

Humor and Creativity Belong in the Workplace

By Avery M. Henderson, PH.D. M.P.H. and Cynthia L. Torkelson

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The many business obstacles are no laughing matter! New technology, evolving management strategies, organizational restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, lower revenues and subsequent demands for more time and effort are causing dramatic changes in the work environment. Here's some of how American business spent more than \$100 billion in 1997 on stress-related health care costs, worker's compensation, and absenteeism. Job related stress, negative and customer dissatisfaction is at an all time high. Inappropriate competition within the workplace is adding to the overall toll on morale and productivity. And, strikingly evident over the last decade, interpersonal conflicts are not being resolved peacefully, more and more, they are resulting in violence. The question is... what can be done to prevent this workplace malady?

When management allows and encourages employees to be more humorous and creative in the workplace, stress-related health care costs can be reduced. Important to the "bottom line," is the fact that recent medical research is substantiating the old adage that "Laughter is the Best Medicine." Medical laughter has positive effects on the immune system and produces healthy, positive emotions. Positive emotions lead to positive attitudes and supportive relationships between employees. When employees are more supportive of one another, overall conflicts get resolved more peacefully. The playfulness one gets from being humorous leads to more flexible, creative "problem-solving" thinking and

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POSITIVE HUMOR & CREATIVITY BELONG IN THE WORKPLACE



Avery M. Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H. and Cynthia L. Torkelson

Too many business situations are no laughing matter! New technology, evolving management strategies, organizational downsizing/reengineering, fewer resources and subsequent demands for more time and effort, are causing dramatic changes in the work environment. Here's more sad news: American business spent more than \$300 billion in 1992 on stress-related health care costs, worker's compensation, and absenteeism. Job related stress, negativism and customer dissatisfaction is at an all time high. Inappropriate competition within the workplace is taking an incredible toll on morale and productivity. And, strikingly evident over the last decade, interpersonal conflicts are not being resolved peacefully; more and more, they are escalating to violence. The question is... what can be done to counteract this metaphorical mudslide?

Where do we begin? Because begin we must! The workplace culture, a fundamental source of our well-being and identity, is suffering a profound human malady. Not only are these issues negatively affecting the bottom line of business, they are symptoms of a crisis in our collective spirit. Work has all but become a race for our lives, instead of a place to find some enjoyment and camaraderie. The stress and unhappy experiences at work do not stay there at the end of day; we transfer them home by, directly or indirectly, sharing them with our families. If there is no inspiration, nor achievement of satisfaction at work, our personal lives are negatively impacted.

Many major corporations (IBM to Wendy's, Great Plains Software, Odetics, Quad/Graphics, Rosenbluth International and Anheuser-Busch, Ben and Jerry's Homemade Ice Cream and Southwest Airlines) are using an age-old remedy to heal these chronic maladies. They are taking action to put positive humor and creativity back in the workplace. Humor strengthens the bonds between workers, improves communication, improves company morale, and helps employees to function well as a team. Humorous and creative presentations help to make learning more fun and lessons more memorable. Positive creativity and innovation result in new products, as well as new ways to combine and recombine old products or ideas for new applications. The "cutting edge" of any industry comes from creative people.

When management allows and encourages employees to be more humorous and creative in the workplace, stress-related health care costs can be reduced. Important to the "bottom line," is the fact that recent medical research is substantiating the old adage that "Laughter is the Best Medicine." Mirthful laughter has positive effects on the immune system and produces healthy, positive emotions. Positive emotions lead to positive attitudes and supportive relationships between employees. When employees are more supportive of one another, stressful conflicts get resolved more peacefully. The playfulness one gets from being humorous leads to more flexible, creative "possibility" thinking and more potential solutions to other stress-related problems like poor time management, being disorganized and lack of communication.

Humor and creativity belong in the workplace – it’s a place to start, with proven results. From employees taking humor and creativity breaks for stress management, to celebrating the accomplishing of goals, providing safety ideas, managing conflict peacefully, and handling customers with an appropriate sense of humor. From management conducting training and sales meetings with fun activities and cooperative games, to posting safety posters with punch lines, facilitating brainstorming sessions for problem-solving, strategic planning and new product ideas – humor and creativity can transform the work spirit and improve the bottom line!

***“People who are humorous are more playful...
People who are more playful are more creative...
People who are more creative find more solutions...
People who find more solutions are better able to deal with change,
everyday challenges and the associated stress.”***

-- Avery M. Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H.

