



OBSERVATIONAL HUMOR

NUMBER ONE

Normally when I present an Observational Humor monologue at a Toastmasters meeting, I almost never present all of the ideas that pop into my head. In the following monologue, I created only 5 lines from the 12 ideas that I came up with.

SET-UP (what was said or what happened at the meeting before I presented the monologue)

1. Someone mentioned Moses from the Bible.
2. During the Observational Humor part of the meeting, a member opened his observations with the fact that, because I always brought a clip board to the meeting, he decided to bring one that evening.
3. That meeting, instead of my normal clipboard, I had brought a large notepad of paper to write on.
4. We had a celebration-type cake. It had someone's name on it. Someone had jokingly requested to be served a piece of cake with his own name on it.
5. Someone in the dating scene said that she was in search of an enlightened man.
6. A new member of the club mentioned that he had bought some sexy wine glasses.
7. Someone mentioned that there was nothing to do in their hometown except to have a Bar-B-Que with the neighbors.

THE MONOLOGUE

I'm Moses. And I brought my tablet.

(I combined two elements from the meeting. Without saying it, I noted that I had not brought my normal clipboard. I linked the writing tablet that I did bring, with Moses, who came down from the mountain with two tablets.)

I wanted a piece of cake with my name on it too. But since they didn't have one, I made do by eating it in the John. (Light self-deprecation, making fun of my own name.)

I woke up this morning...jumped out of bed...and looked in the bathroom mirror hoping to find an enlightened man. Oh well, there is always tomorrow.

(Self-deprecation, suggesting that I was less than enlightened.)

Steve...I've never had any sexy wine glasses. But I do have a really hot corkscrew. We should get together sometime.

(The member's comment about the sexy glasses got a laugh when he said it. Corkscrew is a funny word. This line approached the edge, but I decided it was OK to use it. The line received a good laugh.)

I grew up in a neighborhood of cannibals. It was a boring town. They rolled up their sidewalks at 8pm. There was nothing to do except "bar-b-que the neighbors."

NUMBER TWO

Here's a look at Observational Humor created at a Toastmasters Meeting last Monday.

The Set-Up (What happened and what was said during the meeting before the Observational Humor Monologue was delivered.)

1. A speaker talked about time management and suggested a good way to say NO was to say "Let me check my schedule and I'll get back with you."
2. Our General Evaluator (who evaluates the overall meeting) was Frank who was wearing an unbuttoned shirt with a printed muscle-man T-shirt underneath.
3. Pam said she calls Hawaiian shirts "Hi I'm on Vacation shirts." She asked her partner Bryant why he was wearing one to work.
4. The theme of the meeting was Hawaii. The MC of the meeting told us about the laid-back life style of the Hawaiian people. "It's like working at Yucca Mountain." (A reference to a local federal government project.)
5. A speaker, John, suggested that a way to control nervousness was to take the focus off of ME, the speaker, and put the focus on YOU, the audience.
6. The MC asked a trivia question: Was the state of Hawaii attacked by Japan on December 7, 1941? Answer: No. Hawaii had not yet achieved statehood.
7. A speaker, Mary, sang a couple of bars of music as she began speaking. She explained that she was composing herself.
8. Our time-management speaker told about how a large percentage of people couldn't get themselves to tear up a one-dollar bill.

9. A speaker said that if pirates were to drop her on a desert island and she could take only two things...she'd take a pirate and an iPod.

The Monologue

The General Evaluator introduced me: "And now it's time to hear from our Observational Humor Master...John Kinde."

My opening: **Let me check my schedule.**

(I had prepared this line for my opener. But then the introducer used the line about a minute before he introduced me. So I dropped the line.)

When I saw how Frank was dressed, I was sure he was going to break into a chorus of "I'm too sexy for my shirt."

(I just had to comment on Frank's attire. I chose to do it with a somewhat-dated pop-culture reference to a song. It worked.)

Pam, it's OK that Bryant wears an "Hi I'm on vacation shirt" to work...He works at Yucca Mountain.

(I was afraid that this punchline would be too obvious because of the set-up lines. But that seemed not to be the case by the strength of the response.)

John explained to us how we control nervousness by realizing that the speech is not about ME, the speaker, it's about YOU, the audience. That explains why I'm so nervous every time I hear John speak.

(I asked "what if" the nervousness were transferred to the audience. A well disguised punchline. A very strong laugh.)

I'd blame my nervousness on my state of mind...except that my mind has not achieved statehood yet.

(Playing with the double meaning of state. It worked.)

I was pleased to see Mary compose herself during the meeting. And even more pleased that she will wait until she gets home to decompose.

(Playing with words and the change of meaning when DE is added to a word.)

Last night I wrote myself a check for \$1 million. And then I tore it up.

(The speaker started by saying how hard it would be to tear up a \$100 bill and then illustrated that to show that it's difficult to tear up even a one-dollar bill. I stretched it to the sum of \$1 million dollars, which was absurd because the check was really worth nothing. Silly. But the punchline seemed to be well disguised and it got a good laugh.)

I was kidnapped by pirates who were going to drop me on a desert island. They said I could take only two things with me. I asked for a bottle of their rum and one of their computers. When they left me on the island, I poured myself a drink and sat down at the computer. Then I realized on the keyboard, every key was an "R". Arrrrrrrrgh!

(I recycled an old joke I heard a year ago where a pirate's keyboard had only one key. The letter R.)

Here is a response to several questions about the Observational Humor segment in a Toastmasters meeting, posted in the comment section of [Observational Humor Case Study #25](#), By Sol Morrison, Santa Barbara, California, USA.

The Observational Humor segment comes just before the General Evaluator evaluates the overall meeting. It is placed there so that nearly the entire meeting has been conducted, yet the Observational Humor is still held accountable for good taste because the General Evaluator has the last word. The segment is listed on the printed agenda.

The position of Observational Humor Master is rotated among the members who want the challenge. Before the OH Master presents his/her monologue, the floor is open to all members to present observational humor lines. At a typical meeting of 25 members, about 7 members will have observations to share. No one is forced to do Observational Humor. The entire Observational Humor part of the meeting might take 10 minutes.

We do Observational Humor at every meeting. For most people, it's one of the high points of the meeting. Our club has the reputation of having fun and energized meetings. We have one of the largest clubs in the District, about 40 members. Our meetings are 90 minutes. The majority of our members also have membership in another club. We have about 60 clubs in Las Vegas. It's a great Toastmasters town.

I'd say that our members enjoy the Observational Humor. We try to keep the humor non offensive. However over the years, there may have been a small number who didn't enjoy it (for whatever reason), and I would guess that they're now enjoying the company of another club. One size does not fit all.

One new thing we're adding to our OH (Observational Humor) segment is to ensure that the Best Humor Ribbon does not necessarily go to someone speaking during the OH part of the meeting. Occasionally it goes to the Toastmaster of the Evening who does a fun and funny job of putting the meeting together. Or it might go to a guest who gets a laugh introducing him or herself to the club. Sometimes it might go to a member who almost never uses humor who delivers one great line during the OH session, perhaps winning over the OH Master who delivers a good monologue. Or to a speaker or table topics person who demonstrates a humor technique that we'd like to highlight. We explain WHY the person is winning the Best Humor Ribbon, making it an Educational Moment.

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