

Are We Having Fun Yet?

By JoAnna Brandi

If you're too busy to laugh, you are entirely too busy, according to "fun" expert Matt Weinstein, Founder of Playfair, in Berkeley CA. Matt, who has built an entire organization around the concept of play at work, believes the company that plays together, stays together. The intentional use of fun on the job can help improve employee morale, increase productivity and create a more people-centered corporate culture.

A people-centered corporate culture is exactly what you need to create a customer caring organization. If you are a regular reader of this column you know my reasoning behind my almost obsessive focus on customer caring. It's a simple, practical and profitable growth strategy. An increase of only 5% in your customer retention will increase your bottom line from 25% - 100%! The numbers speak for themselves.

Lets get back to the fun stuff. The use of fun at work can be a positive force in building cohesive teams, caring for customers and building loyalty. It also has a significant impact on health and wellness. Laughter boosts the immune system by lowering levels of epinephrine and the stress hormone cortisol, while increasing level of white blood cells. Laughter stimulates many muscles and organs, including the heart and lungs. It's like a form of aerobic exercise and has some of the same benefits. Laughter relaxes us and as Norman Cousins's now classic *Anatomy of an Illness* tells us, it heals us as well.

When an organization has fun, people enjoy their jobs more, they are more passionate about what they do, and that shows. People want to do business with a company that has a smile on its face. Southwest Airlines, one of the country's ten most admired companies, has built a culture around having fun at work. That doesn't keep them from doing a great job at transporting people safely from one destination to another; it just makes it more enjoyable for themselves and those traveling with them. The first time you hear a flight attendant sing the "buckle your seat belt" speech, or say "If you are seated next to a child, *or someone behaving like one*, put your mask on first" you may be a bit taken aback, wondering if these people could be serious. They are – about flying and about fun. Most companies whine they just can't find good people to hire anymore. Not Southwest Airlines, last year when they needed to fill 3000 jobs they had 150,000 applicants. What does this say about Southwest Airlines? I believe these facts alone state they have built such a strong organization as well as a strong company culture.

If you are looking to attract and keep the valuable people you need to grow your company, why not try to create a little more fun at work? Matt, author of "Managing to Have Fun" and the recently released "Work Like Your Dog" and his staff are on a mission to bring more fun to every workplace. Here's what I think we should do: Let's take a whole month to practice having FUN. Then let's be sure to have a "FUN-day" every day of the week. Here are a few suggestions:

- Create a "Stress-Free" Day (my personal favorite) Hire a masseuse to walk through the office giving neck and shoulder massages on request. Hire a shoe-shiner to shine shoes, hire some one to wash employees' cars in the parking lots. Hire a concierge for the day to pick up people's dry cleaning or prescriptions. You get the idea, build on it and let us know what you did to create a "Stress-Free" day.
- Give people an opportunity to earn unusual rewards. Name a dish after them in the company cafeteria, have their boss do their job for a day, give out coupons for casual days, or a few hours off. Not everyone works for money alone.

- Take joy breaks through out the day. Put some music on and teach people to juggle, belly dance, line dance, tell jokes like a stand up comic. Have your resident fly-fishing expert give tips on fishing, or your resident yoga enthusiast give some stretching lessons.
- Have a baby picture contest. Guess who that chubby baby with the big cheeks is! Prizes for all the entrants.

You get my point. Create an idea, or two, or ten and **celebrate** yourselves by celebrating FUN day.

If you are looking for even more ideas on having fun go to [www. Playfair.com](http://www.Playfair.com)

If you are looking to share your ideas on how you have fun in your workplace write to me, joanna@customerretention.com.

As Matt would say "Take your work seriously and yourself lightly"

As I say, Dare to Care

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