

CLAREMONT EAP *Your trusted resource*

EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

IMPACT

January-March 2020

How a Little Humor Can Improve Your Work Life

Laughter and jokes can make us happier and more productive on the job.



Why do we laugh at movies like *Office Space* or shows like *The Office*? What's so funny about work?

For one student in the GGSC's online Foundations of Happiness at Work course, humor is found in everyday faux pas. Steve from California shared, "During a meeting, my boss complimented our colleague... saying how handsome he is. The team felt awkwardly surprised, until our boss corrected, 'No—it's great how *hands-on* he is!' Everyone laughed, easing the tension from the meeting. 'Well, he is handsome, too!' I defended jokingly, and we all laughed again."

Work may seem like a serious place. But, according to research, introducing some laughter into work life can contribute to our well-being and productivity. In fact, finding humor is one of the practices we teach students in our online course. The

funny stories they shared remind us that a little playfulness goes a long way toward a more enjoyable work life.

The benefits of humor at work

Humor creates an atmosphere of levity and a sense of perspective that can dissolve tension and, in turn, protect us from stress at work and even benefit our health. Moreover, research suggests that people who engage in more conversational humor with colleagues feel happier and have higher job satisfaction.

Laughter serves to create and strengthen social bonds in humans—as well as in our chimp ancestors. One evolutionary theory claims that laughter first emerged in these ancestors as a response to signal safety and relief to others after something unexpected occurs. This has implications in modern times, and it may explain why colleagues who laugh more together

continued on next page

IN THIS ISSUE

How a Little Humor Can Improve Your Work Life **PAGE 1**

Workplace Goals for the New Year **PAGE 3**

Make the Most of Leadership Opportunities **PAGE 4**

Be Happier

The Claremont Positivity Center is an online resource that incorporates Positive Psychology and mindfulness self-help techniques to improve employee well-being in the workplace and beyond.

[Visit the Positivity Center](#)



Positivity Center

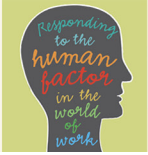
Claremont EAP distributes this newsletter to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and family matters.

For confidential help, call:

800-834-3773

or visit:

claremonteap.com



continued from previous page



tend to enjoy a more safe or comfortable environment and a greater sense of cohesion among teams.

“When friends laugh . . . in unison, their fight-flight response (e.g., increased blood pressure) is calmed and mirror neurons fire,” explains Dacher Keltner. “Shared laughter becomes a collective experience, one of coordinated action, cooperative physiology, and the establishing of common ground.”

Feeling comfortable in our work environment can empower us to think openly and take risks—a foundation for finding creative solutions at work, contributing to our productivity. In one study, leaders who used humor at work were more likely to reach their unit’s target goals, and to receive a higher performance rating from their direct supervisor, one year later.

What’s more, when supervisors integrate humor into their leadership style, they become more likeable, while maintaining respect and influence. One survey study found that employees who say that their manager “makes us laugh at ourselves when we are too serious” or “uses humor to take the edge off during stressful periods” were more likely to trust their manager, and feel a sense of belonging and contentedness at work.

A hint of self-deprecating humor can also be a useful tool for leaders and other employees to make themselves more approachable.

One study revealed that when leaders and employees share this style of self-effacing banter, employees tend to gain even more professional respect for leaders—a counterintuitive finding for leaders who are afraid to show weakness.

Still, there are some types of humor that can be counterproductive, namely condescending humor that belittles people’s worth or status. This is different from gentle teasing, which can bond colleagues together and help us to not take ourselves too seriously. As our student Malika from Saudi Arabia shared, “My coworker did a funny impression of me, and it really made me laugh. It made me feel more included and that they know me really well.”

How to find the humor at work

One way to get more out of the funny moments that happen at work is by writing them down. A 2016 study found that participants who journaled about three funny things every evening for a week felt less depressed immediately afterward, and happier up to six months later, compared to a group who journaled about their early memories.

In the Foundations of Happiness at Work course, we asked people to try this out, and we took a close look at their responses to see what they find funny at work. While some funny moments are out of our control—from pen ink leaking onto our work clothes to accidentally hitting “reply all”—most funny moments can be created with a little bit of practice.

Often, they come from making jokes related to everyday work life. Melissa from Oregon wrote, “My coworker and I were getting ready to step out for a cup of coffee, and she grabbed a huge Big-Gulp-sized mug. We both erupted into laughter because it wasn’t that far-fetched at how much we both needed that much coffee.”

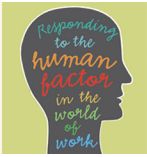
We can also get more creative and integrate humor into work tasks. Leif-Arne from Norway shared, “The HR department had made their own rap during a leadership gathering. That was quite funny, and it helped loosen up the whole gathering.”

Even when work is stressful, finding humor in the situation (if we’re able to) can help. Mariëlle from the Netherlands wrote, “I was talking to a colleague about how much time the local government took to decide whether they wanted me to lead a project about shortening waiting times in youth care. Kind of funny it took them so long to decide, considering the subject of the matter. To complain and joke a bit about it made waiting for their final call less of a burden. It places things in perspective.”

Of course, humor isn’t always called for—particularly if it’s a distraction from our tasks (as Jim Halpert’s from *The Office* is) or keeps us from seeing and addressing real problems at work. But in many situations, sharing jokes with colleagues and finding humor in the chaos or the mundane can make work a little more fun.

Jessica Lindsey | Greater Good Science Center

For confidential help, call: **800-834-3773**
or visit claremonteap.com



Workplace Goals for the New Year

The new year brings hopes and dreams for the future. You've made your resolutions - to lose weight, exercise, plan a dream vacation, for example.

Don't forget, however, that you also spend one-third of your day at work. You can improve your on-the-job enjoyment and your productivity by making the following work resolutions.



Learn new skills

To keep your career moving forward and prevent burnout, learn some new skills. Investigate which ones you'll need for a promotion or for your dream job, then make sure you acquire them. Make a resolution to always be learning something new.

Keep organized

Most people don't function well in the midst of chaos. The clutter on your desk likely distracts you and muddles your thinking. If your office is disorganized, the time you spend getting organized will be paid back in less stress and increased productivity.

Make a resolution to spend the last 15 minutes of every day clearing your desk and getting organized for the next day.

Take daily breaks

Human beings aren't built to sit at a desk for hours at a stretch -- that's why the coffee break was invented. But, there are better ways to use your breaks -- quick, simple techniques that rejuvenate the body, mind and spirit so you can return to work refreshed and ready to accomplish great things.

The following energizing breaks take less than two minutes: Count down from 10 to one, taking a deep breath with each number. Read affirmations, inspiring quotes or poetry. Read a couple of pages of a book. Put your hands over your eyes and visualize a favorite vacation spot. Gaze out a window. Listen to your favorite music. Stand up and stretch your muscles. Doodle. Drink a full glass of water. Eat a healthy snack. Take a short walk.

Structure your time

Are you wasting time taking care of things that just aren't important? If so, you'll be frustrated when you fritter away your work-days doing things your boss would consider insignificant.

The solution is to block off one or two hours of quiet time each day that you spend focusing on your important tasks. Since most people concentrate best in the morning, choose your quiet time early in the day. Then transfer your calls to your voice mail and put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your door.

Make a resolution to set aside quiet time every day to work on your important projects.

Keep an accomplishment journal

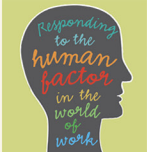
Buy a separate notebook for an Accomplishment Journal. At the end of the day, write the date on a new page and write something that you accomplished. It doesn't have to be something major. Even little steps of progress need to be acknowledged.

For example: "I dealt with Mr. Jones, a difficult customer, in a very kind and professional way." "I wrote two pages of a special report."

Writing such a journal increases your enthusiasm as you look for things to accomplish and write in your journal. Your focus will be on what you did instead of what you didn't do. Keeping the journal will also give you more confidence during employee reviews or when asking for a promotion.

One last thought: When you follow through on your work resolutions and make them daily habits, you'll experience increased productivity, more energy and enthusiasm and the joy of accomplishment.

The StayWell Company, LLC ©2019



Make the Most of Leadership Opportunities

Leadership opportunities at work can crop up unexpectedly. They're unpredictable and sometimes blend in with the surroundings so they can easily get overlooked.

"Leadership isn't a position, it's a way of being. It's about seeing what isn't there and making it happen," says Roxanne Emmerich, C.S.P., C.M.C., author of "Thank God It's Monday: How to Build a Motivating Workplace."

Ms. Emmerich offers the following suggestions on how to make the most of your leadership opportunities.

Do the extraordinary

To be a leader often means to have extraordinary thoughts and to do extraordinary things. The word "extraordinary" is a combination of two words that mean "more than the ordinary." Ordinary employees follow directions, do what they're told to do and put in a good day's work. They have the mind-set of, "This is the way we've always done it, so this is the way I'll keep doing it."

"Every one of us really wants to be extraordinary," says Ms. Emmerich. "The problem is we surround ourselves with excuses for mediocrity, and we begin to believe it's the way to be."

Look for problems to solve

The employee who wants to create leadership opportunities actually looks for problems to solve -- whether the problems are task-related or about office morale.

When you work with the mind-set of making improvements, you're thinking like a leader.

You may have ideas that will make your work more efficient. When you take those ideas and ask for permission to implement them, you're creating your own leadership opportunity -- and an opportunity to be noticed for your innovative ideas.

Give 100 percent

As an employee, you can take advantage of an often overlooked leadership opportunity: giving 100 percent effort to your work. Act as if you were stranded in the ocean and your one thought was to save yourself by getting to shore.

Ordinary employees may give 70 percent or even 80 percent effort, but leaders consistently go the extra mile and give 100 percent on the job.

Have a vision

Finding leadership opportunities requires a vision. Just like the architect who designs a superior building, you can design superior ways to do your ordinary work.

"Each person needs to know his or her vision of what superior looks like. Without a clear vision, results are limited," says Ms. Emmerich. "By having a vision, every employee at work has the opportunity to be a leader."

Improve relationships

Every employee can be a leader by improving employee relationships.

When you avoid gossip, sarcasm and negative comments, and substitute encouragement, appreciation and cheery greetings, you're making the most of a leadership opportunity. You'll be a role model to others, and you'll be rewarded with the trust of your coworkers.

The truth is, no matter what your position, you can act like a leader.

"When you seek solutions to problems, encourage positive workplace relationships and do extraordinary work, you're making the most of leadership opportunities," Ms. Emmerich says. "You'll be noticed for your efforts, and you may even be considered for a leadership position. Best of all, though, you'll be happier and more fulfilled at work."

The StayWell Company, LLC ©2019

For confidential help, call: **800-834-3773**
or visit claremonteap.com