

12 Ways Humor Makes You a Better Employee

An eBook from *humor that works*

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Introduction

Congratulations, you've gotten your hands (or keyboard and mouse) on an amazing eBook. OK, that may be biased considering I'm the one who wrote it, but I think you'll find it pretty darn good.

The goal is to share with you the amazing ways humor can make you a better employee. You may laugh, you may cry, you may even get seasick, but you will definitely learn about humor. Specifically:

1. Humor Enhances Your Perceived Leadership
2. Humor Improves Your Perceived Effectiveness
3. Humor Makes You More Creative
4. Humor Creates More Opportunities
5. Humor Enhances Your Interviews
6. Humor Leads to Better Reviews and Ratings
7. Humor Attracts Wealth
8. Humor Increases Bonuses
9. Humor Strengthens Relationships
10. Humor Burns Calories
11. Humor Relaxes You
12. Humor Improves Life

But before we get to all of the ways humor helps, I want to share a little story. If you are eager to get to the numbers, or are adamantly opposed to stories, feel free to skip ahead to the list. Of course, you might miss something uber-important (probably not (well, maybe (no it's doubtful (or is it?))))).



My Story

Ever since I can remember, I've been an engineer. Growing up, I fell in love with numbers (math was my favorite subject), looked for efficiencies in chores (sorting silverware before placing in the dishwasher makes unloading easier), and would constantly take things apart only to put them back together again (I usually succeeded, except with my parents' marriage).

After dorking it up in high school and graduating in the Top 1% of my class, I went on to major in Computer Science & Engineering—one of the geekiest majors out there—at *The Ohio State University*. There I learned the wonders of project plans, critical path schedules, and of course object-oriented programming. By my junior year, I was on my way to becoming the next Bill Gates.

Then comedy happened. Like a crash-test dummy hitting a wall in a test run by geeks like me, comedy crashed its way into my life and changed everything. On a friend's suggestion, I tried my hand at improv comedy, practicing with a small group in the basement of a residence hall. Two years later I was helping to lead the premiere improv group in Columbus, OH and performing stand-up across the state of Ohio.

I never knew comedy would become a huge passion of mine. I figured I was a computer scientist and engineer, not a comedian... I soon realized the two aren't all that different. My work as an engineer trained me to look for the most effective and efficient methods of getting things done. My education in computer science taught me the value of re-using what works.

As it turns out, **humor is effective, efficient, and re-usable**. It's effective and efficient because it demonstrates understanding, confidence, and gets people to listen. It's re-usable since humor can work in a number of situations, such as bringing people together or easing tensions after a stressful situation.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves—we'll get to the specifics of the power of humor soon enough. After graduating from OSU, as geeky as ever but with a new-found passion for humor, I started working at a Fortune 20 company.

I immediately reaped the benefits of understanding and using humor. Not only was I a project manager who talked geek, I could explain it too. I could give engaging presentations about the details of modeling and simulation; I could hold a conversation with anyone from a contractor in India to the CEO; and I could lead the effort for building a collaborative environment in an ever-changing landscape.

And while I started seeing the impressive power of humor in my own experiences, I wanted proof I wasn't crazy. Not because I didn't believe my own experiences, but to prove I was right.

I ended up being righter than I could imagine. And that's the point of this eBook: to share with you what I've learned about the use of humor, and **how it can make you a better employee**.

Below are **12 ways humor can make you a better employee**, backed not just by my own experience but by various studies and smart people studying smart things. Once you've learned about the power of humor, head to <http://www.humorthatworks.com/> to find out how to start using humor today.

Let's get started.

Leadership & Effectiveness

If your work or life is like a picture of yourself, humor is like Photoshop, helping to make that starting image of you even better (except humor is less fake and easier to learn). While humor alone won't make you an amazing employee, it can certainly help.

1. Humor Enhances Your Perceived Leadership

One of the keys to being a great leader is being perceived as a great leader. You could have many of the skills required to lead successfully, but if no one honors, respects, or believes in your ability, you won't have much success.

Dwight D Eisenhower said "A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."

Eisenhower knew from his time in the military and as President of the United States that humor can help showcase your leadership qualities. He discovered through first-hand experience what the findings of one study suggested:

"People who use [humor], particularly in stressful or seemingly one-down positions, are viewed as being on top of things, being in charge and in control, whether they are in fact or not." [1]

Certainly it's important for you to be on top of things, but the use of humor can suggest to others that you are, even if you aren't quite as close to the top as you'd like to be.

2. Humor Improves Your Perceived Effectiveness

In addition to leadership, humor also demonstrates effectiveness, and as management guru Peter F. Drucker put it so succinctly, "The executive's job is to be effective."

Effective executives know that using humor is a great way to communicate and gets people to listen and remember. Watching the commercials during the Super Bowl highlights the use of humor in effective communication—you have only 30 seconds to get your message across. And considering the cost of each commercial, you bet the executives behind each commercial are banking on it being effective.

But it's not just ad execs that believe in the effectiveness of humor. One of the conclusions drawn in a paper presented by two professors of Speech Communication at an annual Speech Communication Association event was exactly that:

"Humor plays an important role in corporate culture...the more astute one is regarding the uses and misuses of humor, the more effectively one is perceived." [2]

So take it from me, the execs at Burger King, and two people in tweed blazers with elbow patches, humor is effective.

Creativity

Imagination is crucial to innovation, just as innovation is crucial to long-term success. Humor can be a key part in expanding your imagination.

3. Humor Makes You More Creative

Humor and creativity go together like two Ps in a ppod (I've never really understood that saying). But nevertheless, it's true. And nearly any profession can benefit from more creativity (albeit not all of the time--I don't want my dentist getting creative during a regular teeth cleaning).

I discovered this out through experience, but psychologist Joseph R. Dunn figured it out however psychologists do. He concluded,

"Humor and creativity go together. In both, you're looking at variables and seeing new connections. You're tying two things together in a new way." [3]

I believe that roughly translates to "use more humor; be more creative." Of course it's not a direct translation, but it's like how lifting weights can help improve your basketball game through strengthening of important muscles. And if you ask me, humor is a much more pleasant workout.

Opportunities & Chances

Improved leadership, effectiveness and creativity are great, but humor doesn't stop there. Humor can improve your chances of success, whether in a job you already have, or in one you're trying to get.

4. Humor Creates More Opportunities

Henry Hartman said "Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity." Preparation you can control on your own, but opportunities can be a little harder to come by. That's where humor can help.

As one Business Administration Ph.D put it,

"...research has shown that managers displaying a good sense of humor are given more opportunities in organizations than those without a sense of humor." [4]

But you don't need a Ph.D to tell you that--think about it. If you had two equally qualified candidates for a big project at work, would you take the one who uses humor and is personable, or take the more reserved, strictly business one. If I can do good work and have fun, I'll take that over just getting something done every time.

As they say, opportunity isn't just knocking, it's waiting for a knock knock joke.

5. Humor Enhances Your Interviews

The importance of having a sense, of humor starts even before you have a job. Your interview is a prime time to show that you are more than just a prospective drone, but an actual person with a personality.

If you've seen the movie the *Pursuit of Happyness*, you know the power humor can have on making impressions. Chris Gardner (Will Smith), explains in an interview why he is dressed in jeans and an undershirt. When one of the interviewers asks what he would tell people if he hired a man with no shirt on, Chris replies "I'd tell them he must've had on some really nice pants."

But it's not just Hollywood that enjoys humor:

A survey of 700+ CEOs showed that 98% of them preferred job candidates with a sense of humor. [5]

98%! That's a large, nay, huge majority of CEOs who consider humor an important trait in employees.

Quality of Work

Now if you are one of the lucky ones with a job, and plenty of opportunities, there are still a number of ways humor can improve your work. At most corporate jobs, compensation and promotion are based on 2 key components: reviews from your peers and ratings from your manager. Humor helps with both.

6. Humor Leads to Better Reviews and Ratings

Reviews are usually based on two things: your quality of work and your reviewer's perception of your quality of work.

A survey of 1,000 executives discovered that 84% of respondents felt that workers with a sense of humor do a better job. [6]

Enter my "Humor -> Money" theorem (much like a mathematical theorem):

- A. Use of humor -> Better Reviews
- B. Better Reviews -> Better Ratings
- C. Better Ratings -> Promotion
- D. Promotion -> Moolah/Cash/Dinero/Money money money, money!

Not quite sold on theory? It's OK, some people want to check the pudding for the proof. Consider:

A study of 20 executives at one company that showed executives rated as "outstanding" used humor more than twice as often as executives rated as "average" (17.8 times per hour compared with 7.5 times per hour if you really want to know the specifics). [5]

So not only does humor improve your perception, it also correlates to higher ratings.

Wealth

All the above benefits are nice, but there's more to humor than improving your work. To quote *Jerry Maguire*, "Show me the money."

7. Humor Attracts Wealth

Humor and optimism are like peanut butter and jelly. Pretty good separately, but amazing when together. But unlike peanut butter's inability to create jelly, humor can help you become more optimistic by minimizing negative experiences and enhancing positive ones. And why would you want to be more optimistic?

Wealth.

In a recent study of 5,000 individuals, those individuals classified as "wealthy" possessed common traits like optimism, resilience, grit, and curiosity. [7]

As one of the founders of the study put it,

"...optimism is a wealth magnet. Study after study shows that people with faith in themselves and in the future get more jobs and keep more jobs." [7]

Now who's ready for some PB&J?

8. Humor Increases Bonuses

For some people, that last example might be a little too subjective. I understand—you want some cold hard facts to go along with the cold hard cash.

Remember the pudding example with the study that showed executives rated as "outstanding" use humor more? Well one other tidbit from that study:

The study also tracked the compensation of each executive and found that the size of the executives' bonuses correlated positively with their use of humor during the interview. [5]

Sounds to me like we just proved that last part of the "Humor -> Money" theorem. And that's talking about some cold hard pudding. Or more money. Or something.

Relationships

Success at work and more money are nice, but they aren't everything. People and relationships are instrumental to success, and that's exactly where humor can really shine.

9. Humor Strengthens Relationships

Few of us in the corporate world work alone. This is changing slightly as telecommuting becomes more common, but the majority of workers still work with at least a small group of people, even if remotely. And in any company, it is often relationships that make or break not only the individuals, but the whole company.

Humor can help you build, maintain and improve those relationships. How? As one clinical psychologist explained it,

"When people share emotions—positive or negative—they become closer." [3]

It can also be a sign of support. As one university professor described it,

"Kidding ourselves and each other is a way of showing support for each other". [8]

At least one Ph.D./consultant/author agrees,

"When you laugh together you're standing on the same territory." [8]

Sharing a humorous story or playing an improv game can be those positive, supportive experiences. Why not bring your team together through the positive emotions of humor, rather than the negative emotions of being over-worked or stressed-out. Your co-workers and friends will thank you.

Health

Of course attaining all of the above doesn't really matter as much if you don't have your health. As Emerson said, "The first wealth is health." And you've probably guessed it by now, humor can help you there too.

10. Humor Burns Calories

To be fair, almost anything you do can burn calories. Eating technically burns some calories (just not more than you are likely consuming, unless you're eating celery). But it turns out that laughter can actually help you shed pounds.

In fact,

Laughing 10-15 minutes per day could help you lose up to four pounds per year. [9]

And that may not be a huge sum of weight, but every little bit counts. Plus it's likely to be the most enjoyable "workout" you'll come across.

11. Humor Relaxes You

The stress of our daily work and lives can take its toll. The amount of pressure on us day in and day out can lead to constricted blood flow, headache, and even depression. But if stress is the villain, humor is the super hero.

A recent study tracked 300 people; half of which had heart problems and half of which had no history of heart disease. The results showed that the people who had suffered a heart attack or had undergone coronary artery bypass surgery were 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease. [10]

But humor doesn't stop there. In addition to increasing the flow of blood to the heart and brain, it also relaxes muscles.

The muscle relaxation that comes with laughing can last for up to 45 minutes after the laughter has subsided. [11]

That's almost like getting a massage just by laughing. And if you can find something to laugh at once per hour, you'll help to keep your muscles relaxed nearly all day long. I don't know about you, but that sounds, well, relaxing.

Life

I may not be a doctor, psychologist, or a Nobel-prize winner (yet), but I am me, and I know my experiences. And they have taught me that humor can go a long way improving my quality of life.

12. Humor Improves Life

If you're not sold at this point, I'm not sure what to tell you. In between random puns, odd wannabe math theorems and peanut butter and jelly references, we learned that humor:

(1) enhances your perceived leadership, (2) improves your perceived effectiveness, (3) makes you more creative, (4) creates more opportunities, (5) enhances your interviews, (6) leads to better reviews and ratings, (7) attracts wealth, (8) increases bonuses, (9) strengthens relationships, (10) burns calories, and (11) relaxes you.

Whew. That's a pretty impressive list. And I don't know all of my life math, but I'm pretty sure that adds up to an improved life. And an improved life leads to happiness, which leads increased productivity, which leads to being a better employee.

What Now?

Now that you know the positive effects of using humor in your work and everyday life, you may want to learn how to start using humor more. Luckily for you, that's what I've spent my career doing, and now I'm sharing it with you at <http://www.humorthatworks.com/>.

- For easy ways to start incorporating humor into the workplace today, check out the [How-To Humor](#) section. You'll find guides such as how to [setup your very own Lunch Bunch](#), or the value of [sharing 3 pictures to create a stronger team](#).
- The [Humor Benefits](#) area provides even more great ways humor can help you at work, and in your personal life. Read about things like [scientific research on how to be more creative](#) or see how [improv can cultivate team-building](#).
- Humor isn't just fun, it's also a great teaching tool. Head to [Learn with Humor](#) to find various tips, tricks, and techniques for advancing in the corporate world, all written from a humorous angle.
- You learn something new every day, and the things I learn I share in the [What I Learned From](#) section. Find various life lessons I discovered in books, movies, and around the Web.
- Or, if you're just looking for a good laugh, take a recess and enjoy some of the most humorous videos, images, and jokes from around the web in [Corporate Recess](#).

If you want to stay up-to-date on everything at Humor That Works, get the good stuff delivered to your [RSS reader](#) or your [E-Mail inbox](#). If you don't enjoy what you read, you can punch me in the face (OK maybe not Mr. Violent, but you can always unsubscribe if you feel the need to).

Of course if you have any ideas yourself, or questions on the hows or whys of comedy, leave me a comment on the blog or [send me an email](#). Whatever you do, keep up the humor, you're on your way to being a better employee.

Sources:

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- [3] *Let the Good Times Roll: Building a Fun Culture* by David Stauffer. Harvard Management Update, October 1999.
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- [5] *Laughing All the Way to the Bank* by Fabio Sala. Harvard Business Review, September 2003.
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- [11] *Ha! Laughing is Good for You!* by Amy Toffelmire. Canoe.ca, April 2009.