

LEADERSHIP *Warren Bennis* Excellence



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY
 VOL. 29 NO. 4 THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE APRIL 2012

Castle or Crumb?

This ragged entrepreneurial leader is so focused on his fish (his future)—his belief so firm and resolute—that he opts to pass by the beautiful castle of present and proximate opportunity and press on until he finds fulfillment of his aim and ambition.



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Are We Having Fun Yet?

Debunk six myths that may kill your joy.



by Sharon Jordan-Evans and Beverly Kaye

THE ECONOMY LIGHTS ARE BACK ON—or at least flickering. So how's your workplace now? One manager said, "I used to enjoy coming to work. We had a lot of fun—a lot of laughs. That was before a recession, downsizing and the prevalent *do more with less* mentality. What can I do to bring back some of the fun—for my team and for me?"

When was the last time you had a good laugh at work? Last year? Last month? Last week? Yesterday? If it was *yesterday*, you're probably grinning. If your answer was *last month* (or year!) you might increase the fun quotient.

A fun-filled workplace builds enthusiasm, which leads to increased productivity, better service, positive attitudes, and talent loyalty and longevity.

If fun at work is a good thing, why are so many workplaces *fun-free zones*? In part, because times have changed and the workload is heavier. And, in part, because of misplaced beliefs or **six fun myths**. Which of these myths do you believe in? Notice how managers debunked each of these myths.

Myth 1: Professionalism and fun are incompatible. Most concern about *having fun at work* is concern about inappropriate humor, loud behavior, or poor timing. If employees' timing is off or their behavior is embarrassing or disruptive, give them that feedback (as you would about any work behavior).

Slapstick silliness (pie-in-the-face humor) will not fit well in a business-suit environment. But there are appropriate ways to get some kicks in even the most buttoned-up workplace. Find ways that fit for you and your team.

"Every month we had client reports due and most of us dreaded the solitary extra-hours work that the task required. So we started planning to stay late one night each month. We went to a deli for snacks and then held a work party. We were all on our own computers in our own offices, but we took regular breaks, helped each

other, enjoyed our meal together, and had some laughs in the after-work casual environment. It not only made the monthly task much more enjoyable, but it provided a type of team building."

Myth 2: It takes toys and money to have fun. When we asked dozens of people to reflect on fun times they remembered having at work, we heard mostly of examples that did not cost money or involve toys.

- "No specific time. It was just the day-to-day laughter my colleagues and I shared—mostly about small things."
- "Spontaneous after-work trips to the local pizza parlor."
- "Verbal sparring with my brainy, funny colleagues."
- "When we had a huge project, a tight deadline, and we had to work all



night. I wouldn't want to do that often, but we had a good time, laughs in the middle of the night, and a thrill when we finished the project."

"We decorated one of my employee's offices for his birthday. We used five bags of confetti from the shredding machine. We laughed a lot and still talk about that day."

Myth 3: Fun means laughter. Fun often does involve laughter or smiles. Sometimes people just need to take themselves less seriously. But people can have fun at work without laughing or getting silly. An intriguing project or collaboration with great teammates can truly be fun. Work that is meaningful and makes a difference can be fun. Building something new can be fun.

"I managed a team of engineers, and the most fun I had was in the early days of creating a new form of airplane—building something that would make a difference. It was difficult and challenging but much fun."

Myth 4: You have to plan for fun. Planned fun makes sense sometimes. The employee softball team provides fun and requires planning, as does an

occasional employee picnic or the annual holiday party. But a lot of fun in the workplace is spontaneous.

"We had worked hard and nailed all of our goals for the quarter. I called my team into my office and presented them with movie tickets—for the two o'clock show, that day! It was great. We took off as a group and felt like kids, playing hooky from school. It was spontaneous—they loved it."

Unplanned fun can be as simple as showing up at the staff meeting with muffins for everyone, asking a group of employees to join you for lunch at a new restaurant, or taking an unplanned coffee break to just sit and talk about families or hobbies.

Myth 5: Fun time at work will compromise our results. Many managers feel that every minute spent chuckling is a minute lost toward *bottom-line results*. But fun-loving cultures are *more productive*. A fun break can reenergize people and ready them for concentrated effort.

"My employees take breaks when they want. Some surf the Web or play games on their computers. They say that these breaks clear their minds so that when they return to the project, they are fresher and sharper."

You might be thinking, "If I allow my employees to surf the Web during work, they will never get their work done." Maybe you believe that only exceptional employees can be trusted to that degree. The secret to allowing fun at work is to be crystal clear with your employees about their performance goals. Co-create measurable and specific goals with them, then evaluate their performance using those goals.

Myth 6: You have to have a good sense of humor (or be funny) to create a fun workplace. Some of you just aren't funny. In fact, many terrific bosses are not necessarily funny (or even very fun-loving). In many cases, they simply allow others' humor and playfulness to come out. They support rather than create fun at work. Let others initiate the kicks if fun is not your strength.

"I'm task-oriented and serious most of the time. One time I dressed up for Halloween, and my employees were shocked. That was a real stretch for me. Most of the time I just let them have their fun, without judging or squelching it."

Experience proves it: fun enhances creativity, and does not diminish productivity when work goals are clear. Let fun happen—it will energize, motivate, and keep talented people on your team. **LE**

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ACTION: Debunk the six myths and have fun.