



“Are We Having Fun Yet At Work? 71 Ways”

By Steve Wilson

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“When we provide an environment that is pleasant and multidimensional—fun! we inspire people. They look at things differently. They become more creative and productive.”—Fred Pryor

“In general a spirited environment is marked by laughter—enthusiasm for being on a team and trying darn near anything to make the service or product better.”—Tom Peters

“Humor sells. Humor convinces. Humor instructs. Humor entertains. Humor communicates. Humor is the ideal vehicle to capture interest attention, and approval.”—Robert Orben

“A business is too big when it takes a week for gossip to go from one end of the office to the other.”--Anonymous

Ah, The Power Of Humor!

As I consult with organizations about putting more humor to work at work, and as I deliver keynote speeches and training seminars across this continent, there is one very typical response. Many CEOs, managers, and employees have commented, “Sure, I see the value of the right kind of fun at work, but I don’t have a very good sense of humor and that’s not the way I was taught to conduct business, so what can I do?” In other words, “show me how to do it”. It is not very difficult to convince people about the “whys” of good, appropriate fun and humor at work. What is much harder is to teach the “hows”.

Whenever I can, as I interact with people at all levels in all kinds of business organizations, I ask them to tell me some of the specific ways they are having fun at work. Respondents include employees of or consultants to Armco Steel, Pacific Bell, Hewlett Packard, Ortho Pharmaceutical, Coors Brewing, U.S. Navy, Headstart, numerous hospitals and universities, Orange & Rockland Utilities, Litton Industries, IBM, AT&T, University Associates, Digital Equipment, Westinghouse, and many, many more.

In a sense I have become a clearing-house for ideas that show how organizations make work fun. By sharing these specific examples I hope others will be inspired to copy or create their own ways to be in fun. There are many proven benefits for employees, customers, and organizations. Each idea presented here has been “field tested” somewhere in the United States of Canada and is recommended by the person who did it and found that it worked!

This is the list so far:

1. We rent a video and make popcorn then watch and eat during certain boring, repetitive jobs.
2. We keep an office Polaroid camera that everyone has access to; we post the candid and spontaneous photos.
3. We keep a “Far Side” calendar in the photocopy room so while you wait for your copies you can look at cartoons.
4. We sometimes write outrageous memos in the midst of serious ones.
5. One company newsletter we publish is strictly on the lighter side.
6. Departments perform skits at our Christmas party.
7. Our department is 80 women. Once a year we have an outing to a male strip show.
8. We add “fun” names to things or places at work and on agenda items for meetings.
9. “Chinese” gift exchange is held sometimes for a holiday, sometimes for no reason (items are “opt or swapped”).
10. We have “Secret Friend” gift exchanges all through the year.
11. Sometimes an intentionally misunderstood communication breaks the tension.
12. We include a “pearls of wisdom” birthday card at a birthday party. All department members contribute good wishes and wise sayings.
13. We adopt and support local school teams.
14. Practical jokes; exaggeration humor.
15. We made a music video about the job with the help of our media/communications department. All employees got to ham it up, showed great attitudes.
16. We take breaks we all “pause gymnastics”—with music; only takes a few minutes.
17. We made a humorous video involving department members.
18. Friday afternoons about 3:30 all work stops and employees gather in the cafeteria for a social break.
19. We take one-minute “massage train” breaks.
20. We give “Foul Weather Friends” Awards to employees who deal with most difficult customers. They get a certificate and a raincoat.
21. Periodically our executives cook breakfast for everybody.
22. We have potluck dinners.
23. English high tea is held once in a while in our department.
24. We have celebratory meetings for a variety of successes: a job well-done, projects completed.
25. We give a “Hang In” award for completion of extra long projects.

26. We go out to lunch together around holidays.
27. Skits and a variety of awards.
28. We make up acronyms for humorous incidents.
29. Dressing up to impersonate the managers.
30. We hired a caricaturist to draw pictures of us during a meeting.
31. Popcorn parties.
32. Weekend family picnics.
33. Our manager surprised us by renting a bus and taking us on a picnic trip complete with accordion player and watermelon.
34. We give a “Shark” award for hard work, getting through a hard time.
35. Humor/Fun/Joy committees; rotate membership.
36. We go on cruises.
37. We have dress “up” and dress “down” days.
38. We have an “Outrageous Necktie Day” and give prizes.
39. Have T-shirt day or funny hat day or funny badge day. Award prizes for the tackiest, most outrageous, funniest, weirdest, ugliest, etc.
40. We keep a popcorn machine in the office so anyone can pop corn anytime.
41. We held a “Neon Day”. Everyone wore something neon and we gave out prizes.
42. We have taken trips to the circus together.
43. Tickets to various cultural and athletic events are great prizes in our department.
44. Part of our Christmas bonus included two movie passes each month for a year.
45. We have a “TOAD-of-the-month” award for the biggest screw-up with the emphasis on learning from the mistake.
46. Any event that has food catered is extra special and fun.
47. It is fun to decorate for the holidays throughout the year.
48. From time to time we videotape reports instead of making live presentations.
49. We have rented an amusement park for a day of fun for employees and their families.
50. Employees perform Christmas skits and to make it more fun we have added an applause meter.
51. Going out to lunch together.
52. We made the rounds of the homes of co-workers at Halloween for “trick-or-drink”.
53. Dressing up at the office for Halloween.
54. We take “Dysfunctional Breaks”—any break during an overloaded crazy time to relieve the tension.
55. We have played elaborate practical jokes (e.g., moving someone’s car from the parking lot and replacing it with a wreck!).
56. “Bring spouse to work day.”
57. We have a relaxing “Friday Afternoon Club”.
58. We started a “Summer Hours” schedule one year so we could have long weekends. It worked out so well it was extended to year ‘round.
59. We instituted a “Bored Friday” social get-together which follows a Friday Board meeting.
60. We held a mini Olympics and an office wellness Olympics.

61. We have a “Try-pathetic-alon”. (Anyone with a definition of this: please contact Steve Wilson).
62. We play Team Trivial Pursuit.
63. We have formed hikers’ groups among our coworkers (a High Peak group and a Low Peak group depending on the level of hiking one enjoys).
64. We have a contest for “Ties You Wouldn’t Wear To IBM”.
65. Employees can present each other with “You Made A Difference” certificates at any time to show appreciation.
66. Ask someone to teach you something about his or her job.
67. Organize intramural athletic events.
68. Celebrate “Humor Week”—can be done anytime.
69. Create a contest in which employees’ current photos have to be matched with their baby pictures.
70. Hire a Shiatsu masseuse for 15-minute massages twice a month.
71. We put the names of employees who have earned “Applause” recognition for good effort into a lottery for prizes on a quarterly basis. The more “Applause” the more chances to win.

This wonderful list shows the range of creative ideas we all can come up with for having fun at work that keeps us satisfied, healthy, creative, and productive. For more ideas like this as well as 21 guidelines for the right way of putting humor to work at work, read my popular book “The Art of Mixing Work and Play.”

Steve Wilson is a psychologist, author, speaker, workshop leader and consultant who helps people and organizations get the absolute most out of themselves while they love every minute of it. He is the Cheerman of The Bored of World Laughter Tour, Inc. and USA Laughter Clubs. For more information visit his website www.stevewilson.com, or www.worldlaughtertour.com, or phone 1-800-669-5233.