



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

LIGHTEN UP: HUMOUR IN THE WORKPLACE

If you're unaware of how important humour in the workplace can be, just consider some of the research on the topic.

A survey sponsored by an international temporary service agency found that U.S. executives believe that people with a sense of humour do better at their jobs, compared with those who have little or no sense of humour. In fact, a whopping 96 percent of those surveyed said people with a sense of humour do better.

The survey went on to point out that the results suggest that a sense of humour may help light-hearted employees keep their jobs during tough times. And, what's more, it may propel them up the corporate ladder past their humourless colleagues.

Why? It seems that those with a sense of humour are better communicators and better team players.

Studies have shown that happy workers are more productive. In fact, a researcher at California State University found that humour could help the employees to release tension.

Consequently, they can concentrate on their work more efficiently. What's more, employees who enjoy interacting with their co-workers aren't as likely to be distracted, or absent from work.

Research conducted by psychologist Dr. Ashton Trice at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia showed that humour helps us think. When people feel stuck on important projects, they tend to feel angry or depressed. This negative mood can interfere with subsequent performance. According to Dr. Trice's research, taking time out to laugh can help us to get rid of negative feelings and allow us to return to a task or move on to another project unaffected by past defeat.

If humour is really this important, then why don't we use it more often on the job?

Most likely, the main reason is that many people are unaware

of the positive effects of humour in the workplace. They tend to think humour and laughter are unproductive or unprofessional, perhaps both. However, it is important to realize that some humour is inappropriate for the workplace, and that it is often used at inappropriate times.

INAPPROPRIATE HUMOUR

So what is humour? Well let's start with what it is not. Humour has little to do with practical jokes. More often than not, practical jokes are not funny to people on the receiving end. In his book, *Making Humor Work*, psychologist and author, Dr. Terry L. Paulson says, "When humour is working, you laugh with people, not at them."

Humour has nothing to do with taking your job lightly, joking about your company not being a good place to work or joking about its products or services.

And humour has absolutely nothing to do with jokes made about racial, religious or gender-related issues. Don't make the mistake of thinking that jokes are synonymous with humour. In fact, jokes that offend others are actually the direct opposite of humour.

HUMOUR THAT WORKS

Humour that works in the workplace has to do with attitude. It means seeing the humour in everyday situations. It means taking everything and everyone not quite so seriously. It means having the confidence to laugh at yourself. And remember that when you laugh at yourself, you don't risk offending others. Dr. Terry L. Paulson describes self-deprecating humour this way. "When you tell a story that pokes fun at yourself gently, it acts as a social lubricant that says, 'Hey, this person is a human being, someone at ease with life, and we can feel the same way'."

HOW TO USE HUMOUR IN THE WORKPLACE

What can you do to develop your sense of humour to share it with others in the workplace? Try the following:

- ▲ Consider what type of humour would be acceptable in your particular workplace. For instance, if you work for an organization where humour is not encouraged or well received, a "silly hat day" won't likely ever happen. Telling a joke on your own self is probably the best way to inject some humour into this type of workplace. And you may even find that you have to laugh alone when you find something is amusing.
- ▲ Get into the habit of looking for humour in everyday situations in the workplace. Lawrence J. Peter and Bill Dana, in their book *The Laughter Prescription*, say, "Realize that a sense of humour is deeper than laughter, more satisfying than comedy, and delivers more rewards than merely being entertaining. A sense of humour sees the fun in everyday experiences. It is more important to have fun than it is to be funny."
- ▲ Compile your own repertoire of humorous quotes, quips, and jokes. Visit your local library. Take the time to look through humour anthologies, and books of jokes for after dinner speakers. Bear in mind that more often than not, you'll have to adapt the humour to suit your particular situation. Then, use some of your jokes when the time is right. Above all, make sure your humour is in good taste.
- ▲ Suggest that your department have a bulletin board where employees can share humorous cartoon, photos, anecdotes, amusing advertisements, and bumper stickers.
- ▲ Clip cartoons from newspapers and magazines. Then make up your own captions for the gang at the office.
- ▲ Use humour to break the ice when you're chairing a meeting or to make your point during a discussion. A good sense of humour and skilled communication go hand in hand.
- ▲ Try humour when you want to lighten up difficult situations. Barbara Rae, president of Work Force, a national employment agency, said this about humour in the workplace: "When the pressures of work get people close to the breaking point, a well-placed remark can make the difference between a roomful of friends or a roomful of bristling enemies."
- ▲ Give your co-workers funny cards and gag gifts for special occasions.
- ▲ Send "Humour grams." When you want to express appreciation or compliment a colleague, send a humorous card or create a "Humour gram" by writing a note and attaching a relevant cartoon.

- ▲ Take a laugh break. Start a humour library - a collection of favourite comic strips, funny articles, and books of humorous cartoons. Then, when you or your co-workers are having a bad day and your attitude turns negative, take time during your coffee and lunch breaks to read something from your humour library. You'll find that a good laugh can often help you to regain your positive outlook.

Joel Goodman, author of *The Humour Project*, said, "It stops hardening of the attitudes, and creates people who are inverse paranoids - they think the world is out to do them good."

A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.

If you've never tried anything even remotely humorous in your workplace, you might want to test out the waters and get someone else's opinion, because some plans can be inappropriate or bit risqué ("It sounded like such a great idea at the time."). An EAP counsellor is a great person to bounce your ideas off, before you show this new side of your personality to everyone at work. Together, you may come up with ideas you can try to use to lighten up your workplace. It's much nicer to see co-workers smiling. Humour also seems to be a real morale booster.

Life is too serious to be taken seriously. You spend so many hours at work you might as well try to enjoy more of them!

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

English Service: 1-800-387-4765
French Service: 1-800-361-5676
General Information: 1-888-814-1328