

## **MAKING WORK FUN**

Everyone loves laughing. Babies and children do it naturally. Most people like a good joke. Sitcoms are some of the most popular programmes on television. Famous comedians like Eddie Murphy, Rowan Atkinson, and Robin Williams earn millions from their talents. At both school and work, the most popular people are often those who make us laugh.

Yet as we become teenagers and adults, many people seem to lose the ability to laugh. Our parents and teachers tell us there is something wrong with it. “Settle down,” they say, or “Wipe that smile off your face.” Laughter becomes associated with immaturity and insanity. The bad guys in movies often have a maniacal laugh to chill us: humour without kindness.

### **Why are you smiling?**

When we grow up and get a job, work is often considered a laugh-free zone as people are deadly serious about making products, money, and careers. We get embarrassed if we laugh, and even don't say things just because they are funny. Laughter is thought a distraction: we should not be having fun at work, we should be working! Fun activities like teambuilding are conducted away from the workplace, as if such things don't belong there.

But being too serious can actually affect people's ability to do their work effectively. Nobody is perfect, and it helps to be able to laugh at our mistakes rather than get stressed about them. Over a long period of time, lack of humour can make people depressed, and even sick. Feelings, thoughts, and attitudes contribute to mental well-being, physical health, and the ability to recover from illness.

### **A laugh a day keeps the doctor away**

This idea is not new. Even thousands of years ago, people knew that laughter was good for you. In the Christian Bible, Proverbs 17:22 says “Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time.” The ancient Greeks used to visit the “home of comedians” as part of the healing process. In the American Ojibwa Indian tribe, clown-doctors performed to help cure the sick.

Scientific reseach has shown that laughter can aid our physical well-being. A hearty laugh lowers blood pressure, relaxes muscles, and exercises the respiratory system. Natural opiates pour into the bloodstream, making the laugher feel high afterwards. The immune system is strengthened, and the level of stress hormones drops.

A good giggle also benefits the mind. Humour improves creativity, because people practise creating as they use word-play or think up new ways to have fun. Laughter helps bring people together as a group: there is a common link when everyone is laughing at the same thing. And finally, if you feel happy, you think happy. And a happy disposition helps when times are tough.

## **No way!**

There's nothing wrong with using humour at work. Bosses are usually not comedians, but think about a high-level manager you know who gave a great presentation: he or she probably used some gentle humour in their speech. Why? Laughter builds rapport, relaxes the audience, and indicates a common understanding. If the top leaders use humour themselves, then it's got the company stamp of approval. It's sanctioned and it's good for us, so why can't we use it more often?

Some people might be cautious about using humour at work these days because it is so culture-bound: perhaps they are worried they are not understood, or that they offend people. Yet much humour easily crosses borders and culture. For example, the English *Mr Bean*, the Swiss *Pingu*, and the American *Simpsons* have all bridged the cultural gap and are shown on television to the delight of audiences all around the world.

Using humour will always require some risk: will people understand, will they be offended, will I look silly? But if you follow a few simple rules, you can minimise the risk and maximise the laughs.

When joking, avoid personal topics like sexuality, religion, physical appearance, or bodily functions; these offend too easily. Instead, joke about yourself. It doesn't hurt anybody, and those who know you will understand. Poke fun at the situations in which you find yourself (e.g. difficult customers). Be childlike – even bring toys to work to play with during breaks.

## **Conclusion**

Work is not all fun and games. Some gravitas is necessary. But moderation is the watchword: in both seriousness and levity. Allowing our sense of humour to thrive at work relieves stress, improves teamwork, enhances creativity, and generally creates a more pleasant work day.

Some related links (copy-paste into your browser):

*Laughter: The best medicine*

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20050406-000001.html>

*How and when to make humour at work*

<http://www.articlesbase.com/humor-articles/how-and-when-to-make-humour-at-work-255177.html>

*Get caught laughing*

[http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Get\\_Caught\\_Laughing\\_At\\_Work.html](http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Get_Caught_Laughing_At_Work.html)

Next time, we will be discussing how to make meetings more bearable.

*References:*

Bratton, J., & Gold, J. (2007). *Human resource management: Theory and practice*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ford, R.C., McLaughlin, F., & Newstrom, J.W. (2004). Creating and sustaining fun work environments in hospitality and service organisations. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(1), 11-30.

Osland, J.S., Kolb, D.A., Rubin, I.M., & Turner, M.E. (2007). *Organizational behaviour: An experiential approach* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Tamblyn, D., & Weiss, S. (2000). *The big book of humorous training games*. Maidenhead, Berksh., England: McGraw-Hill.