

GETTING THE MOST FOR YOUR COMEDY DOLLAR, by Marian Kelly.

After nearly 20 years of doing standup, I've learned about a thousand ways NOT to put on a comedy show! I humbly offer the benefit of my experience to you, so I can present the caliber of show we both want.

Comedy is a unique entertainment form. You are paying good money for a professional performer, so protect your investment by providing a favorable environment. **Comedy clubs** know that there are two main elements in a successful show: **focus** and **intimacy**.

Focus. Distractions are the enemy of the comedy show. It is possible, for example, to enjoy a music show while carrying on a conversation, but comedy requires the *undivided attention* of the audience. If you miss one syllable of the joke, then the joke isn't funny.

Intimacy. Comedians need to see their audiences' faces to feel connected. Also, laughter is contagious. Get the audience up close to each other, and close to the performer.

Comedy Do's

Do choose a venue that is conducive to a comedy show. Each audience member must be able to clearly see and hear the performer. Rooms with visual obstacles, poor lighting possibilities, and inadequate sound systems create a no-win situation.

Do locate the stage away from high-traffic areas such as bars, buffets, and rest rooms.

Do start on time. Give fair warning by dimming the lights, but don't let stragglers hold up the show. The audience becomes more fatigued every minute they sit.

Do seat the audience close together, and close to the stage. If there's a dance floor next to the stage, for example, fill it with chairs and remove them after the show.

Do shut down TV's, pool tables, video games, etc., and do it at least 30 minutes before show time, so the comedian isn't perceived as the bad guy.

Do light the stage from the front. Facial expressions help to "sell" the jokes.

Do instruct the serving staff to keep their voices down.

Do set up audio equipment for the spoken word as opposed to music (less bass, for instance).

Comedy Don'ts

Don't allow people to sit just anywhere. If there are only twenty people in the room, all twenty of them should be seated together, next to the stage. Don't let anyone sit in booths with backs to the stage, or in parts of the room that don't have a clear view of the stage.

Don't let your emcee tell dirty jokes. The emcee "sets the table" upon which the rest of the show is served. If the table is set with filth, then the whole meal tastes like filth.

Don't change the comedian's introduction. Read it as written and don't make jokes of her life story. That's her job.

Don't serve food during the show. You can't laugh with your mouth full. Make sure everyone is finished eating before you introduce your comedian.

Don't clear dishes during the show. Actually, all services are best suspended during the show. I once did an after-dinner performance in a nice convention center, and two minutes after I began speaking, the entire wait staff was dispatched to refill every one of the **600** guests' glasses with ice water. It sounded like Niagara Falls – not easy to talk over!