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Even Fundraisers Need A Break Now and Again

By Richard DeVeau

There's nothing funny about people losing their livelihoods, their homes or their dignity. There's no humor in the collapse of the stock market, the housing market or the job market. But with every news medium bombarding us each and every day with doom and gloom that seems to be even dooier and glooier than the day before, and everyone we meet professionally, at the supermarket or in our neighborhoods repeating the same news as soon as we enter into a conversation, I've been finding myself close to collapsing under all this negative weight. If you're like me, then you probably need a break right about now, too.

I'm not looking to hide my head in the sand. I don't want a placebo, although the thought of a chemical numbing agent of some kind has been a tempting one. I just want a breather. A break. I just want an opportunity to not take myself, or what's going on around me, so seriously — even if only for a brief and fleeting moment. Plus, those of us who work in the nonprofit world also usually already are dealing with significant and demanding needs of some kind or other — whether they're social, spiritual, cultural or environmental — and sometimes even life and death are at stake.

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So we're doubly whammied when all that's going on in the rest of the world also hits the proverbial fan.

So I decided I'd do what I often do as a matter of course, simply because I'm built that way — I'm finding something to read, watch or listen to that makes me laugh. And as I'm social-media-connected these days, I'm thinking of something funny to post or write on my Facebook and Twitter pages. As a result, I've found it hard to be depressed if I'm laughing, even if it's only for a minute — or for a bit longer if I'm trying to come up with something funny to write.

So I'd like to propose two simple steps that I've been taking lately to help take a bit of the edge off of the recession's realities. You might also find them helpful. You might even find them funny. If you find them both, even better.

1. Visit The Onion's Web site every day or two. I know that one of the dangers of humor is that it tends to be very subjective, and we all don't find the same things funny. But I think there's something for everyone on this Web site. If you don't find a headline like "Obama Depressed, Distant Since 'Battlestar Galactica' Series Finale" funny, then perhaps something like this will tickle your funny bone): "Renowned Hoo-Ha Doctor Wins Nobel Prize For Medical Advancements Down There." Or you could always look up your Onion horoscope, which for Virgo the week of this writing was: "The eyes in that painting will seem to follow you around the room, which is quite odd for a Jackson Pollock." And if not The Onion, there are tons of sites that can provide you with your daily dose of humor. Find a few that suit you, and become a regular visitor.

2. If you're not using social media, you should be. And if and when you do, then you should share some of the funny stuff you find on the Web with the rest of us by posting a link to it. Or try a funny retort to something

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someone else has posted. I love nothing more than having someone respond to a quip I wrote with "LOL." But please stay away from personal attacks, put-downs or general nastiness, which are never funny.

If your kids said or did something that's funny or touching, let's hear it. Or, if you're like me and find yourself to be one of your own greatest sources for humor, then write it down and share it on Twitter or Facebook so the rest of us can laugh with you ... or even at you. You don't need to be a staff writer for "The Simpsons" to come up with a good quip or two every once and a while. I'm proof of that. All you need is the ability to look at yourself or at life from a slightly skewed perspective.

For example, a week or two ago I wrote on my Facebook and Twitter pages, "Richard just lost twelve pounds. No, wait, there they are." I know Dave Letterman won't be calling me anytime soon, but I thought it was funny. Apparently, based on the responses I received to the post, so did a lot of other people.

And that's the whole point. We are all in this mess together. And while this deep, record-breaking recession is all very serious business, we still need to laugh in spite of it, or I'd even go so far to say because of it.

The French writer, Romain Cary, once wrote, "Humor is an affirmation of man's dignity, a declaration of man's superiority to all that befalls him."

I think it's time for us to find a way each day to declare our superiority over what is currently befalling all of us by having a good laugh together. I think we owe this gift to each other — because I, for one, can't start crying. I'm afraid if I do I might not be able to stop. So did you hear the one about the ...

Richard DeVeau freelances for a number of nonprofit organizations and the communications agencies that serve them, as writer/creative director/owner of Richard DeVeu Creative, and he can be heard laughing out loud every time he passes a mirror.