

Laughter can be a Cure for Workplace Ills

On a national level, employee satisfaction, worker productivity and customer service continue to be priority items for managers, supervisors and human resource professionals. The challenge for most organizations is to achieve high levels of productivity and customer service, while maintaining a satisfied, motivated workforce. Not an easy task, but not impossible either.

Furthermore, these objectives are not mutually exclusive, and the solution does not have to drain the bottom line. Certainly, a fair salary and competitive benefits contribute to worker satisfaction, but other parts of the solution cost little or nothing, and having fun at work is no exception.

A survey published by *Training and Development* magazine revealed that 84% of HR managers said employees with a sense of humor do better work and 97% of executives agree that humor is valuable in business. Additionally, studies have proven that humor greatly reduces stress. So why don't more companies encourage humor at work?

Statistics aside, most employees would prefer to work at a place where humor is appreciated and encouraged. And besides, the benefits are virtually endless! Companies that have taken a proactive approach to having fun at work have found that it facilitates communication, improves productivity, builds relationships, energizes employees and encourages creativity. If you do not want energized, creative, productive employees, stop reading now. But if you want these benefits for your work environment, well read on, because the fun starts here!

Let's first dispel some myths.

Work is no place for fun.

Considering that most adults spend the bulk of their waking hours at work, why shouldn't work be fun. Reduced absenteeism and tardiness have been some positive side effects of encouraging fun at work.

Having fun is a waste of valuable time.

Simply false. Studies show that having fun at work results in increased productivity and more creativity. Sounds like more customers to me.

Laughter equals goofing off.

Not so. A good laugh counteracts boredom, reduces personal conflict and releases tension.

Workplace fun will lead to harassment or other bad things.

Only true if not kept in check. As with other initiatives, introducing fun at work must be endorsed, guided and monitored by management.

So how do you initiate a fun-at-work environment? Here are some ideas:

Celebrate successes.

When a new product is a success, revenue goals are achieved, or the new website is launched - Celebrate!

Make it a top down approach.

Happy managers create happy employees and happy employees create happy customers. And happy customers buy more!

Consider passing out Silly Putty along with the agenda at your next senior staff meeting.

It reduces fatigue, minimizes doodling and prevents that annoying “fade-off”.

Reserve a go-cart Grand Prix raceway as the venue for your next team-building meeting.

Sounds like more fun than a hotel conference room to me, but then again, exhaust fumes excite me.

Have employees post anonymous childhood photos of themselves and have a contest to see who can match the goofy-looking kid with the goofy-looking manager.

I did this one time and my co-workers concluded that I looked like Ernie on *My Three Sons*. The nickname stuck even after I got new glasses.

Encourage role playing in training sessions.

There’s simply nothing better than witnessing a Robert DeNiro-wannabe trying to overcome customer resistance.

Surprise attack an unsuspecting coworker with Silly String at an awards ceremony.

Just make sure there are no candles involved. That would be so not fun.

But remember,

- Fun is not telling ethnic, off-color, or otherwise inappropriate jokes.
- Fun is not practical jokes or pranks.
- Fun is not being sarcastic.
- Fun is not sexual jokes, comments or innuendos.
- Fun is not making fun of coworkers, management or the Board of Directors.
- Fun is not a case of beer on Friday afternoon (especially to someone who enjoys a good Merlot).

And finally, fun should *not* be mandatory. If for no other reason, it just seems wrong to suspend an employee for refusing to lighten-up.

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