



Lawpsided Seminars

He Who Laughs ... Lasts By Sean Carter

There is an old adage that “laughter is the best medicine.” Of course, this adage was penned long before the advent of antibiotics, laser surgery and Viagra so it may be somewhat dated. Nevertheless, there is much truth to the proposition that laughter has a beneficial effect on the body.

According to Dr. Steven Sultanoff, a Mirthologist and Clinical Psychologist, “The physical immune system is bolstered through biochemical changes such as an increase in immunoglobulin A during laughter.” Now, I’m not exactly sure what that means but it sounds pretty good. Seriously, there are many studies that document the healthful effects of laughter.

Interestingly, one study demonstrated that pre-schoolers laugh an average of 300 times per day while the average adult only laughs 15 times per day. It’s probably not a coincidence that pre-schoolers tend not to suffer from high-blood pressure or ulcers. Glenville Kleiser states, “Good humor is a tonic for mind and body. It is the best antidote for anxiety and depression.” And perhaps, just as importantly, he goes on to state, “It is a business asset.”

In one survey, 98% of the 737 CEOs interviewed said they would prefer to hire someone with a sense of humor over someone without. One of the biggest proponents of workplace humor is Herb Kelleher, the CEO of Southwest Airlines. He says, “If work is more fun, it feels less like work.” As a result, employees at Southwest Airlines are encouraged to use humor in their interactions with each other and even with customers.

For instance, on some airlines when passengers are slow to take their seats, the flight attendant will say something like, “If everyone will take their seats, we can get ready for take-off.” However, on Southwest, you’ll often here something like, “Eenie, meenie, minie, moe ... pick a seat, we gotta go.” I was on a Southwest flight where the flight attendant said, “Everyone just pick a seat; it doesn’t matter which one, they’ll all get there at pretty much the same time anyway.” I still laugh about this comment when I think back on it.

Now, you may be wondering if the use of humor in a customer service situation is seen as unprofessional. Well, we would all be lucky to work for companies as “unprofessional” as Southwest Airlines. It regularly leads the airline industry in *every* category of customer satisfaction. As one of their satisfied customers, I really appreciate their light-hearted approach.

Of course, Southwest’s approach doesn’t just have advantages for the customer but for the company as well. In addition to being the industry leader in

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customer service, it also leads the industry in productivity, staff retention and safety. According to Dr. David Abramis at the California State University at Long Beach, people who have fun on the job are more creative, more productive, better decision-makers, and get along better with co-workers. In addition, they take fewer sick and personal days.

In short, adding humor to the workplace can be beneficial in terms of employee health and morale, customer service, productivity and retention. This is particularly true in high-stress industries, such as medicine, law and manufacturing explosives. Humor allows professionals to reduce stress, gain perspective and, in many cases, avoid “burn out.” Therefore, it is to every firm’s advantage to implement an employee-friendly and fun atmosphere.

Of course, developing this atmosphere will depend very much on the nature of the firm’s business and the culture of its employees. Obviously, a company that supplies clowns for children’s birthday parties will employ much more humor than a mortuary (or a firm of tax attorneys). Nevertheless, *every* company can benefit from making fun a workplace priority.

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