



How To Use Humor With Negative People

© 2005 David Granirer

We all encounter them. People who constantly complain, blame others and are negative. They may be coworkers, acquaintances, or family members. I'm often asked, "What do you do to reach them with humor?" So let me try and answer this question in a way that addresses what I call "the psychology of negativity."

The behaviors we consider negative, such as obsessive complaining, blaming, and constant focus on what's bad are unconscious defense mechanisms. They protect people from the risk of developing relationships with others. Or to put it

another way, if people are able to keep everyone at a distance, they protect themselves from being rejected and hurt by another human being. Of course the downside of these defense mechanisms, which usually develop as the result of some early trauma or unmet needs, is that they prevent any relationships at all.

Healthy humor on the other hand, is a relationship builder. When people laugh together or share a moment of kindness, it increases their connection to each other. So with humor and negativity you have two opposing forces, one that creates relationship and one that resists it.

Thus when using humor with so-called

negative people keep in mind that their refusal to participate often has nothing to do with you and everything to do with their need to protect themselves. In other words, it's nothing personal.

Depending on how deeply entrenched people's defenses are, your success rate will vary. Some people will take a while to trust, but can be coaxed out of their shell. Others may not.

My definition of humor is: Acts involving some sort of surprise that make people feel good. So I'd recommend going out of your way to give a compliment or a kind word and then gauging the response you get. You may be surprised at how an act of kindness can get

through to someone.
Or not. The important
point is to decide how
far you want to go in
trying to reach a
person. And remember
that if his behavior
becomes destructive to
you, you have the right
to set boundaries and
protect yourself.

*Counsellor and stand up
comic David Granirer
leads Stand Up For
Mental Health, a
program teaching stand
up comedy to people
with mental illness as a
way of building
confidence and fighting
stigma. For more
information call (604)
205-9242 or go to
[http://www.standupfor
mentalhealth.com](http://www.standupfor
mentalhealth.com)*

*For information on his
humor in the workplace
presentations go to
www.psychocomic.com*