

Humor in the Workplace Helps Relieve Stress

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Those on the front line of any service industry know what stress is all about. Working with demanding, hard-to-please customers on a daily basis can take its toll on the best attitudes. A little humor, used in the right way, can help soothe frazzled nerves, ease tension and make your workday seem a bit shorter. Humor can help endear you to customers and co-workers alike.

Many people agree that humor can make the workplace easier to take, but some feel as though they don't know how to be funny. They think they aren't as quick-witted as some of their co-workers or they may have a paralyzing fear of being unfunny. It's okay if you're not the next Robin Williams. There are many ways to show your colleagues that you have a sense of humor.

It can be as easy as responding to the joking and laughter of those around you, if only with just a smile. The key is to loosen up a little and show you are human. Sharing in the merriment helps build team spirit. If you find a particularly funny cartoon or news clipping, share it with your co-workers. It shows that you have a light-hearted side — and it will brighten their day.

Psychologist Barbara Mackoff is author of *What Mona Lisa Knew: A Woman's Guide to Getting Ahead in Business by Lightening Up*. She tells the story of a personnel manager at a high-tech company who was told the firm would be changing to

an unpopular new accounting system. Her department would be responsible for the changes, which meant the team would be faced with both an avalanche of paperwork and a series of complaints and questions from other employees. The morning the changes were to take place her co-workers arrived to find she had changed everyone's last name on his or her nameplates to DANGERFIELD. They would be getting "no respect" for their efforts. The joke was a bit lame, but the message from the manager to the employees was clear: "This is a tough job, but if we pull together we can get it done without too much trouble."

While humor can endear us to our customers and co-workers, it should never be at their expense. If you have to say, "I hope this won't offend anyone, but..." forget the joke. Don't think because you find Democrats or country-western singers funny, your co-workers will, too.



Never tell a joke that is sexist or racist. There's no place in the business world for this kind of so-called "humor."

If you've forgotten some part of your joke and hope it will come back to you while telling it, it probably won't. A bungled joke is worse than no joke at all.

Steer clear of sarcasm or cynicism. That kind of humor tends to tear down rather than be constructive. And finally, just as it's not good to make fun of others, it's not good to make fun of yourself. Don't forget that your feelings and attitudes matter, too.

We spend about one-third of our lives at work, so it's expected that while there we'll feel happiness, sadness, pride and a multitude of other emotions. While most of the time it's important to be serious and do a good job, we don't have to act as though we're made of wood. Remember that humor in the workplace can't solve every problem, and it should never interfere with getting the job done properly and quickly. However, a little humor, at the right place and the right time, can give us higher productivity, improved communication and reduced stress.

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