

## **Humor vs. Sarcasm**

By Nancy Quinn Rummel, ACC

Have you ever worked with a person who routinely uses sarcasm as a way to get a laugh? "I'm not trying to ignore you. I'm just trying to be where you're not."

That was a sarcastic put-down delivered to one of my clients recently by a co-worker. Everyone in the room chuckled except the person it stung. That's because sarcasm tends to be negatively nasty rather than positively funny. It's a cheap shot at someone else's expense.

Humor is a very good thing, but sarcasm usually isn't because it is rarely harmless. It's a verbal hammer and comes from a place of hostility rather than authenticity. For nearly every sarcastic remark, someone feels its sting.

Some people think sarcasm is a talent that makes life more interesting. It's certainly true that it can be a powerful way to communicate and some people seem awfully good at it. Is it just "their nature" to be sarcastic? Probably not. Chances are they have developed sarcasm in response to some bitterness, jealousy, frustration or dissatisfaction.

The word "sarcasm" derives from ancient Greek for "to tear flesh, gnash the teeth, speak bitterly." Its first definition is "a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt." Although sarcastic people may just intend to be funny, their words can also be very hurtful to the intended target.

Beware of those who favor sarcasm as a communication method. Sarcasm is almost always uttered with some degree of scorn or contempt. It may appear "witty" at times but it is the lowest form of wit because it is a laugh at someone else's expense. With some people it becomes such a way of life that they do not realize they are using it. When you encounter sarcastic people, point out what they are doing and ask them to stop.