

YOU MUST BE JOKING

When was the last time you had a giggle at work? Laughter drives productivity and profitability, so your organisation should make a point of fostering fun, says Siobhan Hammond



Laughter at work creates an upbeat environment that encourages positive and innovative thinking

➤ If you think back to your childhood days, they were probably filled with laughter, chatter and fun. Fast-forward to today and that joyful, carefree attitude is probably a distant memory. Since making our voyages into adulthood and becoming working men and women, a (hypothetical) 'serious' switch has been flicked – something that is made apparent when we pass through the threshold of work. This is the place where we become stern, unemotional and don't indulge in laughter or social engagement.

It may sound like an extreme interpretation, but the idea is not far from reality. When we are at work, most of us believe that we must be serious in order to be taken seriously. Why? There are two reasons: ♦ We have a fear of being seen as [insert name here] 'the joker', which will threaten our professional position and career progression; and ♦ Historically, the workplace has been seen as a place 'to get the job done'. Employers and employees take the view that if work isn't a toil, we simply aren't working hard enough.

But the truth is that this style of thinking and working is outdated. Research proves that an absence of laughter in the workplace is a major contributor to workplace stress. And stress is one of the most common causes of long-

term sickness absence in UK workplaces today (according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), which costs the UK economy around £8.4bn every year.

The time has come to revert back to our childhood tendencies. Let's take laughter and embrace it. Let's use its power in the workplace to transform it into a place of positivity, productivity and engagement. Why? Laughter is a powerful tool that can achieve astounding results for businesses. Research conducted in 2002 for an industry-wide study of 2,500 employees found that 93% believed laughter on the job helped them to reduce work-related stress.

That said, laughter is much more than a tonic to reduce

stress. Laughter is, in fact, a product of humour and instilling it at work creates an upbeat environment that builds bonds between colleagues, encourages positive and innovative thinking, creates better communication and eliminates negative attitudes, the result of which is increased productivity and profitability.

We are now working longer and harder than ever, but by creating an environment where humour – and laughter – is viewed positively, work can be enjoyable. It's this enjoyment that will create a more productive, more efficient workforce, where everybody will feel more engaged with the business. ♥

LAUGHTER LOVERS

Below are some examples of how the world's largest organisations are wholeheartedly embracing playfulness, humour and laughter:

NHS Tayside

This NHS body has recently undertaken laughter initiatives to support its health and wellbeing policies. By training key employees on using laughter in the workplace, the body aims to use these individuals as advocates for laughter at work and spread the idea across the organisation.

Ben & Jerry's

The ice cream manufacturer has a committee that arranges monthly activities to reinforce the value of humour at work. Such initiatives have enabled it to "discover that the punchline is not that far from the bottom line... [and that] if you want to get more out of your employees, make sure that they are having a good time at work".

Southwest Airlines

This US airline endorses the importance of fun at work – from looking for a sense of humour in prospective employees to presenting organisational results via rap music and videos. It encourages employees "to take their jobs seriously, but not themselves".



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