

Create A Fun Workplace to Encourage Employee Loyalty

Developing a workplace where people enjoy spending time starts with developing your company's funny bone.

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By Scott Miller

Last month we discussed how the current economy provides wise employers with a prime opportunity to build loyalty among their employees. This month, we'll discuss more ways you can build employee loyalty.

Employers, managers, and supervisors who take steps to win their employees' loyalty now will reap the benefits when the pool of prospective employees dwindles. Their track record for providing a desirable working environment will draw the best people--those who will have their choice of companies and organizations to join. Wise employers will also begin, if they haven't already, to make their workplaces welcoming and rewarding for a diversity of people, to take advantage of the growing diversity of the population. Companies who fail to do this will find their choice of employees severely limited.

One way to improve the work place for everyone is to create an atmosphere of fun. According to [Duane Smelser](#), a trainer/coach in Beaverton, Oregon, people who are lighthearted, having fun, and in good spirits are more likely to be successful. Their mental attitude produces increased oxygen, endorphins, and blood flow to the brain, which enables them to think more clearly and creatively. They are more relaxed and spontaneous, more accepting of others, and more likely to share their sense of humor. People like to be with others who are laughing and having fun. As Victor Borge, the comedic concert pianist once said, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people." Smart managers will let laughter be a team-builder for them.

Here are five tips for creating opportunities for having fun in your workplace:

- 1. Understand that taking 15 minutes to laugh will increase productivity, not reduce it.** People think more clearly and operate more productively when they've had a break that clears the cobwebs from their brains. Nothing clears cobwebs more effectively than laughter. If your organization is results-driven, your people will enjoy and benefit from the fun they have at work and will not let the fun interfere with their productivity.
- 2. Provide a forum for everyone to collect and share their favorite cartoons, jokes, and stories.** People connect through shared laughter, wit, and appreciation of irony. Encourage everyone, from the top down, to bring in jokes, cartoons and stories that tickled, or even flabbergasted, them. Provide a public area for these things to be posted, perhaps a large bulletin board or an expanse of wall. Encourage people to congregate there as time permits and share a laugh or two. In the process, they'll get to know one another better and develop a shared sense of belonging. Caution: Make it clear that jokes and stories with a racial, sexual, or ethnic slant are not acceptable. If it becomes necessary, develop a system for making sure that unkind or bigoted items don't get posted, for example, by having each one checked first by a person or committee charged with maintaining a sense of humor while culling out offensive material.
- 3. Encourage everyone to take a few minutes to do something uniquely their own to break the tension.** A short break from routine can reinvigorate the thought processes. Take short breaks yourself and encourage others to take them. Do whatever helps you to truly disengage from the issue, problem or project at hand. For some, that might be working on a crossword puzzle or a Rubik's Cube; one person might do 50 jumping jacks, another might hold a yoga pose for several minutes. One might listen to his favorite music on headphones, while another walks around the block. Encourage people to share their methods for relieving tension; laugh about the more outrageous ones; enjoy the different ways people find to lighten the atmosphere in which they work. Some might find they enjoy doing some tension-breakers together.
- 4. Learn to look at the humor in negative situations.** Lead the way in making jokes about a difficult situation your company is experiencing. When people can laugh in the midst of a horrendous deadline, make fun of themselves after making a mistake, share the ludicrousness of a bad experience with a very difficult customer, they open themselves up to more creative solutions to those difficult issues and situations. They also clear the way for themselves and others to work on those issues with greater enthusiasm and clarity.
- 5. Ask for employees' ideas for ways to add fun to the workplace.** Don't do all the work of figuring out what would be fun at your workplace--let employees bring their ideas to the table. Consider creating a committee whose job is to dream up ways for bringing fun into the office. Let people use their creativity to raise the level of laughter, and there will be creativity left over for accomplishing job objectives.

Everyone--from the CEO and upper management to part-time employees--benefits from laughing on the job. People like to go to work when they can expect to have a good time while doing a good job.

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