

# Laughter Increases Perceived Personal Warmth

## VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **Competent (adjective)** /'kɒm.pɪ.tənt/: Able to do something well or to a satisfactory standard.  
**Example:** People who laugh at their own blunders are often perceived as more competent.
2. **Authentic (adjective)** /ɔ: 'θen.trɪk/: Real, true, or what something is claimed to be; sincere.  
**Example:** Showing a natural reaction to a mistake makes a person seem more authentic.
3. **Blunder (noun)** /'blʌn.dər/: A serious or embarrassing mistake, usually caused by a lack of care.  
**Example:** Tripping in public is a common social blunder that most people experience.
4. **Evaluation (noun)** /ɪ.væl.ju 'eɪ.jən/: The process of judging or calculating the quality or value of something.  
**Example:** Constant fear of social evaluation can make a person feel very self-conscious.
5. **Insensitive (adjective)** /ɪn 'sen.sɪ.tɪv/: Not noticing or caring about other people's feelings or hardships.  
**Example:** Laughing when someone else is hurt makes you appear insensitive to their pain.



Imagine you are walking down a busy street with friends when you suddenly trip and fall. Fortunately, you are unhurt, but how do you respond? Do you blush with embarrassment, attempt to hide your emotions, or laugh at your own clumsiness? According to recent psychological research, your reaction significantly influences how others perceive your character. If your goal is to appear warm, competent, and authentic, laughter is the most effective response.

Researchers from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States conducted six distinct experiments to analyze how individuals are judged based on their reactions to minor errors. These mistakes are often referred to as "faux pas"—a French term used in English to describe social gaffes or personal blunders, such as forgetting a name or knocking over an object in a shop. Generally, these incidents are minor and do not result in any actual harm or cruelty.

The study involved over 3,200 participants who were presented with various scenarios and photographs of people reacting to their own social errors. The data revealed that individuals who laughed at their mistakes were judged far more positively than those who did not. "Laughing at yourself signals self-acceptance, and we tend to admire people who accept their own flaws," explained researcher Ovul Sezer. These individuals recognize that while their actions might have been awkward, they were ultimately harmless.

In contrast, participants who reacted with visible embarrassment appeared more self-conscious to observers. This reaction suggests that the individual is overly focused on how they are being evaluated by others. However, the study also identified a critical boundary: laughter is only appropriate when the mistake is harmless. If a blunder results in negative consequences for someone else—such as spilling water on a friend's expensive phone—laughing is viewed as insensitive. In cases where harm is involved, a laughing response makes a person seem less likeable and uncaring.

---

## DISCUSSION

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to laugh at yourself when you make a mistake?
2. Why do you think self-acceptance is considered such an attractive trait in a person?
3. Can you remember a time you made a "faux pas" in a professional setting? How did you react?
4. Do you agree that people who are too embarrassed seem "overly focused" on themselves?
5. How would you feel if a friend laughed after accidentally breaking something of yours?
6. In your culture, is it common to hide embarrassment or to show it openly?
7. Do you think a leader who laughs at their own mistakes seems more or less competent?
8. How can we train ourselves to be less self-conscious in social situations?
9. Is there a difference between "laughing at yourself" and "being a clown"?
10. If you saw a stranger trip and laugh, would you be more likely to help them or ignore them?