

Directions

Newsletter of E. C. Davis & Associates

Issue 2, June 2009

The following articles appeared in our June 2009 email newsletter. *We welcome your comments on any of our articles. Send an email to info@ecdavis.com.*

It's Summertime: Can 'living be easy' even during a recession?

by Ellen C. Davis

Goodness knows this has been a tough year. And we do not mean to diminish those difficulties when we suggest that this summer may be a good time for injecting some light-heartedness into your workplace. Not just gallows humor, but true belly laughs can be good for the soul and good for the business.



Case in point: Southwest Airlines. I recently read that Southwest is currently the strongest US airline financially. And while known for doing many things right as a business, Southwest may be best known for its corporate culture, punctuated by a remarkably effective use of humor. How do they do it?

The Southwest Way to a Sense of Humor

Think funny. People at Southwest are masterful at looking at the flip side of all situations. Try to focus and zero in on your most outrageous thoughts – make these thoughts fun, not embarrassing.

Adopt a playful attitude. Let your mind be open to uncensored, nonconformist, silly and outrageous behavior and responses to life's daily occurrences. It doesn't mean you have to do outrageous things – but you can always consider them!

Be the first to laugh. At Southwest, it's hard not to laugh at the incongruities in everyday situations involving yourself and others. If you don't, someone else will – and they will encourage you to join in. Try to be the first to find some humor in an otherwise awkward or stressful situation.

Laugh with, not at. Southwest promotes healthy humor – that is, laughing with others about what they do or what you don't do. Never laugh at people because of who they are (unless you are assured they can laugh at themselves). If and when we do laugh with others about their idiosyncrasies, we should use it as an opportunity to visit our own.

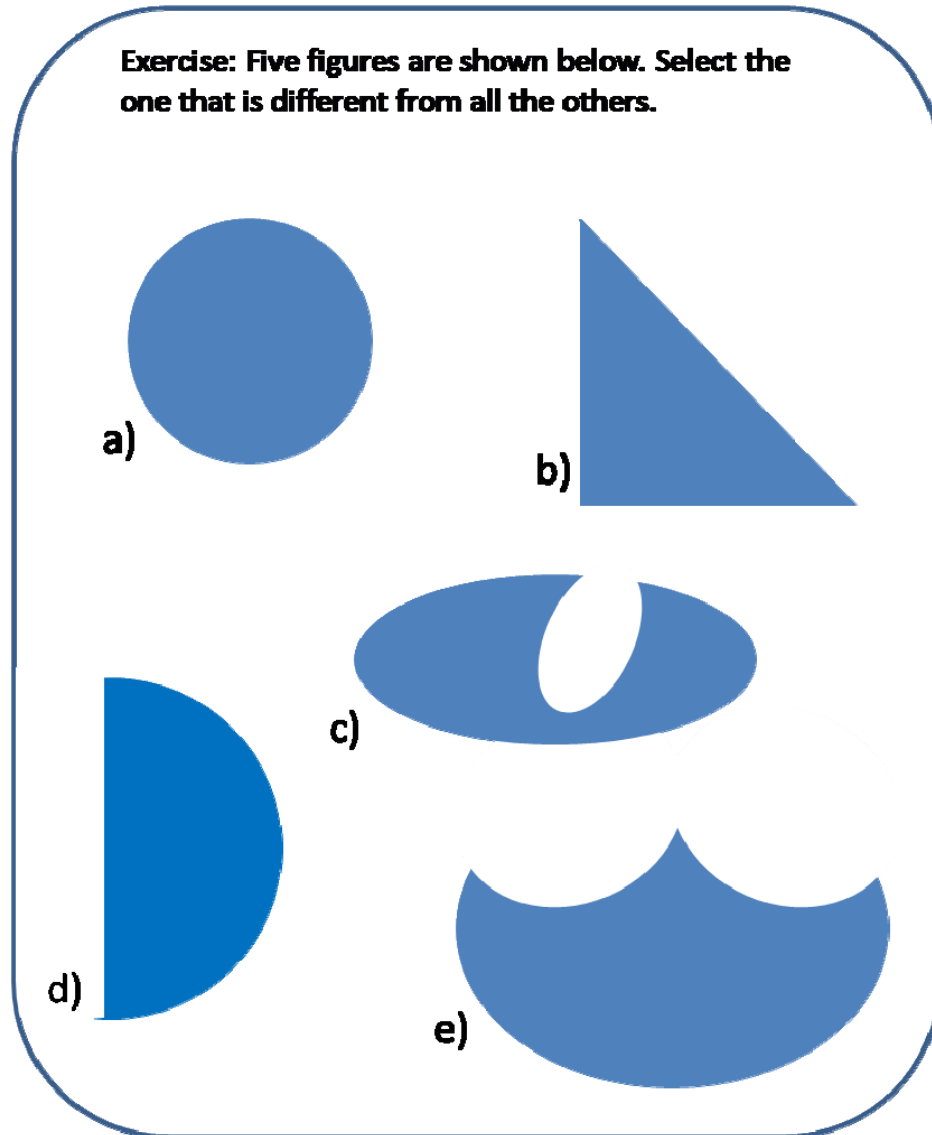
Laugh at yourself. Kelleher (CEO) is the first to laugh at himself, not in mockery, but with objectivity and self-acceptance. Laughing at ourselves is a great first step in taking life less seriously.

Take work seriously, but not yourself. One of Southwest's mottoes is: "Take yourself lightly and take your job and responsibilities seriously." By adopting this motto, you may soon discover that life's burdens and anxieties are lighter – sometimes even lighter than air.

Source: Nuts, by Kevin & Jackie Frieberg.
Broadway Books, New York, 1996.

You may like the idea of Southwest's "way," but not be sure how to take that into your work setting or even how to be a humorist yourself. (We suspect that most of *our* readers are not quite ready to don a clown's suit for casual Fridays.) Here's some food for thought:

- A key is to start with the things that make you laugh. Incorporate fun into your personal behavior; don't create a "culture statement about fun." Your modeling can be far more effective than a mission statement on culture! It's ok to start small; try putting cartoons on the bulletin board, wearing a funny hat, or sharing laughs from a situation comedy you watched on TV.
- Get your team engaged, too. We all know the importance of creativity to problem-solving, but tend to forget about the importance of fun to creativity. Consider starting your next serious problem-solving session with a little fun exercise that also sparks creativity. Here's something you may want to try:



What's the "right" answer? Well, if you chose B, you got it right because that is the only figure with all straight lines. However, perhaps you chose C because it is the only asymmetrical figure. That is also right! A case can also be made for A, as the one with no points of discontinuity. And D ... and E. In other words – all figures are right, depending on your point of view.

Use this exercise to share a small laugh and to help open up your team's thinking. Remind them that if they assume there is only one right answer to the problem you are facing, the team could erroneously stop looking as soon as they find the first solution. A different – maybe better – solution could be there by searching just a little further.

Source: *A Whack on the Side of the Head*, by Roger von Oech.
Warner Books, New York, 1983.

A 2000 issue of the Harvard Management Update makes these suggestions:

- Hook up a punching bag and flail away.
- Hold a laugh lunch. Show a hilarious film clip.
- Add something funny in your routine emails.

The point is this: *humor is not something only a professional comedian can do*. That same Harvard Update offered this quote from psychologist Joseph Dunn: "The difference between a comedian and the rest of us is not that more funny things happen to a comedian, but that he or she more often recognizes the humorous aspect of things that happen to everyone."

Be on the look-out and bring more humor into your workplace!

As a PG-13 rated closing note, I want to share a Southwest Airlines joke I found at www.about.com when preparing this article:

A mother and her son were flying Southwest from Kansas City to Chicago. The son (who had been looking out the window) turned to his mother and asked, "If big dogs have baby dogs and big cats have baby cats, why don't big planes have baby planes? The mother (who couldn't think of an answer) told her son to ask the flight attendant. So the boy asked the attendant who responded back, "Did you mother tell you to ask me?" The boy admitted that this was the case. "Well, then, tell your mother that there are no baby planes because Southwest always pulls out on time. Your mother can explain that to you."



Tips for the Times: Model the way, Set the example, or How to laugh even at times like this

by Tommy Davis

Most leadership research speaks to the importance of modeling expected performance and behavior. Teams and employees look to their leaders to set examples; they gauge their own behavior and actions in comparison to their leader's actions and behavior. Therefore, it is paramount that you model the type of behavior you want from them. Think about what behaviors you want to see in your employees, then focus on providing those behaviors yourself first.

Successful modeling requires that you build your credibility and demonstrate sensitivity. Do the following *far more* under times of stress than you might normally do them:

- do more face-to-face personalized encouragement
- ask more questions
- follow through
- say more specific thank you's
- remember to smile more

Try to bring more humor into the mix of your work. Lighten things up when you and others are feeling stressed. A manager who can lead with humor and a laugh can be far more effective at engaging followers than one who gives exactly the same direction but without the encouraging banter. Below are a few of my thoughts on humor and how it fits into even stressful situations.

As many of you know, Ellen and I live in a hurricane zone, and over the years we have had occasion to board up and evacuate to higher ground. It's a very serious situation, yet we always observe folks finding a moment for humor with signs on their boarded windows. This was one to warn off potential looters: "Two dawgs and one ex-husband -- Beware!"

The Orlando Sentinel even published this humorous list on their website:

Top 10 Reasons Hurricane Season Is Like Christmas

10. Decorating the house (boarding up windows)
 9. Dragging out boxes that haven't been used since last season (camping gear, flashlights)
 8. Last minute shopping in crowded stores
 7. Regular TV shows pre-empted for "specials"
 6. Family coming to stay with you
 5. Family and friends from out-of-state calling
 4. Buying food you don't normally buy ... and in large quantities
 3. Days off from work
 2. Candles
- And the #1 reason Hurricane Season is like Christmas ...
1. At some point you know you're going to have a tree in your house!

You might be wondering why – or how – people insert humor into difficulties. It isn't because they take the situation lightly. Rather, it's because deep down we all understand that laughter truly is "the best medicine." Humor provides a sort of coping mechanism, a way to help us keep moving through the tough times.

Here are a few tips to help you model a little humor – even during the tough times.

1. There are a lot of wacky quotes out there from our favorite late night shows and elsewhere. Sort through them to avoid offending anyone, then share one every few days as a "thought for today." Here are a few I found on the internet...
 - What worries me most about the credit crunch is that if one of my checks is returned stamped 'insufficient funds', I won't know whether that refers to mine or the bank's.
 - Money talks. Mine said good-bye.
 - Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest. - Mark Twain
 - Don't go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing; it was here first. - Mark Twain
 - Speak when you're angry, and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret - Lawrence J. Peter
2. Reach to the past. Jokes about the economy were everywhere during The Great Depression – and since then. Share a few with your team when you need to lighten the mood. Here are some from Reader's Digest magazine.

September 1931

So you're the bill collector? Well, just take that pile on the desk.

--*American Boy*

January 1933

Sign in a Brooklyn grocery store ...

Notice: Due to the depression, credit will hereafter be extended only to persons over the age of 80 years if accompanied by their grandparents.

--*New York Sun*

February 1963

Prosperity is when people buy things they can't afford; recession is when they stop doing it.

--H. E. Martz, *The Wall Street Journal*

July 1991

Overheard: "The recession is hitting everyone. Just last week, a Washington lobby organization had to lay off seven congressmen."

--*Current Comedy*

3. Go the extra mile -- it usually is never that crowded. Teams and employees will work harder and more effectively for leaders they like and can have fun with.

I'll close with a reminder from Mark Twain, one of America's greatest humorists:

"Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place."

TEAM MANAGER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

RECESSION SPECIAL IS STILL AVAILABLE: save 40% over current TMDC pricing!

For the remainder of 2009, we are rolling back the TMDC fee to our original pricing from 1990 -- **only \$1200 per participant!** If you have training and development plans for your employees in the coming months, this special offer on a proven program may be just what you need. Next programs are scheduled in Charleston, South Carolina:

September 21 - 23

November 9 - 11

Send an e-mail to admin@ecdavis.com to register or for more information. If you're not familiar with this program, read about it [at http://www.ecdavis.com/TMDC/tmdc.htm](http://www.ecdavis.com/TMDC/tmdc.htm).

The Power of a Cartoon

by Lynn R. Miller

"A picture is worth a thousand words." Since our childhoods, and in practically every culture, we have valued comic strips, cartoons, and animation for entertainment and sometimes for snippets of wisdom. A message conveyed visually reaches us all on some level. Humorous visuals can be used advantageously to lighten the seriousness of the work environment. Humor can also be effective in reducing stress, improving communication, and building camaraderie.

A popular satirical comic strip about a micromanaged office is "Dilbert," first introduced in 1989. We've all read and shared the Dilbert strips. Sometimes they just make a point – or highlight an area where a team or company might have a weakness. Nothing is sacred in the Dilbert strips. Communication is satirized as easily as management techniques. For years Dilbert has been providing an interesting perspective on everything from HR policies to social skills (or lack of!) to project management. (Note: You can receive the daily Dilbert cartoon in your inbox by subscribing at www.dilbert.com.)

Searching on the web, we ran across a website that has quite a catalog of cartoons on a variety of workplace subjects: time management, meetings, creative problem solving, safety, stress management, among others. We've selected a few that we liked; we hope they will give you a chuckle too. (Note: You can read the daily cartoon at www.glasbergen.com.)

How does your team work?

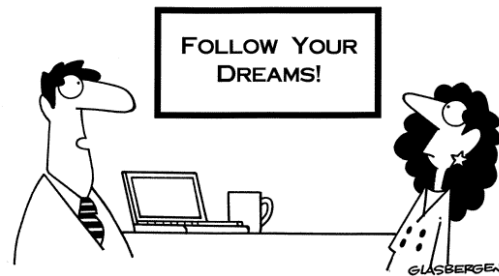
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"I want everyone at the meeting to dress up like Lego blocks. Then we can see exactly how each team member interlocks with the other team members in the project."

Are you encouraging creative thinking?

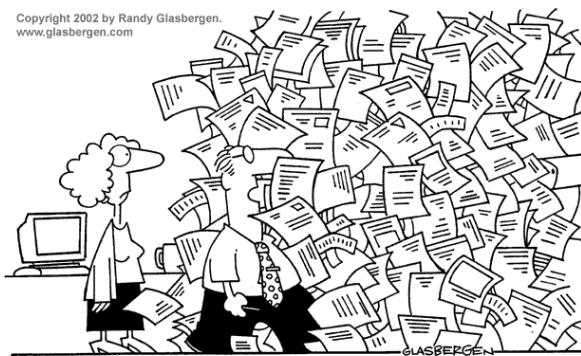
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"It's supposed to inspire, but most employees see it as permission to take a nap."

Is priority setting and organization a concern?

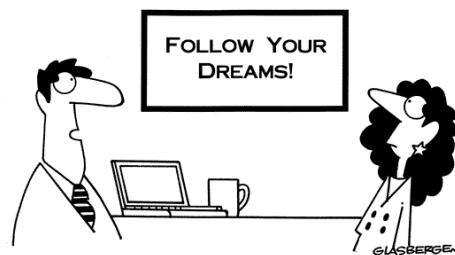
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"I have some paperwork to catch up. If I'm not back in two days, organize a search and rescue team!"

Are your employees imaginative?

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"It's supposed to inspire, but most employees see it as permission to take a nap."

The important thing to remember when using humor in the workplace is to use it appropriately and wisely. Consider your audience. Be sensitive. Then share and enjoy the laugh!

Spotlight on our Strategic Partner: Upchurch & Associates

From Ellen: An important part of our success as a small consulting firm is the collegial relationship we enjoy with other consultants. Their firms complement ours and provide us a way to suggest worthwhile and proven services when client needs are outside of our own business niche. Upchurch & Associates have partnered with us for over 20 years.

[Upchurch & Associates](#) specializes in developing technical work instructions for manufacturing industry and online e-learning materials for a wide variety of businesses. Their customers include Timken, Federal-Mogul, Ingersoll Rand, Cummins Inc., BNFL (British Nuclear Fuel), Pella Corporation, Pittsburgh Corning, Cornell Iron Works, Firestone Building Products, Johnson & Johnson, and the National Kitchen Bath Association. Over the past twenty years, the 10-person company has provided professional support for many U S companies and has also worked in Germany, England, China, Thailand, Mexico, and Canada.

Technical Process Documentation and Training

“What we offer companies is a way to confirm and stabilize their best practices and train their operators in the specific jobs for a manufacturing setting,” said Jim Upchurch, principal consultant for the group. “Companies often come to us with manufacturing processes that vary from person to person or shift to shift.” A unique feature of working with Upchurch is the development process where they have a very smooth system for debriefing a subject matter expert. [Click here](#) to see an example of their process documentation work.



Online E-learning Materials

“Companies that need an efficient way to train a graphically diverse workforce often find an online interactive training program very helpful,” said Stephanie Phillips, general manager and instructional designer. These programs are designed to keep the attention of the learner with interactivity, animation, digital images, text that is read automatically, and a glossary to look up terms.



The Fit with EC Davis

In a start-up or redesign effort, technical process improvement is critical, through the introduction of new technology and/or the redesign of work. Employees need to master new technical skill sets, and a sound, documented approach to their training is vital. Furthermore, organization change periods can be stressful, causing people to fall back into old work habits; this is a time to hone and reinforce existing technical skill sets. Upchurch provides technical training tools that support an organization development plan and help keep the organization moving in the right direction. To learn more, visit www.upchurchassociates.com.