

Being Serious Won't Make You Silly, Yet Being Silly Can Help You Be More Serious

By Robert Alan Black, Ph.D.

Over 35 years of working in creative fields and working with people striving to be more creative or use more creativity I have discovered that silly has its place in the serious workplace.

Since first attending CPSI in 1978 I have met hundreds of consultants, business leaders, managers, trainers and educators that have shared how they use silly as a serious creativity tool.

Silly putty, toys, props, balloons, water guns, noise makers, practical jokes, comedy movies, cartoons on the screen or the wall, TinkerToys, Zots & ????, Frizbees, clown noses, costumes, pinball machines, video games.

These are only a sampling of what I have seen people use and have tried to encourage people to use.

Lindsay Collier, creativity consultant, has shared often the efforts of his Creativity Room at Kodak. Dave Morrison and Frank Prince have talked about their work while inside Frito-Lay. Others have shared about their work at IBM, GE, Motorola, and endless other corporations.

C. W. Metcalf, Malcolm Kushner, Matt Weinstein, Joel Goodman, Bob Basso Esther Blumenfeld and Lynne Alpern represent only a few of those who have written about their experiences as humor consultants. Annually Joel Goodman and his Humor Project holds a Humor Conference in Sarasota Springs, New York and Humor Development Workshops during the summer.

In his recent book *Faster Company*, Pat Kelly, the founder of PSS, first nationwide medical supply distribution company, shares about many of the fun things they have done in his company to help increase the creativity of the employees.

My 20 years has introduced me to officers, directors, managers and supervisors at poultry plants, sewing plants, clay processing companies, baby product producers, police and fire stations, libraries, school rooms, government offices where humor and fun are used to increase the creativity and lessen the stress of the daily pressures of today's workplace.

The discovery I have made is that the companies that deliberately strive to make their workplace and their work fun and add humor intentionally are the ones who are more successful consistently over time.

How can you add humor into your workplace?

Cartoons, jokes, share humorous work anecdotes, dress up in costume at holiday times or in celebration of a great success.

Pacesetter Steel based near Atlanta chose a baseball theme for a sales campaign. All the employees were taken to an Atlanta Braves game for the kick-off. The lobby of the headquarters was changed into a baseball field with a dugout that visitors sat in while waiting for their appointments. As a prize, if they increased sales to a chosen point, was a cruise for all employees. They did. They went.

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Ice cream and cake parties. Parades, props, posters, gag gifts.

The AT&T Longlines plant in Norcross celebrated a great win by holding a parade throughout the plant. The floats were made from leftover supplies by the employees on their own time. The end of the parade was the operations manager, Lou Hatala and the president of the CWA local not just shaking hands but hugging in congratulations of their joint accomplishments.

Why do these things?

To increase morale. To lessen stress. To enrich comradery and teamship. To make work fun and something people look forward to each day.

How do you benefit?

Lower turnover, absenteeism, lateness, error rates. Increased production, accuracy, finer quality. The overall results...higher profits and greater staying and hanging in power when things get tough.

How do these increase creativeness?

When people are having fun they will bounce back for misses, failures, mistakes easier. People work better in teams when they are having fun along with challenges. Conflicts will be resolved and benefited from more. People maintain higher levels of enthusiasm and motivation when they are having fun and find value in their work.

Am I saying that everyone in your next board meeting should be given cans of silly string?
Am I saying that everyone in your next planning meeting should be wearing clown noses?
Am I saying that your sales force out to hand out humorous gag gifts to clients this quarter?

Yes I am!

Look at Southwest Airlines, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, Thiele Kaolin, Duck Head Apparel and many other examples. When they spontaneously and deliberately strive to add fun and have fun at work they are more successful.

When was the last time you toured a poultry plant and most of the employees and supervisors and the plant manager were dressed up in halloween costumes? When was the last time you went your bank branch and the president was dressed up as Dracula?

At Gold Kist Poultry they do. At First American Bank he does. These are a couple of local examples from my home town of Athens, Georgia.

How about you? How about your department? How about your plant or organization?

How can you add humor and fun this week?

The results will be tremendous.

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