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Laughter May Be The Best Medicine

By Cheryl Nason, BS, MEd.

"I deeply believe in humor; not in jokes. Humor is spectacular!" -Tom Peters

"He deserves Paradise who makes his companions laugh." -Mohammed, The Koran

Humor has always been an expression of the freedom of the human spirit; the ability to stand outside of life's flow and view the whole scene—the incongruities, the tragedies outside of our control, the unexpected. I am personally convinced that humor is a part of our lives that is becoming more and more important. If we cannot see the humor in the changing, serious world around us, we are doomed to internalize it and that can be damaging to us mentally as well as physically.

Here are some results of research into the relationship between stress, work and wellness.

■ Forty five percent of a sample of coronary patients spent more than 60 hours per week on their job.

■ Job stress has been associated with high cholesterol levels, increased heart rate and increased smoking.

■ Blood pressure was higher among employees who said they "did not understand" what was expected of them.

■ "Responsibility for people" on a job is more likely to lead to heart disease than having responsibility for things.

■ Executives who are poor delegators have 8 times as many ulcers as good delegators.

■ White-collar workers reporting job dissatisfaction are 5 times as likely to use tranquilizers.

■ High stress occupations have suicide rates 2-6 times higher than the general population.

Many of these statistics are sobering at best. Yet with the present recession, the current trend toward company downsizing and the rising costs of doing business, what can the average Joe or Jane Employee do?

2.

One solution may be to "lighten" up your work environment. That doesn't mean taking your job less seriously; jobs are very serious right now. The idea is to take yourself less seriously. Don't be afraid to let yourself laugh a little every day. It will improve your face value.

Interestingly enough, when a comedian uses humor you ask "Is it funny?" When you use humor in the business world, you ask, "Does it work?" There is growing recognition today that something as seemingly frivolous as humor can actually promote productivity and cohesion within an organization. Many companies are beginning to take a serious interest in humor as it is used in speeches, training, employee relations, and managing stress. The value of humor also reaches into the boardroom. Executives who incorporate a sense of humor into their management styles find that it pays off in increased employee morale, decreased employee absenteeism, higher employee productivity and improved communication within the organization as a whole.

The role of humor as a stress reducer cannot be overestimated given today's climate of corporate calamity. Stress interferes with your objectivity and clouds your business judgment. Humor, used judiciously, can help you maintain the perspective necessary for successful decision-making and problem solving. Humor can be taught and workplace health is likely to improve as a result.

The positive emotions such as hope, faith, love and laughter have a direct effect on your health. Laughter is not only good medicine, it is also good business. Because laughter and play have been shown to relax tense individuals, humor may be the ultimate weapon for combating stress and preventing burnout.

Laughing seems to work in relieving stress and even physical pain. Stress experts believe laughter does so by:

- Distracting attention
- Reducing tension
- Changing expectations
- And increasing the production of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers

Laughter also produces physiological effects, which, in total, act as an internal organ massage. When the spasm of laughter subsides, the pulse rate drops below normal and the muscles relax deeply. The effect can last as long as 45 minutes.

Here are some quotes about various aspects of daily living that might give you a chuckle:

Stress

"The secret of living with frustration and worry is to avoid becoming personally involved with your own life."

Ziggy

"Relax...otherwise you might die all tensed up."

Unknown

3.

Work

"How would you like a job where if you make a mistake, a big red light goes on and 18,000 people boo?"

Jaques Plante, former hockey goalie

"My father taught me to work, but not to love it. I never did like to work, and I don't deny it. I'd rather read, tell stories, crack jokes, talk, laugh...anything but work."

Abraham Lincoln

"To love what you do, and to feel that it matters...how could anything be more fun?"

Katherine Graham, newspaper publisher

Goals

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals."

Unknown

"Don't wait for your ship to come in, swim out to it."

Unknown

"The greatest of all mistakes is to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can."

Sydney Smith

Health

"This is serious, some things suppose to last the rest of my life are already wearing out."

Ashleigh Brilliant

"To avoid delay, please have all of your symptoms ready."

Notice in an English doctor's waiting room

Laughter

"You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in something, you can survive it."

Bill Cosby

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two individuals."

Victor Borge

The most helpful humor involves the good-natured contemplation of life's ups and downs. Good humor is related to a healthy self esteem, especially one's ability to laugh at him or herself.

"When people have the ability to laugh at themselves, they start to develop a different attitude. They stop believing that life owes them certain things. They know that they have to work for what they get. They become more effective in life. It's a kind of paradox. Until they can really accept their shortcomings, they can't go out and do what they are capable of doing."

Dr. Frank Prevost, Psychotherapist, Western University

4.

Humor is important, but always remember the following tips when using humor with others:

1. Adopt an attitude of playfulness
2. See the funny side or the flip side of every situation.
3. Learn to take yourself lightly, to laugh at yourself.
4. Laugh with others for what they do, NOT what they are.
5. The key to successfully using humor is "laughing with," never "laughing at."
6. Be sensitive to the right time, the right place and the right amount.
7. Know your audience and be appropriate.
8. Consider age, level of education, values and culture. Remember, it is embarrassing to be the one not to get the joke!

Bear in mind, in this negative world we live in, don't leave the positives to chance! Build humor into your daily work environment and reap the benefits!

Correct attribution for this article is:

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