

No joke! The workplace needs a good laugh

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A little humor can help your career — and a company's bottom line



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A guy dies and meets St. Peter who tells him, "Look, you've lived a good life, we do things a little differently than what you'd expect. I'm going to let you choose where you'd like to spend eternity. Hear me out, spend a day or two in heaven and in hell and then decide for yourself." The guy chooses heaven first and finds it beautiful and pleasant, the choirs of heaven singing, animals getting along, streets paved with gold. Nice.

"OK," St. Peter says. "Now spend a few days in hell." There the guy enjoys endless beach volleyball games, parties that last forever, many of his friends are there (naturally), beautiful people everywhere all laughing at his jokes, front row NBA finals tix, you name it. He rushes back to St. Peter and says, "I can't believe I'm saying this but I choose to live the eternities in hell."

He's dispatched back to Hades where he finds brimstone and burning lakes, miserable people chasing Satan. "Heyyy, what gives?" he yells at Lucifer, "Last week I was here and it was all fun and games."

"Last week you were a recruit," Satan responds. "This week you're an employee!"

This joke was sent to me by Scott Christopher, co-author of the new book, "The Levity Effect: Why i Workplace HR magazine.

He shared it after I asked him if he could dig up a funny workplace joke I could pass along to all of y

Why? Lately I've noticed a lack of humor among many of the employees and managers I've been tal



Tough economic times and tough times, but we need to

One human resources manager for a major corporation in Virginia, told me, “We’ve got our people : She surmises that workers are afraid of crossing the line for fear of being terminated, so they don’t fly under the radar,” she explains.

And what that means, she adds, is that “people aren’t laughing and you don’t hear joking or fun am Welcome to the increasingly humorless American workplace.

Lighten up!

Tough economic times and the perpetual threat of layoffs are gnawing away at our collective funny correctness in workplaces have clamped down on laughter.

And that’s bad news for productivity, creativity and the general well-being of workers, say HR and “It’s a natural tendency for some folks to tighten up during tough times, but we need to lighten up,” Project Inc.

Goodman believes it was no accident that during the Great Depression, the heyday of comedy emer Benny.

Here’s a great one that came from Groucho Marx in the 1931 movie “Monkey Business”: “I’ve worke poverty.”

Such a wave of humor, witnessed during the Depression, has yet to hit many of the nation’s busines order to balance the seriousness of the times.”

What’s exacerbating the joylessness this recession has spawned, some believe, is decades of joke sla “The whole issue of political correctness has gone too far when it comes to the criteria for determini workplace psychology expert and professor at Boston University. “If anybody is offended, then it’s c personalized. It only takes one person being slightly upset at something for it to become offensive.”

It started in the 1980s, he continues, got worse in the 1990s and “has now reached its maximum.”

And it’s not just the workplace that is seeing the anti-humor phenomenon. We see it all around us, c

No funny business

Just a few weeks ago, the nation was wrapped up in a debate over a satirical New Yorker cartoon de nominee Barack Obama and his wife Michelle as terrorists.

Whether you thought the joke was over the top or not, no one would even entertain the notion that :

publicly.

On the flip side, the nominees have to be careful when they're passing along puns.

The expected Republican nominee John McCain has recently come under fire for at least trying to b

This from Politico.com:

To his detractors, some of the jokes are offensive and out of touch with contemporary mores. It's s over the line. This cycle, he's drawn wincing, and worse, for everything from a joking reference to c about bombing Iran.

It's clear to me that we all need to get out the lampshades, and fast.

But how do we do it without undermining our credibility at work and getting ourselves added to the

A fun place to work

Clearly, a good mood in the workplace translates into good news for a company.

Christopher, the workplace humor columnist, says year after year the companies that have the high competitors are those that encourage fun at work.

Sometimes it's the type of industry you work in that dictates the degree of fun, says Donna DiMenna: Personnel Decisions International, a human resources consulting firm. Buttoned-up sectors like ba things stiff, while advertising or retail may be more whimsical.

"Some organizations think if you're laughing you're not working," she adds.

Everyone is always talking about how Southwest Airlines has always been a fun place to work. So I f employees are still laughing, even in this economy.

"Now, more than ever, we are really focused on creating a fun atmosphere for employees and encou economy," says Christi Day, a spokeswoman for the airline.

That means the company is still holding a deck party with a band or D.J. every Friday at the corpora runway. And the flight attendants are still telling those corny jokes to passengers.

Here's a particularly silly one: "There's no smoking on the aircraft, but if you do want to you can sm

Day admits the jokes can be a bit cheesy but, she adds, "it lightens up the mood."

Humor can pay off

Being funny and being able to laugh at things may also help your career. Someone with a good sense of humor is likely to climb the corporate ladder. Indeed, Southwest looks for applicants that have a good sense of humor.

According to a Harvard Business Review study on “What Makes a Good Leader,” one of the key hallmarks of a good leader is a sense of humor.

Being able to laugh at yourself, says Wendy Kaufman, president of Balancing Life’s Issues Inc., an e-commerce company, is a key to bringing humor into the workplace without setting off harassment alarms because you made an off-color joke about a racial group or gender.

She suggests you take baby steps when embarking on a laughter plan. First off, you have to start limiting the hilarious in your daily grind.

You don’t have to be another Chris Rock in the office. You can be a “levity enabler,” says Christophe Joly, a comedian who jokes and not taking every job so seriously, and finding humor in the ridiculous in your workday. All you have to do is encourage their subordinates to have a good time.

The Humor Project’s Goodman advises workers to become aware of the positive power of humor, both in life and career. There are a number of studies, he says, that point to the healing powers of laughter and humor.

He says things as simple as putting up funny pictures on your desk or having a funny prop like a rubber duck in any office.

“Everyone has heard the expression that misery loves company, right? On a corporate level right now, it’s all about suffering,” he explains. “But very few people use the term, ‘Laughter loves company,’ which is true. It’s a cliché in motion.”

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