

Andy Weisberg | Article

On Humor...

Aside from the occasional sarcastic remark or the passing around of a Dilbert cartoon, humor has not been an important part of the American workplace. But the increasing popularity of comedy clubs, "Humor Consultants" and medical reports suggesting laughter should be more of a priority all make it clear that businesses should get the message.

Humor is the great equalizer. It can smooth out transitions, release tension, and promote creative solutions to seemingly overwhelming problems. Changes in the structure of many companies and in the ways people work together are creating the need for new leaders... leaders that can increase productivity, enhance communication, raise morale and lower absenteeism all at once. Faced with the phrase, "Do More with Less," only an environment that supports creativity and humor will stand out and attract top notch employees and customers. And the only environment that can do all that is one in which people enjoy their work, or better yet, play their work.

As important as the bottom line may be, it is no more critical than the health and well being of the people that produce it. There have been a series of recent studies and qualified reports that confirm the healthy aspects of humor. Along with the obvious benefits that can result from increased doses of joy in our lives, greater recovery speed, longer life span and increased ability to handle change are also reported. This is especially important if you consider that in the year 2002, nearly 80% of Workers' Compensation was paid for problems that were related to stress alone!

Humor generates good health and good business. A positive, supportive working environment that builds strong business and personal relationships is the kind of workplace that will thrive and grow. Helping others to laugh shows that you care, and it is not a frivolous waste of time but an appropriate and even crucial part of business activity. Laughter and work need not be mutually exclusive. By taking your job seriously but yourself lightly you can do yourself and all of those around you a greater service. Taking the time and effort to brighten and encourage others is no less powerful in its world-changing potential than any other public service or aid program.

Although the job of transforming the workplace and the way we look at it in this country is not an easy one, without the effort we only maintain the status quo. Spending energy maintaining a "normal" work environment produces the very things we complain about most, and continues to impair our ability to do our best work. While training programs on the subject are difficult to find and even more difficult to deliver, there **are** people with the expertise and experience to deliver them. The challenge to American business in the future will not only be to maintain financial growth and prosperity, but the growth and development of any company' greatest asset -- the people in it.