

They particularly don't recognize the *power* of humor. That lightening the atmosphere can actually strengthen your hand. In any meeting or event, being able to use humor shows you in such *control*, and so much at *ease*, that you can afford to lighten up a sober or important situation, and by doing so, lighten the atmosphere for everyone. What control! Powerful! And so welcomed by everyone you're dealing with.

Humor has the additional benefit of *disarming* everyone and cutting tension. To break that toe-to-toe stance allows everyone to put the fists or the defensive armor down for a minute and start afresh.

And isn't that what the Exec wants to do? Doesn't he want to make Mike *listen* and *think*, without the need to put on a show for the boss? To effect some real changes in Mike's seemingly conditioned pattern?

The Exec can afford to lighten up, too, because it's his/her meeting. Since he's running it, he can choose to lighten up whenever he/she needs to.

### *Compare*

Let's see if this approach, the planned surprise based on knowing what Mike expects, would make all that happen.

How would Mike react?

- Surprised at the calm, open environment created by the boss, Mike drops some of his defensiveness and thinks: "Hey, this may not be as bad as I thought!"
- "You thought I'd pound on the table . . ." says the boss. Mike thinks: "That's right! That's just what I was afraid of. He really does understand my side, too. I never knew that."
- "But that's not very constructive . . ." says the boss. Mike gets the word that this will be a constructive meeting, not a recriminatory one.
- Exec: "Make me feel much better . . . giving me a *lot* of grief . . . creating a problem . . ." Mike: "I never thought of it that way before—'grief,' 'a problem,' for *him*!"
- Exec: ". . . creating a problem for the *whole group*." Mike: What does he mean, the *whole group*? How? It's not about them—it's about *me* and my reports, isn't it?"

See what's happening? Remember the Exec's original goals?