

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

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# Being funny is a serious career move

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Colleagues who make others laugh are seen as more self-confident, more competent, and higher in status, according to a series of US experiments.

Twitter chief Bruce Daisley used to have the wrong photo on his LinkedIn feed, as he explained on the MediaCom Connected Podcast this month. Instead of his happy smiling face, for a long time he had a picture of British comedian Bob Monkhouse, a man who frankly does not bear much physical resemblance to Bruce.

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Not many people are that aware of Monkhouse these days. Jon Culshaw calls him the “Rolls Royce of gag tellers”. The only joke of his I can remember is this, “They laughed at me when I said that when I grew up I wanted to be a comedian. Well they’re not laughing

now.”

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Bruce takes comedy seriously. He says that he “laughs every day in his job”, which might be a key part of his road to career success.

Being funny really drives status.

Colleagues who make others laugh are seen as more self-confident, competent and higher in status, according to a series of experiments by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School and Harvard Business School and reported by WSJ.

The average British worker has over 6,000 meetings during the course of their career. It would be a bit grim if none of them made you laugh.

The right sort of humour is crucial however.

During the course of writing *The Glass Wall*, Kathryn and I came across a gender divide as far as humour is concerned.

There might be a culture of banter in the workplace that blokes find incredibly funny, and women find very excluding, even if they laugh along with the jokes.

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Creative legend Dave Trott explained the gender divide with his own joke, “Men insult each other all the time in the workplace, but they don’t really mean it. Women compliment each other all the time at work, and they also don’t really mean it.”

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This led us to ask, Do women take “funny” seriously enough as a career boosting technique, and do men allow them to do so?

One story that didn’t make it into our book involved a young account director at a creative agency who was specifically told by her boss (a man) not to open a presentation with a joke, because it was inappropriate for her status in the agency.

Was it because he thought it wasn't a funny joke? Or was it because he didn't like the idea that she was funny?

There was a media storm last year when a City receptionist was sent home because her heels weren't high enough. Note that the story wasn't about whether or not she was smartly dressed (no one was suggesting that she was wearing trainers or flip flops).

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This led Times' journalist Deborah Ross to write, "No woman has been told (as far as I'm aware) that perhaps, after lunch, it might be a good idea to re-apply her wit if she wishes to get places... just lipstick and heels".

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On the contrary in *The Glass Wall*, we absolutely recognise the power of humour for women, both to respond to (and hopefully put a stop to) uncomfortable banter, and to win over your audience.

Everyone (regardless of gender) should consider putting the same amount of effort into devising the appropriate opening joke for a big presentation as they put into the rest of the content for that meeting.

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