

This column is just what the happy-go-lucky Mike Veeck wanted — more ink to promote his wacky ways. Forgive me, but I've succumbed to Veeck's media magnetism. But I make no apologies for this column because Veeck is worth writing about.

Veeck spoke in December at the Ohio Turf Federation's annual conference in Columbus, Ohio. While Veeck didn't talk about turf, he was informative and entertaining. He had people roaring with laughter one minute and reflecting in their thoughts the next. Here's betting that word gets out about Veeck's talk and he shows up more often on the golf turf show circuit.

Veeck is the owner of several minor-league baseball teams and the master of many zany baseball promotions (he holds disco demolition night to his credit, among others). Unlike some, such as the brash and bratty Randy Johnson, you can stick a camera in Veeck's face and he'll happily ham it up for you.

"I'm a media pimp," the goateed and bushy-haired Veeck said with a toothy smile, noting that it's a rule of his to never say "no comment" or talk off the record to the media. (By the way, if you "Google" Veeck, you'll find item after item of stories in magazines and newspapers about him.)

Veeck is the son of former Major League baseball team owner, the late Bill Veeck, a dynamic baseball owner and promoter and obvious mentor to his son. Mike is not your typical keynote speaker. Let's just say he's a bit unorthodox in style and substance — but refreshingly so.

There was Veeck, mugging for photographers at the outset of his speech. "I'm having a very bad chin day," he quipped.

Don't get me wrong. Veeck, who counts Bill Murray and Jimmy Buffett as his pals, isn't all schtick. He has some influential thoughts, and he shared them with attendees of his talk.

It's not that what Veeck said contains insightful philosophy that we haven't heard before. But hearing these things from a guy who has tried more things in his life than 10 of us put together seemed to hit home a little harder.

"Do you remember when you were 3 years old and so many things were possible?" Veeck asked in his low, husky voice. "And now you're 33 and not many things are possible."

Here's to a Good and Hearty Laugh

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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Veeck's point was that while we *say* we aren't afraid of taking risks, deep down we *are* terrified. "Why is it we're so afraid of change?" Veeck asked. "Because we don't know how to deal with failure."

Veeck doesn't hide the fact that he's failed — he's been fired four times by Major League Baseball teams for trying promotions that went awry. For instance, while disco demolition night at Chicago's Comiskey Park in 1979 was a rousing success in terms of razing disco records, a near riot broke out at the park and the second game of the doubleheader had to be canceled. Hence, Veeck was fired from his promotion's post the next day. But Veeck didn't hang his head after the firing because he knew he used his brain as best he could to try something original.

"Behind our eyes is the greatest machine ever known to mankind," Veeck says. "And we shouldn't squelch it."

I've never seen a someone laugh more at himself than Veeck did during his talk. It's not that he likes to *hear* himself laugh — he just likes *to* laugh.

Laughter, it seems, is Veeck's medicine when tough times occur. Veeck told a story about his small daughter, who's as happy-go-lucky as her old man. While she suffers from an incurable eye disease and is going blind, you wouldn't know it from her attitude, Veeck says "She reminds me that the *only* cure is laughter," he adds.

If there was a theme to his speech, it was the importance of laughter. In fact, Veeck could start billing this speech as Jollity 101: The Art and Importance of Laughter.

"Be outrageous, be irreverent and have some fun," Veeck said before departing the stage. "What are we going to remember about our trip through this wonderful life? We're going to remember a little bit of laughter."

Here's to a hearty hoot and howl from the deepest part of your tummy.

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