your audience a fantastic experience. Here are your tools:

SURPRISE (TOOL 1)

In the midst of the Coronavirus in 2020, people used humour to deal with the stress. The football season in the UK had been cancelled and here is one man's response to that cancellation. It involved a tool I call 'surprise'. He said, "Football is cancelled so I decided to have a conversation with my wife . . . **She seems nice.**" This line is funny because you don't anticipate the direction of the comment, ***"She seems nice."***

Let me remind you that humour is rooted in misdirection and playing around with people's expectations. Once you grasp this, you'll start to easily create humorous moments that get your audience laughing and create an enjoyable experience for them. Here is an example of how I used this tool:

In a speech, I was telling a story about how my wife and I dealt with her being pregnant. I said, "My wife came up to me and

said, 'Mal, I'm pregnant.' I looked at her and asked, '*Is it mine?'* The line got a lot of laughs. The audience found it funny because it contained an element of surprise. My audience expected me to react with joy on hearing that my wife was pregnant, but I don't meet that expectation and this gives them a laugh.

"For surprise to work in your favour, you need a setup line that is logical and predictable, and then you throw in your surprise line."

For surprise to work in your favour, you need a setup line that is logical and predictable, and then you throw in your surprise line.

CHAPTER 4

THE RULE OF 3

(TOOL 2)

"A B C, it's easy as 1 2 3..." This was the first line in the chorus of the 1970 number one song by The Jackson Five, and there is some truth to this when we think about using the law of three to create humour in public speaking.

Many jokes are founded on the law of three. For example, we've all heard the 'There was an English man, an Irish man and a Scottish man...' type of joke. If you listen closely you will notice that there are three characters in this joke. The same is true of the famous 'knock-knock jokes' – the third thing the joke teller says in this joke is usually the funny punchline.

Although these jokes are dated (as is Michael Jackson's song), the law of three in humour will never go out of fashion because it is founded on surprise and exaggeration—two elements that almost always get a laugh. When I learnt this secret, it shifted the storytelling in my speaking to a whole new level. This tool is probably the easiest to use; it's one

I consistently use on stage, online and in conversations. It works all of the time and will help you 'funny up' your speeches.

> "The foundation of humour is to break expectations and misdirect the thoughts of your audience."

When you say two things rhythmically, add a slight pause, and then say a third thing that breaks that pattern, you will give your audience laughs because you've used the rule of three. Again, I must emphasise that the foundation of humour is to break expectations and misdirect the thoughts of your audience. Most of these tools are based on this principle. The rule of three is just another way of using misdirection.

I'll give you an example. In a speech, I say, "My wife is a dreamer and she makes things happen. She dreamt of owning a business and that happened. She dreamt of being a speaker and that happened. **She dreamt of marrying me . . . she made that happen.** The third line is the funny line, the punchline; the one that my audience doesn't expect, especially because I say the first two lines with no particular intonation in my voice.

Here is another example from a speech I gave at a Toastmasters speech contest. "My wife recently joined Toastmasters

and now she wants to have kids. She's a toastmaster, I'm a toastmaster, and now she wants to have mini toastmasters." Can you see how the last line has a little twist to it? The secret is: the first two lines should have a pattern and a rhythm to it in the delivery, and you break that pattern with the third line.

REFINE THE LINE

One of the most powerful things you can do with humour is to refine your lines! You see, one word can make a huge difference. One word has different connotations and associations, so one word can draw laughs from an audience or fall flat. Take the line below as an example.

"She's a toastmaster, I'm a toastmaster, and now she wants to have ***mini toastmasters.***"

It got laughs, but I could play around with it and say, "Now we are creating a bunch of mini toastmasters" or "Now we are breeding our own toastmasters club." It's all about being creative and experimenting with your laugh lines.

When you are refining a line, you need to test the line in front of different audiences and take the line that gets the most laughs. I know this may seem like a long process but we are talking about doing things the world-class way.

TIP:

Comedy is cultural! This simply means that there are certain things particular cultures relate to that others won't! If you've never been to Toastmasters, I may not connect with you when I tell you about my experience in speech contests. It's important to know who you are talking to and either create material that is universal, or convert your content to fit the audience you're speaking to. I'll have more on converting comedy later.

CHAPTER 5

DIALOGUE

(TOOL 3)

Sometimes you can have a conversation or hear a conversation that is funny, and, when you retell that conversation as you heard it in one of your speeches, the audience connects and laughs. The dialogue in a story is usually the funniest part. Here is an example.

At night time my daughter Tatiana said, "Mum, pray for Brielle [her little sister]."

Mildred said, "Lord, I pray for this young lady," but Brielle interrupts and says, "Mum I'm NOT young. I'm . . . 6!" (The best part is, she's 3.)

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR HUMOUR RADAR

Notice I didn't precisely tell a joke—the dialogue alone creates the humour. The great thing is that all I did was capture a real-life conversation. I think it's so important for speakers to put

on their humour radar! Record everything that makes you laugh or, at the very least, record every time you laugh. Your mind will then begin to see patterns and it will be easier for you to create humour.

Take note of conversations that make you laugh and get into the practice of capturing those conversations see them as potential speech material. That way you can secretly 'test' to see if you have content that will be funny on stage.

"Take note of conversations that make you laugh and get into the practice of capturing those conversations see them as potential speech material."

The great thing about dialogue is that it is generally effortless. You literally have to retell what a character said! Some speakers fail to do this and narrate their whole story, rushing to get to the point of the story and forgetting that they have the opportunity to give the audience pleasure before that point is reached.

Dialogue also works because you can act out a character's movement and mannerisms, adding to the humour. If you aren't using dialogue, then start! It will funny up your speeches.

CHAPTER 6

THE PAUSE & THE CALLBACK

THE PAUSE (TOOL 4)

The next tool involves something that most speakers are afraid to do. Pause.

A pause is a powerful tool because it builds anticipation in an audience. When you pause, you raise the tension and build anticipation, and this creates more room for laughter once you release your punch line. Here's an example: "My wife just said, 'Mal, I like being locked down with you' and I thought, *SO DO I . . . I'm such a nice person to be around."*

The pause helps the audience process what's been said. After saying, "I thought, *So Do I . . .*" I then pause so the audience can process. Only then do I deliver the line, "I'm such a nice person to be around."

In the comedy world, they call this type of use of the pause 'comedic timing'. Knowing how long to pause and when to deliver your laugh line/punch line is important. If you pause for too long your audience will think you forgot your words;

if you don't pause long enough, then you will speak too fast and they may miss the joke.

> "The pause helps you let your audience laugh and increases the anticipation for your next words."

One mistake is to 'talk over' the laughter. This means that some speakers talk while the audience is laughing, and this can send the wrong signal to the audience. The pause helps you let your audience laugh and increases the anticipation for your next words.

BOUNCE-OFF' HUMOUR

Pauses also create the opportunity to do what I call 'bounce-off' humour. You can bounce off one joke after an audience laughs by using a pause before delivering another laugh line that is connected to the previous line. Here's an example of bounce-off humour from the example we used in ***tool 3***:

Tati was leading a bedtime prayer and said – "Mum, pray for Brielle."

Mildred says, "Lord, I pray for this young lady" and Brielle interrupts and says "Mum, I'm NOT young I'm ... 6!"

At this point, the audience laughs; I pause and this next comment bounces off the last comment and creates an extra laugh. **"The thing is, she's 3."** This wouldn't work without a pause.

Bounce-off humour works because the audience thinks that your laugh line has been completed and your listeners don't anticipate another one after the pause. The pause helps me bounce off one laugh line into another one. For the audience, the pause signals the end of your joke, but for you, the pause is setting up the ***bounce-off***.

THE CALLBACK (TOOL 5)

The callback is a tool that will connect you with your audience more than any other tool can. It will help you appear and sound natural and have your audience laughing and feeling like you have prepared your presentation just for them. The best news is that a callback is easy to use. They are all about referring to moments that your audience is connected to.

I remember using a callback in one of my speeches. I talked about how my wife was the reason I joined Toastmasters and everyone was laughing because they thought that was sweet.

Later on in the speech, I said, "I came third in the world semi-finals and I was angry. I thought ***Why did I join Toastmasters in the first place?. . . I listened to my wife."*** The audience burst out laughing because of the irony. They were already connected to my wife in the early moments of my story because she was my hero, and now, ironically, I'm blaming her and not taking responsibility.

The key is to look for the moments when your audience is most connected and call back to them, interweaving the callback into your speech. Sometimes I do it on the spot and sometimes I'm strategic about it.

In my last presentation, I mentioned that I had books to sell. Everyone laughed because I was trying not to mention selling my books, and the next time I mentioned my book they laughed again—they had become connected to that moment.

The speaker who took the stage after me got up and said, "I don't know if you've heard but there are a few books on sale today." He got a 20-second laugh; that was huge for this speaker! What a great way to start his speech.

The audience erupted because they were connected. If you were not in the room you'd wonder why the audience was laughing because you need to be connected to the content for

a callback to work. Callbacks work with connection. The key is to look out for the moments when your audience is connected. I deliberately listen to the speaker who takes the stage before me, not just to grow but to look for things I can call back to.

“Callbacks work with connection. The key is to look out for the moments when your audience is connected.”

Here are a few things you can call back to:

- Circumstances at the event
- Characters in your stories
- Moments in other speakers’ speeches
- Conversations you’ve had with an audience member before your speech

Remember, callbacks work when you call back moments the audience is already connected to. These moments can be moments from your speech or other people’s speeches. That’s why it’s important to be in the room before you are on stage—it gives you more opportunities for callbacks.

"Humour humanizes you as a speaker"

CHAPTER 7

WORDPLAY & RANT IT OUT

I have heard speakers do this in the past but I never really tried it until I spoke to one of my speaking pals, Douglas Dewar. Doug told me about a speech he wrote that helped him reach the district level of a Toastmasters International humorous speech contest.

WORDPLAY (TOOL 6)

Doug said he had an unusual title, 'Am I speaking English?' He then explained how he used wordplay to make his speech more humorous; he told me that his whole speech was founded on the fact that he was English and his audience was American.

In the speech, he shares a time when he was still new to the States and a friend invited him to a bar.

The friend says, "Doug do you want to join us for a drink? We are going to Hooters."

Doug replied, "Hooters? That's a strange name for a bar! Why would you name a bar after people's noses?"

"No, Doug, it's the waitresses."

"What? The waitresses have big noses?"

Hooters is a chain of bar restaurants in America where the waitresses have big . . . ahem, assets. In England, however, the word 'hooter' is used to describe noses! This story went down very well with the audience as Doug used the ambiguous concept of 'hooter' to cause a laugh.

After speaking to Doug, I started to notice so many opportunities to use wordplay in creating humour.

The way you use words is important, especially when it comes to humour. If you are willing to think outside of the box, then you'll be able to use words to get laughs. Wordplay is using the ambiguity of words to create humour. There is something about misunderstanding a word that makes an audience laugh.

"The way you use words is important, especially when it comes to humour. If you are willing to think outside of the box, then you'll be able to use words to get laughs."

In one of my speeches, I tell a story about placing only third in the world semi-finals of public speaking. I bumped into a fellow contestant, Garret Garrels, and he asked me, "Can you find the elevator?" I turn to him angrily and I say, "It's not an elevator. It's a lift." The audience laughed because of the play on words. In England, we say lift! I'm angry that I lost and the audience picked up in my tone of voice that I am deliberately trying to get one over on my contestant.

In another speech, I say, "Welcome to my workshop. We **work** here, and you can **shop** over there." Then I point to my sales table and the audience laughs! I'm using the word 'workshop' and breaking it into two words! Again, playing with words as in this instance helps the audience to be aware that I have products!

Playing with words is about discovering/exploring if there are any words in your speech that:

- Are ambiguous
- Sound similar to another word
- Are used differently in a different culture

You don't have to force this tool into a speech. A lot of times wordplays can be found in daily life. In your interaction with people you sometimes have a situation where there has been

a misunderstanding of words that ends up being funny. Write it down and you can use that material for one of your stories.

TIP: TEST IT AND TWEAK IT

Sometimes when you start a presentation, the audience is cold. People seem disinterested. You can use your introduction to see how they will respond to the rest of the speech. I **strategically** place laugh lines or the funniest parts of my presentation in the beginning. If the audience laughs, I know that the rest of my content will land. If they don't, I will tweak my presentation. This tool has saved me so many times. Sometimes I **deliberately** place laugh lines in my written introduction too; if people laugh, I will **strategically** respond to their laughs with my first words, calling back to my introduction.

In one introduction, the announcer ends by saying, "Malachi is a Man United fan." So sometimes audience members boo. I respond to this with my first few words: "If you don't like United . . . leave." The audience laughs, and I know that they are primed and ready for laughter.

RANT IT OUT (TOOL 7)

One of the best things I picked up from Judy Carter's book ***Stand-up Comedy*** was an exercise called 'the rant'. This is a great technique if you are struggling to create laugh lines. She suggests getting a dictaphone, picking up a topic and ranting—just letting whatever words come out of your mind flow along.

I did this exercise and it was excellent for helping me get laugh lines. Here's an example. I turned on my dictaphone, picked up a sheet of paper, and the first topic was my daughter getting older. I started to rant:

> *When my daughter gets older, she's going to want a boyfriend. I don't want her to have a boyfriend because I don't like boys. Boys are boring. Imagine my daughter wanting to go on a date. I won't let her—no way, no way. If she says a boy asked for her number I tell her to tell him to go away. I tell her to give him* my *number.*

That was my rant. I listened and kept the parts that I thought were funny. The line that ended up in my speech was:

> *If my daughter comes up to me and says "Dad, Dad! What do I do when a boy asks me for my number?" I'll say, "That's easy. You give him my number!*

Ranting is a great way for you to unlock your creative ideas. It may feel strange, but it's a great way to get laugh lines.

TIP: THE POWER OF PROPS

A prop can add a lot of humour to your speech if you use it properly. In 90% of humorous speeches in speaking competitions, it's a good idea to have a prop because props help an audience to be bought into a speech visually. **Be careful, because sometimes props can end up being a distraction.** But when used well (by following the four 'S's below) a prop can breathe life into your presentation.

My four 'S's for using props are:

- **Support:** Does your prop support your message?
- **Shift:** Does it help to shift the energy in the room?
- **Sight:** Can your audience see your prop?
- **Speed:** Can you use it without slowing down the pace of your presentation?

If you can say 'yes' to the four 'S's, then go for it!

CHAPTER 8

BODY TALK

(TOOL 8)

Body language is overrated, but your body does speak. The amount of clutter out there about body language is laughable. I've heard it all. Things like: Remember not to cross your arms or to keep them too close together. Then there's advice about how an open palm makes you seem nicer to the audience.

You could listen to this all advice and look like a badly choreographed breakdancer at karaoke night at your Uncle Jones' birthday! Don't do it! You'll end up being 'unforgettable' for the wrong reasons.

BE NATURAL

Have you noticed that when you're excited your hands move? And when you are saying something serious, you slow down, stop and make eye contact? Most speakers don't even notice these things and exchange being 'natural' for being mechanical.

Your body communicates naturally. Your body knows what to do and when to do it. When you force your palms to be open when they naturally want to be closed, you'll come across as awkward or less authentic. Audiences do pick up nonverbal cues from you, and that why it's important to be authentic and not mechanical.

Here are a few tips:

- Record your presentation BEFORE you give it to a live audience. That way, you'll pick up how you are being perceived by the audience.
- If you have a few habits that come across as distracting (i.e., playing with your clothes) then focus on cutting these out.
- Record your presentation and look at your mannerisms and gestures. Look for your style. What do you do constantly? Are you high energy or low energy? What type of speaker are you?

Your audience is more concerned with your ***content*** than they are with your ***choreography.*** Don't overthink things.

DELIVERY TIP: MATCHING ENERGY

Speech coaches and trainers always say, "Be energetic on stage." Well, that's the WORST speaking advice you could listen to. Why? Your energy level should MATCH your environment and the energy and of the audience. If you have low energy and the audience is high energy, you'll come across as boring. If you have high energy and they have low energy, you'll come across as over-the-top and wild. Matching energy prevents this. Match the energy by shifting energy if you need to, depending on the size of the room, the size of the crowd, or the energy you sense that the audience is giving you.

YOUR BODY CAN BE FUNNY

When it comes to creating humourous moments, body language can aid you and draw more laughs. There are a few comedians who get into character and their whole act depends on their

> "Using your body to entertain your audience can really enhance an average laugh line because you are giving your audience visual experiences, not just verbal ones."

being quite static; that's them putting on a persona deliberately. Using your body to entertain your audience can really enhance an average laugh line because you are giving your audience visual experiences, not just verbal ones.

Comedy trainer Judy Carter talks about doing an 'act out'. This is where you actually slip into character for a second and literally act out a part of your story. I do this a lot when I speak, and the audience responds well. Sometimes I literally become my Nigerian mum or my wife having a moan. I imitate their bodies and mannerisms and act out a scenario just for a few seconds. To see a visual example of this, go to **https://publicspeakinghacks.com/but-im-not-funny-humour-tools-in-action/** and you will see me using an act out and hear how the audience responds. Remember, adding an 'act out' to your speech boosts the level of entertainment.

"If humour isn't supporting your story, it's suffocating your story."

CHAPTER 9

SILLY SLIDES

(TOOL 9)

Do you use slides when you speak? Using slides can be the quickest way to get a laugh. You literally just need to choose a funny slide that supports your message. Images can really cause laughter more quickly than anything else because visuals are easy to process. You can even use the rule of three with slides. A good example of using silly slides is Scott Ginsberg's TED talk. He uses a lot of silly slides and he gets a lot of laughs in his speeches.

https://publicspeakinghacks.com/but-im-not-funny-humour-tools-in-action/

COMEDY MUST BE CONVERTED OR REVISITED

I learnt this when I was being coached by Jim Key in the World Championship of Public Speaking semi-finals. Jim had looked at one of my lines.

> *Malachi, you can improve this. When you are telling your story in America, don't mention the location specifically. That may distract the audience because they won't know where the station is and also you have an opportunity to make your audience laugh. And you mention a smell in your speech, but if you use a metaphor and mention 'Right Guard spray' instead of 'deodorant', the audience will laugh because that's a popular brand in North America.*

I learnt that, just like money in another country, before you use humour in front of a new audience it must be converted, especially if it involves another culture. To convert your comedy, think about items and places in your speech—do you need to rename them or remove them? And ask the event planner about abbreviations and acronyms your audience may use.

"Even unfunny people can give funny presentations!"

CHAPTER 10

SOUND EFFECTS

(TOOL 10)

There is nothing more sleep-inducing than a **monotone** voice! It's very easy for an audience to lose interest when a speaker isn't using vocal variety. Vocal variety is the pitch and pace of your voice. When it comes to public speaking, mixing up the way you use your voice is good. Things like pausing when you make a point, raising your tone and pace when you are excited, or using sound effects when you are telling a story can help you avoid sounding monotone. Check out this clip from motivational speaker Victor Antonio; watch how he uses his voice in the first minute.

"Things like pausing when you make a point, raising your tone and pace when you are excited, or using sound effects when you are telling a story can help you avoid sounding monotone."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAAG3b9kyYs

Did you notice the 'ping' sound effect that he used? It was a good use of his voice and it keeps his speech interesting. Just remember to use all the elements of your voice when you speak; it will help to keep your audience engaged.

I've always loved being in the audience and listening to a speaker use sound effects when they speak. It can really bring a speech alive. Many of your audience members will be auditory learners, so using your voice in this way will benefit them and engage them even more. And it's also very impressive and shows creativity when you use sound effects. Just like in using body language, you look at your story or parts of your speech to determine when the best time is to use this tool.

CHAPTER 11

HIDDEN HUMOUR & STORIES WITHIN STORIES

Here are two humour hacks that will help you ramp up even more entertainment for your speeches. I couldn't just give you 10 tools!

HIDDEN HUMOUR

Sometimes your story or parts of your speech have what I call 'hidden humour'. I discovered this when a coach gave me some feedback that I didn't want to hear. Jim Key, world champion of public speaking 2003, said, "Malachi, your speech is too intense. There are lots of opportunities for humour and you aren't taking them." I did know what he was talking about until I looked at a video of my speech.

If you deliver the story in front of a live audience and find them laughing at places that you couldn't predict, then you have hidden humour in your story that you need to develop!

Most speakers neglect this, and they miss opportunities to connect, impress and impart to the audience. This is why it's important to be aware of your audience's reactions when you speak. Countless times I have found hidden humour in my speeches because I took the time to watch my audience while I am speaking.

Please do this. It is so rewarding because there are times you are being funny without trying to be funny, and those are the seeds for entertaining speeches. While watching the video, the real secret is to look at the audience! Listen to the audience and you'll be able to pick up on lots of hidden humour.

STORIES WITHIN STORIES THAT AREN'T DETOURS

My coach says to never tell a story just to get a laugh! He calls this detour humour. I agree you shouldn't try to be funny for the sake of it, and sometimes laugh lines don't fit the stories you are telling. My approach is to use stories within stories to ***introduce*** my characters, and that usually gets a laugh.

Here is an example. After telling the audience I am married, I introduce my wife and say, "My wife is a go-getter. She

makes things happen. In fact, she dreamt of having a business and she made that happen; she dreamt of writing a book and made that happen. She dreamt of marrying me . . ."

The audience laughed. I've used the rule of three and used a mini character description to introduce my wife, and it's not a detour.

I also find it useful to be funny in 'pull-in' moments. A pull-in moment is when you put the story on 'pause' and you keep your audience on 'play'. A pull-in moment is when I am speaking to my audience in the middle of a story. For instance, in one speech during a pull-in moment, I turn to my audience and say, "You know those times when you are hoping the sales assistant tells you the price is cheaper than you thought because you know you afford it?" (The audience laughs because they can relate.) Then I say, "I'm praying, Lord please, please, please. (They laugh even louder.)

When it comes to storytelling, the actual dialogue from characters gets the biggest laughs. The audience will also laugh at what they relate to; your thought process is something they will be able to relate to, so don't be afraid to tell them what you were thinking. I talk more about this in my book "Smash it with a Story".

TOOLS IN ACTION

Go to https://publicspeakinghacks.com/but-im-not-funny-humour-tools-in-action/ and you can watch me deliver speeches and see some of these suggestions in action. But for now, let's review some tools below with a little note on what I was trying to do (each line did get a laugh).

TOOL IN ACTION: **SURPRISE**

"Children come into the world crying and sponge off you for 18 years, if you're lucky, and 30 years if you've run out of luck! How do I know? . . . My parents ran out of luck. I sponged off them for 30 years and I just turned 31."

> **I build tension by pausing after saying, "How do I know?" Then I break their expectation by stating, "My parents ran out of luck." The line is something that they can't see coming.**

TOOL IN ACTION: **RULE OF THREE**

"I like my life how it is now; my wife and I have a great relationship. She's beautiful, intelligent... and she does the dishes."

In this line, I break the audience's pattern of thinking and then change direction with the third thing I say. It is a cheeky line. I make sure I say my wife's first two attributes with rhythm. The audience will be thinking that I have a great marriage and I am a sweet guy. Then I twist things.

TOOL IN ACTION: **DIALOGUE & PAUSE**

"I am going to be an overprotective parent if we have a girl. When she's a teenager and says, 'Daddy, what's my curfew?' I'll say, 'You don't have one. You can go out whenever you want, wherever you want . . . as long as I am right next to you.' Or if she asks, 'Daddy, what do I do when someone asks for my number?' I'll say, 'That's easy. You give him *my* number.'"

This is an imaginary conversation I am having with my daughter. The pauses, the body language and the misdirection contribute to the laughter. It's always good to fuse a few tools together. When you use an 'act out', the audience really engages.

TOOL IN ACTION: **WORD PLAY**

"My wife recently joined Toastmasters and now she wants to have kids. She's a toastmaster, I'm a toastmaster, and now she wants to have mini toastmasters, Mr Toastmaster, fellow toastmasters, and anyone who is tired of hearing the word 'toastmaster'."

> **I play with the word 'toastmasters'. I say it a lot in this part of my story; I know my audience will be thinking I am using the word a lot, so I use that to my advantage.**

All of these lines come from the same 7-minute story! There are a lot more laugh lines in the speech. (If you want to hear the audio, shoot me an email by going here **https://www.subscribepage.com/u3g5v2**)

Now it's your turn. You've got the tools and you've read the tips and you've seen the tools in action. As you craft your story/speech, think about the questions on the *But I'm Not Funny* worksheet.

CHAPTER 12

WORKSHEET

***As a speaker you'll need a story or some content to implement the tools.**

1. Where can you use misdirection in your story?

- What will the audience be thinking?
- What will you do to misdirect them?
- Will you need to pause?

Remember: Create a list of your audience's expectations; then a list of funny misdirections.

2. Are there any opportunities for the Rule of Three?

- What are your first two lines in the rule of 3?
- Write out your set-up line.
- What is your third line—the punchline?

Remember: Rant if you need to—it's the easiest way to create laugh lines.

Dialogue

- What characters will have conversations in your speech?
- Will you do an 'act out'?
- Can you exaggerate your inner dialogue?

3. Bounce-off Humour

- What parts do you expect your audience to laugh at?
- If they do laugh at some other point, can you create some bounce-off humour by adding a pause and then another line?
- What will that line be?

4. Callback

- Is there anything that you can call back in leading up to the event?
- How can you turn it into a laugh line?
- What can the announcer say to create humour?

Remember: Callbacks are all about linking comedy lines to what people are already connected to.

5. Sound Effect and Slides

- Will you use sound effects in your story? Or an accent? If so, when?
- Will you use slides? Do you have funny images that come to mind? Do they support the message?

After answering all these questions and creating your material, try doing the following:

1. Deliver it to a test audience.
2. Re-watch the video while looking for hidden humour.
3. Watch some stand-up comedy while looking for ways you can improve your delivery.
4. Practice at home (in front of a camera).
5. Deliver your speech to a live audience.

The process above is just a fraction of what top stand-up comedians do to create their best material. Most speakers won't do it, but when you do, you'll have a huge advantage. You will walk onto the stage with confidence and off the stage knowing you hit a sweet spot with the audience.

APPENDIX

A CULTURE OF COMEDY

If you want to create entertaining speeches, you've got to train your brain to identify what's funny. I want you to create a culture of comedy and make it a part of your lifestyle. Watch lots of stand-up comedy; lots of it. You'll start to see patterns. Then create a funny file to capture the thoughts that come to you and make you laugh.

Before you know it, you will start to find humour easier to identify and create in your stories. I constantly post potentially funny content on social media. I usually capture anything that makes me laugh and then post it on social media to see readers' reactions to it.

Doing this for a while teaches you what is funny and makes the creative process easier. Here are some materials that will help you understand and create humour. Coupled with this book, these tools, I believe, will make it possible to double the entertainment value of your speeches.

If you really want to dive into humour a little more, read both these books!

- *Stand-up Comedy: The Book* by Judy Carter
- *Do You Talk Funny? 7 Comedy Habits to Become a Better (and Funnier) Public Speaker* by David Nihill

Remember, you don't have to be funny, you just need to know what makes people laugh. Who knows, maybe one day I'll be in the audience laughing at you (I mean laughing at your humourous speech).

Let's stay in touch.

Go to www.publicspeakinghacks.com to get your free copy of **Nail Your Next Speech Toolbox** and join my VIP speakers list.



You can also find me on social media:

- Facebook: facebook.com/Publicspeakinghacks
- Twitter: twitter.com/MalachiTalabi
- Linkedin: linkedin.com/in/malachitalabi
- Youtube: youtube.com/user/MalachiSpeaksTV

Oh, and if you enjoyed this book, I'd be grateful for a 5-star review on Amazon!

Tool Recap



- Surprise
- Rule of 3
- Dialogue
- Pause
- Call back
- Word play
- Rant it out
- Body talk
- slides
- Sound effects

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