

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Lighten Up: Using Humor to Your Advantage in the Workplace

A survey sponsored by an international temporary service agency found that U.S. executives believe that people with a sense of humor do better at their jobs. In fact, a whopping 96 per cent of those surveyed said people with a sense of humor do better.

The survey went on to suggest that a sense of humor may help employees keep their jobs during tough times.

Those with a sense of humor are better communicators and team players. Studies have shown that happy workers are more productive and better able to release tension. Consequently, they concentrate better and work more efficiently. What's more, employees who enjoy interacting with co-workers are less distracted and have fewer absences from work.

Research conducted at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia showed that humor actually helps us think. When people feel stuck on a project, they become angry or depressed which further interferes with performance. Taking time out to laugh can help us to get rid of negative feelings, can allow us to return to a task refreshed, or can help us move on to another project unaffected by past problems.

Many people are unaware of the positive effects of humor in the workplace. Some think humor and laughter are unproductive or unprofessional. As important as it is to use humor to your best advantage, some humor is inappropriate for the workplace.

Appropriate Humor

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

Humor has nothing to do with taking your job lightly. Joking about your company not being a good place to work or about its products or services will only create negativity, and could land you in trouble if it travels to the wrong ears.

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

Humor That Works

Humor that works in the workplace has to do with attitude. It means seeing the humor in everyday situations and taking things less seriously. It means having the confidence to laugh at yourself. When you laugh at yourself, you don't risk offending others.

Dr. Paulson describes self-depreciating humor 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 Humor in the Workplace

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

- Consider what type of humor would be acceptable in your workplace. For instance, if you work for an organization where humor is not encouraged, a "silly hat day" won't likely happen. Telling a joke about yourself is probably the best way to inject humor into this type of workplace.
- Look for humor in everyday situations. Lawrence J. Peter and Bill Dana, in their book The Laughter Prescription, say, "…a sense of humor is deeper than laughter, more satisfying than comedy, and delivers more rewards than merely being entertaining. A sense of humor sees the fun in everyday experiences. It is more important to have fun than it is to be funny."
- Read some humorous quotes, quips, and jokes. Bear in mind that you may have to adapt the humor to suit your particular situation. Use some of your jokes when the time is right, making sure it’s in good taste.
- Suggest that your workplace have a bulletin board or humor library where employees can share cartoons, photos, anecdotes, and stories.
- Use humor to break the ice when chairing a meeting or making a point during a discussion. A good sense of humor and skilled communication go hand in hand.
- Try humor when you want to lighten up difficult situations.
- Give funny cards and gifts for special occasions.
- When you want to express appreciation or compliment a colleague, send a humorous card or a hand-written note with a relevant cartoon.

If you've never tried anything even remotely humorous in your workplace, you might want to get someone else's opinion. A counselor is a great person to bounce ideas off of before you show this new side of your personality at work.

A happy person is not created by their circumstances, but by their attitude. A good laugh can often help to regain morale or positive outlook at work. Life is too serious to be taken too seriously. Many hours are spent at work. Why not try to enjoy more of them?