

LIGHTENing Bolts

Vol 2 No 2

February 2004

HUMOR AT WORK – WHEN THE BOSS AIN'T LAUGHING

In my first real job, a group of coworkers use to serenade employees on their birthday. The group wore funny hats and regaled these birthday honorees with kazoos. The band was all women but I was made an honorary member because of my affinity for fun and humor and the fact that I represented one of only 4 men in the entire organization.

At that job, I was also known to joke at staff meetings, pass around funny cartoons and encourage an atmosphere of levity. Believe it or not, this was a hospice organization! My boss said to me one day, "I think you're taking this humor thing a little bit too far." Whereas I am now a professional speaker and humorist, my boss's comment is shared by a lot of people in the workplace today. In fact, audience members routinely ask me, "What do you do if your boss does not have a sense of humor?"

Even though I don't believe there are many people in the world totally devoid of a sense of humor, I do believe there are a lot of people that are perceived to be. When you, as an employee, would like to add more fun and humor to your work environment and your boss is "humor challenged", that's a problem. Since I'm assuming you won't resign just because your boss does not have a great sense of humor, here are a few suggestions for working with an Un-Funite.

A. Have a Humor "Sit Down".

In the HBO series "The Sopranos", when the heads of families have a beef with one another, they have a "sit down" to discuss the issue and find a solution that everyone can live with (or not!). I believe you will find similar success if you discuss humor with your boss. Ask your boss how he or she sees humor in the workplace. Explain your perspective. See if you can agree on the value of humor for employees, the work environment and for your constituents or customers. You'd be amazed at what could happen if you simply bring it up.

B. Start Slowly.

One of the biggest mistakes I see with those who support humor is that they go over the top with their humor thus alienating potential supporters. Making coworkers sing songs, wear clown noses or laugh on cue may not initially be the best way to integrate humor in the workplace. Consider sharing a bit of humor at the start of a meeting or putting a fun outgoing message on your answering machine as a first step. Invite coworkers to watch a humor video or listen to a humor audio tape over lunch as a way to slowly integrate humor into your work. By the way, feel free to use my video and audio products to accomplish this!

C. Always Be Respectful With Humor

No matter how you use humor, it must always be respectful. This does not mean you can't poke fun at others, but you must always display an underlying atmosphere of respect. When I emcee a fundraiser or awards ceremony, I honor the award recipients and dignitaries in attendance. However, I may also poke fun at them but only if I know them well or have gotten their permission ahead of time. If you show that you respect others, you can have fun without offending or alienating them. This is the "heart" of humor and allows us to connect with others.

D. Always Do a Good Job

Last year I did a presentation for a hospice in the Midwest. The CEO of this hospice welcomed the group and then introduced me. As she walked onto the stage, she received a standing ovation before she even opened her mouth. I've never seen such respect and admiration for someone in a top leadership role. Clearly this group knew that she was good at her job and they showed their appreciation with their applause. When you do a good job, people respect you. When people respect you, you can have fun at what you do. If, on the other hand, you are not doing a good job, the use of humor may work against you. Your boss may feel you don't take your work seriously and then you will lose his/her respect and support.

Humor is a great resource for the workplace. It reduces stress, enhances communication and makes the environment more enjoyable. Your greatest ally in bringing humor to work is your boss. If your boss is not a humor advocate, you may not be able to change his/her humor skills. But you can change your attitude and your approach. If you can bring integrity to the way you promote humor, you stand a good chance of convincing your boss that humor at work is workable.

HUMOR RESOURCES

Here are a few books that might help you to make a positive and humorous impact on your boss and others.

"Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere", Arnold Sanow and Sandra Strauss (Nautilus Communications, Inc.).

"The Knowing-Doing Gap", Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton (Harvard Business School Press).

"The Light Touch", Malcolm Kushner (Fireside, Simon & Schuster).

"301 Ways to Have FUN at Work", Dave Hemsath & Leslie Yerkes (Berrett Koehler)

[Click here for a Amazon.com for books, movies, etc.](#)

HUMOR IN REAL LIFE

It's News

In a recent edition of AARP's magazine, Roberta Yared reports that a Stanford University study lead by Allan Reiss, MD found that humor triggers the part of the brain that rewards you by making you feel good. Reiss said, "Humor has significant ramifications for our psychological and physical health."

In the December 2, 2003 edition of USA Today, an article by Marilyn Elias identified personality traits that help us to battle the common cold. The article states that "happy relaxed people are more resistant to illness than those who tend to be unhappy or tense." Since humor is a key ingredient for happiness, I guess laughter is nothing to sneeze at!

The November-December 2003 edition of Priority, Pitney Bowes' magazine, an article by Patricia Edmonds reported that a study performed by the Society for Human Resource Management reported that "fun in the workplace, more than ever before, is becoming significant for companies today." Apparently, three fourths of the HR personnel surveyed said that companies that promote fun at work are more effective than companies that don't at attracting new employees, reinvigorating veteran employees and sparking innovation. Let the games at work begin!

It Really Happened

On a recent Delta flight from Wichita to Atlanta, I noticed this interesting and funny paragraph in the Exit Seat Information on the Passenger Safety Information brochure.

"Passengers should identify themselves to allow reseating if they...Have a nondiscernible condition that will prevent him or her from performing any of the functions in paragraph (B)."

I may be wrong, but if my condition is "nondiscernible", chances are, I don't know that I've got it!!

From the Priority magazine article by Patricia Edmonds: “At his Bloomington, Ind., telecommunications firm, CEO Tim Lybrook laid a toy-car racetrack from one office to the next, then passed out miniature vehicles and challenged staffers to cross the finish line first.” He let the staff members move their cars forward as production goals were hit. The winner received an award. Now that’s fun in the workplace!

JUST HUMOR

In a recent motorcycle magazine, Harley Davidson put an advertisement that read, “If one day you’re asked: ‘How did you spend your time on Earth?’ Will you say: ‘I kept a crabgrass-free lawn.’”? (The purpose of the ad was to encourage motorcycle riding)

Henny Youngman said, “What’s the use of happiness? It can’t buy you money.”

A health expert once said, “If it tastes good, spit it out.”

On a flight from Wyoming to Atlanta, the flight attendant said, “This is a non-smoking flight. In addition, smokeless tobacco is not allowed.” I guess in Wyoming, there is a big problem with second hand spit!

NEWS FROM FUNSULTING, ETC

Products Purchases Made Easy:

FUNsulting, etc. is pleased to announce the opening of a new online shopping cart at www.FUNsulting.com. Please check out the product page for a variety of humor offerings especially our new anthology called “Humor Me.”

Humor Project Conference:

Join Ron Culberson, David Hyde Pierce and 50 practical and inspiring sessions at the Humor Project’s 19th Annual International Conference “The Positive Power of Humor, Hope and Healing” The conference will be held April 16-18, 2004 in Saratoga Springs, NY. For more information go to www.HumorProject.com.

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Ronald P. Culberson, MSW, CSP, Director of Everything! at FUNsulting, etc., works with organizations that want their people to lighten up by using humor as a way to manage stress and become more effective. He is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the highest earned award from the National Speakers Association, and is one of less than 450 individuals worldwide who have received this designation. He is a humor expert and has provided entertaining and informative programs to over 50,000 people in more than 500 associations, government

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