



Management

Reducing Stress One Laugh at a Time.

Thursday, February 8, 2007, 12:08 AM - [Laughter](#)
Posted by Administrator

In today's workforce, it doesn't matter whether we're the CEO or a front line customer service representative - we all face stress. We're often expected to work longer hours and do more with fewer resources. All the technology geared to making us more efficient simply means that we're a phone call or email away - goodbye downtime, hello stress. In fact it's one of the top two reasons for employee absenteeism and/or healthcare costs in the workplace (Ipsos Reid 2004).

Hoping and praying that stress will go away is not the answer. We need to manage it as best we can and with any and all tools that are available. If we don't we, along with our companies, could pay a huge price - burnout, anxiety or depression.

So where does laughter come in? Stress is our body's natural reaction to perceived danger. In order to deal with the threat, stress hormones are released, muscles tense, the heart beats faster and we breathe rapidly to get more oxygen to the lungs, brain and muscles. Recent scientific research has proven that laughter reduces stress.

How does it work? When we laugh, our muscles tighten but relax right after. Everyone knows how those rigid stomach muscles can hurt when you're having a good guffaw. Dr William Fry of Stanford University found that 1 minute of laughter is equivalent to 10 minutes of rowing. Also stress hormones are reduced and air is forced out of our lungs forcing us to breathe more deeply and slowly.

This is great news! A good chuckle is one more tool for reducing workplace stress and is more fun than working out. The question is how can we use it? Does this mean we need to brush up on our joke telling or develop a comedy routine? Luckily, no. It is much easier than you think.

Here are three simple strategies:

1. Take ourselves lightly but our jobs seriously.

Many of us are very serious at work, which is essential, but forget to separate the intensity of our jobs from our lives. This awareness is the first step toward change and making room for more laughter. Lighten up and remember laughter is a healthy and quick way to reduce stress.

2. Create a laughter kit.

Fill the kit with things that makes you giggle or smile, then use it when needed. A collection might include: cartoons, videos, stories, pictures, and audio clips – whatever works for you. Try visiting one of my favourite cartoonists www.glasbergen.com. As Milton Berle said “Laughter is an instant vacation” so anything that makes us laugh will be the perfect stress break.

3. Try laughter yoga.

Laughter yoga was started in 1995 in India. Now there are over 5,000 laughter yoga clubs in 50 countries. With laughter yoga, we don't need jokes or funny pictures because we essentially laugh for no reason. Specific activities get us faking the laughter but genuine laughter quickly kicks in because it's so contagious. By the end, the laughter is natural. Attend a laughter club and then bring the activities to your next office meeting or offsite. For more information about laughter yoga, visit laughter-yoga.ca/laughter_yoga.pdf

Now we know that laughter isn't just about playing – it's about surviving in the workplace.

By: Wendy Woods

Wendy Woods is a certified laughter yoga leader and has developed unique programs to bring laughter into the workplace to reduce stress, improve relationships and boost productivity. For more information, please contact her at wwoods@watershedtraining.ca and visit <http://www.watershedtraining.ca>

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