

NHC Article: Laughing our way to Workplace Wellness (Laughter Yoga)

Laughing our way to Workplace Wellness

Humour in the workplace is not only a vital component in stress reduction, but key to working together as a team.

Last summer I was heading to a meeting when I saw a group of people having their picture taken with a huge sign that read "Shrek Rules" and they were wearing bright green Shrek ears. This put a huge smile on my face and it had the same impact on the people around. As the photographer snapped away, passer-by's cheered and shouted as the Shrek clad group responded in kind.



They were having a ball and barely resembled a group of co-workers having their picture taken for a client. The green ear effect was infectious and everyone wanted to be part of the action. I even tried to secure my own Shrek ears with little luck.

This wonderful distraction reminded me of how important it is to bring a sense of fun and humour to work. While we need to take our jobs seriously, we don't need to take ourselves too seriously. Humour is a great way to relieve stress at the office and remind us to keep things in perspective.

Physiological reactions to stress

We know when we're feeling stressed by its unwanted presence in our bodies.

Our muscles tense resulting in painful necks, backs, shoulders or wherever else it chooses to rear its ugly head. Breathing becomes rapid and shallow minimizing oxygen flow and our heart rate increases.

Laughter has the wonderful effect of interrupting this physiological reaction. **It reduces our heart rate and relaxes our muscles.** I dare you to keep your muscles tense during a good guffaw. Respiratory activity is also improved allowing for a better flow of oxygen. In fact, **William Fry**, a professor emeritus of Stanford University, says that **20 seconds**

of laughter is equivalent to 3 minutes of strenuous rowing. Once the physiological cycle has stopped, we're able to think clearly and focus on more productive things.

What do we mean by humour at work?

Luckily we're not suggesting you become the office stand-up comic or resident joke teller. We're talking about sharing a simple smile, a giggle or even a full belly laugh - anything that can break the physiological cycle of stress. Remember to use humour in your own way and don't feel compelled to try out for Yuk Yuks.

Benefits to Employers of Laughing to Workplace Wellness

According to Statistics Canada estimates, lost work time due to stress related ailments costs employers **\$12 billion a year**. This is time lost resulting from absenteeism, lost productivity, disability claims and inadequate customer service.

To manage this growing problem, many companies are implementing workplace wellness programs. While many traditional programs have emerged, humour is an innovative approach. Professor Stu Robertshaw of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has noted one corporate study where after a trial period incorporating humour into work, **the company experienced a 21 per cent decrease in staff turnover and a 38 per cent decrease in Friday absenteeism.**

Using humour has the added benefits of enhancing rapport and building teams. It is also perceived by employees as a form of reward and recognition.

Wendy Woods is Principal of [Watershed Training Solutions](#), a company that specializes in helping individuals and teams improve their effectiveness by improving their interpersonal skills. Watershed Training Solutions: Making the workplace flow.

Direct link:

http://naturalhealthcare.ca/articles/laughing_our_way_to_workplace_wellness.phtml