

PUNCH LINE

From: Horace Hello, PhD, Manager, Strategic Analysis

To: Cynthia Diamond, Director, Human Resources

Subject: Resignation

Hello, Cynthia. I have been with the department for almost 12 years. In that time I like to think I've made a few meaningful contributions to the successful operations of our section and to the organization as a whole. As you no doubt will recall, over those years I have maintained a devotion to classic comedy (here I remind you of last year's Christmas party). The time has come for me to work full time at the business of making people laugh. I have a book project underway, and at the age of 55 (I know, I know, it's hard to believe), it is time for me finally to follow my dream and, I hope, bring a little joy to my fellow fellows and fe-fellows.

I realize it's a requirement to give notice of two weeks, but I'm certainly willing to stay longer—up to six weeks if that would be helpful.

I've found my work here fulfilling, and I've made friendships that I trust will outlast my tenure.

Best, Horace

From: Cynthia Diamond

To: Horace Hello

Subject: Notice of intent to resign

Hello, Dr. Hello:

Thank you for your email. We will do our best to facilitate a smooth—not to say speedy—transition for you. An information package is being prepared and will come to you by the end of business today. The length of your tenure with us is certainly hard to believe. You are in many ways a fixture, one that feels decades long. It will be difficult to imagine not being regularly asked why some critter or another crossed the road. Your humor certainly had the quality of regularity.

Thank you for offering an extended notice period, but we wouldn't want to impose that on you when you have your future to attend to. Indeed, it is my plan to have you embark on your exciting future by the end of this week.

I certainly shall remember last year's Christmas party, not just now, but I suspect always. Your performance was capped off by the question, "Why did the magpie stand in the road?" Answer: "To eat a dead gopher." Memorable, I assure you, especially coming, as it did, immediately before dinner.

Best, Ms. C. Diamond

To: Otto Mattik, Editor in Chief, Joke Publishers, Inc.

From: Dr. Horace Hello, Author, Provocateur, Laugh Therapist

Subject: New book concept

Dear Otto:

In my last query letter to you, I proposed a volume of jokes based on the classic why-did-the-chicken-cross-the-road model. With amusement, you might recall one of the samples I sent you: Why did the raven fall from the tree?

Because he was raven mad.

(Chuckle pause.)

Attached is a further sample, this one with a dozen terrific jokes. My wife loves them. As I sat in his office, my bank manager practically passed out from laughter (there's more to that story, though, but still); my dentist may have actually wet himself when I delivered No. 3 with both his fists in my mouth. I don't mean to brag, but honestly, these are side-splitters. I know you weren't that keen on the last batch I sent you, and maybe you had a point about the appropriateness of a joke about a pole-vaulting dwarf, but honestly, these new ones are fresh, imaginative, and, most of all, funny.

Cheers,

Horace Hello, PhD

Attention: Otto Mattik, Editor in Chief, Joke Publishers, Inc.

More Fantastic Funnies from Horace Hello

(Note: Under Canadian Law, these jokes are copyright protected.)

A sonnet and a sestina walk into a bar. After a while the bartender says, "How 'bout a little poetry, boys?"

"Sorry," says the sestina. "No free verse."

A giraffe rushes into a bar. Less than a minute later, another giraffe rushes into the same bar. The bartender says, "I see you boys are running neck and neck."

A man walks into a bar. The bartender asks, "What'll it be?" The man says, "A double crème de menthe. Neat." (That's the joke! Get it? No one drinks crème de menthe.)

A man walks into a bar, but he leaves right away because he hates chocolate.

A man walks into a bar. He's carrying a rabbit in a cage. "What's with the caged rabbit?" asks the bartender.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm afraid of losing my hare."

A man walks into a bar. Under his arm he carries a plush pillow, which he sets carefully on the carved wooden seat. "I get it," says the bartender to his customer. "A stool softener."

A construction worker walks into a bar. He has a drink. Pays for it. Walks out. Two minutes later he comes back. Orders another drink. The bartender says, "You're back already?"

"Yes," says the man. "Can't help it. All day I work with rebar."

A phrenologist walks into a bar and hands the bartender a résumé. The bartender skims through it. "I notice you have a career as a phrenologist," he says. "Why are you giving that up?"

"Too hard to get ahead."

A man walks up to a food truck. (Not a bar, Otto, but same idea.) He asks

the cook for a hamburger and offers to pay for it with a copy of his PhD thesis.

"Not a chance," says the cook. "No food for thought here."

Two men are sitting at a bar. They start chatting. "What do you do for a living?" one man asks the other.

"I just started writing joke books."

"Oh. Anything I might have heard?"

"I hope not," says the writer. "My first title was *Jokes for the Terminally Ill: 150 Pages to Cheer Up a Dying Loved One.*"

"Nice sentiment," says the first man, "but a bit of a downer."

"Yeah," says the writer, "and that wasn't the only problem."

"What was, then?"

"No repeat business."

"What are you working on now?"

"*A Hundred Jokes for Fishers: Laughing Just for the Halibut.*"

The first man says nothing. Takes a gulp from his glass. Continues to perch on his stool.

Two men are talking at a bar. One complains to the other: "My brother-in-law went broke."

"What happened?"

"He was in finance."

"So?"

"Too small a customer base. He specialized in loaning money to exterminators. It's hard to make it as an infestment banker."

Hello biography

Horace Hello, PhD, lives in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada. He has a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from the Royal Academy of Applied Writing in Saskatchewan and a PhD in the sociology of humor from Nobel Distance Learning Academy, Cambridge (Ontario).

He once sold a joke to *Reader's Digest* (August 2003). He also contributes humor to anyone undertaking a public speaking engagement such as a talk, a toast to the bride, a graduation address, or a memorial service. He writes a blog, *Hello, Hello.ca*, on which there have been several hits. None has caused serious damage.

He is married to Lola Hello (née Hoti), one of his biggest fans despite their age gap (37 years) and their cultural one (she is Albanian and speaks little English).

While laughing to the point of tears, she recently asked, "Was is 'hal-ee-but'?"

To: Horace Hello

From: Otto Mattik, Editor in Chief, Joke Publishing

Subject: Rejection!

Dr. Hello:

As you have doubtless noticed over the many, many months of our correspondence (or has it been years, decades perhaps?), it is my custom to gently begin these rejection letters by thanking writers for their contributions, for their interest in having us publish their work, for their dedication to making people laugh. Here I break with that practice.

You have submitted three full manuscripts, each more than 150 pages, to Joke Publishing. That, to my rough calculation, amounts to 413 jokes (not counting today's additional dozen). We've rejected each manuscript and

complimented exactly one joke (the one about the space alien and the plastic wrap), and it was marginal. So I'm writing today not to thank you but to beg you. Please do not send us any more manuscripts. Do not send any more sample jokes. Just stop it.

If I was to characterize your jokes, I would say they feature bad timing, bad rhythm, predictability (of the worst kind, the kind that's accompanied by dread), and a certain slavish attachment to a form that was last popular some decades ago when jokes were rarely off-color and television was black and white. But let me skip all that. Instead let me say that we at Joke Publishing are people of remarkable flexibility. We're really only looking for one thing when we buy one joke or a book of jokes: humor. And your jokes, Dr. Hello, are not funny. They are seldom even amusing. On those very rare occasions when they prompt even a modest smile (and I'm talking here of a smile that would make the Mona Lisa's look like a goofy grin), it is because they are derivative. Dr. Hello, your jokes range from familiar to tedious to tiresome.

I have no idea what subject you have your doctorate in, but my bet is electrical engineering or perhaps entomology. If it was possible to get a PhD in bookkeeping, I'd guess that. Maybe it's soil sciences. (I interrupt here to warn you away from writing anything about dirty jokes.) Maybe your doctorate is in archeology, a subject in which everything studied is dead and much of it remains buried. Whatever it is, Dr. Hello, please go back to it. I'm sure your colleagues miss you in ways we never will.

Truly, Dr. Hello, your efforts at humor are nothing to laugh at.

Sincerely,

Otto Mattik, Editor in Chief, Joke Publishing

To: Otto Mattik

From: Dr. Horace Hello, Author, Provocateur, Laugh Therapist

Subject: Rejection

Dear Otto:

Thank you so much for your last letter. I must say your admiration for the alien-and-the-plastic-wrap joke was gratifying. (Actually, it was aluminum foil, but still...) To have a leading figure in my field compliment my work is a gratifying moment, one I'll not soon forget. I shall keep writing. And let me assure you, I will work with determination to continue improving the spontaneity and originality of my work. You truly are an inspiration to me, Otto.

I left my employment recently. I did so in order to have the time and energy to throw myself into the serious business of making people laugh.

We, Otto, and those men and women like us, have a calling, a mission, really, to bring humor to those who suffer from depression, discouragement, loneliness, illness—or who otherwise are simply boring. It may well be that when I'm good enough, you and I can work together, in the words of the space alien with the aluminum wrap, to “foil all those who resist” a good joke. (Chuckle pause.)

In the meantime I will continue to send you the occasional *bon mot* by way of a progress report. Again, thank you so much for the consideration, the stern feedback, and the mentorship. Yes, the mentorship.

Best. Hello, here.

Don McMan