



130 Ways to Put Humour to Work

M I C H A E L K E R R

LIGHTEN UP YOUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Research shows that gerbils lose brain cells when kept in stark, gray, cubicle-like environments – whereas gerbils that are provided with lots of colourful and creative stimulus actually grow more brain cells. Can the same be said for humans . . . ?

1. Work to music – studies show it can help productivity and creativity
2. Allow staff to personalize work areas
3. Create a fun waiting room or reception area that sends a positive message
4. Program your computers to play inspirational music each time they start
5. Create an official "lighten up!" room with books, posters, videos and toys
6. Decorate your office with humorous posters, pictures and props and add a humour section to the office bulletin boards
7. Create your own "hall of fame" photo gallery highlighting employees and achievements

SPRING TRAINING - TRAIN FOR HUMOUR AND ADD HUMOUR TO YOUR TRAINING

If you truly value humour then take it seriously enough to offer training in it for everyone. And remember to use ample doses of humour in all training sessions – humour can boost attendance, encourage participation, make difficult concepts easier to grasp, alleviate anxieties of attendees and improve retention of the material being presented.

8. Offer training in stress management
9. Offer training in humour in the workplace to all employees

10. Offer training in creativity in the workplace – creativity and humour feed off each other
11. Create a humour, stress and creativity library of books and tapes
12. Hold weekly or daily work related trivia contests to promote knowledge of the company
13. Use role plays, cartoons, game-show style quizzes, funny videos & props in training sessions
14. Incorporate participants names in training materials (vs. Jane and John Smith)
15. Have door prizes during all training classes
16. Use fun methods of introducing participants – have them describe their favourite interests when they were five years old, or have everyone go on a "scavenger hunt" to match different people with different characteristics (e.g. find two people with the same colour underwear, three people who can sing the Gilligan's Island theme song, four people who . . .)

MEETINGS FOR THE SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED

The best way to make meetings more bearable is to not have them (just kidding). If you must have meetings, at least try to make them interesting, engaging and worth having. Using humour in meetings can help encourage attendance and participation during the meeting. Humour also helps participants feel more relaxed, facilitates more open communication and can help people to problem solve or brainstorm more creatively.

17. Create agendas with catchy titles, cartoons, jokes or quotes
18. Have a theme agenda (e.g. use movie titles to describe agenda items)
19. Name your meeting room or boardroom something fun and inspiring (who wants to spend three hours in a BOARDroom?)



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20. Hold meetings at your house, a local picnic site, park or the bowling alley – anywhere that breaks people out of the routine and creates a relaxed atmosphere
21. Have door prizes at every meeting - be creative, they don't need to cost much
22. Have a fun penalty for late arrivals (a quarter into the social fund)
23. Start each meeting with the Mission: Impossible theme and deliver the agenda with a fun sense of urgency.
24. Use toys or props to loosen people up before brainstorm meetings
25. Brainstorm wacky topics to loosen people up before a serious brainstorm (25 uses for a paper clip)
26. Play a fun game before brainstorming (pictionary, office charades)
27. Arm people with water pistols, Nerf balls or paper wads to assail anyone who uses "idea blocking" language in meetings (e.g. "we've always done it that way")
28. Think of fun ways to penalize ramblers or people who stray of the agenda topic
29. Add a rumour mill section at the end of every meeting – it's a fun way to squash rumours and bring out people's concerns and issues in a safe environment
30. Have a "whine and cheese" section in the agenda where people are allowed two minutes to vent and whine in an exaggerated, over-dramatic manner
31. Have awards for the best work related funny story, joke or work blooper for each meeting
32. End meetings with a fun, upbeat work-related anecdote or game to leave people feeling positive and energized (make it a humour mill to accompany the rumour mill)
33. Try holding meetings without chairs for faster meetings with a totally different perspective
34. Play "jargon bingo" during meetings (make bingo cards out of overused phrases and words related to your profession) as a way to reduce babble speak
35. Have a "pick your nose" meeting, where everyone has to don a clown nose, animal nose or Grouch Marx nose as a way of lightening up
36. Have an official bonehead or foot in mouth award each time someone makes an inappropriate comment

AND THE WINNER IS . . .

Find reasons to celebrate – continually. Celebrate new employees, small milestones, anniversaries and celebrate successes as well as your blunders. Rewarding employees is a simple and creative way to say thanks, show appreciation, keep workplace spirit alive and keep morale and motivation high.

37. Hold a fun awards ceremony mid-way through a particularly stressful period to give people a break and energizer
38. Have an annual "Best Worst Job Day" award to encourage people to laugh at their bad days
39. Keep a bloopers log and reward people for their smart blunders to encourage an atmosphere of risk taking and openness.
40. Have awards that encourage appropriate behaviour, but that are still fun, for example:
 - Most Creative Idea
 - Best Sense of Humour
 - Most Succinct Memo Writer
 - Best Team/Project Name
 - Nicest Smile
 - The Most Fun Department Award
 - Friendliest Phone Voice
 - Best Answer on the Answering Machine Award
 - Rookie of the Year
 - Most Likely to Be Adopted by a Customer Award



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41. Create some just-plain-goofy awards, for example:
 - Most Creative Excuse Award
 - Biggest Blunder Award
 - Foot in Mouth Award
 - The Most Technologically Challenged Award
 - Most Likely to Jam the Photocopier
 - Most Likely to Staple Themselves Award
 - Sexiest Phone Voice
 - Conference Groupie Award
 - Most Likely to O.D. on Coffee
 - Wackiest Tie Collection Award
 - Person-Who-Comes-Closest-to-Violating-the-Dress-Code-But-Never-Actually-Does
42. Create fun team awards to promote team work and friendly competition between teams
43. Try imitating the Oscars or Emmys when presenting the awards
44. Hold contests that involve all the staff or even families of employees - for example, hold a contest for a new company jingle, motto or slogan
45. Have a "welcome to the company" party for new employees (instead of just "sorry you're leaving the company" parties)
46. Develop a list of possible rewards that employees can receive - be creative. Think of things that are relatively inexpensive or involve an exchange of labour (for example, get the boss to agree to wash your car, have the managers serve ice cream to the staff, have managers man the staff cafeteria, get a food dish named after you in the staff cafeteria . . .)
47. Show appreciation to spouses and/or family members when employees are putting in long hours or traveling on business - say thanks with a card, movie tickets, flowers . . .
48. Develop a list of creative ways of showing appreciation to customers
49. Have a "pass-the-thanks" day when one bouquet of flowers or box of chocolates is passed at regular intervals from desk to desk (accompanied with a reason the person is passing it on)

GETTING TO KNOW YOU . . .

Use ample doses of fun and humour to help people to get to know each other, build trust between employees and management, facilitate more open communications and create more cohesive teams.

50. Hold social events on a regular basis - they don't have to be elaborate or expensive. Create creative excuses for picnics, lunches or gatherings after work. Celebrate small victories as a team. Rotate the responsibility of "social coordinator" around the staff and develop a yearly or 4-month calendar of events so people stay committed to making the events happen
51. Have lunch/breakfast/dinner at a different staff members house every two months
52. Keep an office calendar with significant dates, birthdays, milestones, etc.
53. Penalize people who talk about work at some "out of work" functions - make violators pay a buck into the social fund for every mention of work
54. Hold team sporting events - darts, baseball, bowling, anything that gets everyone involved
55. Hold your own Olympics with events relevant to your profession
56. Hold job swap days to encourage staff to experience each other's work day
57. Hold a family open house where family members can tour the office and meet co-workers
58. Keep a fun photo album or scrap book for staff and clients to view



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59. Hold a "match the employee to the baby picture" contest
60. Hold a "match the employee to the attribute" contest (e.g. favourite movie, sport and animal)
61. Hold a "match the employee to their pet" (past or present) contest
62. Hold an employee scavenger hunt – give people a week to find other staff members who match a list of attributes (e.g. find 3 people who: are die-hard Seinfeld fans, who know how to SCUBA dive, who love to paint . . .)
63. Personalize those dry organization charts by scanning in photos of the actual people, of their baby pictures, and/or listing some personal qualities related to each person
64. Keep lists of people's "isms" - common sayings, flubs, favourite words that become a trademark for that particular person
65. Grab the whole team and meet someone at the airport the next time they return from a business trip
66. Create campaign style buttons for staff to wear to remind people to lighten up!
67. Compile a list of staff names as they appear on the computer spell checker and create an alternate employee phone list with their new nicknames
68. Invite retirees and former employees to social functions
69. Assign secret buddies to perform unexpected acts of fun for their secret partner

STRESS BUSTERS

Humour is one of the fastest and most effective means of combating stress, in fact, humour in many ways is the complete opposite of stress. It's not easy taking a humour break during times of stress, yet it's during these times that humour is needed the most.

70. Create a humour first aid kit full of cartoon books, humorous videos, funny pictures or zany props – anything that will allow you to access your sense of humour as quickly as possible
71. Focus on the positive side of any problem, on what's working right – take a five minute break and write down as many "what's working/what's positive" things you can think of
72. Brainstorm worse case scenarios. Exaggerate – having fun with the wildest possibilities can help provide you with a healthy perspective and more balanced view of the crisis
73. Imagine a positive reference point for you - last summer at the cabin, last weekend at the ski hill – anything that allows your mind to travel to a positive place, and go there (in your mind of course)
74. Take a humour break – read a joke book, watch 10 minutes of a funny video or juggle
75. List your 3 top stressors at work and brainstorm with staff creative ways of handling them
76. Create your own goofy version of the Top 10 Ways to Deal With Stress and then read it to yourself or other staff the next time you're stressed
77. Find someone outside the work office to talk to about your stress or problems
78. Assign "Stress Buster" partners in the workplace – your contact to call the next time you feel you've hit rock bottom and are tempted to push the photocopier out the window



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79. Have a slogan or goofy song to recall every time you face stress
80. Re-frame situations by looking at them from the perspective of a sitcom writer, comedian or fictional hero (e.g. how would James Bond or Elmer Fudd handle this problem?)
81. Staple a piece of Kleenex to bad news memos and correspondence
82. Laugh. Just start laughing - even fake laughing can produce some of the same positive physiological benefits as real laughing
83. Have a goofy hat or clothing item you can put on every time you feel stressed, or wear something wacky under your business clothes to remind you to keep cool when the heat is on
84. Switch sides in a debate and argue to ridiculous extremes from the other side
85. Count to ten and imagine how funny it will seem one year from today
86. Imagine tomorrow's newspaper headline with a caption related to what you felt like doing in your moment of stress overload (e.g. Frank Remple Puts Co-Worker's Head Through Paper Shredder)
87. Visualize the person you're mad at as the name you're wishing to call them (e.g. imagine them as an actual, real life, literal - "bonehead")
88. Find the nearest 4 year old - kids can do wonders for your nerves. (Note: If it's a kid causing you stress, find the nearest 40 year old. . .)
89. Ask yourself. . .what's the one thing that I can take away, learn or laugh at about this mess. . .
90. Make goofy faces - they're great for relieving tension in the facial muscles where a lot of stress builds up
91. Complete the following... "The only way this could get worse is..." or "I knew I was in trouble when..." (exaggerate and have fun with the possibilities)
92. Create a reward system that accompanies a frequent stressor (for example, every time the photocopier jams, you're entitled to a free chocolate . . .)
93. Create an "end-of-the-work-day" ritual to leave work behind (write down outstanding issues and lock them away, play a goofy song or put on a clown nose)
94. Create a weekends/time-off only calendar so that you don't bring work issues home with you

SPEAKING OF HUMOUR. . .

Use humour in presentations to add interest, increase participation, maintain interest, improve retention, build rapport with your audience and reduce your nerves. Remember to practice safe humour only!

95. Use cartoons in overheads, flip charts and handouts
96. Use props to make points
97. Tell amusing anecdotes that deliver a message
98. Use humorous quotes related to your topic
99. Find out any audience "in" jokes before-hand
100. Laugh at your own flubs throughout your talk (provided you make some like the rest of us!) For example, if you lose your spot during a talk respond with "I'm sorry, my train of thought derailed on me."
101. Use jokes only that are current, "safe", relevant to your topic and that deliver a message
102. Use interesting or amusing trivia or statistics to make a point
103. Intersperse humorous overheads between dry subject material (e.g. one of the family dog)



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AND FROM THE HODGEPODGE PILE . . .

As you may have gathered by now, there are dozens of ways to inject a little fun and humour into the workplace. All it takes is a little sprinkle of imagination, a heaping dose of creativity and the willingness to do so something. Above all else, it is a simple matter of giving yourself and each other permission to have fun and permission to play once in a while. Once you've done that, the possibilities are endless . . .

104. Create your own company version of a dictionary of terms only your company would use or understand
105. Keep a joke-a-day calendar handy
106. Circulate relevant work-related cartoons
107. Put cartoons on all memos and correspondence
108. Have a rotating "corporate jester" who's responsible for bringing some spontaneous fun into the workplace. Transfer the role each month to a different employee
109. Start a humour library in the lunch room
110. Name menu items in the cafeteria after worker's names
111. Keep a file of bizarre or humorous questions or complaints received from customers
112. Keep a "You Know You're Having a Bad Day When..." file of work-related bad day stories
113. Create fake alternative business cards for staff that describes the real person with a more creative, imaginary title that really captures the person's spirit
114. Create a fake membership I.D. card for your professional association
115. Put jokes, cartoons or funny quotes on customer invoices, correspondence and receipts
116. Have a warm, funny office door sign that let's people know you're a warm, funny, caring, approachable, lovable kind a person
117. Create a humour file or journal of jokes, quotes and anecdotes relevant to your particular profession
118. Form a Joy Committee or Fun Squad or Stress Busters Department
119. Have a "pass the joke" relay from phone to phone until everyone's been reached
120. Have theme days (or weeks or months)
121. Have a goofy tie, mis-matched socks or wacky boxers day
122. Personalize your screen saver with fun messages
123. Perform random acts of humour on a fellow employee once a week
124. Give yourself a nickname based on your spell check name or the last four digits of your work phone number (for example if your extension is 3764, the letters could spell out "frog")
125. Hold an office scavenger hunt
126. Hold an office Easter egg hunt
127. Show home slides or videos in the office during lunch hour
128. Create an annual "Yearbook" of your company's highlights complete with fun photos, memorable moments, significant dates, employee profiles etc.
129. Create calendars for all the staff using workplace photos - most printing shops do mass runs at a reasonable cost
130. Create a "Humour Code of Conduct" that describes how your office is going to commit to valuing the safe and effective use of humour day in and day out