

Using Humor to Win Friends and Influence People

By John Wagner

Is there someone in your life- a friend, a relative, a coworker, maybe a boss or mentor- who makes you feel energized? No matter how you feel before talking to this person, afterward you feel like you could conquer the world. And this person seems to have that effect on everyone. What is it that? What does this person have that makes everyone like them? The answer: They have a good and a positive sense of humor.

Humor can help you make friends, influence the opinion of others and, ultimately, boost your career. If you get your work done and you are fun to be around, then you are adding value. If you're not easy to get along with, and you won't work well in a team, then you are considered a liability in today's workplace.

In fact, there is a business survey to back this up. According to a survey by Robert Half International, top executives who have a sense of humor are more valued by companies than those who are just competent. The reason is that companies know work is stressful. We all have the same initial reaction to stress- we shut down. People who have a sense of humor, though, take those overwhelming feelings and immediately reframe them in a way that is useful. If you can relieve the stress at your place of work, no matter what your title, you will become more valuable.

It begins with something as simple as a smile. Do you smile at work? It's a proven fact that smiling sends positive messages to your brain. We can all agree that work is, well, work. The definition of work is an exertion or effort to produce or accomplish something. So by accepting that there are challenges inherent in the definition, we can begin to reframe them as opportunities.

Say everyone in the office has to make 40 cold calls. This is a dreaded activity. Rather than focusing on the dread, have a little fun. Make it a game to see who can make the cold calls the fastest and pass out a silly prize to the winner- maybe a little telephone or some chattering teeth.

Meetings are another area that could use more humor and a little more productivity. Many people hate meeting and is it any wonder why? Milton Berle once said that committees are groups of people who create minutes and waste hours. Make meetings more fun and, in return you will find the group being more productive. Yes, fun does equal more productivity. Why? Many times in meetings we are trying to find solutions to difficult problems. If we are having fun, it sparks our creativity and we are more open to new solutions. There are so many opportunities to add humor in meetings:

Give fun names to the committee or group that you are on. Many of the names companies use for committees are so pretentious, especially when they come up acronyms. The name of the group really doesn't make a statement about the group or what it does. You can use this to have fun. Instead of the "Marketing Task Force Meeting" informally call it the "Mo' Money Meeting". Instead of the Recruitment and Retention Department call it the "Git 'Em and Keep 'Em Department."

Items that remind people of their childhood are always a hit. This can mean different toys for different people: Slinky, Silly Putty, a Star Wars figure. Candy is always a good option. You don't have to be a leader to pass out candy at a meeting.

Best of all, you don't have to be in a position of authority to recognize others. Show gratitude to anyone who helps you out at work. Maybe you were behind on a deadline and someone stepped in and gave you a hand. Announce that you're giving out the "knight in shining armor" award and present the person with a goofy prize - a little horse or a play sword. By using humor and creativity you can break the monotony at work and create a place where people aren't afraid to take risks.

There is one caveat about using humor at work: Humor is a tool and like any tool, it needs to be used wisely and cautiously. Using humor inappropriately can damage everything you try to build. Here are some safety checks: Think about your motive for using the humor- are you trying to hurt or help? Does it send a positive message? If using humor hurts or sends a negative message, don't use it.

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