

Directions

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

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."