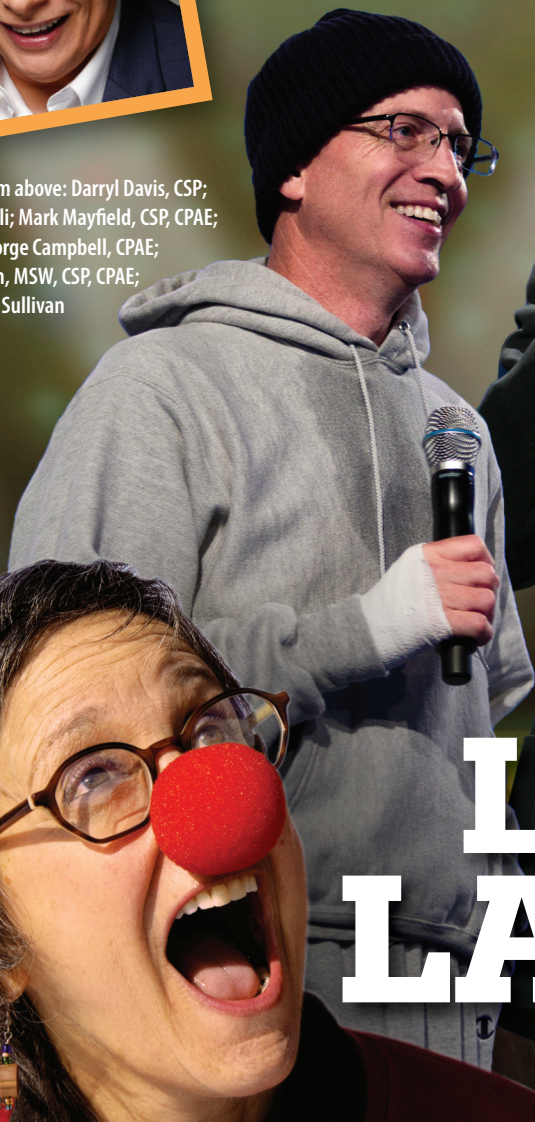


# SPEAKER



Clockwise from above: Darryl Davis, CSP;  
Kerri Pomarolli; Mark Mayfield, CSP, CPAE;  
Lisa Mills; George Campbell, CPAE;  
Ron Culbertson, MSW, CSP, CPAE;  
and Julie Ann Sullivan



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PAGE 42**

# LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING

**THE HUMOR ISSUE**



# FUNNY **IS** MONEY

## 5 tips to take your comedy to the next level (and increase your fees!)

**I** can't say I remember much about fourth-grade math except that my teacher told a joke about fractions and a donkey, and I laughed so hard chocolate milk came spewing out of my nose. I remember Mr. DeRoo as the only teacher who made math mean something to me before I realized God created calculators.

And no matter what our topic, don't we as speakers want our content to remain memorable and meaningful? I mean, isn't that what we're all going for—to

make our audiences spit up whatever they're drinking? #Winning!

If you ask an audience member about the most impactful thing about a speaker they just heard, the funny moments will top the list. We love to laugh. And when you surprise your 2 p.m. half-asleep conference crowd with a funny moment, you win their attention.

"Using humor breaks down walls and defenses in my keynotes and allows me to deliver content in a way that is easy to 'digest,'" says Vicki Hitzges, CSP.



BY KERRI POMAROLLI







## Can Funny Make Money?

So, are there really more profits in punchlines?

Just ask Kelly Swanson, who has said, “The funnier I am, the more I get paid! Laughs are currency.”

Devin Henderson, CSP, adds, “Since I started adding more humor in my keynotes, my income is three times what it was last year.”

My NSA clients have told me time after time that funny is where the money is. But the big obstacle for most is this: What if I’m not funny? Can it be taught?

Let me, as a professional stand-up comedian and coach, give you the cold hard truth: I cannot teach you to be naturally funny. Steve Martin, Jim Carrey and other comics were just picked on too much during childhood.

We ended up with a twisted kind of thinking.

But the good news? There is no one who can’t learn to put humor in their keynotes and “fake it ’til they make it.” With the right material inserted in the right places, you can look like a comedy all-star, and how you got there will be your little secret.

What about serious subjects, you ask? One client asked me to help her speak to a group of young women about math. I gave her the opening line: “If you don’t think math is sexy, you haven’t seen Matt Damon in *Good Will Hunting*!” See?! Any subject can be humorous, even if just for one moment.

Here are a few tips to take your keynote to the next level of funny.



## You need a great opening joke.

This can be a line that you can insert into any speech and you know it will work. When I go on stage, I sometimes open with, “I’m sorry my kids couldn’t be here . . . They’re in the car!” That’s a general opening that gets a chuckle and lets my audience know they’re going to have fun.

You can find a great joke several ways: Ask funny friends to help you brainstorm; hire a comedy coach to help you add humor throughout your speech; or stop random strangers and see if you can make them laugh on the street. We call that guerilla comedy!

P.S. Don’t pay attention when your 9-year-old says to you, “I just don’t get it. People think you’re funny?”



## Practice the funny lines aloud.

Indeed, 99 percent of great comedy is timing. Those brilliant impromptu moments we all love on stage—I guarantee you—have been honed hundreds of times over the years. You have to feel confident about your material being funny before you hit the stage. Some of us learn the hard way.

“When I wrote my signature keynote,” Elizabeth McCormick says, “there were so many things I thought were funny . . . until I had an audience.”

Just because you think something is funny doesn’t mean your audience will, too. I will call friends all the time and say, “Do you think this is funny?” If I don’t get an audible laugh over the phone at least three times, I won’t even consider putting that story up on stage until it’s right.







### **Find something funny about the industry or client.**

Do this and they will think you are masterful. Meeting planners will applaud that you went the extra mile to personalize your speech just for them. For example, if you're speaking for a group of accountants, you might say, "Everyone, shout some advice at me right now and then you can write this event off on your taxes!"

Another good idea is to make a comment about the city you're in that's humorous. Research the local culture, sports teams, restaurants, landmarks, etc. When I speak in Arizona in the summer, I might say, "I've always wanted to know what it's like to walk . . . on the sun! Oh, I know, it's dry heat! That's what you guys tell yourselves so you can sleep at night!"



### **Study the art of comedy.**

Watch your favorite funny people in action, and see what you can learn about delivering funny material.

NSA member and my first teacher, Judy Carter, wrote a brilliant book called *The Comedy Bible*. It breaks down the art of constructing a joke. If reading isn't your style, just get out of the house and head to a comedy club and see some live performers! And then I'm sure you'll wish all your audiences had a "two-drink minimum" to make you seem more hilarious!



### **You get to make fun of only yourself.**

The best advice I can give here is to be self-deprecating and share funny stories. Always make sure you aren't making fun of anyone but yourself. You don't want to anger your audience by offending them unintentionally. And besides, we're speakers. You know we have tons of material about ourselves to work with! This also lets the audience know you're not coming from a place of pretension, but you're just like they are with your struggles and mishaps. They can identify with you and then listen even more intently to your content.

No matter how you choose to incorporate humor into your keynotes, I can guarantee you one thing: I've never heard a meeting planner say, "They were just too darn funny!" I hope these tips have been helpful and will send you down the yellow brick road to Funny Land. Or better yet, down that cash-paved highway to more bookings and higher speaker fees!

P.S. I'm also available for parties and bar mitzvahs.



*Kerri Pomarolli is a stand-up comedian and speaker with 29 appearances on The Tonight Show, CNN News, Good Morning America and Comedy Central.*

*She coaches speakers on how to find their funny bone. Go to [www.thelaughdr.com](http://www.thelaughdr.com) and [www.kerripom.com](http://www.kerripom.com).*