COURSE OVERVIEW

There exists a mistaken belief in today's corporate world that we need to be serious all the time to be taken seriously. But research tells a different story. In this course, we delve into the behavioral science of humor to reveal why it is a secret weapon in leadership (and life) to yield influence, fuel creativity, defuse tension, foster resilience, and strengthen relationships on your teams and with customers.

You'll learn tools and frameworks for understanding your humor style (hint: everyone has one), how to read the style of others, and how to harness humor styles to become a more effective authentic leader at work. You'll practice applying concrete tools from the world of comedy to deploy humor effectively. You'll hear stories from inspiring leaders — in business, politics, entertainment, and professional sports — and the tactics they used to bridge the trust gap, boost engagement, and unlock agility in the face of change. You'll explore the nuances of navigating difficult, grey areas of humor and finally present a “Signature Story” - a one minute meaningful story infused with levity.

You will leave this class with both a practical toolkit and a fundamental shift in mindset: navigating your life on the precipice of a smile.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing the course, students will be able to:
Reframe. Reframe challenging personal and professional moments with evidence-backed approaches tied to happiness and well-being.
Apply. Use concrete techniques grounded in behavioral science and the world of comedy to bring humor effectively into work and leadership in authentic ways.
Navigate the grey. De-risk humor; understand why humor fails happen, how to avoid them, and what to do when you accidentally cross a line.
Teambuild. Apply strategies to create more bonded, effective, and creative teams.
Storytell. Develop a signature story to present their personal and professional narratives in more engaging, memorable, and filled with levity.

FACULTY

Jennifer Aaker
General Atlantic Professor, Stanford GSB
jaaker@stanford.edu
Jennifer is a behavioral scientist and leading expert on what creates meaning vs happiness in life, how to use time in unconventional ways, and how to infuse more purpose at work. Her work has been widely published in scientific journals and featured in The Economist, NYT, WSJ, The Atlantic, and Science. A recipient of the Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award and the MBA Professor of the Year, Aaker counts winning a dance-off in the early 1990s among her greatest feats.

Naomi Bagdonas
Lecturer in Management, Stanford GSB
nbagdonas@stanford.edu
Naomi helps leaders build more innovative, collaborative, and joyful work cultures (and lives). She facilitates innovation sessions for Fortune 100 companies, advises executives and celebrities for appearances ranging from Saturday Night Live to company All Hands meetings to political campaign speeches, and teaches improv comedy in the SF county jail. Formally trained at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater, Naomi's favorite role was in the writer's room of the 2015 GSB Show.

Connor Diemand-Yauman
Lecturer in Management, Stanford GSB
connordy@stanford.edu
Connor is Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Merit America, which trains low-wage, diverse workers for high growth jobs. Prior to Merit America, he founded Philanthropy University (the largest educator of social impact organizations worldwide), starred in an Asian children's education show (while in drag), published learning science research (not in drag), worked at multiple edtech startups and lost on two reality shows.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance matters. Excused absences don't affect your grade (as defined by GSB). You may miss 1 class unexcused with no impact to the grade. You can make up a second unexcused absence with an assignment. To notify the team of your absence, email Keala (kealaa@stanford.edu) in advance.

WHEN & WHERE

Spring 2023, Tuesdays (April 11 till May 30)
2:50-5:50 PM (Section 1) and 6:00-9:00 PM (Section 2)
GSB Colab

CLASS MATERIALS

Humor, Seriously: Why Humor is a Secret Weapon in Business and Life (suggested)

OFFICE HOURS

By appt; request with reckless abandon!
### MINDSET
**DAY 1**
April 11 @ CoLab
**THE POWER OF HUMOR**

We’ll start with a grounding in the power of humor and the misperceptions that hold us back from using it at work. We’ll explore the relationship between levity, humor, and comedy, and you’ll learn about your unique humor style. You’ll start making small mindset shifts to find levity in your life.

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**DAY 2**
April 18 @ CoLab
**ANKY OF FUNNY**

We’ll delve into the world of comedy, exploring what makes something humorous, training our brains to look at the world through a different lens, and crafting humor using proven techniques from professional comedians. You’ll practice writing and delivering humor using these tactics.

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**DAY 3**
April 25 @ CoLab
**SIGNATURE STORIES**

Maybe you intuitively understand the power of humor and have plenty of it in your personal life, but you struggle to incorporate it at work. You’ll learn a set of simple tools to help you start using more of it strategically in your day-to-day work, and then you’ll put those tools to practice.

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**DAY 4**
May 2 @ CoLab
**HUMOR TO LEAD**

Status changes the game. We’ll explore how to harness humor to lead and flex your style in a leadership role. You’ll learn strategies for balancing authority and approachability and see how a wide range of leaders (from business, sports, and politics) make a habit of using humor authentically and effectively.

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**DAY 5**
May 9 @ CoLab
**GRAY AREAS OF HUMOR**

What people find funny (and appropriate) is far from universal, and no one nails it every time. We’ll dive into the gray areas of humor, exploring why humor fails happen, how to read the room, and what to do when you accidentally cross a line. You’ll gain tools to recognize, diagnose, and make it right.

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**DAY 6**
May 16 @ CoLab
**YOUR LIFE WITH LEVITY**

Don’t get us wrong: we care about you being a badass business titan. But we care more about you using the concepts from this course to lead a meaningful, resilient, connected, and joyful life. Core to this journey is designing for levity in our life. Our lives are our remembered stories; we get to choose the genre.

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**DAY 7**
May 23 @ CoLab
**CULTURES OF LEVITY**

Great leaders don’t just harness humor themselves; they create the conditions for humor to come from anywhere. We’ll explore how to create a culture of levity and play in your teams and organizations, and you’ll be challenged to transform a culture of your own in small but meaningful ways.

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**DAY 8**
May 30 @ CEMEX
**TAKING THE STAGE**

We’ll share your Signature Story with the class, bringing to life the power of balancing gravity with levity. We’ll share a toolkit for taking the learnings forward and pop champagne and sparkling waters to celebrate you becoming a humor hero in just eight short weeks. Look at you go!

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<th><strong>COCKTAIL HOUR</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Kives</td>
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<td>Stacey Abrams</td>
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<td>Terry Crews</td>
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<td>Leslie Blodgett</td>
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<td>Bob Sternfels</td>
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**PREPARATION**

- **Read:** Humor is Serious Business by Joel Stein [Link]
- **Read:** The Cost of Being Humorless by Joel Stein [Link]

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**PREPARATION**

- **Read:** How to Write a Joke
- **Watch:** What Key & Peele Teach Us About Comedy
- **Case:** Sara Blakely (Spanx): Using Humor to Launch a Company
- **Case:** Leading with Humor
- **Read:** Pretty Good Advice

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**PREPARATION**

- **Read:** Link Between Happiness and a Sense of Humor
- **Case:** Levity at McKinsey

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**PREPARATION**

- **Case:** Terry Crews: Becoming Unembarrassable
- **Read:** Richard Branson and Joan Oelwang (Virgin): Play is Where the Real Work Happens
- **Read:** Signature Story

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**DUE BEFORE CLASS**

- Humor Typology Quiz
- Humor Audit & Mine Your Life (I)
- Mino Your Life (Q) & Headlines
- LinkedIn with Levity
- Gray Areas of Humor & Signature Story Interview
- Levity List
- Signature Story
- Humor Seriously Playbook submission