



“ The arrival of a good clown into a village does more for its health than 20 asses laden with drugs,” observed Thomas Sydenham, a 17<sup>th</sup> century British physician, who may have been the first doctor to recommend laughter as the best medicine.

Executives and managers today are increasingly acknowledging that laughter is good not only for personal health and well-being, but for career success and overall workplace wellness as well. Around the office, laughter can motivate and facilitate team building, improve stress management, and increase productivity and morale.

In other words, business can (and should) be a laughing matter.

Here’s what the American Association for Therapeutic Humor, composed of more than 600 health care professionals who study the effects of humor on humans, is discovering:

- Laughter decreases the amount of stress hormones in the body, activates the cells that boost the immune system and increases the activity of natural killer cells that go after tumor cells and fight viruses.
- Three minutes of deep belly laughing is the equivalent of three minutes on a fitness rowing machine. This kind of laughing also releases anti-depressant mood chemicals.
- By the time a child reaches kindergarten, he or she is laughing some 300 times a day. Compare that to the typical adult who, one study found, laughs a paltry 17 times a day.
- When you laugh, your heart rate goes up, bringing more blood and oxygen to the brain. You also breathe faster, expanding your lungs.
- Laughter increases production of catecholamines, which increases the level of alertness, memory, and ability to learn and create.

So with all their prods and wires and gizmos and gauges, professionals are telling us what we knew all along: when we laugh we feel better. It doesn’t take much to reach the conclusion that all this extra brain power and relaxation leads to enhanced performance at work.

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Still, the prevailing attitude is that one cannot be “professional” and have fun at the same time. The office motto has become the athlete’s: *No pain, no gain*. If you’re laughing, then you’re not working.

*Right...*

Consider these:

- The *Harvard Business Review* (September 2003) reported that executives with a sense of humor climb the corporate ladder more quickly and earn more money than their counterparts.
- University of Wisconsin professor Stu Robertshaw cites a corporate study in which the firm experienced a 21% decrease in staff turnover and a 38% decrease in Friday absenteeism after incorporating humor into the workplace.
- Robert Half International, an executive recruitment firm, surveyed 1,000 executives and found that 84% felt that workers with a sense of humor do a better job.
- In a study, David Abramis of California State University determined that employees who have fun on the job are more productive, more creative, are better decision-makers and team players—and have fewer absentee, sick and late days.
- An often-cited survey of 737 corporate CEOs by Hodge-Cronin & Associates found that 98% said they prefer to hire someone with a sense of humor to someone without.

Injecting humor in the workplace is not about turning your organization into a comedy club. It’s not about entertaining others or being able to tell a joke. It’s not about pranks, practical jokes or juvenile antics. Instead, it’s more of an attitude, a way of viewing and processing things.

## Stronger Connections

Laughter breaks down barriers, builds relationships and allows for better communication among coworkers. People with a sense of humor often have the ability to deal effectively with people and work issues; they are able to keep the severity of problems in perspective.

Humor also enhances motivation, collaboration and team-building, quickly creating a climate in which people feel motivated, energized and ready to contribute. You could say that the group that plays together stays together.

## Happier Workers

Laughter reduces workplace stress, and breaks up boredom and fatigue. Happier, more relaxed workers are able to better focus on tasks, make fewer errors in their work and produce more. They also stick around longer, are absent less and don’t burn out.

Humor also helps to minimize resistance to change. It is a good weapon to defend against the

stress of reorganizing, downsizing, outsourcing and other negative trends in today’s workplace.

## Creative Problem-Solvers

Humor unleashes much-desired creativity and divergent problem-solving. For example, good jokes guide us down one path only to suddenly track us onto another with the punch line. This breaks the mindset of our thinking and leads to increased creativity.

The bottom line: All work and no play isn’t even good for work.

## Tips for Bringing More Humor Into Your Work Life

*Attention all executives and managers: Lead the humor parade. Fun and laughter affects attitudes. And once you affect attitudes, you can unleash a new level of productivity and commitment in your organization (or in yourself). But where do you start? Following are just a few suggestions to get your own creative humor juices flowing:*

**Figure out your humor profile.** Listen to yourself for a few days and see what makes you laugh out loud (and be honest!). Have your coworkers or staff do the same.

**Collect humor.** Using your humor profile, start a funny file, collecting cartoons, jokes, comic strips and stories from newspapers, magazines and friends. Set aside a portion of your office or desk or wall as a “humor corner.”

**Encourage laughter in your department.** Establish a humor bulletin board, keep a prop box, play simple games on a regular basis, gather a “fun committee,” encourage humor breaks.

**Laugh at yourself.** One of the characteristics of effective leaders is the ability to laugh at themselves when things they try don’t work. Without that, people view them as critical.

**Use humor in the course of normal business.** Add humor to presentations, performance evaluations, meetings, in memos, newsletters and emails, and at parties and recognition events.

**Keep the humor appropriate for the office.** Never poke fun at anyone in a subordinate position in the organization and be careful not to offend others with humor that deprecates anyone’s beliefs or backgrounds. There is plenty of wonderful, clean humor out there.