

FINALWORD

Good Humor

Carol Ann Small teaches Bostonians to laugh through stressful times.

By Una LaMarche

CAROL ANN SMALL, a licensed stress-management consultant who calls herself a “motivational humorist,” is the one-woman band behind *Laughter with a Lesson*, a business that offers a unique perspective on the benefits of finding humor in the workplace and everyday life. Ever since she made her performing debut at age five, on the *Bozo the Clown* show, Small has been offering audiences across the country an enlightening message: Laughter heals. A veteran of many odd jobs (“emphasis on the odd,” she adds), Small imparts wisdom with a twist of comedy. She counseled *Boston Common* on accepting change, eating well, and learning lessons—with laughter, of course—for the coming year.

TECHNOLOGY AS A SOURCE OF STRESS

“Battling burnout has [become] my number-one program. People are overwhelmed. Take technology—I mean, it’s really freed us. But on the other hand, remember when being on the cutting edge of technology was upgrading to a four-slice toaster? Now there are so many new things. Last year there was also a real fear of the unknown, with the election and the economic crisis. I think now that Obama has been elected, people are calming down.”

“New Year’s resolution: to limit myself to one cup of coffee per day. But it will be a CUP of coffee.”

SMILING WHILE YOU WORK

“I’m actually busier because of the economic crisis. Companies hire me to come in and boost morale because everyone is so stressed with all of the changes going on. And I always say, if we didn’t change, we’d still be in kindergarten with ‘left’ and ‘right’ written on our shoes. Whenever a bad thing happens, it’s important to have a sense of humor about it. I read that 86 percent of CEOs prefer [employees] with a sense of humor. I also heard that a coworker will regard you 10 times more positively when you smile. Even when you take your work seriously, you should take yourself lightly.”

HEALTHY BODIES AND HAPPY MINDS

“We all watch the news: It’s fire, flood, locusts! You have to put blinders on, like a horse. It’s important to take a break, even for a few minutes, to focus on something positive. I think people need to lighten up when times are dire. In addition to using humor, I emphasize eating well to de-stress. If you are what you eat, do you really want to be a Twinkie or a Ding Dong? Taking care of yourself, exercising, and eating right can go a long way.”

RESOLVING TO HAVE A BETTER NEW YEAR

“January is the worst. But just think, you have a whole year to have fun breaking your New Year’s resolutions! Make one or two, not 20. Have fun, and don’t feel guilty if you break them. It’s easier to start a new habit than to break an old one. If you say, ‘I’m going to take a walk every day,’ that’s easier than saying, ‘I’m not going to eat chocolate cake.’ It makes a difference to your brain; it’s more positive. I mean, no pastry cart has ever gotten a flat tire on its way to my table. But it’s important not to be too hard on yourself.”

Laughter with a Lesson, 97 Linwood Avenue, Melrose, 781-662-2078; laughterwithalesson.com.

