



Laughter at work proves profitable

Laughter is an antidote for poor performance in the workplace, research has revealed. Rather than lowering productivity among employees, a work environment where humour is encouraged has been found to boost morale and improve performance.

A recent study by Swinburne University of Technology researcher Maren Rawlings found that individuals who used, and were surrounded by, positive humour in the workplace had higher levels of job satisfaction than those who didn't.

Rawlings surveyed 300 workers from 20 countries about their individual use of humour in the workplace, and how they perceived the humour used by their colleagues.

"I found that the more positive the climate of humour was in a workplace, the greater the job satisfaction of employees," she says.

"In fact, personality and mood, combined with the use of humour, explained more than 40 per cent of workers' job satisfaction."

Just as a dose of positive humour was found to increase workers' job satisfaction, Rawlings' research showed that a lack of light-hearted banter significantly lessened it.

"Workplaces where humour was used in a negative way — for example, using a joke to put somebody else down — had a definite negative impact on employees' job satisfaction," she says.

"Workplaces that were humour-free were also perceived as being negative."

Internet gift company RedBalloon Days has tapped into the need for fun in the workplace.

Chief executive Naomi Simson says the company regularly uses humour to engage and motivate its employees.

"One of our company values is 'having a sense of humour and fun'," Simson says.

"This means how we do business, how we problem-solve. It means not taking ourselves too seriously.

"There's such a melding between the working week and leisure time that employers must re-examine how an employee experiences work.

"We certainly leave plenty of room for laughter and fun at our monthly meetings."

Simson believes people who enjoy where they work are more loyal to a company than those who don't like the environment.

"Being able to share a laugh also provides room for creativity. It reduces stress, relaxes us and puts a smile on our dials," she says.

"It's also a means of connecting your teams and getting them sharing, because a problem shared is a problem halved."

Dr Barbara Plester, a lecturer at New Zealand's Auckland University, says research she has done on the subject shows that humour is discouraged in more formal work environments, whereas informal workplaces have fewer boundaries when it comes to humour-related activity.

"When people go to work in new cultures, they pretty quickly pick up on what the boundaries are from one workplace to another — what sort of jokes would or wouldn't be acceptable," Plester says.

Employers are beginning to see the value of fun workplaces where employees can laugh and enjoy themselves, she says.

"Laughter provides release, relieves boredom and can make being at work more fun."

—ELLE HALLIWELL



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Humour as a motivator: RedBalloon Days staff at their Pyrmont office

Picture: Ella Pellegrini