

Humor at Work Builds Profitability

By John Madden

Mark Twain said, “The one serious conviction a man should have is that nothing is to be taken too seriously”

Not only should we not take ourselves too seriously, we should *intend* to find and incorporate humor in every facet of our lives, especially in our jobs.

How can humor help us in the workplace? Can it help us be more profitable? Sure, and here’s why. Consider that the biggest causes of lost productivity and declining profits are inadequate training, stress, low morale, and poor teamwork.

How does humor help? Funny you should ask!

It locks-in learning. See how it’s been used in advertising. Remember that great hamburger commercial with the slogan “*Where’s the beef?*”, and that insurance ad with the animated duck...*Aflac*. Think of others that make you smile.

In presentations and training, humor works to illustrate a principle or a technique. With the aid of cartoons, humorous stories and anecdotes, great trainers and teachers insure that learning takes place. I had an opportunity to conduct training for a group of aerospace industry instructors on how to use humor in training. Their topics include blue print reading, computer processing, and sheet metal working, among others – not the most exciting topics. They discovered how to reduce the tedium and make the classes more interesting, thereby helping people to learn more in a shorter time.

Humor builds rapport- and teamwork. The great Danish entertainer, Victor Borge said, “Humor is the shortest distance between two people” If you can make people laugh or smile, you can do business with them; you can connect with them; you can reduce conflict and intimidation.

Humor reduces tension and improves creativity. When you’re laughing, it’s impossible to be stressed-out at the same time. And studies have shown that while you’re

laughing, or immediately after you've been laughing, the mind is at it's most creative - and is more efficient at solving problems and developing new ideas.

Humor heals illness and depression. Laughter releases pain-killing endorphins in the body. A book worth buying is *Anatomy of an Illness* by Norman Cousins. Back in the sixties, Cousins was dying of a debilitating bone disease, and given six months to live. While he was in the hospital his doctor, at Cousin's request, brought him comedy tapes to watch, including popular shows at the time, such as Candid Camera and The Marx Brothers. Cousins laughed himself to recovery. He lived another 25 years! In his book, he says that 10 minutes of belly laughter was equivalent to two hours of restful sleep.

How can *you* use humor to improve productivity and profits in the workplace? Try these.

1. Start all your meetings with a little humor. Share a story, joke or cartoon to lighten the mood and get the creative juices going.
2. As you work through your day, look for humor opportunities, in your job, your activities, and in your communications with others.
3. Collect humor material from the newspaper, emails, cartoons, bumper stickers etc. Share with coworkers at all levels.
4. Put a humorous conversation piece on your desk or worktable.
5. See the funny side of an argument you have with a coworker by standing back to get another perspective.
6. Laugh at your own inadequacies and weaknesses. This reduces stress and gets you more respect from others.
8. Read the book, *Nuts*. It tells how Southwest Airlines uses humor to make it the most successful and profitable national airline in the USA.

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