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Achieve More: Lighten Up and Laugh Often!

Lessons I've learned from a turkey.

Imagine, you're in the middle of a senior executive presentation; there's a decisive tension in the air. Amidst discussion about production targets and external threats, there comes a loud tapping at the full length windows behind you. The tapping stops, discussion continues but then at a particularly sensitive moment, the tapping resumes with a vengeance; and it doesn't stop either!

The suspense is killing you, so with apologies to your audience you excuse yourself and retract the curtains. The sight is more than your audience can bear; the laughter in the second floor boardroom grows to a crescendo as tears roll down the faces of the attendees.

There, standing nearly four feet tall, with a barrel chest and blazing colors stands an exceptionally narcissistic male turkey. The windows are glazed so he can't see you but you know for sure he sees himself. When the laughter dies down (and thankfully the tapping as well), the mood in the room is decidedly more cordial. It's almost as if someone opened a pressure-relief valve. In fact, in a way that's just what happened.

This is a true story; it could not have been scripted if we wanted to. But it does underscore the profound impact that laughter can provide wherever we are; yes, even in the workplace!

Did you know that laughter...

- **Reduces stress?** Laughter has been shown to reduce levels of the stress hormones cortisol, epinephrine and dopamine, while at the same time increase levels of 'feel good' endorphins.
- **Enhances the immune system?** The number of antibody producing cells is increased as a result of laughing and the effectiveness of T-cells (natural killer cells that destroy viruses and cancer cells) is enhanced.
- **Improves creativity and productivity?** Studies have shown that laughter expands our vision and opens us up to new ideas and potential.
- **Improves communication and rapport?** Hey, just take a look at the boardroom example above.
- **Feels real good?** Yeah, that's a no brainer but I had to throw it in.

With all these benefits I've got to wonder why I don't see more laughter in the work-places I visit. I've heard a lot of excuses- if we're laughing how can we expect anyone to take us seriously? Lightness and laughter are not consistent with the serious nature of running a business; the list goes on. Sound familiar? For many of you it probably does. Is there something you can do about it? You bet there is!

Lead by example; let your staff know that laughter in the workplace is OK.

Our society has a history of equating work with seriousness and many managers and executives make a point of perpetuating the notion. Unless you're adamant that laughter is not permitted in your work-place (and if you are, I'd like to chat with you) make a point of letting people know that it's OK to be light. After all, you already know the benefits.

The only thing more contagious than the common cold is laughter. If it feels good let it show. The example you set leads the way for others to be more spontaneous and genuine in their day to day actions. Let your staff know that it's OK to enjoy themselves while they are working. If everyone adopts a similar position it won't take long for the effort to have a major and quite positive impact.

Incorporate laughter into meetings.

It's too bad we don't all have turkeys flying around our offices; the unexpected laugh may be the most fun. But even setting the mood (let's call it the inspired laugh) can be beneficial. Why not set aside a few moments in your next meeting for a bit of joke telling, a funny story or something else to lighten the mood? I know, it sounds totally weird; but why is that? Because you never did it before?

Why not try to loosen it up a bit? Imagine what you have to gain; let's see, your colleagues are experiencing reduced stress, feeling more creative and productive and have improved communication and rapport. Oh did I mention they're feeling good as well? Wow, this sounds like my kind of meeting! What are you waiting for?

Above all, keep it real!

One final tidbit I'd like you to consider- laughter is a valuable work-place addition but it's a serious matter too. That is, laughter is great when it's genuine but meaningless when it's staged. I'm not referring to unexpected versus inspired laughter but heart-felt versus contrived. Real laughter comes from deep inside; watching others laugh might lighten our grip on the restraints but genuine laughter is a spontaneous response- we permit something to move us to giddiness. Permit yourself to be moved and you will move others.

The benefits of laughter in the workplace are real. Let your laughter be felt and heard!