

## HELP FOR THE HUMORLESS

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Humor aids in communication, helps with relationship building and workplace morale. It reduces stress and energizes us. It has been said that laughter is sometimes the “best medicine”. I challenge readers to recall the physical and emotional feelings following a great and spontaneous bout of laughter. What a feeling of well being.

It is essential to take our work seriously and to work at our optimum potential. A little bit of levity can actually help us face work stress and perform better. In an article titled: Taking Humor Seriously in the Workplace, Steven M. Sultanoff, Ph.D. when asking administrators and human relations personnel about the qualities of an effective employee, “check humor as one of the choice attributes of desire.” Additionally, in a recent survey conducted by Accountemps, more than 80% of CEO’s questioned said they believe that a good sense of humor is “important to very important” in moving up in their company.

When we understand that laughter and fun can improve the climate in the workplace, some might ask, Can it get carried away? Yes, is the answer! The proverbial clown can get annoying and inappropriate. The challenge for any workplace is to achieve a balance by accepting some spontaneity, setting limits if needed as well as strategizing ways to integrate a lighter approach to our daily routines.

Laughter is directly related to health and stress reduction, according to an article, “The Laughter Immune Connection” written in 1997, by Berk, Lee, M.D. & Stanley Tan, M.D.Ph.D. The article relates “laughter is a form of eustress that releases those bad and distressful emotions that cause harmful chemical effects on the body. It can lower blood pressure, increase vascular flow, and boost the immune system. It gives the diaphragm, abdominal, intercostals, respiratory accessory, and facial muscles a complete workout. Laughter also releases endorphins in the brain; these are our bodies’ natural painkillers. Endorphins are neurotransmitters that attach to the same receptors in our brains as opiates. Opiate drugs numb pain. When we laugh, it releases the endorphins in our brain: thus, laughing is like taking morphine without the adverse side effects.” (Berk & Tan, 1996)

Berk and Tan also did an experiment with 10 males in 1996, concerning the laughter immune connection. The men had volunteered and were fasting. Berk & Tan had the men watch funny videos for one hour. They took blood samples of their interferon-gamma (IFN) before, during and after watching the films. The significant results showed increased activity of IFN after watching the videos and even into the following day. IFN activates the cells that help to fight viruses. (T-cells, B-cells and immunoglobulins.) This could be paramount in researching Cancer and deadly viruses, and still another logical reason to seek joy. Even John Steinbeck, famous author of Grapes of Wrath, once said,

“A sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker than a germ.” When we laugh, we simply feel better.

Some ideas, which your workgroup, can use exercise their “laughter muscles” are the following:

1. Have a bright and cheerful breakroom where employees can get away and relax.
2. Dedicate a bulletin board for rotating a variety of humorous items. This can include tasteful jokes and posters, cartoons and fishtanks.
3. Lighthearted reading materials or jokebooks.
4. Place surprises in the room or decorate for holiday themes.
5. Make a list of amusing things you can do for yourself and do them every week.
6. Provide puzzles or games.
7. Add something new to this list monthly.

Stress and humor are polar opposites. It is not possible to experience both simultaneously. Stress is often the cause of illness, burnout and absenteeism. When we laugh, feelings like depression, anger and anxiety dissolve. The integration of humor and acceptance of periodic humor makes for happier workgroups.

The Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (C-SEAP) is your confidential resource for workplace and personal issues. We provide confidential counseling, manager consultations, organizational development programs as well as skill development for a more positive workplace. We help to prevent workplace violence and provide conflict resolution for individuals and work groups. To reach us in the Denver area, call 303 866-4314. Out side the Metro area, the toll free number is 1-800-821-8154.