

Pay Attention To What You Laugh At

There are generally two reasons we laugh: the delightful (positive) or the unexpected/shocking (negative).

Unfortunately, in the moment we also don't really know which is which. **We rarely pay attention to what we're laughing at.**

This plays out often at parties, particularly among young people. One guest says something reprehensible (e.g. they insult others, or they joke about poor habits, their manipulation of others, their cynicism, or their lack of virtue etc). They quickly get a laugh from the people around them, and the conversation moves on.

If you asked most people their values, they wouldn't say that they are delighted by poor habits and manipulation and other reprehensible things. But laughing is an easy way to respond to the unconscious shock of a reprehensible statement. In the moment, we do it as if it's automatic (it may be).

It's too bad that laughter which comes from shock sounds about the same as laughter which comes from delight. The practical effect of that is that the person saying reprehensible things feels that you are in on their joke. They feel affirmed. And many conversations go just this way.

Instead of laughing next time, pause and take a second. Ask yourself if you actually approve of what was said. If you don't, stay there with the disapproval. Don't modify your face. Don't gloss over the bad taste of the person talking.

Pay attention to what you laugh at. Signal delight through laughter for the things you love, not the things you hate. You'll be doing a service yourself and others, and you'll be able to call out corrupt behavior in the world.