



# EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

February 2023



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# HUMOR AND LAUGHTER STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS

Humor and laughter work to reduce stress, ease pain, and lift your mood. Positive humor also draws people together and strengthens the bonds in relationships.

A sense of humor is attractive. People who can make you laugh are a pleasure to spend time with. People who draw out your sense of humor help you keep worries in perspective and make you feel better about yourself.

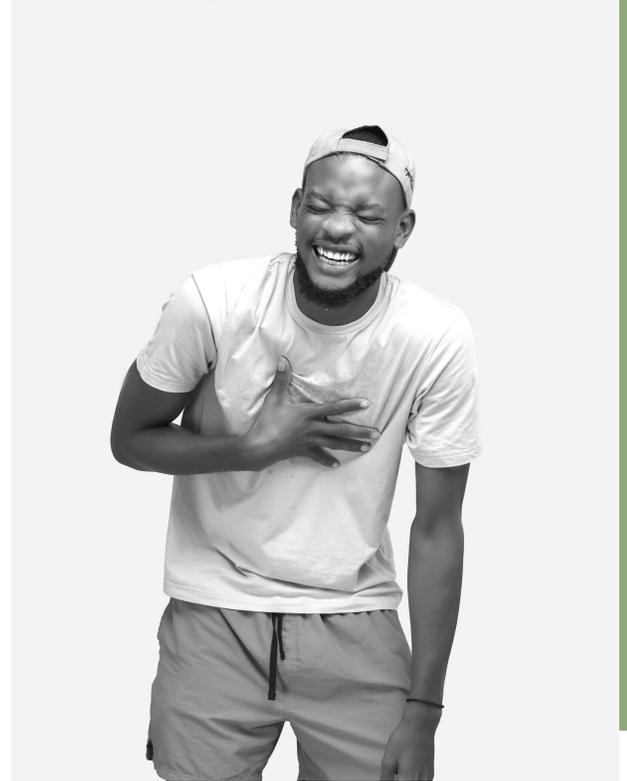
Laughter helps with the awkward moments as people get to know each other. Positive humor can help friends and couples work through conflicts. It helps long-term relationships continue to feel fresh and exciting. Sharing laughter and funny moments together builds intimacy and strengthens feelings of connection.

Laughter isn't a cure-all for relationship problems, but it can help you through rough patches. If you have a history of laughing together, you're more likely to be flexible, open-minded, and forgiving as you deal with disagreements and disappointments. Knowing how to make each other laugh can help keep your relationship resilient.

## How to Bring More Humor and Laughter Into Your Relationships

Even if you don't think of yourself as naturally funny, you can learn to appreciate humor and be humorous in ways that strengthen your relationships. If humor comes easily to you, there may be ways that you can refine your humor to build stronger bonds. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Smile.** Show that you're relaxed and happy by smiling. Just as laughter is contagious, a smile is likely to draw smiles in return—and a smile is the first step toward a laugh.
- **Create calm spaces in your life for shared laughter.** If you or your friend or partner are hurried or anxious, attempts at humor may fall flat or even be perceived as irritating. While humor can be used to defuse tension, it's easier to spark a laugh when you and the person you're with are both calm. If you find yourself too tense to laugh, step back from what's worrying you, and take a few deep breaths to relax. Help your friend or partner create calm spaces, too, then find ways to share a laugh.



- **Find things to laugh about in your everyday life.** Absurdity and silliness are all around, waiting to be noticed and laughed about. Young children are naturally funny if you're lucky enough to have them in your life. Pets and other animals can make you laugh. Even things that don't seem funny at first can be if you consider them from different perspectives. That aggravating request at work almost surely has an element of absurdity to it if you let go of your frustration and consider it with humorous eyes.
- **Learn to laugh at yourself.** Let go of your defensiveness and own up to the fact that, like everyone else, you make mistakes—that you have quirks and awkward moments. Set aside your pride, and turn an embarrassing interaction into a funny story. Your partner or your friends will appreciate the laugh and respect you for both your openness and your sense of humor. (One caution here: If you find that all your jokes are at your own expense, you may be overdoing the self-criticism, perhaps because of self-esteem or self-confidence issues.)

- **Share things that make you laugh.** When you find yourself laughing out loud at a joke, cartoon, or video, share it with your partner or a friend. Share entertainment that makes you both laugh, like funny movies, TV shows, or comedy acts.
- **Do something silly together.** Play a game designed to make you laugh. Go out for a karaoke night. Try something you're not very good at, like bowling or miniature golf, and laugh at your mistakes. Crank up the music and do some outdated dance moves together.
- **Remember funny incidents from your past.** Keep a mental inventory of things that have made you laugh together in the past. Bring them up as funny memories when you both need a lift.
- **Draw on inside jokes.** Inside jokes are the words or phrases that spark funny memories for you and your partner or friends, but no one else. When you're together, use them for a private laugh.

## Humor Cautions in Relationships

Tastes in humor vary widely, and different types of humor can be experienced as warm-hearted and uplifting or mean-spirited and cruel. Use care with humor in your relationships. When you're laughing together, what you're doing is working. When you find yourself laughing by yourself, your attempts at humor may be doing more harm than good:

- **Pay close attention to the other person's reactions.** If they're not laughing with you, you've missed the mark. No matter how funny you think you're being, if it's not funny to the other person, stop. Learn what the other person finds to be funny, and calibrate your humor to lift their mood.
- **Aim to laugh with others, not at them.** Positive humor includes others by finding things to laugh at in shared experiences and everyday absurdities. Aggressive humor, sarcasm, and ridicule get laughs at other people's expense, and can be offensive and hurtful. Lighthearted teasing is appreciated by some people, but not by everyone. Mean-spirited teasing is almost always damaging to relationships.
- **Don't use humor to avoid serious issues.** While humor can defuse tension and help you discuss tough issues calmly, it can also be used to change the subject and avoid those issues. Watch that you are using humor to grow closer in your relationship, not to "keep things light" when significant problems or painful emotions need discussion.

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, September 14). *Humor and laughter strengthens relationships* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



## BAD FOOD HABITS AT WORK? GET BACK ON TRACK IN 5 STEPS

Does it feel like your workplace is conspiring against your aims to eat healthier? You're right. It probably is. And you're not alone.

Somewhere between the early morning doughnuts and the late-afternoon stop at the candy bowl, American workers lost their way on the road to healthier eating.

Consider the big picture: Adults spend, on average, 8.8 hours a day at work and work-related activities. And one survey found that 65% of adult workers are overweight or obese.

The good news? Research has shown that making simple changes to your work environment and your daily routine can improve the quality of your diet and help you maintain a healthier lifestyle.

Ready to get started? Here are five steps you can take right now:

- **Banish the candy bowl; bring on the fruit bowl.** Out of sight, out of mind is very true here. Simply moving a candy bowl away from your desk, or stashing it in a drawer, has been shown to significantly reduce consumption of sugary treats. Conversely, a prominently placed fruit bowl encourages healthy snacking.
- **Beware of the vending machine.** Research has confirmed something that most of us know intuitively: Vending machines largely dispense snacks high in sugar, salt and calories, and low in nutritional value. When afternoon hunger pangs hit, bypass the break room machines.
- **Plan ahead; bring healthy snacks from home.** Take control of your snacking by bringing healthy food from home. For a desk-drawer stash, consider preportioned mixed nuts, dried fruit and granola bars. Refrigerated snacks can include yogurt, raw veggies, fresh fruit and string cheese — all healthier alternatives to your co-workers' cookies.
- **Stop eating alone at your desk.** Desktop dining has become the American worker's default. But research has shown that eating with co-workers can increase both cooperative behavior and overall work performance — a win-win. Another alternative? Get outside for a walk. It'll leave you less time to consume a big meal, improve your enthusiasm and make you more relaxed.
- **Don't forget to hydrate.** Even mild dehydration can adversely affect your memory and increase anxiety and fatigue, setting the stage for both decreased work performance and nervous snacking. Keep a water bottle handy so that you can drink throughout the workday. Drinking water instead of one 20-ounce sugar-sweetened soda saves you about 250 calories.

It's all too easy to go with the unhealthy flow in a workplace setting. But increased mindfulness about what you're eating and where you're eating it can really help turn the tide.

*Source: 1998 - 2021 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER).*

## OPENING UP APPROPRIATELY

You probably know the importance of being a good listener, but you may not realize that being a good talker is just as critical to your relationships at work, at home, and with your friends.

A primary way to build rapport and connect with people is a skill called self-disclosure—the ability to tell people about yourself in a way that lets them to get to know you easily and naturally. Done appropriately, self-disclosure enhances trust



and intimacy in your relationships.

Telling people about yourself also can boost your own self-esteem and personal development. Describing your values, goals, and dreams leads you to define them in terms that others can understand—and that you can act on.

It can be intimidating to tell people how you feel and think, and what you want out of life or a relationship. But you'll probably find that most people will accept you for who you are. In any case, it's up to you to choose what information to disclose.

### Different relationships call for different levels of self-disclosure.

Different relationships call for different levels of self-disclosure. Consider these four levels of appropriate self-disclosure, so you'll feel comfortable telling people about yourself in professional, social and personal situations.

## Level 1: Answering Ritual Questions

Ritual questions are often used in greetings such as, "How are you?" "How have you been?" or "How's the family?" Brief responses such as "Great!" "Okay" or even "Not so good" usually result in brief exchanges. However, if you disclose additional information in your response, the other person may pick up on it and ask a follow-up question. Here are two examples:

- Ritual question: "How are you?"
- Additional information: "Great. I'm going on vacation next week."
- Follow-up response: "Oh really? Where are you going?"
  
- Ritual question: "How are you?"
- Additional information: "Not bad. I'm trying to figure out what to cook for dinner tonight."
- Follow-up response: "Do you want a good soup recipe that's easy to make?"

Try to remember not to disclose too much negative information in response to a ritual question. This usually dampens conversation and discourages future contact, particularly between people who haven't established a rapport.

## Level 2: Disclosing Your Background and Preferences

This medium level of disclosure sets up the building blocks of relationships. Telling people about your family background, where you're from, your occupation, hobbies, marital status, some of your personal likes and dislikes, and the like paints a more specific picture that people can relate and respond to.

Perhaps you're worried that people will jump to conclusions or stereotypes about you, based on the limited information you share at this stage. If so, consider the following:

- While self-disclosure requires taking a risk, it's necessary to build trust in a relationship.
- Not disclosing basic information about yourself suggests that you've got something to hide—and perhaps you do. Remember that it's up to you to decide what you tell people about yourself. You're entitled to omit sensitive or personal information, or save it for later.
- Some people may stereotype you based on what you tell them. The only thing you can do about that is to present more specific details, to paint a more accurate picture of who you really are.

Here are some examples of disclosing your background and preferences:

"I was raised in a small town in Wyoming, but I've always been a city-person at heart."

- "I was raised in a small town in Wyoming, but I've always been a city-person at heart."
- "I work in an office to pay the rent, but in my spare time I write short stories and enjoy cooking."
- "I enjoy traveling, reading, and college football and basketball."
- "My kids are grown. I'm divorced, living on my own, and enjoying every minute it!"

## Level 3: Discussing Your Opinions and Values

At this level of disclosure, you reveal more of your views, personal attitudes, and experiences in politics, religion, money, health, hopes, goals, and relationships. These types of self-disclosures require more risk-taking and mutual trust. That's because most people have strong, sensitive and often differing views in these areas. You may find that you agree in some of these areas and disagree in others.

You can disclose your values by talking about some of your actions. Describing experiences that you're proud of often helps people see you in a positive light and shows them what's important to you. Here are some examples:

- "I volunteer at the children's hospital."
- "I gave up a steady paycheck to go into business for myself."
- "I support our local Humane Society."

On the other hand, you can reveal your opinions by making direct statements, such as

- "I really feel strongly about..."
- "In my opinion..."

## Level 4: Expressing Your Feelings

This high level of disclosure is often the most difficult and risky—yet often the most rewarding, too. Revealing your feelings about your close relationships, health, emotions, fears, desires, failures or frailties requires the greatest amount of trust and rapport. At the same time, when people share their feelings, the results frequently are deeper friendships and greater intimacy.

To reveal your feelings, you can say things such as

- "I'm happy (or sad, angry, elated, relieved, worried, thrilled, disappointed, etc.) about..."
- "I'm upset, and I want to tell you why."
- "I want to tell you how I feel about..."

A note of caution: In the area of romance, the more intense your feelings are, the more risky it may be to reveal them, because your feelings may not be mutual or even welcome. And if your feelings are inappropriate, or offered too early, revealing them may permanently damage the relationship.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some answers to questions people typically ask about self-disclosure:

### **My friend says I reveal too much personal information, especially to people I don't know that well. I say I'm just being honest. What do you say?**

Telling near-strangers more than they want to know—about such things as your broken home, peptic ulcer, lousy love life—may be honest, but the results are predictable: "Check, please!"

Revealing too much personal information can scare people away. Remember the last person you met who launched into his life story after knowing you for five minutes? Most people feel it's a bit too much to take it all in.

On the other hand, if you reveal your background and some basic information a little at a time, people will feel more comfortable talking and getting to know you.

### **I'm not particularly anxious to go into the details of my childhood when I talk with people I don't know well, since it wasn't happy. How can I keep that part of my life private without sounding like I'm trying to hide something?**

When you're exchanging background information with someone, glossing over certain periods of your life can send the message that the topic is sensitive and off-limits, at least for the time being. For example, you might say, "My family moved around a lot and it wasn't really a great time for me. But when I turned 20, I got a fresh start and moved to...." or "I got a job at ...," or "I became really interested in..."

### **I'm a recovering alcoholic. Is this kind of information okay to share with a coworker?**

The decision to disclose a personal problem such as substance abuse to a coworker depends on your view of the person's



character and the relationship. If the coworker likes to gossip, for example, your self-disclosure could end up being a topic of conversation at the water cooler. On the other hand, if you've already established a foundation of trust, then disclosing it could expand your friendship. If you're not sure, keep this information to yourself.

### **How do I tell my new romantic interest that I have a medical condition that may affect our sex life?**

Medical conditions are among the most sensitive self-disclosures to make, especially when they involve sex. But what could be more damaging to a loving relationship than not disclosing a medical condition that could affect your partner? While there's a clear risk that an intimate disclosure could end the romance, it could also have the opposite effect and bring you closer together.

*Source: Gabor, D. & Schuette, B. (Ed.). (Reviewed 2022 [Ed.]). Opening up appropriately. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*