

Confusion

by Ulrik Remy

Sometimes, when there's nothing else to do, I like to confuse people. Actually, I like to confuse people, period. There's hardly anything more entertaining than counting teeth in a wide open mouth.

I discovered the joys of confusion on a rather prosaic subway ride in Paris, France. Somewhere in the middle of staring at my shoe tips and counting the broken neon tubes on the ceiling of that Metro car, I remembered a joke that a co-worker had told me a little earlier in the day. It was good joke, and I felt a giggle creeping up my throat.

Now, the way the world works, people will become concerned when you giggle without an obvious reason. You may refuse to laugh in a comedy show or a funny movie, you may be a rock of seriousness in a parliamentary debate where everybody else cracks up, nobody will take issue. But giggling or laughing without proper authorization – that is heavily frowned upon. Isn't that sad?

So I am sitting there, desperately trying to keep a straight face while the punch line of that joke goes on a rampage through my brain cells. And the more I try to fight it back, the more irresistible that giggle becomes – like air bubbles rising to the surface in an otherwise calm bath tub.

The reactions on the part of my fellow passengers were precious. The men would furtively glance down at themselves, the women would desperately pull down the seams of their skirts, as I covered my mouth with my left hand and wiped the tears from my eyes with my right –

Several months and an extended stay at one of the best mental institutions of France later, I decided to dedicate a solid portion of my remaining worldly existence to the great task of getting people confused. Since then life has become so much more colorful –

“Could you spell that for me, please?” Sure – T as in Texas, H as in Hovercraft, A as in Alabaster, and T as before –

“No, I mean, could you please spell your first name for me, please, Sir – “ Alright, if you wish – that's Y as in Yeti, O as in Onomatopoeia, U as in my first name –

I have left ineffaceable impressions on thousands of customer service reps. And on this police officer from Wellington, Florida who was just writing a ticket for one of the cars parked in front of a grocery store –

“Officer, Sir, please – I was in this store for less than two minutes – “

“Well, that's two minutes too many. This is a tow-away zone.”

“I can see that, Sir, but – if you have a heart, could you please cut me some slack here. I have two children and a puppy dog, and – “

“Sir, this is the country of the Rule Of Law, there is no such thing as 'cutting slack'!”

“I didn't mean to offend you, sir, but you know, that is why people hate cops. And I, for one – “

“Can I see your driver's license, please - and would you please step over here for a minute – “

“Sure, whatever. Here you are, my driver's license – “

“Proof of insurance - ?”

“I don't have insurance.”

“You don't have insurance? Don't you know you have to have insurance when you're driving a vehicle?”

“I am not driving a vehicle, sir. I don't own a vehicle.”

“You are – then – whose vehicle is that?”

“How am I supposed to know? I was just explaining to you that I have been in this store for less than two minutes - !”

I met him again, a few weeks later, as he was entertaining some toddlers in a day care facility. Nice man.

Truth be told, I discovered this technique in a book of the great Israeli writer Ephraim Kishon. Works like a charm, every time. Just like this one:

I: “How do I get to Hopkins, please?”

He: “Down U.S.1, second traffic light to the right.”

I: “No, that's Harrison.”

He: “Yes, you're right. Then, where's Hopkins?”

I: “Down to SR 50, make a right, first traffic light after the tracks – that's Hopkins”

I bet you a Dollar, he goes there and can't figure out why in the world –

I love confusing people. Some people say I'm pretty confusing myself.