



Happiness and humor in the office is good business and good for you

Happiness and humor in the office enhance employee and employer satisfaction, increase profit, heighten creativity and result in exceptional patient care. You do not have to transform your practice into a comedy club, but recognize that the little things in human relations reap huge rewards. Small changes in attitude, cooperation and respect can create major changes in your practice.

Dr. Paddi Lund, a general dentist in Australia, has authored *Building the Happiness-Centered Business*, published by Solutions Press of Australia. In his discourse, Dr. Lund illustrates how a happy staff is one of the most powerful business tools available to the dentist, or any businessperson. Our practice has incorporated many of his ideas. As a result, we interact much more positively with each other as well as with our patients.

We handle problems differently. We address negative behavior and energy quickly. We take responsibility for our actions and interactions. If something goes wrong, we look at the system first to see what needs changing. Patients are referred to and communicated with by their names, not by their procedure or symptom.

Content, happy staff members are much more likely to offer creative suggestions and ideas. An empowered staff is a more productive staff. Personally, I am more apt to buy something from a happy, warm and kind establishment, instead of a disinterested, unhappy and threatening one.

There is significant data to support the benefits of humor. Dr. William Fry, psychiatrist, humor researcher and former man of the year for the Association for Applied Therapeutic Humor, reports in the medical magazine *Hippocrates* the many physical benefits of laughter. He claims that laughter boosts cardiovascular fitness by increasing the respiratory response, as well as lowers blood pressure and heart rate. It also reduces pain perception, stimulates circulation and increases oxygen tension. The net effect is that you feel better.

In the November 1995 issue of *Pain*, Drs. Weisenberg, Tepper and Schwarzwald, after testing 80 subjects, reported that pain perception was lessened when watching a humorous film in comparison to watching a neutral film or no film at all. Interestingly, watching a

repulsive film showed the greatest decrease in pain perception.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published "The relationship with malpractice claims among primary care physicians and surgeons," in its Nov. 19, 1997, issue. One hundred twenty-four doctors were videotaped during 10 consecutive office visits. The researchers found that the primary care physicians who have never been sued spent more time with their patients, used humor and encouraged patients to talk. No such differences were found among the surgeons.

Ben and Jerry's Homemade, Inc. has their "Joy Gang." Joy grants are awarded for creative ways to bring happiness to the workplace. The grants have varied from hiring a masseuse to providing a hot chocolate machine.

Humor experts exist and are frequently used by Fortune 500 companies. I had the pleasure of recently speaking with Dr. Steve Allen Jr., retired family practitioner, son of the famous comedian and humor expert. I asked Dr. Allen how he would sum up laughter in the workplace. He said, "Humor and lightheartedness let you take a look at difficult situations from a different point of view." He added that one needs to be very careful and must look at the "pluses and minuses" of the intended humor; you do not want to tease people and be discriminatory. Dr. Allen said it is essential to be able to laugh at yourself.

Humor must be used with no sarcasm and extreme sensitivity. A doctor needs to be sincere, clear and non-offensive at all times. Being lighthearted and friendly could be a valuable tool. As caregivers, each of us needs to strike a balance between professionalism and being a human being.

In my opinion, happiness and humor go hand in hand to create awesome patient care. They enable individuals to feel better about themselves, which translates into so many positives for everyone involved. Therefore, remember to lighten up around your staff and patients to create rewards for all. ■

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