

Is the use of sarcasm helpful or hurtful in speaking presentations?

POINT: Audiences love hearing it like it is.

“We are pretty sarcastic on stage. Whenever we try to be more serious, people always expect it is leading up to some sarcastic joke. Sarcasm works well for us because it connects us to our audience. They see us more like them. It is common for someone to approach us after a performance and remark that we reminded them how they are with their friends. We appear to be more human and less pretentious.”



Jon Wee, CPAE, and Owen Morse, CPAE, are a comedy juggling team known as The Passing Zone.

“I use positive sarcasm regularly to show my audiences that I understand where they’re coming from. I am super direct and I don’t sugarcoat my material (which happens to be retirement planning for federal employees). I simply tell it like it is, and they love it because nobody else seems to be able to explain this confusing material to them with financial planning perspective.”



Chris Kowalik is a nationally recognized federal employee retirement benefits expert. Since 2001, she has coached over 1,000 financial professionals.

“Sarcasm is a tool that can be used for good or bad. I use it for good to break the ice into difficult conversations and topics, name elephants in the room, and bring people into a conversation. If used poorly, it can be decisive, hurtful and too sharp.”



Jessica Pettit, CSP, is the “diversity educator” your parents warned you about. She uses humor to help audiences put difficult concepts into practice.

Continue the debate! Are you in favor of the point or counterpoint? Tweet your thoughts using the hashtag #speakermagcounterpoint.



COUNTERPOINT: Sarcasm can be destructive.

“As a speaker with 10 years in morning radio and seven years in stand-up comedy, humor is part of my presentations. Sarcasm should be used only when it is blatantly obvious to the audience. Thinly veiled sarcasm can be dangerous, as it may undermine your credibility with audience members who don’t get the joke. Sarcasm is best left in the hands of those who understand its power to both create and destroy.”



Steve Gamlin, ACB, is The Motivational Firewood Guy™ and the founder of a giving mission known as BeachBum Philanthropy.

“Sarcasm is implied humor. It isn’t a joke. It’s a tone. I think sarcasm can be absolutely hilarious when using it among your peers and friends who know you. But it also can be disastrous in front of audiences who may be experiencing you for the first time. You are assuming the audience understands it is sarcasm, and assumption is the lowest form of comedy. I think audiences deserve better.”



Rik Roberts is a keynote speaker and corporate comedian who works with groups to energize their events.

“If humor, particularly sarcasm, is not in your speaker toolkit, then it may hurt rather than help. That’s why rehearsing with trusted peers is so worthwhile. I wouldn’t recommend for or against sarcasm. Rather, know your audience and decide what, if any, humor is right for the event, and rehearse and test.”



Sally Foley-Lewis is a professional emcee, trainer and speaker who connects with the audience’s and client’s needs.



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