EPISODE 17 // SHOW NOTES

The Serious Business of Laughing

A fifteen-minute pause in a noisy world — with Paul Cleworth

The Steady Path
Green Farm, Bendish
SG4 8JD
~15 minutes per episode

THE BIG IDEA

Laughing isn't the opposite of being serious. The daft kind — a man who thinks he's been called Shirley — and the kind that happens in a war are doing the same job: a few minutes when the hard thing isn't in charge. Adrian Cronauer in a jeep and Axel Foley at a hotel desk are the same man, with the same weapon. And the funniest person in the room is often the one keeping a perfectly straight face.

"Surely you can't be serious." "I am serious. And don't call me Shirley."
— Airplane!, Abrahams, Zucker & Zucker, 1980
They hired serious actors and asked them to play it straight. The funniest man in the film is the one being the most serious.

"Good morning, Vietnam!"
— Good Morning, Vietnam, Barry Levinson, 1987
A suspended DJ, a traffic jam and a convoy of very young soldiers. For two minutes, they weren't alone with it.

EPISODE OVERVIEW

The Hook	"Don't call me Shirley." Played dead straight.
The Proverb	Bernard Righton: unless you're asthmatic…
The Hotel Room	Norman Cousins and the Marx Brothers.
The Jeep	Robin Williams, a traffic jam, two minutes.
The Stoic	Seneca: more human to laugh than lament.
The Hotel Desk	Axel Foley: no reservation. Then a suite.
The Weapon	Twain: nothing can stand against laughter.
Three Kinds	Stupid, outrageous — and plain silly.
The Suit	When did we all get so serious?
The Practice	Something stupid. Someone. Yourself.

WHY 'LAUGHING'?

In investing — a bad year is easier to sit through if you can still laugh. Not at the loss — at yourself, checking the app again.

In family life — nobody remembers what was on. They remember who was on the sofa, and who laughed first.

In business — you can do a serious job, with a straight face, and still be the funniest person in the room. Ask Leslie Nielsen.

In life — ten minutes when the hard thing isn't in charge is not a distraction. It's how people get through.

"When did I last laugh until it hurt?"

— and who was I with? Then ring them. That's the whole of the homework.

STOIC & OTHER WISDOM

"It is more human to laugh at life than to lament over it."
SENECA · ON TRANQUILLITY OF MIND, 15

"Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand."
MARK TWAIN · THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

"There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour."
CHARLES DICKENS · A CHRISTMAS CAROL, STAVE THREE

"No one is laughed at who begins by laughing at himself."
SENECA · ON THE FIRMNESS OF THE WISE PERSON, 17

REFERENCES THIS EPISODE

FILM

Airplane! (1980) · Good Morning, Vietnam (1987) · Beverly Hills Cop (1984) · Blazing Saddles (1974)

MUSIC

Monty Python — Always Look on the Bright Side of Life (1979) · Harold Faltermeyer — Axel F (1984)

BOOKS & THINKERS

Anatomy of an Illness — Norman Cousins · On Tranquillity of Mind — Seneca · On the Firmness of the Wise Person — Seneca · A Christmas Carol — Dickens · The Mysterious Stranger — Twain · The Merchant of Venice — Shakespeare · Bernard Righton, 1995

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THE STEADY PATH PRINCIPLE

Watch something stupid. Laugh with someone. Laugh at yourself.

THIS EPISODE'S REFLECTION QUESTION

"When did I last laugh until it hurt — and who was I with?"

Then ring them. Proper, helpless laughter is something that happens between people.

COMING UP — EPISODE 18

Character Is Everything

A word nobody uses any more — and the Stoics' whole point.

Platoon, Batman, Michael Jackson and Bonnie Tyler — and the case for being good.

TAKE THIS WITH YOU You can keep a perfectly straight face and still be the funniest person in the room.

Slow down. Think clearly. Keep walking your steady path.

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