

How 'Seinfeld' nailed the importance of humility

There's a great lesson about the usefulness of self-deprecation in an old episode of "Seinfeld," the show that seemingly covered every awkward situation and human foible.

In the episode, Jerry accidentally offends an acquaintance of his, Sally Weaver, by implying she doesn't have the talent to make it in show business. Sally proceeds to launch a one-woman show called "Jerry Seinfeld is the Devil," in which she tirelessly lambastes him on stage. When Jerry catches wind of the show, he pleads meekly for her to stop it and eventually resorts to a hapless cease-and-desist letter. His bumbling attempts to kill the performances are immediately reported on stage by Sally, to the delight of audiences who love her skewering of the comedian.

Guest star Kathy Griffin once performed a comedy routine accusing Seinfeld of being rude to her during the filming of an earlier episode of the series. Instead of becoming defensive about the incident, Seinfeld expressed his amusement with it—and this became the genesis of the plotline involving Sally Weaver's one-woman show.

While in the episode Jerry scrambles to protect his image, the real Seinfeld chose to accept public criticism and even acknowledge it with self-deprecation. The more good-naturedly *you* take punishment, the more favorable you will seem to everyone. You've also taken the power away from those who have gone after you, leaving them with nowhere to go next ... and now *you* own the conversation.

Poking fun at yourself costs you much less than you think—and if you're not able to bring yourself to do it once in a while, others may unfortunately choose to poke fun at you themselves. Few targets are easier than those whose pride is overbearing.