

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**My husband and I have an employee who he likes a lot, but this guy strikes me as “fakey.” There is something about his demeanor and his smile that just don’t ring true to me. My husband says I’m nuts and paranoid and that Bruce is being genuine. Is there a way to tell if someone is really laughing at your jokes because he thinks they’re funny, or just trying to make a good impression and cozy up to the boss?**

**-- Delores**

Dear Delores,

Send me a joke and let me see if I think it’s funny. Having never heard your jokes or met Bruce, I can’t say whether you are on to something about him or not. Is his laughter a genuine reaction to humor, or an attempt at self-preservation? But, in fact, there are ways to tell if someone’s smile is authentic and comes from the heart, or an empty gesture: “I better smile and laugh when the boss tells a joke, no matter *how* bad it is.”

You might be surprised to find out that researchers have looked into exactly what you are describing, and have defined two broad types of smiles: “The Duchenne Smile” and the “Pan American Smile.” The Duchenne Smile – named after the French neurologist Guillaume Duchenne who mapped more than 100 facial muscles in 1862 and the researcher who first described it – is a genuine smile in which the corners of the mouth turn up, and the eyes crinkle in a crow’s feet shape. Since it is almost impossible to voluntarily control these facial muscles, a Duchenne Smile is genuine and comes from within. It is associated with increased activity in the left prefrontal cortex of the brain, the seat of positive emotions.

The Pan American Smile – named after the now defunct airline – is inauthentic, perfunctory, and nothing more than polite. Think about flight attendants in those old television ads saying “bye-bye” to passengers. “Thank you for traveling Pan Am, bye-bye!”

Duchenne Smiles are associated with greater levels of happiness. For example, psychologists at Berkeley studied 141 senior class photos from the 1960 yearbook at Mills College. All but three of the women pictured were smiling. Half of them showed the Duchenne, or genuine smile. The researchers contacted all of the women at age 27, 43, and 52 years of age and asked about their marriages and life satisfaction. Astonishingly, the Duchenne smilers were, on average, more likely to be married, to stay married, and to experience more personal well-being over the next thirty years. The mere crinkling of their eyes predicted these outcomes. The researchers wanted to rule out attractiveness from genuine smiles so they went back to the senior year pictures and rated prettiness. They found that looks had nothing to do with good marriages or life satisfaction. A genuinely smiling woman – who expressed inner joy and a positive outlook on life – was simply more likely to be happily married, cheerful, and satisfied with her life.

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1

It's unlikely that the facial expression was the cause of these women's increased life satisfaction. Rather, women who smiled from the inside – and it showed in the *orbicularis oculi* and the *zygomaticus* muscles around the eyes -- were happier to begin with, and that was expressed in their facial expression.

So there you have it. Next time Bruce smiles take a good look at the muscles around his eyes. I suggest you do this without getting right in his face – remember, your husband already thinks you're paranoid. Smile!

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).