



COMMUNITY // April 7, 2020

# How clown tools help me to stay happy during the Corona lockup

*Like many of us, I am in self-isolation at home. The Corona Virus has turned our life upside down within only a few days. So let me share with you a few techniques from the clownish mind-set, which might help you just as much as they help me.*

By Monica Culen, CEO and Founder at RED NOSES Clowndoctors International



Like many of us, I am in self-isolation at home. The Corona Virus has turned our life upside down within only a few days. Almost nothing has remained the same, neither in private nor in professional life.

We see major limitations, insecurity, anxiety, loneliness, our physical as well as our financial health seriously endangered. It's rather scary. I sympathize with all of you as we are all stuck in this unprecedented situation.

The virus also hit our organisation, RED NOSES Clowndoctors International massively. Our healthcare clowns, though they are now needed more than ever, are prevented from bringing cheer and laughter to the bedside of hospitalized children or old people in wards. All skills, professional experience and human relations with their patients have to change now to digital visits, but they still remain caring, funny and creative.

The clown philosophy reaches deep into the physiological sequences of the human body and is therefore applicable – with little adaptations – worldwide in each and every situation when pain, fear, stress and exhaustion seem to overwhelm individuals.

I was fortunate to learn a lot during my more than 25 years of involvement in hospital clowning and its unorthodox methods in dealing with all sorts of tensions and troubles, with life and death.

So let me share with you a few techniques from the clownish mind-set, which might help you just as much as they help me:

### **1. Healthcare clowns always look on the bright side of life.**

In approaching a patient, the clown disregards the disease and concentrates entirely on the healthy aspects of his vis-à-vis. He – or she – diverts the attention away from pain and despair. In exchange, the clowns handle things differently by using the eternal methods of humoristic interventions such as a smile, laughter or relaxation.

All scientific studies tell us that laughter signals to the body: „The danger is banned, relax, and turn down stress symptoms!“ Since body and mind are not two distinct entities, as has been assumed until only recently, but one interdependent system, humour has effects on both – the mental and physical side.

So open your senses to the beauty of creation, to small things like the smell of spring or the magic of a tender touch.

## **2. Clowns are masters of improvisation.**

Our clowns do not arrive with a previously prepared programme or show. They respond precisely to the situation they face in the moment with the small patients, observing attentively the atmosphere, the environment, and the state of mind of the kids, who immediately become part of the intervention. By making fun out of the unexpected, using unrehearsed exaggerations, grotesque interpretation of medical instruments or machines, just to mention a few, clowns bring distraction, laughter, and relaxation..

So look around, try to see your own small world with the eye of the clown. Perhaps use things differently, out of the normal, arrange something in a new way, be playful!

## **3. Clowns are curious.**

When encountering other people, the clown is always curious about them. In a non-judgmental, innocent way, like children who learn about the world. Healthcare clowns are curious about patients' stories, about how they face the day or how they handle life. They live in the moment and see people with best intentions through their heart.

You don't have to be a master of clowning to maintain or rediscover a piece of childhood curiosity. You will detect an unexpected number of things you never thought of having around, some skills you have in you, but neglected until now. It is endless, what a curious mind can detect and what joy it may bring.

## **4. Clowns are warm-hearted.**

Clowns have a very innocent and open way to connect to people. They understand and accept human worries and fears, failures and weakness, and they will always try to make the best out of it.

**As we are all stuck in this critical situation, let us not follow our fears, but rather let us keep the spirits up.**

Photo: RED NOSES

— *Published on April 7, 2020*



Monica Culen, **CEO and Founder at RED NOSES Clowndoctors International**

Monica Culen is the co-founder and CEO of Red Noses Clowndoctors International, the world's largest clown doctor group, operating in Europe and the Middle East. She also currently serves as chairwoman of the board for the European Federation of Hospital Clown Organisations and for the Austrian Fundraising Association. In 2008 she received the very prestigious award – the Silver Medal of Merit of the Republic of Austria - for her work, as well as the Centrope Prize for outstanding commitment to transnational cooperation between Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Czech Republic in 2015 and the Brand Life Award of the European Brand Institute in 2017.

Monica Culen was the youngest Chief hostess for 80 team members at the Olympic Games in Munich (Germany) in 1972 and she worked in the PR department of INSEAD in Fontainebleau (France) in the mid-70ies. Later on, she was appointed as PR and Protocol Officer at the OPEC Fund for International Development, organising Minister's conferences in Austria, Africa and South America.

An article in the "Life Magazine" about Michael Christensen, the very first hospital clown visiting sick children in New York in the 1990s impacted Monica Culen strongly. Immediately she remembered her own negative childhood experiences in the infectious wards in hospitals, where she had to stay for several months, filled with loneliness, fear and anxiousness.

Her strong and adventurous spirit got vociferous and together with the clownery expert and acting teacher Giora Seeliger, who knew about the power of humour due to his many years of stage experience all over Europe, they decided to found the healthcare clown organisation 'RED NOSES' in Austria.

Their clowns empower vulnerable audiences in personal interventions, not only children in hospitals, but also people in geriatric centres, patients in rehabilitations centres, youth with mental and multiple diseases, refugees and other displaced people. The figure of the clown is extremely human and touches individuals deeply by bringing them relief and hope in moments where they cannot connect to their positive emotions.

As thousands of studies have proved the positive effect of humour, healthcare clowns are more and more accepted in the medical sector, and even involved in difficult or painful treatments. They can create a positive atmosphere, reducing stress and anxiety, not only for the sick children, but as well for the medical staff and the care providers.

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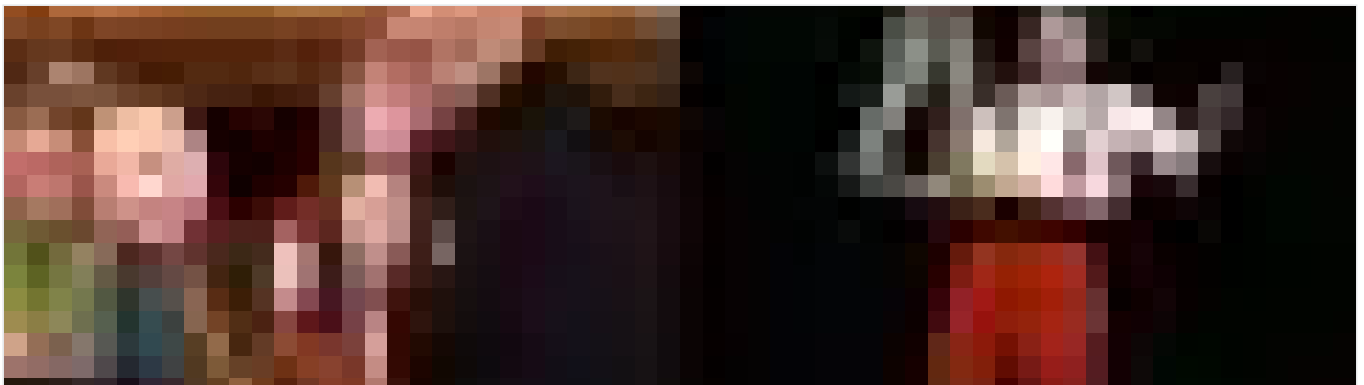
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