

Eight Great Ways to Encourage FUN at Work!!!

A few months ago, I bumped into a good friend of mine from college. Alan (my friend) is generally a rather morose character, and he is a securities trader, so I was expecting to have a conversation that wasn't very uplifting. However, I was pleasantly surprised with our conversation. Although his industry is pretty tough right now, he was upbeat about work, excited about the future and positive in reference to the employees that surrounded him. After our conversation, I had a little more spring in my step, and I formed a very positive image of his organization (which I had no previous frame of reference for). Here are some tips to create that positive frame-of-mind in your organization:



1. SMILE! Just try it. Smile, and hold that smile for a few seconds. Do you feel better? We generally view smiling as a response to some sort of positive stimulus, but smiling can actually cause positive feelings ([there is even a recognized "smile therapy"](#)). Smiling, like a lot of body language, is infectious. A defensive posture makes others defensive. Smiling at someone generally generates reciprocation of your smile, and it takes a lot less facial muscles to smile than it does to frown. Make a conscious effort to smile for the people you interact with and you will be pleasantly surprised at the response you get!

2. Humor in the Work Place... Appropriate humor can be a vital part of any positive work environment. [A good \(or even bad\) joke can lighten the mood.](#) A funny story is a good way to engage the people around you. You can even use humor to illustrate a point you are trying to make with staff, customers or volunteers. Keep it clean, but realize that people like to laugh and have fun. Don't be afraid to poke fun at yourself to lighten the mood a bit. You can use humor relating to your own mistakes or shortcomings to create stronger bonds and let people know the real you. During our Garden Adoption project, I've let people know about my "black thumb", and that as a former farm kid I can plant the same thing over several acres, but I have problems when it comes to the aesthetics of a small plot. By sharing in a humorous manner, I asked for help, made people smile, let people know my limitations and engaged the people I talked to.

3. Do non-work things together. A professional distance is sometimes necessary, but don't be afraid to arrange a "night out", a trip or a picnic with staff or volunteers. Comradery can produce a more effective and efficient work place. The "outside-of-work" activities can be as formal as an employee appreciation dinner or entertainment laden night on the town, or they can be extremely informal. For example, you could make the decision to attend ["Live in the Lot"](#) as a group any Wednesday in June or July. It's a free event, and we could arrange some recognition for your organization in attendance. It's amazing how little gestures can create a positive work environment.

4. Enlist your neighbors help. Part of creating a positive work environment relies on extending that environment outside of your own four walls. Introduce yourself to your neighbors, talk about ways you can coordinate your activities to improve business ([Emporia Main Street can help](#)) and look for ways you can help each other create a more positive work environment. For example, you could trade gift certificates, goods or services with a surrounding business. Hold a company contest, or distribute items "just because". Unexpected treats create a sense of thanks and joy in the workplace. Who knows, you may be able to expand your customer base and develop some long term profitable relationships! Get creative with what your business can offer a neighbor and make the effort to extend the hand of friendship, you will be glad you did!

5. Reward positive behavior and discourage negativity. When you see someone that brightens your day, let them know how much their behavior means to you and your organization. Of course there will be times in which situations occur that have a negative connotation. We are all human and we make mistakes. Yes, we need to minimize and correct those mistakes, but we need to make corrections in an effective, yet positive, manner. Persistent negativity can undermine any organization. [You cannot dictate](#)

[an individual's personality, but people need to understand their effect on an organization and those around them.](#) However, you should make an attempt to understand the source of negativity. While some negativity can stem from an individual's personality, other sources may include personal or professional frustrations. You may want to steer clear of personal entanglements, but if staff has legitimate complaints that are affecting morale, the positive thing to do is address issues to the best of your ability while communicating your efforts.

6. Let people into your world, and become part of theirs (professionally speaking). In point 5, we discussed frustration, and a lot of that frustration can stem from a lack of organizational understanding or transparency. Familiarize your employees or volunteers with all aspects of your organization. Focus on training. People are generally negative about the unknown. When individuals understand their role, and the role of others around them, they typically have a favorable response. A healthy organization generally contains management that is "in-touch" with staff. Find opportunities to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with staff members working on a project. Make sure individuals understand their importance to your business goals. Remember, organizational transparency leads to advocacy. A staff willing to advocate can significantly help your business or organization succeed.

7. Be flexible. Every person around you has different talents, temperaments and convictions. You can enhance positives and discourage negatives, but generally the only person you can change is you. Flexibility means extending the willingness to adapt to staff while maintaining your organizational standards. Flexible hours that allow a parent to watch a child's event, flexible work environments that encourage input & creativity or flexible organizations that adapt to take advantage of their staff's inherent gifts generally create a fun place to work or volunteer. And, when you need extra help, past flexibility generally leads to more staff willingness to go that extra mile!

8. Build unity and pride! It's easy to have fun when you are proud of what you do and who you represent. A common organizational mistake is made when your marketing efforts focus completely on the external world while ignoring the message sent to staff and volunteers. If the rest of the world hears that you are the number one (insert blank), the best (whatever you are best at) or that you have some sort of significant history, and you don't share that information to the people closest to you, you are losing out on a great opportunity. Market internally. Tell those closest to you why "we" (the organization) are awesome. Tell them why you are unique. Explain your history. Educate people around you about why you do what you do. Create activities internally that build unity. If those closest to you have a lot of pride in your organization, they will share it with others. And, let's face it; working with people that believe in what you do is a lot more fun than the alternative!

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