

HUMOR

Humor: an often temporary state of mind imposed esp. by circumstances; ...the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous.

—*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*



The use of humor by a leader helps to relieve day-to-day pressures and instill a feeling of camaraderie. Executives who are open with humor become more “human” and are more approachable to their employees. When people feel they can express their uniqueness, it allows everyone to see a different perspective and view things in a different light.

Living in our changing world involves uncertainty. “When John Glenn, the first U.S. astronaut in space, was asked what he had thought about just before taking off into space, he said: ‘I looked around me and suddenly realized that everything had been built by the lowest bidder.’ You can laugh, or you can cry.”⁴

To some, humor is an illusion and is dependent entirely on the person who perceives it as such. There are different ways to be funny. There are the stand-up comics who are funny and make a living at it. There is the slapstick humor of the Keystone Cops and the Three Stooges. There is the infinite scheming of Lucille Ball.











In the everyday world, we all know people who are funny. We have a colleague named Rob Jolles who is quite the sales trainer. He uses a combination of stories, music, and props to get his messages across to the participants. He can use a certain tone of voice that invokes laughter as only he can. This is Rob’s style, and it works for him. He uses humor to make learning more fun.

Rob says, "I believe when talking to a group of participants the real thrill is just how far you can push the humor envelope. Vincent van Gogh said, 'What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?'

"Humor is about risk. It is about taking chances. It is about doing something in front of a group that people may not find funny and working with it. What if they don't laugh? What if it is not perceived as funny? That, in a nutshell, is the risk. And that is where the challenge begins."

Other people crack jokes to be funny. Not all of us have the sense of timing to repeat a joke successfully. Yet we may have a dry or wry sense of humor. Some people play on words using puns. Others are humorous by poking fun at themselves.

What is humorous to you? Use the space below to list your favorite things that bring a smile to your face. Examples:

-  Bugs Bunny
-  Your favorite funny movie
-  Your favorite comedian or performer
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- 
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And sometimes we are just silly. The mundane becomes ridiculous. And sometimes seeing clowns gets us into the mood for humor. One of the easiest things to do to make someone smile is to put on a clown nose and smile.

Guggenheimer, Patricia; Szulc, Mary D.. Understanding Leadership Competencies. Boston, MA. USA: Course Technology Crisp, 1998. p 28. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/apuebrary/Doc?id=10058856&ppg=28>

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List four ways that using humor as a leader works for you on the job. Some possible answers: *reduce stress and burnout, help others view a situation from a different perspective, release tension, reduce illness.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Terry Paulson writes in *Making Humor Work: Take Your Job Seriously and Yourself Lightly*, "It is dangerous to confuse professionalism with seriousness. You can take your job and your world seriously, and still take yourself lightly.

"Human beings by nature are spontaneous and playful creatures. Yet the older we become, the less appropriate it seems for us to allow it to be expressed. We get 'professionally' serious and then pay comedians to do a job we've forgotten how to do ourselves."

One CEO expresses his humor very subtly. He wears the most professional attire and is immaculately groomed at all times. People comment on his beautiful ties regularly. Should you happen to sit across from him at a meeting, you would be pleasantly surprised to notice that Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck are woven into the fabric of a tie. What message is this gentleman sending? Perhaps that he is approachable, that he wants you to feel more at ease, take yourself less seriously, crack a smile, and also to relax upon meeting him.

What can you do to put other people at ease?

EXERCISE: Collage

Another way to view humor is through creating a collage. The collage will give you a humor kick. Review the collage on a regular basis to remind yourself to use humor.⁵

Go to an art supply store and buy a piece of picture mat board and a glue stick. Pick your favorite color for the mat board. Then cut out pictures from magazines and newspapers that reflect you and what you find funny. You may choose anything that appeals to your sense of whimsy or is amusing to you.


Arrange the final selection of cut-out pictures on the mat board. Leave it overnight. The next day, see if you still like the arrangement—if not, change it. Then coat the backs of the pictures with the glue stick and press into place.

| COMPETENCY: Humor | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|---|---|----|--|
| <i>Circle the number that represents your level of humor.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| LOW | | | | | | HIGH | | | | | |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |

Nevertheless, some people just don't find anything humorous. We have a quote you should remember when these people pop up:

*"Sometimes, no matter what we do, we get our heads cut off.
And what goes around does come around."⁶*

You may feel that you are taking a risk in practicing some of the behaviors suggested. You will need to find your own comfort level with what works and what does not, based on the people you lead, the situation, the culture, the pressures of your industry, etc., but we invite you to work on incorporating this competency in some manner into your daily life. Studies have proven that you will live longer.


My Key Learnings

Take time to consider what you have just read. What have you learned about leadership competencies? What examples of these competencies have you noticed in others or yourself? Make notes about any areas you would like to improve upon or would like to see others improve upon.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

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