

Laughing Your Assets Off – Can Humor Help Your Bottom Line?

FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter

A newsletter for people who want to add more humor into healthcare.

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WELCOME TO FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter

FUNsulting, etc.'s Newsletter is a somewhat regular newsletter from FUNsulting, etc. whose mission is to redefine excellence in healthcare through humor. Each edition includes fun, funny *and* practical articles and resources which will enhance the humor potential in healthcare without sacrificing the integrity of the care that is delivered. Remember, a laugh a day gathers no moss (or something like that). Enjoy!

FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Laughing Your Assets Off: Can Humor Help the Bottom Line?

I recently read a book called *The Levity Effect: Why It Pays to Lighten Up* by Adrian Gostick and Scott Christopher. The authors make a case for the bottom line benefit of a fun work environment. Historically, there has been an absence of data correlating the use of humor with workplace success or profitability. Gostick and Christopher, however, took a different approach. They analyzed data from the Great Place to Work Institute® and showed that 81 percent of employees from the best companies in America consider their workplace to be a “fun place to work.” Based on this data, the authors conclude that fun and success *are* linked. Eureka, sort of.

Now let's be clear. Just because you distribute email jokes or wear a red clown nose, does not mean that your organization will be more successful than your uptight competitor across town. However, humor and fun combined with quality patient care and effective organizational processes can lead to a very successful healthcare environment. Humor is simply one tool that, when combined with excellence, has the potential to take your organization to a new level.

When we talk about an organization's bottom line, we usually mean its profitability. However, in a non-profit environment, it refers to the cost effectiveness of delivering

care so that the organization stays financially viable. It's about thriving rather than profiting. However, regardless of the profit status, all organizations need to function like a business in order to manage their finances responsibly.

Humor has a direct impact on the way that the work is done thus having a direct impact on organizational success. Humor makes the business more human, processes more enjoyable and increases the likelihood that employees will work cooperatively towards meeting the organization's goals. But how does this actually work?

Remember your favorite high school teacher or that class in college that was always the hardest to get in? Mine interviewed a possum on the first day of class. It was both weird and hilarious. But the teachers and professors in these classes realized that by doing things differently, by using some aspect of fun and humor in their classes, they could make the process of learning more fun. If the process was more fun, they knew that students would be more interested in participating. Not only that, but the learning outcomes were more successful as evidenced by research showing that students retain and recall information better when it is presented with humor.

The same principle applies to the work environment. If the work experience is more enjoyable, employees will want to be there. They will also be more likely to contribute in a positive way. Does this mean that you don't need process improvement, good clinical skills or competent staff? No. Your excellence is the foundation upon which fun can be built.

Specifically, humor improves the work environment in these ways:

- It makes communication easier and more effective. Humor and laughter reduce tension and enhance relationships.
- It makes a message more memorable. Whether you're a manager speaking to your staff or a nurse talking with a patient, humor helps you to convey information more effectively.
- It forces us to see things differently. It is simply creativity packaged differently.
- It makes us human. If we can laugh at our daily foibles, we can escape the grip of the ego and become more relatable.
- It makes the mundane processes of our work more enjoyable. Adding an element of fun to meetings, projects and celebrations creates an environment in which people *want* to work.

Bottom line is, you may not make a million dollars by sharing a joke with your colleague. However, if you're willing to make the work environment more fun, you're worth your weight in gold!

POSITIVE RESULTS

Too Much Information

You just never know where you're going to find humor. My wife and I celebrated our 22nd anniversary at the Walkabout Inn in Lancaster, PA where our friends, Bob and Lynne Griffin are the owners. At breakfast, I met Chuck and Cindy Phillips. Chuck is quite a character who is always looking for an opportunity to enjoy humor. When he found out that my work is focused on humor, he shared two of his own experiences.

When he went in for his colonoscopy, Chuck attached stickers on his backside near the "entry point" of the procedure. One sticker showed a finger with an **W** across it and the other one read, "One Way. Do Not Enter!"

One night at his church a small group of people were praying for a member of the congregation who was ill. After the prayer, a woman standing next to Chuck suggested that they lay hands on his broken foot and pray for him. Always the jokester, Chuck said, "You didn't do that for Joe Thompson after his prostate surgery."

I'll never forget my hilarious breakfast with Chuck even though it probably was way too much information!

THE BEST MEDICINE

Are You In Need of a Humor Injection?

Answer these five questions to determine if your workplace needs humor:

1. Did you ever wish that one of the button choices on a hospital bed was "eject?"
2. Have you ever wanted to tell the process improvement team what they can do with their flow charts?
3. Have you ever wished that your administrator was your patient and that you were responsible for his enema?
4. Have you ever considered "First, do no harm" as merely a suggestion?
5. Did you ever want to test the defibrillators on the JCAHO surveyor?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, your work environment needs a humor injection!

DISCHARGE PLANS

It's the Process, Stupid

In the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton's political strategist, James Carville, came up with the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid." The slogan pointed out that Clinton's opponent George H.W. Bush had not adequately addressed the economy.

Similarly, most healthcare organizations have not adequately addressed the normal, mundane, everyday routines that make the business of doing healthcare burdensome. So, when it comes to making work less like work, it's the process, stupid.

Most of you got into healthcare because you saw it as a calling rather than just a job. It was your desire, or perhaps your need, to help others that drew you to the work. Then, in a moment of brutal enlightenment, during the first week of your first real job, you discovered that healthcare was not about patient care but about adhering to a multitude of regulations, attending too many meetings and documenting only a tad less than a court reporter. Gradually, disillusionment set in and you became a grumpy employee who feels that the work gets in the way of being at the bedside. And you grudgingly acknowledged, "That's just the way it is."

To me, this is the downside of the healthcare environment. It's the organizational aspect of providing care that prevents staff from enjoying the work more. And if you're not careful, you'll fall into a state of complacency thinking there's no way out. While you can't change the regulations, certain organizational procedures or the flavor of the Salisbury steak, you *can* change the way you approach the processes.

According to Webster, who *is* the recognized leader of "according to's," a process is "a series of actions or operations leading to an end." Basically, a process is nothing more than the steps leading to a particular goal. For instance, a medical procedure is a process. An improvement project is a process. A meeting is a process. Even going to the gift shop for a Snickers Bar is a process. So when you look at the way you do your job, you can usually break it down into a variety of processes. And the key to making the organizational side of your work more enjoyable is to make the processes more fun.

Any process has a beginning, middle and end. Plus there is the pre-planning and the post-process activities. So, as a way to improve the overall process process, I came up with a simple system. It's called PCFRC or "pickfrick." OK, so I'm no genius when it comes to acronyms. LOL.

Pickfricking breaks a process down into the following steps:

Plan: Plan every aspect of the process to include an ultimate goal and a timeline of smaller goals moving towards the ultimate goal.

Create Excitement: Make the journey fun and interesting for the participants.

Set **F**un Benchmarks: Set fun milestones that can be measured along the way.

Reward and Acknowledge: Make sure everyone is appreciated.

Celebrate: Celebrate the journey regardless of the outcome.

It's not rocket surgery. This formula simply does two things. First, it allows you to pay attention the processes in your work. Second, it forces you to find ways of making every step of the process more fun *and* more effective. If you can create excitement, keep it fun along the way and celebrate everyone's contributions, you will change the way work works.

QUOTE: *Oh you hate your job? Why didn't you say so? There's a support group for that. It's called EVERYBODY, and they meet at the bar.* – Drew Carey

BACK QUOTE: *Every day I get up and look through the Forbes list of the richest people in America. If I'm not there, I go to work.* — Robert Orben

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