



Head & Heart is a collection of ideas, resources and frameworks to support your personal and professional development in leading yourself, others and organizations.

Summer 2013

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

We take our approach and practice of developing people seriously. To a point. While few company handbooks or corporate guidelines mention humor, we are convinced it is a great catalyst for connecting people, building trust and creating a stimulating learning environment.

See Tim's article on page two for useful tips. Michael shares how to use humor to support and encourage yourself, rather than beat yourself up.

Chris looks at the origins of humor and how a bit of imbalance may be the positive thrust your team is looking for. Too much of anything can turn into a liability and Steven explains how to leverage the positive and minimize the dark side of humor.

And imagine the fun I had with the steps to humor on page four!

Enjoy your read and have a laugh.

Dan Norenberg

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Thought Leadership

Leadership & Humor

Realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive.

Anne Wilson Schaefer

Effective leaders have a good sense of humor. The ability to make or better yet, take humor shows that a leader has a high level of self esteem and a positive outlook towards the world.

Abraham Lincoln was masterful in his use of humor, as described by Doris Kearns Goodwin in "Team of Rivals". Lincoln's storytelling and jokes helped him develop a following of men bound by mutual trust. He saw laughter as the joyous, universal evergreen of life. His stories were intended to "whistle off sadness", which was so much a part of his growing up and years as President during the Civil War.

Sir Ernest Shackleton, who led his men to safety after his vessel shipwrecked in route to the South Pole, set up sing-alongs and card games to help take his crew's mind off the dangers they faced, if only for a few hours where laughter could recharge their batteries of hope. While Shackleton's mission failed to reach the South Pole, he managed to save the lives of his 27 men over the 16 month ordeal.

During our Leadership Development Programs we set up fireside chats that enable executive leaders to meet and exchange informally with developing leaders. The sessions usually last a few hours, followed by dinner and further discussions after the meal. The best fireside chats have been when executive leaders ask members of the group

to share their first day on the job or something funny that happened to them during their work. The executive leader starts off with a personal story (usually with a humorous aspect) and it sets the stage for an evening of real sharing, real listening and real laughing.

People tell me the next day how valuable the evening's session was to connect with their group in a deeper and meaningful way and how they felt that they know the executive leader now as a person and not only an executive.

Woody Allen once said that being funny is not anyone's first choice and using humor effectively doesn't mean you have to be a stand up comedian.

Effective leaders use humor to reframe experiences in a positive, non-threatening way, dissolve tension and then let laughter serve as a social connector among people for a common purpose.

After all, people who want to have fun, enjoy life and feel alive are people who make your business thrive.

Dan Norenberg

Leading Self

Cry and You Cry Alone. Laugh and You Learn!

"A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life."
William Arthur Ward

There are some very interesting words in the quote you see above: "well-developed". Somehow this implies that a sense of humor can and should be developed. We probably assume that we already have a sense of humor so why would we want to develop it? What benefit could it bring to develop our sense of humor and what does that mean?



To begin with, humor has countless medical benefits including:

1. lowering blood pressure
2. reducing the flow of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline
3. improving alertness and creativity
4. increasing blood flow and oxygen in the blood
5. stimulating memory and learning

Yes, humor plays a huge role in helping us learn! I sincerely hope that if you have ever attended an N Vision workshop, you have seen and felt us practice humor to aid learning. If not, you probably weren't listening – yes, that was an attempt at humor.

We know that reframing is essentially simply examining events or situations from multiple perspectives to change and enrich how we see things. Obviously one method of reframing can be to look at a situation and try to find the humor in it. This is literally what helps us see a "mistake" as a "learning opportunity".

As the famous saying goes, "life is lived forward but understood backwards". This is important to remember if we want to learn from looking backwards. When caught in a tense or frustrating situation, it can be easy to feel that there is a conspiracy and "they" are out to get me. It's personal! When looking back on such a situation, I often have to laugh at my own sense of self-importance that

so many people have nothing better to do than make intricate plots to get me. And then I have to laugh! But, and this is important, I learn and hopefully become less likely to view it that way in the future. Humor helps us reframe "I can't believe what I did! I'm so stupid!" to "I did something silly and while I may make another mistake in the future it won't be that one!" This helps us remember that what we did reflected our best thinking at the time (however misguided we now see it to be) but "I did something silly" sounds like a person more likely to truly learn than "I am stupid".

The next time you're beating and berating yourself for something you have done, stop! Step back. Reframe and find something humorous in it. Yes, you may be child-like in that moment but you are certainly not being childish! In fact, you are reframing to stimulate your learning. And lowering your blood pressure is probably not a bad thing either.

Michael Couch

Point of View

To Laugh or Not to Laugh

Two elderly women are at a Catskill mountain resort, and one of 'em says, "Boy, the food at this place is really terrible". The other one says, "Yeah, I know; and such small portions".

Did you laugh at this old joke? If you did, your blood pressure probably dropped a few ticks. If not, well you might not be a Woody Allen fan.

Is there an appropriate time and place for humor or is humor something that is always with you, even when the situation is serious? Used with sensitivity, I believe, there is always a place for humor.

In addition to scientifically proven health benefits, humor creates a sense of togetherness. When you laugh with someone you instantly feel connected. It sends a message that you are "safe" and want to "play". This is definitely a message I want to send to my business partners.

Here are a few tips for keeping humor in the forefront of your interactions:

1. Don't make jokes all the time but be open to it when it comes.
2. Keep things light. There are times to be serious but tears and laughter often go hand in hand.
3. Use humor to build relationships, not to ridicule or alienate others.

One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was to "approach life as serious play". Now that's something to smile about!

Tim Nash

Word Watch

The Word Humor

The word humor, originally stemming from Latin, meaning “liquid” is defined in the Oxford dictionary, in addition to above, as “the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech” and “a mood or state of mind”. How did this word develop?

The ancient philosophers believed that our bodies were made up of four liquids and depending on the proportion of these liquids, your physical and mental properties could be defined. The four liquids were blood, phlegm, bile and black bile. It was believed that a surplus of blood would result in optimism and a sanguine temperament. A balance in favor of phlegm would make you slow and impassive. A make-up of yellow bile and you would be choleric and short tempered. And, fourthly, an overflow of black bile made you melancholic.

An imbalance of the “fluids” was believed to make someone eccentric or odd and subsequently, humorous. So, why is humor important for leaders? Because when humor is used positively, it can often be an effective method of maintain and promoting collegiality, can minimize power differences and can lighten the mood. However, in contrast, failed humor can undermine, threaten and can be easily misunderstood, even more in an intercultural context. As leaders, it is important to remember that your first priority is to lead. No humor is better than failed humor but if your liquids are a little unbalanced, and you use humor positively, it may be the difference between a team drowning or streaming forward with the right state of mind.

Chris Chamberlain

Leading Others

The Dark Side of Humor

Leaders are running businesses, not comedy clubs.

Humor plays a prominent role in achieving corporate objectives. We all know that laughter reduces stress, anxiety and pain. It boosts our sense of well-being. It even increases creativity, commitment and motivation on the job. Ultimately, it benefits business by raising key measures like productivity and innovation.

With the case for humor apparently so clear, shouldn't we make leading with laughter and joking on the job our top priorities? Yes, but not to the point where we're running a comedy club. While the benefits are all desirable, the reality is that humor can be overdone.

There are a few companies which think humor without limits is a formula for success. I read an article about a British-based advertising agency that had huge success. And the main reason for its success? The constant humor in its internal communications. This, the article claimed, challenges stale ideas and stimulates creative thinking.

Nothing was off-limits at this agency – not even jokes about the managing director's sexual preferences or nationalistic comments about a non-British creative designer! The directors had created a culture of “hedonistic humor at anyone's and everyone's expense”.

What struck me was what the article didn't say. There was no mention of the market environment; we can all laugh when business is good and customers are buying. There was no

mention of management control or employees disagreeing with strategy; any conflict seems to have been simply laughed off – that's difficult to believe. There was mention of in-groups and out-groups; but those people in the out-group apparently did not regret their loss of power or status. That doesn't chime with the daily reality in 99.9% of organizations.



The reality is that people who overdo humor often want us to ignore their weaknesses and insecurities. The excessive joker uses humor to hide his lack of confidence or

lack of competence. He uses sarcasm and cynicism to criticize indirectly. He makes a quick joke to escape responsibility for his failed actions. This is the dark side of humor and it is pretty distasteful.

Above all, excessive humor prevents intimacy. And that can block self-awareness – a cornerstone of personal and team development.

Good humor exposes awareness and unites in one of two ways. Either it is a spontaneous joke with no specific target beyond creating amusement. Or it is finding amusement with the strange things that happen in life and making a funny comment about them.

The best leaders instinctively know this. To them, it is common sense. They are the leaders who have seen the light and push their people to avoid the darker, destructive side of humor.

Steven Hunt

Leading Organizations

Business Success is a Laughing Matter

"What do our year end reports tell us and where are those employee engagement survey results?" muttered the CEO.

"They're here, boss, and I'm not sure you're going to like to results", his assistant answered meekly. "Sales are in the pits, absenteeism is at an all-time high, those that come to work aren't engaged, everyone is stressed and there's no cooperation between departments".

Sound like a laughing matter? Perhaps it's laughter that can turn this business around. The emotional climate within a company can account for as much as 30% of its performance according to Dan Hill, author of *Emotionomics*.

Emotional happiness in employees can contribute to higher job performance, increase levels of trust and contribute to more collaborative work relationships.

What about wellness at work? Science shows us that laughter reduces stress levels, strengthens the immune system and is a great workout for our lungs and heart. Laughter lowers our blood pressure. In fact, it's impossible to be stressed, depressed or anxious when you're laughing.

Here are seven steps you can take to make laughing matter in your organization and stimulate your business success:

1. Starting laughing classes during work hours.

2. Allow and support appropriate tickling at work. (Tickling stimulates laughing).

3. Support employees who bring laughter at work, through public transport for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmDFt7Obz2U>

4. Recruit, hire and promote funny people. Laughing is an intensely positive social emotion and it's contagious. (See video link above).

5. Encourage children to play and interact with employees during work hours. Children laugh 300-400 times a day while adults laugh only about 12-15 times a day.

6. Reward people that bring humorous material to work. Jokes, stories, YouTube clips, funny videos are a great source for giggles or a good belly laugh.

7. Bring in some top comedians as interim managers. Imagine what Jack Black, Margaret Cho, Florence Foresti, Whoopi Goldberg, Ricky Gervais, Chris Rock or Robin Williams could do with a department or division on an interim basis.

Laughter is good medicine. It reminds us to live (and laugh) in the present moment, not to take life too seriously and that work can sometimes feel like play. Make laughing matter in your organization or support someone who does.

Dan Norenberg

Food for Thought

"A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Leadership Facts and Figures

The emotional climate within a company may account for much as 30% of its performance.

Source: *EMOTIONOMICS, Leveraging Emotions for Business Success* by Dan Hill

Laughing Resources

Humor is situational and influenced by personal and cultural preferences. Nevertheless, we're convinced that within the Head & Heart Reader Community there are many great resources for humor. While we won't post individual jokes, we will post your reading resources and YouTube links for everyone's benefit.

Send us your suggestions to info@nvision-learning.com. Let's have a laugh together!

Great Learning Locations

Finding the right off-site learning location can greatly enhance the learning environment and serve as a positive permanent anchor in sustaining learning. Follow the link to learning locations that have worked well for us.

Send us your best locations and we'll continually update this resource.

[Great Learning Locations](#)



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