

## What's Funny About Work?

Humor in the workplace can cure many ills, first among them is stress. Research shows that humor and laughter are great stress relievers. Humor, tactfully used, can improve a climate of negativity and pessimism. Laughter also improves your mood and raises morale among your co-workers. In fact, organizational psychologists have clearly demonstrated the benefits of humor in the workplace. So what do we know about humor in the workplace?

1. People that are enjoyable to be around – those with a big smile and a light heart – tend to be better able to defuse conflicts, reduce defensiveness among peers, may be better able to deliver bad news, and tend to handle complaints better.
2. Life is unpredictable and can be zany at times. In order to keep sane and healthy in the workplace, it helps to be flexible and adaptable, and humor can play an important role in your personal flexibility.
3. The physical act of laughing relieves tightness in the body, relaxes muscles, and creates an improved sense of well being.
4. Integrating humor in daily work activities reduces stress and increases the ability to have fun at work. Strategies for increasing humor include comic strips, funny quotations, and jokes.
5. Humor in the workplace is more than having employees laugh and be happy. Humor enhances communication, expands the creative process, and thus empowers productivity.
6. Laughing for a full 20 seconds can be the cardiovascular equivalent of three minutes of strenuous rowing. Plus, as an added benefit, laughing gets your endorphins flowing, which helps to minimize physical and psychological pain.

There are several different kinds of humor, and we'll look at only a few of them here. Relieving tension is one use for humor, and comes in handy when you find

yourself in a situation that is too serious or perhaps causing discomfort. Emotional survival is made possible by not taking the work too seriously, and introducing a bit of levity into the situation. This type of humor is called “tension-relieving nonsense” and can be as simple as an ice-breaker exercise where each person introduces themselves with a creative word that starts with the same letter as their first name. What other ways can you use humor to relieve tension?

Another type of humor is the “play on words” technique, including malapropisms (which means “ludicrous misuse of a word, especially by confusion with one of similar sound). For example, we all know someone who has a “photogenic memory!” Of course, what we meant was that they have a “photographic” memory. What's the funniest slip of the tongue you've ever heard? (continued on next page)



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If you think about it, humor is about developing your own sense of the preposterous or incongruous in this zany life. There are examples of the absurd and ridiculous around us every day – it just takes your attention to notice it. Exploring your ability to be creative in your observations and perceptions is also a great way to keep your mind sharp! What are some of the things you see or hear every day that strike you as funny or strange?

It's said that children laugh around 400 times a day and adults may laugh about 5 times a day. If you want to increase your humor skills, there are a couple of different things you can do. First, make a "My Fun List" of the activities you enjoy doing. Try to remember things you liked as a kid, and make sure all of your activities are fun, not merely "to do" items. Schedule time on your calendar to do the fun things on your list, and you'll be amazed at how wonderful you feel. Secondly, you could learn more about humor in the workplace. A good place to start is the book *Humor at Work: The Guaranteed, Bottom-Line, Low Cost, High-Efficiency Guide to Success Through Humor*, by Esther Blumenfeld. Third, you could think about creating a "fun committee" to explore different ways to apply humor to the workplace. What are some other ways can you increase your humor skills?