

Fundamentals

Increasing
Productivity
through Humor
at Work

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Why Fun is Fundamental Today:

- ✓ Rapid change makes us feel more stressed out than every before.
- ✓ Humor is the secret for dealing with interpersonal problems everyone faces.
- ✓ Laughter can make you a happier and healthier person.

Humor Busters:

Early childhood training.

Early career training.

Fear of loss of power or fear of embarrassment

Five Fun Facts About the Power of Humor:

1. Humor leads to better problem-solving.
2. Humor reduces tension and conflict and leads to better member service.
3. Humor accelerates and facilitates learning.
4. Humor motivates people—both the credit union team and members.
5. Humor helps us deal with change and stress.

How to Improve Your Humor-ability:

- ✓ Share an embarrassing moment.
- ✓ Keep a funny file
- ✓ Belly laugh once a day
- ✓ Practice funaerobics
- ✓ Do something spontaneous at least once a week.

Humor at work is:

- ✓ An ability to laugh at yourself
- ✓ An ability to laugh with—not “at”—someone else
- ✓ An ability to see the absurdity in a difficult situation
- ✓ An ability to look at something in a new way
- ✓ An indicator of flexibility in thinking

Humor at work is not:

- ✓ Practical jokes
- ✓ Sarcasm

About the Speaker:

Constance Anderson is a nationally recognized credit union speaker and author. Raised in Hyannis, Nebraska, population 350 (including dogs and chickens)—she learned early in life that if you can't laugh at yourself, there may be no one else to laugh at! She honed her humor working in the depths of the marketing departments at a number of companies. She has been responsible for marketing diet cookies, psychiatric hospitalization, and asphalt (not necessarily in that order). Today, her company is the fastest-growing provider of mystery shopping services for credit unions across the U.S. and in Canada.

She is the author of *The Credit Union Marketing Handbook*, *Strategic Marketing for Credit Unions*, *A Fresh Perspective on CRM*, and *The Strategic Membership Growth Planning Guide for Credit Unions* along with several really believable notes from her mother excusing her from class in the 10th grade.

Constance sincerely believes that life is too short to miss out on the fun—even at work. And she is sure that when all is said and done, the moments we'll remember most are the ones in which we laughed together. As Victor Borge said, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."

Constance welcomes your jokes, your stories, and your comments. Here's how to reach her:

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52 Ideas for Motivating Your Credit Union Team

Ways to Reward People

- Give a regular “standing ovation” to anyone who makes a heroic effort
- Institute a “Call in Well” day. Give every employee a day off when they’re actually feeling good!
- Call a co-worker’s extension and leave a voice mail message that just says, “Great job!”
- Make new employees feel extra welcome. Put a welcome banner at their desk or provide a basket of treats and coupons. Too many companies spend all of their money on the “going away” party. What about a “Welcome to the Credit Union” party?
- Give away coupons to top performers. A popular coupon is “Get Off 30 Minutes Early (and the boss does your job.”
- Write a positive message on a banana and leave it on your co-worker’s desk.
- One company “toasts” new employees by bringing in a toaster, speciality breads, and great jams. Everyone enjoys toast and juice for breakfast.
- Give a special award to employees who cover for others on vacation or sick days. Movie passes are a nice way to say “thanks” for going above and beyond the call of duty. Often, those who come in every day and cover for everyone else, get the least reward.
- Many companies have instituted “Peer Recognition Awards.” (Wells Fargo Bank calls it “You’re in Good Company.”) Each employee is given a certificate for a certain dollar amount. The catch is that they can’t spend it on themselves. They must give it to someone who has done something praiseworthy. The person with the most certificates not only gets to spend them, he or she is also recognized publicly. A less costly idea is to have employees give each other raffle tickets for a job well done. These are filled out and entered into a drawing for a nice prize.
- Use paycheck stubs to give congratulatory messages—number of days without calling in sick, number of consecutive days on the job, etc.
- Leave anonymous notes of good cheer around the office for co-workers.
- Write a “thank you” letter to the spouse of an employee who has put in a lot of overtime on a project. Include a gift certificate for dinner for two.
- Give top performers the chance to be “Manager for a Day.” The manager, of course, gets to do the employee’s regular job.
- If professional dress is a management issue, adopt the Nordstrom’s strategy. They give awards to employees who most represent the Nordstrom’s look. If that fails, the management team can do a tongue-in-cheek fashion show with “in” and “out” looks for the company. Nice slacks, skirts, blouses may be “in.” Checkered coats and white buck shoes (ala Herb Tarlek from WKRP in Cincinnati are definitely “out.”)

Ways to Create an Atmosphere of Mirth

- Wear a mask to a meeting. Martin Gonzales, manufacturing program manager for Hewlett Packard once wore a pig snout to a budget planning session.
- Get an office mascot—a Furbie or a Pet Rock—and put it in mysterious places. This is an especially effective way to recognize people’s stress. One manager was on her way to a busy meeting and when she got there, found the office mascot, a Beanie Baby, in her coat pocket.
- Be like Ben & Jerry’s. Create a “Joy Gang” who think of ways to make the atmosphere lighter. The Joy Gang at Ben & Jerry’s gives out “joy grants” to departments who can justify them. Joy Ninjas at Ben & Jerry’s often sneak around to employees’ workspaces and leave candy or other welcome surprises. Capital One of Tampa, Florida calls these fun committees “Scream Teams.”
- Have a TGIM—Thank God It’s Monday—celebration each Monday morning. Bring muffins and coffee. Sing the company song or lead the company cheer. (Hey, it worked pretty well for Sam Walton. Gimme a “W”!)
- Put a puzzle, cartoon, or joke above the office copier.
- Have a day where everyone wears something with polka dots. Variations include “stripe day” and “purple day.”
- Post pictures from the last office event and encourage people to write captions with those little stick on talk balloons.
- Give everyone in the office a small desktop mirror so they can check for smiles during the day! This is especially helpful for those who spend a lot of their day on the telephone.
- Instead of dress down days, have “theme” dressing days in conjunction with special promotions—Western days, 50s days, etc.
- Encourage employees to bring a picture of their pet for a bulletin board display. Award prizes in various categories. (You could also have a child/grandchild bulletin board display.)

Ways to Stamp Out Stress

- Award a pizza and movie tickets to the person who has dealt successfully with the most obnoxious customer that week.
- One company, who was introducing a new computer system, asked every employee to “name” their computer. This helped people deal with the stress of learning a new system. Now they jokingly referred to their PCs as Willard or Barney. Comments such as “I have a Barney problem today,” were often overheard, followed by lighthearted sympathy statements.
- One manager has a masseuse come in once a week to give neck and shoulder massages to employees during the break periods.
- Keep a “funny file” in your office to refer to in times of stress.
- GTE Data Services give employees yo-yos imprinted with the slogan, “Work has its ups and downs.”
- Form an “oops” squad. These are employees who volunteer to wear clown noses and surround anyone who calls out “oops” during the day. This is a fun way to relieve the frustration of making a mistake.

- Gather at lunchtime for a serious reading of a tabloid magazine. Once you've found out that Aliens Have Landed in England, your life won't seem so depressing!
- One department manager at a company where I worked had lunchtime showings of the T.V. show "Mystery Science Theatre." We all left a little more lighthearted.

Ways to Build the Team

- Make a "company calendar" complete with birthdays, time-on-the-job anniversary dates, and silly holidays such as "Receptionist's Day," "Be Nice to the Information Systems People Day," and "Bring Cookies to Work Week." Pacific Power and Electric has "Frisbee Memo Day" on which all memos are passed around on Frisbees.
- Have a once-a-year "Company Olympics." Design events that have to do with your products and services. Quaker Oats has events such as the "Aunt Jemima Syrup Squirting Contest."
- To change a bad habit, institute a "tax" system. Make a jar for quarters. Anyone who violates the rule must add a quarter. Use the accumulated change to buy a treat for the office.
- Have "decade days." Ask everyone to bring a picture of themselves in the 70s or the 80s. Post pictures in the break room. Results are hilarious. For added fun, have a "Guess Who's In the Picture" contest.
- Remember the Pinewood Derby from your Cub Scout days? Why not have one at work with prizes for winners in all kinds of categories?
- Set up a bowling alley in a long hallway or devise a miniature golf course around the office. Have people compete and record scores during breaks. Those with the highest scores at the end of the day are the tournament winners."
- Have a paper clip art contest. Give prizes to employees or teams who make create the best paper clip pieces.

Ways to Increase Learning and Participation

- Make a habit of starting every meeting with a joke or funny story to put people at ease.
- When handing out a stack of reports or financial statements, slip a cartoon between the pages.
- If you must show training videos, give everyone popcorn and soda while they're watching.
- Start idea sessions with a puzzle or brain teaser unrelated to the subject at hand. This increases people's creativity when the real task is presented.
- Devise a company bingo game. Use product names, types of requests, etc. for the cards. Those who answer the phone and hear the product or request mentioned can score. Award prizes at the end of the week for all who get "BINGO." This is a great way to teach product concepts in the training room or on the floor.
- Play "Jeopardy" at training sessions as a "test" of product concepts rather than using the standard pencil and paper quiz.

- Give everyone at a meeting a squirt gun. This gun can be used to “punish” habitual latecomers. One company used them during a planning session to anyone who was a “censor” or “naysayer” during brainstorming sessions. If squirt guns are too messy for you, try “Nerf” guns and darts.
- Be like Pacific Bell. Encourage employee participation through a “graffiti system.” Pacific Bell posts plain, brown paper in hallways and conference rooms. Employees are encouraged to contribute by adding Post-It notes with their ideas and comments.
- Create a “fun” suggestion box. Kinko’s awards a trip to Disney World to the employee (and everyone else in that store) who gives the best suggestion each year. Executives take over the duties at the store.
- Send new employees on a “scavenger hunt” to track down information about departments and people. It’s a great way to learn about the company and meet people at the same time.
- Have an employee talent fair. Ask employees to share their skills at monthly meetings. At one company a man showed how to make balloon animals. Another guy taught everyone how to juggle, and a woman showed everyone how to arrange flowers.
- Use a talk show format for your next employee meeting. Someone can dress as Sally Jesse, Oprah, Rosie, or Jerry. Let the CEO and department managers be the guests who get questioned by the host and the audience.
- Why put up boring charts when you can put up exciting ones? If you’re having a sales contest, make a race track and give everyone a paper car. When they make a sale, they advance their cars. See who gets the furthest in one day and award a prize.