

In Practice

Enhance Your Sense of Self-Mirth

“We want to have fun!” is how Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines, sums up his corporate philosophy.

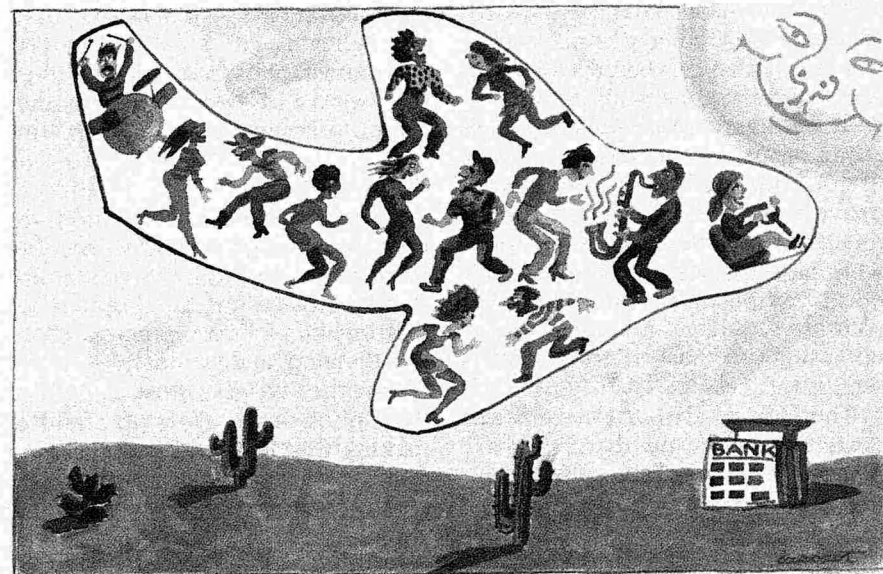
Injecting humor and fun into the workplace is a way of life at Southwest. Kelleher has been known to feed peanuts to startled passengers aboard flights and to show up at a Southwest hangar in a flowered hat and purple dress at 2 a.m. Prospective employees watch a company video of briefcase-toting pilots dancing off a plane to rap music, flight attendants wearing wild costumes, and people acting silly at company parties.

But doesn't all that silliness get in the way of the bottom line? Not at all. In fact, Southwest is the only airline that has turned a profit every year since it began. And it has by far the lowest turnover of personnel in the industry.

Companies such as Southwest Airlines reap another payoff that may in part be attributable to fun in the workplace—fewer sick days. Laughter is healthful, according to many experts.

Mirthful laughter has a scientifically demonstrable effect on the body. It activates muscles, increases the heart rate and blood circulation, and allows greater oxygen intake. When laughter subsides, endorphins are released in the brain, causing physical relaxation and the alleviation of tension. In other words, humor is a kind of internal jogging.

William Hodge, a management consultant, surveyed 329 company executives. He found that 97 percent agreed that humor is valuable in business and 60 percent felt that a sense of humor can be a deciding factor in determining how successful



Andrzej Czeczot

a person can be in the business world. In another survey, conducted by Burke Marketing Research, 84 percent of the personnel directors who were interviewed said that employees with a sense of humor do better work.

Humor does not necessarily mean we create jokes or comedy routines around trying circumstances. It means we stay open and flexible and seek new perspectives. It can be a powerful tool that can give us a sense of power and triumph over our lives.

“I feel as though my work environment is a cross between a carnival sideshow and the Twilight Zone,” says a human relations director. “The minute we get a handle on how to help our people deal with one change, another supplants it, and we have to start all over again. Learning to accept, and to operate efficiently...is more than a challenge.”

In Mandarin, the word for crisis and opportunity are the same. Think about it. How many times has something wonderful come from a

A fun-in-the-workplace philosophy keeps one airline—and a lot of other firms—laughing all the way to the bank. Also, here are tips on starring in your own self-training film and using ergonomic principles for happier, healthier workers.

situation we judged as bad or unmanageable?

Turning a negative into a positive is a hallmark of the humorous perspective. If we can find humor in the most dire of circumstances, it naturally increases our sense of "self-mirth." What a great sense of freedom and power it is to know we can "roll with the punches." That's why people with high self-esteem tend to have a well-developed sense of humor.

The emphasis is on the word, "developed." A humorous perspective is a quality that can be developed—it is not something we are born with.

The primary block to developing a humorous perspective is our fear of looking foolish, being disappointed of, and, ultimately, being rejected. Such fears were instilled with messages we received in childhood: "Wipe that stupid smile off your face!" (Smiling is stupid.) "Grow up and get serious!" (Growing up is serious business.)

The U.S. educational system was designed for the needs of industry

The Humor-Preparedness Kit

Keep the following tools and suggestions close at hand in the workplace. Use them often to give yourself and others a lift.

▶ Make a list of all of the things and people that bring you joy, fun, pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Refer to it when you're bored, upset, or depressed—or whenever you just need a break. Joy lists are great to exchange with others, too!

▶ When you're ambushed by dire circumstances, ask yourself this: How would your favorite comedian react in this situation? Your

mother? Richard Nixon? Harpo Marx?

- ▶ Make silly faces in the mirror.
- ▶ Find new toys.
- ▶ Start a humor library.
- ▶ Start a cartoon board.
- ▶ Write humorous memos.
- ▶ Have outrageous contests—for example, choose the silliest tie or jewelry, the ugliest socks, or the funniest hat.
- ▶ Take improvisation, comedy, or acting classes.
- ▶ Remember: If you're too busy to laugh, you're too busy!

during the industrial revolution—to create a mass of people who could read, write, and follow instructions. It does not foster the sense of joy that inspires independence, innovative thinking, and creativity.

In other words, most people in the United States grew up afraid of making mistakes and embarrassing

themselves. But few great achievements have ever been realized without a great many mistakes made in the process.

Have you ever said or thought, "I'm so embarrassed I could just die!" That's quite an extreme reaction, isn't it? But there is actually a physiological reason for it.

THE TELEPHONE "DOCTOR"® LIBRARY

16 Best-Selling Training Videos at a 47% Savings!

The Telephone "Doctor"®

12119 St. Charles Rock Rd.,
St. Louis, MO 63044



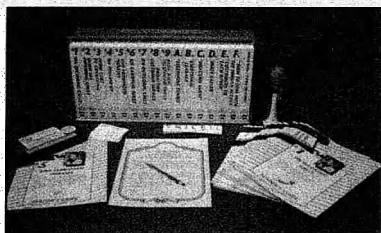
314/291-1012
FAX 314/291-3226

On-site training available!

The Telephone "Doctor"® offers a 16-video library covering the full spectrum of customer service and telephone skills training.

All the skill-driven titles are presented by Nancy Friedman, The Telephone "Doctor"®, the international authority on telephone skills and customer service!

Celebrating our 10th-year of customer service and telephone skills training!



COMPLETE 16-VIDEO TELEPHONE "DOCTOR"® LIBRARY

Titles include:

- * How to Handle the Irate Caller
- * The Five Forbidden Phrases
- * Proactive Customer Service
- * How to Deal with the Foreign Accent
- * Voice Mail -- Curse or Cure?
- * We are Customers to Each Other
- * Basic Basic Telephone Skills
- * Plus 9 other best-selling titles.

Leader's guide, support materials, and workbooks available.

Call for
FREE Preview:
800/882-9911

COMPLETE LIBRARY
\$3,990

Studies from a relatively new science called psychoneuroimmunology—which looks at the relationship between the mind, neuro-impulses, and the immune system—conclude that our mind cannot differentiate, chemically, between a threat to our physical life and a threat to our ego. The exact same chemical is released in the brain in response to a physical threat as to an ego threat.

We have to learn that we can take risks and even make fools of ourselves—and that it won't kill us!

Embrace the fool within and reap some positive rewards. The fool can jump outside the constraints of convention and shed new light on an old problem. In Tarot cards, the fool is the first card in the deck. According to the *Encyclopedia of Tarot* by Stuart R. Kaplan, it can signify a new adventure, enthusiasm, initiative, spontaneity, new opportunities, and unlimited possibilities.

There is great freedom in foolishness and silliness. In fact, the word "silly" comes from the Old Middle English word *selig*, which was a blessing. It meant, "to be healthy, wealthy, and wise."

— Terry Braverman
Studio City, California
(adapted from L.A. Interchange
September 1992)

Careers, Lies, and Videotape

Camcorders don't lie. Well, maybe they make some of us look a little heavier. But for the most part, video footage can let us see what we really look like—how we move, talk, sit, and stand. It can show us how we use our eyes, what we do with our limbs, and what expressions cross our faces.

That kind of insight into the impression we make can be a valuable career development tool for you or the managers and executives in your company, says a recent article in *Executive Strategies* newsletter. After you see how you're coming across, you can train yourself to change the patterns you don't like.

Have family members record you at home. Set up a tripod in your office and let the camera run as you go about your work. Don't be self-

conscious and don't worry if the camera misses some movements.

When you watch your "home" movies, here's what to look for:

▶ Check your walk. Do you stride or lope? Are you purposeful, or do you loiter? Does your walk reflect your personality?

▶ Watch other body language. What do you do with your arms and hands? When you fold your arms, do you look as if you're listening seriously—or as if you're shutting down all conversation?

▶ Study your platform manner and delivery. Pay special attention to your recorded speech. Is it in synch with your appearance?

▶ See how you interact with other people. Look at the differences, for instance, between the way you deal with strangers and the way you deal with family and friends. Check for changes in posture, eye movement, gestures, and tone of voice.

Once you've observed yourself, act on the information you've gleaned from your starring role. Practice. And keep recording yourself for an ongoing visual record of your progress.

Executive Strategies is published by the National Institute of Business Management, in Alexandria, Virginia.

Holding Up a Mirror to Diversity Issues

A stumbling block for any diversity trainer is showing trainees the link between diversity management and workplace performance. But right there in the classroom, you have a resource that can show a group of trainees how diversity issues are played out in real workplace situations. That resource is the training group itself.

One way to strengthen for trainees the link between diversity issues and workplace interactions is to rely on the dynamics of diversity within the training group. In other words, use the group's interactions as part of the lesson. These discussions work well as part of the small-group work in a diversity-training program.

First, notice the seating arrangements of the group, if people were

allowed to choose their own seats. Who is sitting next to whom? People are likely to sit near others who look similar to themselves; employees tend to sit next to those of the same sex, age group, and ethnic background.

But the dynamics of seating arrangements can be more subtle than that. Bring them out into the open by questioning trainees to determine if people are sitting next to others from their own work units, geographic locations, or areas of expertise.

Making trainees aware of their seating choices can demonstrate how natural it is for us to surround ourselves with people who are like ourselves. Of course, that choice can provide a level of comfort, but it can also hurt the quality of decisions made and actions taken at work.

Observe which trainees tend to give the answers. For example, in a discussion that focuses on problem definition, experienced workers are likely to provide tried-and-true solutions before exploring the problem. This eagerness to provide a solution assumes that the people with less experience have little to contribute. But a fresh perspective on a problem can often contribute a lot to the solution-development process.

Pointing out this dynamic to a group often slows down the process in a productive way. It gets people to ask open-ended questions and to explore the problem and its causes in more depth. It encourages solution development rather than pat answers.

Consider gender issues. Do the men and women in the group tend to take on different roles in discussions? In general, women in groups do more supporting, active listening, and reflecting than men. Men do more solution-seeking and challenging than women.

Asking the group how gender roles differed in a discussion can help them see the advantages of each role—and maybe get them to seek a "female perspective" or a "male perspective" in future decisions back on the job. It also provides a safe way to explore some of the ways in which men and women relate to each other differently, and why.

What about listening? Are participants really listening to each other? Or are their responses to each other telling you that they aren't listening?

If you sense that someone hasn't really heard what another person has said, step in and facilitate an understanding of the last statement before allowing people to critique, challenge, or build on it.

Once people understand the statement, ask why the speaker was not heard in the first place. Could it be because of differences in communication styles, gender, experience level, race, age, or expertise?

When time limits are set for small-group work, and time is running out, what happens to a group's interactions? In many cases, people tend to interrupt each other and "bulldoze" their input through, to the exclusion of other ideas and people. Acknowledging this dynamic to the group can show people that such behaviors are natural when people are under pressure. Then they can work on developing strategies for including and valuing everyone's input for the benefit of everyone.

Leadership roles can say a lot about attitudes toward diversity. Who was designated for or voluntarily took on the leadership role in group work?

Taking a few minutes to ask participants why a particular leader was chosen can make them aware of the criteria used to define leaders in the company. Once they are aware of those criteria, they can see how the norms may encourage or hinder diversity in the firm's leadership ranks.

When using a group's own dynamics to show how diversity affects actual work interactions and performance, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- ▶ Allow group members to become comfortable with each other before you begin showing them what they can learn from their group interactions. Don't begin pointing out their dynamics too soon. An over-awareness of the process can cause trainees to interact in ways they normally would not, just to please the trainer.
- ▶ Be sensitive to individual comfort levels. Some people are uncomfort-

able about their own diversity being used as a topic of group discussion.

- ▶ Avoid putting a trainee in the position of having to explain to the group how all women, or all people of color, or all members of any other group, think or feel.

- ▶ Don't point out everything yourself; rely on group members' awareness. With the right questions, an effective facilitator can help people verbalize their observations in sensitive ways.

- ▶ Remember that the behaviors you are noting are developed over a lifetime and may be subconscious. Trainees may answer your reflections with denial, so don't expect immediate changes in behavior.

- ▶ Be honest. These dynamics involve the whole group, including the facilitator. Be willing to put yourself on the line when diversity issues affect your own comments and actions.

— **Steve De Valk**

*475 Central Park West, Suite 5C
New York, NY 10025*

A Six-Pack of Skills for Success

What do companies want? According to Goodrich & Sherwood, an HRM consulting firm, companies look most often for the following six skills when interviewing applicants for management jobs.

- ▶ public speaking: the ability to convey a message to strangers in a less-than-relaxed situation
- ▶ financial management: experience in managing operating budgets successfully, with an eye on costs
- ▶ people management: an indication of leadership skills, and the abilities to delegate, lead by example, and motivate workers
- ▶ interviewing: the ability to handle an interview effectively, as both interviewer and interviewee
- ▶ training: the ability to train and develop subordinates, not only to ensure that the work gets done properly, but also to ensure that competent managers are available for succession
- ▶ writing: the ability to communicate clearly through the written word.

Is This the Party to Whom I Am Speaking?

"Hundreds of thousands of dollars are leaking through the phone lines of small business and corporate America because of how people answer the telephone," says Nancy Friedman, the self-proclaimed "Telephone Doctor."

The truth is that most businesses just don't pay much attention to the way employees answer calls. But the first four to six seconds of a call are critical—that's all the time it takes a potential customer to create a first impression of your firm.

If you don't know how the customer-service representatives in your firm are answering calls, pick up the phone and call them. Then, if you don't like what you hear, Friedman suggests training employees to use the following three-part greeting:

The buffer. This part of the greeting is the "welcome mat." Some common buffers include "Good morning," "Thank you for calling," and "We're glad you called."

The buffer sets the tone for your company or department name. Without the buffer, that information can sound cold and impersonal. Also, the first few syllables spoken are often cut off because the employee was still raising the receiver to his or her mouth. Buffer words are expendable; your company's name is not.

The company or department name. This is the most important part of the conversation, says Friedman. It should be said confidently and clearly—not rushed or mumbled.

The employee's name. A customer-service representative who gives his or her name is going a long way toward building rapport with the client. If the caller has to ask, "Who is this?" then the phone has been answered inefficiently.

Many companies have representatives answer the phone by saying "Can I help you?" But Friedman says that "Can I help you?" is not necessary as part of the greeting, because it goes without saying. The employee is there to help, Friedman points out. That's why he or she answered the phone.

Five Things You Should Know About Ergonomics

Is your workplace hazardous to employees' health? The health and safety of workers could depend, in part, on such issues as proper posture, indoor air quality and circulation, appropriate lighting, noise control, and the correct use of computers.

When any of those ergonomic elements are unsatisfactory, work-related illnesses can emerge, including repetitive-motion injuries, eyestrain, and sick-building syndrome.

Ergonomics is the process by which the work environment is assessed and reshaped according to the capabilities and tasks of the employees who work there. Human resource specialists should consider the following ergonomic factors when communicating with employees about their health and comfort in the workplace.

Adjustability. Help workers discover the features and functions of their work spaces that enable them to adjust their environment for safety and comfort. Explain the functioning and purpose of devices that allow a worker to custom-fit a workstation to his or her needs and tasks.

That may include such items as adjustable computer-keyboard support trays, as well as chairs with tilt control, seat adjustability, and arm-height controls.

Job management. Many task-intensive and "keystroke-driven" office jobs, such as data-entry positions, have work requirements, such as quotas, that discourage workers from taking breaks. Urge people in such jobs to vary their tasks during the day. They should take 10- to 30-second breaks from their computer screens every 30 minutes, and longer breaks every two hours.

Varying hand movements and taking frequent breaks can help prevent repetitive-motion injuries such as carpal-tunnel syndrome.

Vision, glare, and VDT use. Workers who spend long periods of time at VDTs, or video-display terminals, should occasionally look away from their screens and focus instead on distant objects. These mini-breaks can help prevent eyestrain.

Another source of stress for the eyes is VDT glare. To minimize it, add glare-reducing screens to computer monitors, reposition VDTs, or adjust brightness and contrast controls.

Posture. Discomfort caused by a prolonged "static" position can sometimes be relieved through attention to posture. Three basic sitting positions can promote a healthy posture—leaning slightly forward, sitting upright, or reclining slightly. Both feet should always rest comfortably on the floor or on a foot rest.

Personalization of the workplace. People spend a lot of time at work, and they want to feel comfortable there. If possible, companies should give them some say in how their work spaces are arranged, furnished, and managed.

Don't discount workers' requests for more control over their immediate environments. Giving them the opportunity to make some of those decisions can enhance their emotional well-being. And that can improve their morale and make them more productive employees.

— *Carol Rickner and Suzanne Cohen*

*Stern & Associates
11 Commerce Drive
Cranford, NJ 07016*

Heard in Passing

"Make the manager and employee equals in the appraisal meeting, to eliminate the parent/child relationship. If we don't want employees to act like children, we shouldn't act like parents."

— *Dave Lynn*

*Blessing/White Inc.
Princeton, New Jersey*

This month's "In Practice" was edited and written by Catherine Petrini. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

ETHICAL CHANGE Not Ethical Rhetoric...

CONSIDERING AN ETHICS PROGRAM?

- ☛ Will you demand experience and professionalism?
- ☛ Will you integrate ethics into your quality, customer service, and participation programs?
- ☛ Will you measure change?

We Believe that Pro-Competitive Ethics™ is essential to:

Superior service
Total quality
Motivated Compliance

ETHICS SERVICES SINCE 1980

- Program Leader's Course
- Keynote presentations
- The Ethics and Effective Management Course
- A Code of Ethics for Your Organization
- The Ethics Survey (validated)
- Full support materials including:
Gaining the Ethics Edge, by Mark Pastin, Ph.D., interactive cases, and leader's guide.
- Sentencing Guidelines expertise

PLEASE CALL:

Christina Brecto, Managing Director
(602) 831-6920 FAX (602) 759-9037



The Council of Ethical
Organizations

P.O. Box 24838
Tempe, Arizona
85285-4838

Circle No. 109 on Reader Service Card