

Humor Energizes Employees, Physically and Emotionally

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"A good belly laugh is worth two cups of coffee and one trip to your therapist."
(Paul McGhee)

[Adapted from P. McGhee, *Health, Healing and the Amuse System: Humor as Survival Training*. Call 800-228-0810 to order.]

If you're like most people, you feel physically and emotionally drained at the end of high stress days. And since many employees now experience stress every day they walk into their office, this feeling of being drained is now a commonplace experience. Over a decade ago (1994), a poll showed that 42% of American workers felt "used up by the end of the day."¹ It's no surprise that so many employees are burned out. And this is precisely why leaders in many companies have made finding ways to revitalize their work force a top priority. Other articles at this website discuss the many ways in which companies are putting fun to work. All of these fun activities are designed to help revitalize employees and help them enjoy their work.

Most people use their weekends to revitalize themselves. They do things that are fun to regenerate the energy and aliveness that the work week steals from them. By building opportunities for fun and laughter into the workplace, you provide opportunities for this revitalization to occur every day.

In my view, burnout becomes a problem not only because of all the negative experiences employees have on their job. It is just as much a product of failing to have enough positive experiences to counterbalance these negative ones. We have seen in earlier articles that humor is very effective at weakening negative emotions and replacing them with positive ones. Anything that you can do on your job which makes you feel good, and makes your work more enjoyable, has to help battle burnout.

Nurses and others who regularly work with people who are seriously injured or ill constantly tell me that they would burn out on their job very quickly if they didn't find a way to lighten up in the midst of the emotionally difficult work they do. If you're having surgery, the last thing you want is a surgeon who is feeling burned out—physically and emotionally drained. Your life could be hanging in the balance. Doctors and nurses have no choice but to find ways to recharge their batteries and provide quality care, no matter how stressful the day has been. If humor works for them, it will also work for you.

Top Five Signs of Burnout

- 5. You don't set your alarm anymore because you know your pager will go off before the alarm.**
- 4. You consider 40 hours a week a vacation.**
- 3. Visions of the upcoming weekend help you make it through Monday.**
- 2. Your Day Timer/Work Planner exploded.**
- 1. You think about how relaxing it would be to be in jail right now.**

In my humor programs, I do a laughter exercise in which everyone in the room does 20-30 seconds of side-splitting belly laughter. When the laughing stops, I ask what they notice about the difference in the way they feel as a result of the laughter. Someone usually says they feel more energized, more alive, or just "better." When I ask everyone to vote, 75-80% usually say they feel more energized by the laughter—even though they're perspiring, their heart rate is up, and they should be more tired. This energy boost can offer you a powerful way to revitalize yourself every day of your working life.

As job stress mounts, we wind up taking more and more of our work home with us. Even if we don't take it home, we keep thinking and worrying about it. The anxiety, tension, frustration and anger this produces disrupts the quality of home and family life and causes us to dislike our jobs even more.

Helen Gelinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute in New York completed a 20-year study of work life balance a few years ago. She found that in 1977, 38% of employees said their jobs were interfering with their family life. By 1998, the figure was up to 54%. Since there is every reason to believe that this trend will continue, it becomes imperative for individual employees to take personal responsibility for finding tools which help them leave the office behind at the end of the day.

As you improve your sense of humor, you'll find it easier and easier to let go of office upsets as you head home, allowing you to be totally present and have fun when you're with your family. And this, in turn, helps you return to work each morning refreshed and ready to tackle the day's problems.

References

1. Paxton, L. Foregoing the American Dream. *Chicago Tribune*, September 17, 1994, p. 21.