

Don't Send in the Clowns!

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At the risk of being somewhat unpopular, I take exception to the recent trend among business gurus who promote ways for companies to create *'more fun at work.'* As a businessperson and a trainer for a variety of corporations, I don't believe it is the responsibility of the company to motivate people with rah-rah sessions or games to make the work environment "fun." Unless your name is Ronald and you are selling hamburgers, you don't need to be a clown. People who feel the answer is to motivate everyone forget that if you motivate an idiot, you end up with the worst possible employee, a motivated idiot.

The company's responsibility is to provide an environment that will attract and retain quality self-motivated employees who enjoy their job, thereby creating a pleasurable atmosphere.

Leaders have an obligation to provide an environment that is as cheerful as possible. Everyone who enters the door should not have the stress of not knowing whether it is a "Good morning" morning or a "Go to hell" morning. Walking on egg shells is how several employees in one office described coming into work because of one person with a very unpredictable morning manner. She could ruin the tone of the day for the entire office and after several attempts to help her change her attitude, it was time to set her free so she could find a more favourable place of employment. Similarly, one manager barked, "What is good about it?" as people cheerfully said "Good morning." In this case, the business was a revolving door of employees.

The workplace does not have to become a carnival to be happy but it should be respectful, cheerful and positive. Remember, attitude is a reflection of the leadership.

I am not suggesting there should be no laughter in the workplace, in fact I prescribe it. One of my greatest compliments came from a leader in a larger business after we had trained about half of his staff. He said, "I don't know what you did but since they took your course I notice a lot more laughter in our office. I consider that a success. And by the way, our volume is up 25%." Does this happen at your office? If not, what steps will you take to change it?

To create an enjoyable workplace for your employees consider these five concepts:

1. **Be Flexible:** Be willing to listen to your employees. Maybe flex-time or job-sharing would allow you to keep valued employees. Maybe job descriptions should be adjusted to suit the changes the business has experienced. I hate to use old clichés, but remember that if nothing changes, nothing changes. Always be looking for ways to make things better. If your team is struggling, forget about hiring a business comedian, look into a team building workshop that will teach them new skills they can take back to the workplace.

2. **Be Collaborative:** Have your managers ask employees for their opinion when considering change. At least consider the ideas even if you don't implement all of them. If you want to create a team atmosphere, treat people like they are members of the team. Send your employees as well as your managers to leadership courses so they can improve these skills and you will grow your own next generation of leaders.
3. **Give Respect:** Be respectful of your employees. They do have other lives. They have had other experiences. If you disagree with something they have done, talk about the issue, not the person. Treat employees as you would a customer and sell them on your ideas as opposed to telling them your ideas. Layton starts sales training sessions by telling the class *"There are only two kinds of people in the world, those who are in sales, and those who have not yet come to that conclusion."*
4. **Be a Risk-taker:** As a businessperson, you are accustomed to taking risks so use the same philosophy when dealing with suggestions from your staff. Ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen?" before dismissing their ideas. You will find some of the best ideas come from your employees. Also, give them some latitude in dealing with difficult clients. This empowerment can really add reputation of the organization by improving customer service.
5. **Hope:** Napoleon said that "Leaders are dealers in hope." If you tell someone that you want to give their *"idea a shot"* you reinforce a belief that you do value them and their ideas. Offer people the opportunity to hope-to hope for more opportunity, more trust, more respect.

Most employees want to do a good job and only fail to do so because they feel they have no control or they are not valued. By creating an environment where they believe they are a valued member of the team, they will take more interest in what they do, be motivated, and want to contribute more to the success of the organization. This will in itself create "more fun at work" and you can send the clowns home.

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