



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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## Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

### For Those on the Run

It is a known fact that laughter improves creativity. Yet, laughter is missing in many of the environments where we work and live. Read this month's newsletter to find out how to obtain a licence to laugh.

### Licence to Laugh

*"Laughter is, after speech, the chief thing that holds society together."*

- Max Eastman

Laughter and humour is all around us (although some may find it lacking lately given the current economic times). All we have to do is - Stop, look around, and listen for it!

The average four-year-old laughs 400 times a day. The average adult laughs 15 times a day! Why does our use of humour and laughter diminish so much in adulthood! Why do we begin to laugh only at certain times and only in certain places? Here are some possibilities:

- "Stop being silly!
- "Don't be ridiculous
- "Act your age!"
- "Be polite"
- "Stop acting foolish!"
- "Follow the rules!"
- "Don't rock the boat!"
- "Wipe that silly smile off your face!"

Do any of these phrases sound familiar? Probably yes. The thing is smiling and laughing are common behaviors in most people. Yet we often get conflicting messages that laughter and humour might not be appropriate in some settings i.e. at church, in some work settings, at school. The sad news is that humour is disappearing from the workplace leading to decreased performance, lack of creativity, stress, anxiety, absenteeism, conflict and poor morale. A study by the Business Council of Australia (2003) found that 'fun'

was one of the key elements of extraordinary, productive [and creative] workplaces. Workplaces which achieved outstanding performance are filled with laughter and humour.

Leading American neurologist Vilayanur Ramachandran sees a strong link between creativity and humour so much so that he believes that humour should be formally taught in school. In one of his free *Alfred Deakin Innovation Lectures*, he commented "You wouldn't think you'd normally have jokes and humour as part of a school syllabus, but I think they're very important because they teach people how to be creative," he said. "Jokes involve juxtaposing seemingly unrelated ideas, seeing something from a novel vantage point, and that's the basis of all creativity."

Laughter improves creativity. Laughing in response to something funny is a very sophisticated brain function, which sweeps our entire cerebral cortex and is terrific for improving mental flexibility. A study by *Cornell University* found that people, who had just seen a funny movie, increased their creative flexibility and were better able to find creative solutions to puzzling problems.

Karen Williams (*Humour, healing & leadership*. Cleveland, Ohio: Website: International Institute of Humour and Healing Arts, HaHa Institute, 2003) suggests, "Laughter opens our energy channels and places us directly in the present moment, where memories of the past no longer burden us, and speculations about the future seem irrelevant. The ability to laugh at one's own foibles and shortcomings is an essential characteristic of being human.

The "benefits" of humour and laughter in the workplace include:

1. A way to break the ice in stiff or uncomfortable business situations.
2. An effective bonding technique - a wonderful way to build common ground with other employees.
3. A way to break down resistance.
4. A much-needed way to improve the content, enjoyment, and ultimately the productivity of meetings.
5. A way to assign work when people can't take any more.
6. A wonderful way to ease and control tension.

And if you are not convinced, here is another interesting benefit -laughter helps you lose weight. Researchers at Vanderbilt University found that 15 minutes of laughter burns as much as 50 calories. According to nutritionist Dr Mac Buchowski, a healthy laugh a day "could burn 2 to 4 pounds of fat, even without changing dietary habits". Sure beats dieting.

If you are not laughing at least half the amount of laughing a child does each day, it is time to start. Here are some ways to start your license to laugh immediately.

### Start Your License to Laugh Today

- **Get a book of humor.** Short jokes, funny stories or inane observations — and pick it up now and then for a few laughs. Twelve good laughs is a minimum daily adult requirement.
- **Take a humour break.** Get a player and a pair of headphones, and bring some humorous tapes, CDs or MP3s to work. Take a humor break now and then with Tom Lehrer, Elayne Boosler, or Garrison Keillor. They'll help you keep corporate policy — and workplace politics — in perspective.
- **Check Out The Humour Project.** An excellent resource center for humour is [The Humour Project](#) in New York. They conduct workshops and conferences, and publish a magazine "Laughing Matters". An online store is also available.
- **Watch a Funny Movie.** You can't go wrong with Monty Python, Faulty Towers, Absolutely

Fabulous, Mister Bean (Rowan Atkinson), Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, the very silly Mel Brooks spoofs: "Space Balls", "Robin Hood, Men in Tights".

- **Join a Laughter Club.** "Laughter Clubs" have spawned in which the faithfully mirthful gather in the early morning hours - not unlike Tai Chi groups to belly laugh their way to serenity and happiness. To find a laughter club near you check out <http://www.worldlaughtertour.com/>
- **Set up a Humour Room.** Kodak has created a humour room where employees can go to relax or have creative brainstorming sessions. The Kodak Humour Room offers joke books, cartoons, video tapes of comedians, stress-reducing toys and software for creative problem-solving.
- **Bring in a Humour expert.** If you Google "humour/business consultants" you will get upwards of 125 matches, among them: "The Humour Project; Playfair, Inc., HaHa Institute; Funny Business Inc. and Humour Consultants, Inc." Many of these organizations offer laughter and humour workshops.

### What's the Bottom line

Laughter is essential - It is the grease of human relations and fuels creativity. We need to relearn how to laugh, joke, play and have fun.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at [jlaws@foursightconsulting.com](mailto:jlaws@foursightconsulting.com).

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