



Timely Information for Personal Success

It's Important to Make Work Fun

By Mike Jacquart

In today's uncertain economic climate, you might think that humor and laughter in the workplace is an oxymoron. In reality, the need to use laughter and humor to reduce stress and lighten a tense mood has become more important than ever.

I've been told that I do some pretty good impressions: Milton from the cult classic *Office Space*, Forrest Gump, and Raymond Babbitt (*Rain Man*), to name a few. In fact, at a former workplace it seemed if you weren't at least reasonably familiar with *Office Space*, you couldn't catch on to half of the jokes that were told! Milton's obsession with his Swingline stapler, in particular, was always good for a few laughs to ease the tension during a stressful period. I enjoyed having the gift of making people laugh ... especially during tough times.

Humor has a lot of benefits. It's been proven helpful in combating stressful illnesses such as cancer, high blood pressure, stroke, and scores of other diseases and conditions.

A study conducted by the State University of New York (SUNY) reported that employees who worked for bosses that utilized humor in the workplace had higher productivity and better job appraisals.

Additional studies show that humor in the workplace can:

- Reduce the number of sick days;
- Increase company loyalty;

- Retain valuable employees;
- Encourage creativity; and
- Improve morale.

More Companies are Catching On

Most firms have become "leaner" in recent years, and yet there is still constant pressure to do things faster, to assimilate more information, and to learn new skills. The need to "make do with less" amidst increased competition has triggered more job-related stress than ever before. The good news is that an increasing number of businesses are catching on that unorthodox approaches – like fun and humor – are needed to help employees deal with stress. Take the following examples:

continued on Page 2





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Healthy Recipe: Roasted Lemon Salmon Fillets

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 six-ounce salmon fillets
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Juice of one lemon
- 1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 244
- Protein: 34 g.
- Carbohydrates: 1 g.
- Sodium: 585 mg.
- Fat: 11 g.
- Saturated fat: 2 g.

DIRECTIONS:

- ➊ Season salmon fillets with salt, pepper, and lemon juice, then drizzle with olive oil.
- ➋ Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.
- ➌ Place an oven-proof sauté pan large enough to accommodate all the fillets over medium-high heat. Add salmon and sear the fillets for 3 minutes per side.
- ➍ Place in oven to finish cooking, about 5 to 10 minutes more, depending on the thickness of the fillet.

LifestyleTIPS[®]
 2017[©] Impact Publications, Inc.
 PO Box 322, Waupaca, WI 54981
 Phone: 715-258-2448
 Fax: 715-258-9048
 Website: www.impact-publications.com
 Email: info@impacttrainingcenter.net

Publisher: Scott Kolpien
 Managing Editor: Mike Jacquart

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Questions and Answers

Saving for Retirement

Q: I just turned 50, and I recently starting having money taken out of my paycheck for retirement. Any other tips?

A: First, I commend you for recognizing that need earlier than many people. You are also doing a good thing by having money withdrawn automatically from your checks. You can't spend money you never see! But you didn't say how much. At a minimum, save 1% of your earnings each payroll period. When you get a salary increase, add more to your savings while spending some. For instance, when you get a 3% increase at work, save 2% and spend the other 1%. If you receive a 5% raise, save 3% and spend 2%, and so on. Good luck. ■

Source: Bill Losey, author of "Retire in a Weekend! The Baby Boomer's Guide to Making Work Optional."

It's Important...

continued from Page 1

❖ *It's almost inhumane if companies create a climate where people can't naturally have fun.* At least, that's the prevailing view at Rosenbluth International, a Philadelphia-based travel company. "I know our company is doing well when I walk around and hear people laughing," states CEO Hal Rosenbluth.

❖ *Use humor, but not at the expense of others' feelings.* "Once you've established that you're good at what you do, and that you're professional and take your work seriously, you'll find that humor and a lighter style will work for you, not against you," explains Paul McGhee, a motivational speaker. "The number-one rule, of course, is to always be sensitive to when any kind of humor or laughter is, and is not appropriate."

Courtesy of psychotherapist Margot Escott, the following are a few ideas for creating more humor in YOUR workplace:

❖ Create humorous bulletin boards – bring in baby pictures of staff, and let the fun begin as employees try to guess who's who.

❖ Form a "fun committee" to continue to think up ways to create company-wide morale boosters.

The possibilities are endless, but whatever you do, remember that humor is an important coping skill in dealing with stress. It can even add a colorful dimension to your personality – whether it's impressions (like me) or something else. ■

Mike Jacquart is the editor of "Employee Assistance Report" and a frequent blogger and LinkedIn contributor.