Making the Workplace More FUNctional
Part II – The Environment, The People, and The Activities

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"Do it Well. Make it Fun."

This is the second of two articles on making the work environment more enjoyable. In the previous article, Ron discussed the principle of making work more fun. In this article, he describes how use fun and humor to improve the environment, interact with the people, and make the activities in the environment more fun. For copies of Part I, please contact Ron at Ron@RonCulberson.com and request "Making the Workplace More FUNctional, Part I."

There are three ways to make the workplace, uh, funner. You can inject some fun into the **environment**, the **people** or the **activities**. Let's look at all three.

Making the Environment Funner

I recently visited a donut shop where a sign on the wall read, "Warning, Donut Area. That means police officers are nearby."

That's hilarious. And what's great about a sign like that is it makes the donut shop more fun *and* implies the employees have a high degree of confidence in their work. If you can make fun of what you do, you're more likely to be confidently competent.

I saw another sign in a hospital on the door going into the maternity unit. It read, "Push, Push, Push." This makes everyone smile (except perhaps someone in their 40th hour of labor) and in no way diminishes the seriousness or what's happening on the other side of the door.

You can make your work environment fun by creating a pleasant environment without negatively affecting the work or the productivity. The more enjoyable the setting, the more likely you'll want to be there. The key is figuring out what works for you.

Here are some ways to lighten up your work surroundings:

- In a central, non-customer area, post cartoons, funny headlines or funny pictures.
- Decorate the walls with fun posters (such as the de-motivational posters you'll find at www.Despair.com. Example: *Worth: Just because you're necessary doesn't mean you're important.*)
- Decorate equipment (copiers, computers, phones, etc.) to make it more fun to use.
- Place light de-stressing toys (Koosh balls, stress balls, Nerf guns, etc.) around the work area for use when things get heavy.
- Buy a joke-of-the-day calendar and place it where everyone can enjoy it.
- Create a Wall of Shame where every month, you hang a picture of someone who did the goofiest thing that month (like wearing two different shoes to work).

- Put up a white board where you can pose questions to staff such as "What good movie have you seen lately?", "What's the best restaurant you've eaten at?" or "Briefs or boxers?"
- Decorate the staff bathroom with posters, flowers or even a sign that reads, "Smile, you're on Candid Camera."
- Decorate meeting rooms so that the atmosphere makes for a better meeting.
- Take up a collection to buy board games for staff to play on their breaks or during lunch.

When you make the environment more fun, the workplace is a welcome sight to those that work there. It's much more desirable than a work environment that's dull, boring or stressful. So, lighten up!

Being Funner with People

When you're experiencing stress, it's easy to let that stress "bleed" onto other people. That creates tension and friction. However, by sharing humor with one another, you're more likely to avoid the interpersonal stress I call "staff infections."

My first healthcare job was working as an aide in a psychiatric hospital. The staff had a great time with each other. In fact several of us regularly engaged in pulling off elaborate practical jokes. Once, I told a colleague that he had a phone call. Actually, he didn't. I dialed into the public address system and left the receiver on the desk. When he picked up the call, his voice was broadcast over the entire hospital.

"Hello? Hello? Who the hell is this?"

It was hilarious.

One of the reasons my job in the psychiatric hospital was fun was because we had fun with each other. We shared jokes, recommended shows and movies, shared cartoons, and of course, made fun of each other. This type of interacting created close working relationships and life-long friendships.

If you'd like to add some inject some fun into your relationships with colleagues, consider the following:

- Challenge staff to celebrate April 1st with practical jokes, humorous announcements and fun interactions.
- Share a joke with your colleagues at least once a week.
- Create a funny message for your answering machine ("Hi, the answering machine is broken. This is the refrigerator.")
- During lunch, encourage your colleagues to eat together and pick a fun topic to discuss (funniest movie, favorite patient story, most embarrassing moment, etc.)
- Create funny thank-you cards or give rolls of Lifesavers candy to colleagues who do something special or just need a bit of encouragement.

- Share funny websites via email with your colleagues.
- Allow yourself to have humor breaks throughout the day. A five minute exchange of a funny experience will help your day go by faster and you'll be more productive during the time you're working.

Funner Activities

The final way to make the work environment more fun is through planned, organized and purposeful activities designed to create fun-ness. Each year at Hospice of Northern Virginia, we celebrated Hospice Nite Out, an evening for staff and volunteers to gather for a meal and entertainment. We rented the ballroom of a hotel, offered a buffet dinner and then enjoyed a different funny program every year. The entertainment ranged from mock Academy Awards for people who'd done stupid things to Family Feud where teams competed in different hospice categories to a talent competition in which employees displayed great and not-so-great talent. The event was very well received by staff and volunteers.

Some organizations create a committee to develop and coordinate fun activities throughout the year but they can be accomplished by an industrious individual as well.

The following are some fun activities you might want to consider for your organization:

- Hold monthly Laugh Lunches during which staff eat lunch and engage in a specific activity designed to create laughter (stories, jokes, etc.).
- At annual all-staff meetings, give funny awards from the previous year for Worst Emails, Messiest Office, Funniest Shoes, etc.
- Celebrate holidays with contests for costumes, decorations, funny hats, etc.
- For those who get a regular lunch break, designate certain days as "video day" during which you watch a funny video with your colleagues.
- Each month, have a contest for the funniest work experience. The winner gets a free pizza and publication in your organization's newsletter.
- Conduct a funny slogan contest for your department or unit. Post your slogan proudly for a year and then have another contest.
- Create contests with fun rewards that reinforce workplace goals (customer service, efficiency, cost reduction, etc.)
- Conduct a contest for funny t-shirts. Take the winning entry and produce a t-shirt that you can sell to employees. The profits can go towards a party for staff.
- Always look for ways to make meetings, events, and training programs more fun with games, contests, cartoons, quotes, etc.

Whether you're making the environment, the people or the activities more fun, I think we can all agree that a fun workplace is attractive to current and future employees. What a great asset to have employees who *want* to come to work!

Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including **_Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between_**. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit www.RonCulberson.com.