

## HUMOR IN LEADERSHIP

“Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face.”

– Victor Hugo As E.B.

White once eloquently stated, in America we cherish the ideal of the “sense of humor,” yet at the same time we’re highly suspicious of anything non-serious. It seems as though we feel there is a time and a place for everything, and often the group meeting is not considered the appropriate time or place for humor. In many cases, however, a joke or a bit of laughter is all that is needed to reduce tension, make others comfortable or keep the meeting moving in a positive manner.

Don’t feel like you must be a comedian or a great joke teller to be able to add humor into your group meetings. Many of us can not remember a punch line to save our lives, yet we are able to surprise ourselves now and then with a bit of wit. If you do not fall in the “comedian category” (or even if you do!), there are ways you can inject humor into your group:

- Create a humorous physical environment. Add some life and laughs to your office, cubicle or meeting space by hanging humorous posters, ads and pictures.
- Memo Mayhem. If you send notes, memos or emails to members reminding them of meetings or giving them minutes from the past meeting, add a humorous saying or picture to your note or email signature.
- Start with a bang! Try beginning each meeting with a humorous quote that relates to your group or an event you’re currently planning. Many quotation books are arranged by topic so finding some on a particular theme is not difficult.
- Feed off others. Don’t have anything enlightening or funny to say? Have others do it for you. Go around the room and have people tell the most hilarious thing that has happened to them this week– or their most embarrassing moments. Or delegate a person each week to provide the “Weekly Dose of Humor” for your next meeting.
- Break the ice. Short icebreakers, games or exercises are a great way to get people laughing. By getting your members to move around, you will get creative juices flowing and have a productive – and fun – meeting.
- Hold up that “Applause” sign! If someone completed a project or created a great program, don’t let it slide by. Applaud them! Give them a standing ovation! Make some noise! As a wise person once said, “Some people feel like they work in an environment where doing a good job is like wetting your pants in a dark suit...it gives you a warm feeling but nobody notices!” Help everyone notice jobs well done.
- With vs. At: The Continuing Battle. Laughing with others can bring people together, ease worries, increase confidence and help people forget their problems (if only momentarily). Laughing at others destroys many of the elements you may be striving to achieve, such as teamwork, cooperation and confidence. Don’t bring someone else down to try and bring yourself up - it just doesn’t work.
- Make Miss Manners proud. Think before you speak (easier said than done, isn’t it?). Make sure what you are about to say is both appropriate and tasteful.

Why bother trying to create a humorous environment? So many reasons...

- Your health. Ever heard the phrase “laughter is the best medicine?” It’s true! Laughter can cure many ills – or at least help you forget about them for a while.
- Stress relief. Studies have found humor is one of the predominant coping mechanisms that helps make sure stress doesn’t cause more deaths. Life is too important to be taken too seriously!
- Bond. Team Bond. They say crisis can bring people together – but who wants to encounter crises every time they want to unify a group? A more productive team bonding exercise: a good, hearty, belly laugh together.
- Retention. If you look at organizations that experience high amounts of turnover, you might find that the members just don’t have any fun. By keeping a light atmosphere your members will be more excited about participating.
- HAHA and AHA. There is a link between these two phrases. Humor and creativity go hand in hand!

You may be thinking people won’t take you seriously if you make use of humor in your leadership role. If your meetings are one hour and you spend 50 minutes telling jokes each time, yes, your humor may be getting a bit out of hand. It is possible to establish a balance between getting things done and getting laughs in! You can still have focus and lead effectively while encouraging your group to smile.

### **Reference:**

Goodman, J. (1995). “Invest in jest: Take your job seriously and yourself lightly.”  
Laughing Matters. (WWW)

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