



Leadership Letter

Having fun yet?

Two guys walk into the company coffee corner. One has a big smile and is laughing as he opens the door. The other is straight faced and looking down at the ground as he orders his coffee. Which one's better at his job? You will probably say you need a bit more information, right? Well current research backs the guy who's laughing and enjoying himself. He is considerably more likely to be more productive, inspiring, engaging, committed, efficient, secure and trusted – an overall better leader.

I was reading this paragraph in a book called "The Levity Effect" by Adrian Gostick and Scott Christopher and it gave me something to think about! I'm not sure I would be seen as the life and soul of the party and so I read on and here are some more thoughts that I hope you find inspiring and thought provoking.

Is fun on your agenda?: It's surprising that many adults are suspicious of having fun. A recent study of preschool children noted that children laugh up to 400 times a day. What's your guess on the number of laughs adults manage to squeeze into their schedule? You're not going to like this – 15 laughs – and that's generous for some! There are now academic journals, conferences, university departments and research institutes all dedicated to humour – I find that surprising and encouraging. Of course we know joy is the third fruit of the spirit and we are exhorted to rejoice and give thanks and count it all joy – but is it a curriculum topic in our training? I know for myself that the fruit of joy doesn't just come spontaneously for me, so practically I can see why this is an important subject for all leaders to take note of. We have recently been very blessed by a Korean group we have had on retreat. They have been one of the happiest groups we have had stay. No matter what was going on – in sessions, at the meal table, or just chilling with one another, there was the sound of constant laughter – how refreshing.

But, But, But: Some of you are saying, me included, "I am not that great at telling jokes and I probably wouldn't be described as a funny guy!" Well researchers tell us that a sense of humour or humor for those across the pond (USA), is deeper than laughter, more satisfying than comedy and delivers more rewards than merely being entertaining. A sense of humour sees the fun in everyday experiences. It is more important to have fun than it is to be funny. Remember that great leaders are often humour appreciators rather than humour initiators. So that means there is hope for me and you after all!

Having fun develops trust: Strong bonds of trust develop in team when they are able to have fun at work. When a group or team is having fun together there is a sense of belonging. I know this to be true as I led a national leadership team for many years. We would go away for a 3 day retreat a couple of times a year. The time was set aside for sharing our lives and praying for one another, with a little agenda of urgent issues kept to a minimum. The thing that made these retreats memorable was the fact that they were held in cabins in the country with a gym, swimming pool and great places to walk. Every couple of hours, we would take

a “play break” and enjoy ourselves in competitive sport and come back ready for more spiritual connection time. All this fun activity along with great meals that we prepared together, made for very good bonding days away.

Trust gradually develops as leaders show their teams that they can laugh at themselves and can use levity to diffuse tense situations. These leaders come across as more approachable, which also encourages rapport and eases stressful times.

Humour helps build team: Humour is the grease in the machine of any team, community or gathering: it smooths interactions, helps everyone to relax, lifts people’s spirits and actually moves decisions along. It facilitates a transition from any feeling of tension and defensiveness to a realisation of relative safety and playfulness. This is why leaders will do well to create a fun environment in which to relate and work. The leader must lead by example.

Fun at work is part of the process that encourages cooperation, commitment and helps people work well together. When people are able to have a diversion from work it gives their brains a chance to process things in ways they might not normally think about so they can go back to their task with a renewed energy or new perspective.

When I was coordinating the UK & Ireland leadership team, we decided to move from meeting one day a month to two days every 2 months. We wondered how it would work and whether we would stay as ‘in touch’ with a two-month gap. However, we were surprised at the positive change. Moving to two days meant that now we had an evening spare, not to fill with more work but to do something fun. So we went out for meals, played cards or 10 pin bowling but always with an agenda for fun and relaxation. Suddenly our meetings were more productive, more relational and because they were more fun, we looked forward to them more! (if people are not wanting to show up at meetings – add some fun elements!)

The fact is, that if people are having fun they are more motivated to work harder, stay longer, maintain their composure in a crisis and take better care of each other in the team. The research also shows that leaders who taught themselves to be funnier are more effective communicators and better salespeople, have more engaged staff and earn a lot more than their peers. (sorry about that last result ywammers)

Fun stimulates creativity: Part of creativity in the workplace is developing an atmosphere where people feel safe. People are spending an awful lot of time working, so you’ve got to get people to really like and trust each other. If people don't feel warmth and humour in the room, they aren’t going to throw out an idea in the first place. Fun helps to stimulate the brain in a different way from your work mode and can therefore encourage out of the box thinking – which is exactly what we want if we are to help solve problems and brainstorm for the future.

While you can help employees be more creative, building a fun and creative culture is easiest if you start out with fun and creative people to begin with. So if fun is going to be a value, then look for it in the people you bring on staff. The simple rule is - look for a smiling face, a positive attitude and an open personality! It’s that easy.

Humour enhances speaking and keeps attention: As you are about to step up to speak, do you have a smile on your face and a confident twinkle in your eyes or are you straight faced, perhaps a little nervous or a little serious? Relax, be yourself, you are just talking to people, engage them in conversation, and of course add humour. Google the topic for funny pictures, quotes and stories. Presenters encourage you to aim at something funny every 6 minutes or so! Students are more likely to recall a lecture when it is sprinkled with jokes or when there was a fun activity.

Personally I have had to work hard at this over the years, as I am not spontaneously funny but I look for film clips, pictures, fun activities, role plays and whatever I can find to help the atmosphere in the class be light and appealing.

Use humour in announcements: When you pick your MC's for meetings or conferences, it's always a good idea to choose people with a sense of humour. For instance, if you are giving a simple announcement about costs, would you prefer the first or second example here?

- "To pay for your stay here see the accountant after lunch!
- "For those who's pockets are dragging on the floor and you would like to lighten your load, our accountant, will be eager to relieve you after lunch!"

Turn boring announcements into fun ones and turn awkward announcements into opportunities to have a smile or laugh.

Use humour in letters of complaint: It's amazing how a little humour gets the point across without causing bad attitudes in you the complainer or the person you are complaining to.

I just had a situation on my return flight from the USA where I turned up to the check in desk and the lady told me I didn't have a flight! How should I respond? *"I have just about had enough of your bad service and If it doesn't improve I am not going to use your company again!"* That's not going to help is it? A smile and a few

questions to clarify what is going on help the lady behind the desk to want to help me! She was actually amazing and found KLM's mistake and sorted out a ticket for me – even though she was working for Delta!



A word of warning: Be careful with comedy in emails. It is easy to be misunderstood because the recipient doesn't see you smiling, doesn't see your body language that goes along with the message, doesn't hear the tone of your delivery and so the humour can back fire quite easily. It's OK when you know the person well, but when you are writing emails across cultural boundaries, humour varies so wildly, it's good to err on the safe side.

Laughing is good for the health: It has been shown that a good belly laugh has measurable benefits on the heart, blood sugar, stress levels, circulation, the immune system and more. Mankind has actually known the beneficial affects of laughter for centuries. In medieval times, the court jester was often summoned to try to lift the monarch out of an angry or melancholic mood. In 1979 Norman Cousins' break through research, proved the healing power of laughter. While suffering from Ankylosing spondylitis, a painful degenerative

disease, Cousins was almost paralysed and given a couple of months to live. He checked himself out of hospital, and prescribed for himself Marks Brothers movies and comic books which helped to alleviate the pain, allowed him to sleep and aided his recovery.

How much money is in your fun budget?: A high percentage of leaders have been found to not even consider fun to be part of their leadership role. And if this is the case, then obviously there will be no budget set aside for it. So it's time to rethink and work at creating environments for our teams, communities and schools where fun is a standard part of the curriculum. One successful leader shared, "If you look at it from a business standpoint, fun reduces turnover, gets people more engaged in the work, increases creativity and productivity, helps communication and morale – it just makes good sense!"

The bottom line is this – generally we need to lighten up: We have been talking mainly about our work life but this is an important topic in other parts of our lives too – our marriages, family and friends. So whether it's at work, or in the home, with the kids, in public or wherever we are, let's allow the joy of the Lord to bubble up. Let's smile more. Relax more. Look at the bright side of life more. Let's see the fruit of the spirit of joy flowing everywhere.

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P.S. - A simple little test for you: (1 never, 2 hardly, 3 neutral, 4 most of the time, 5 always)

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| 1. New staff are made to feel very welcome | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Meetings are positive and light | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. We have fun activities at least once a month | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. It's common to hear people laughing while they work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I can be myself at work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. We have a lot of celebrations for special events | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. We like to have fun brainstorming new ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. The leader is usually optimistic and smiling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Our students and contacts say we are fun to work with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. We have a good time together as a team/community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Anything below a score of 40 and you seriously need to lighten up!