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# TOYOTA PLAYERS

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## Are we having fun yet?

By Sheryl Silver, Career Source

Are you a supervisor or manager looking for a way to boost productivity in your department? Management consultant Matt Weinstein, author of the book "Managing to Have Fun," would suggest you find ways to inject a big dose of fun into your work environment. Weinstein, founder of Playful Inc. in Berkeley, California, contends that introducing more fun into a work setting can benefit the bottom line by boosting employee morale, loyalty and productivity.

"What keeps people motivated, in large part, is a nurturing environment," says Weinstein. "Before we ask employees to deliver service with a smile, we first have to ask ourselves, 'Are we giving them something to smile about?'"

Weinstein contends that employees who have more fun at work convey their enthusiasm to customers, creating better service and customer relationships, and more sales as a result. "People like to do business with people who like to do business," he asserts.

Karen Donnelly, inside sales executive/generals business for BMW's North America Sales Center in Atlanta, says, "Donnelly, who has

injected fun into her sales environment with such activities as Crazy Sock Day, Crazy Hat Day, and a recent "Ocho de Mayo Celebration," says, "I believe happy employees project their job satisfaction on the telephone to customers. I see a direct correlation between the fun activities we do and the production and revenues that are subsequently produced."

The telecommunications company Sprint has firsthand experience with the bottom line benefits of fun too. 3,000 employees of Sprint's Business Division participated in "National Fun at Work Day," an event sponsored by Weinstein's Playful Inc. For the event, Sprint employees formed 12-25 person teams, each of which was given a disposable camera. Each team then had to pick 10-15 clichés from a list of 20, and create photographic representations of those phrases in just 90 minutes.

Commenting on this "Photo Safari" activity, Margery Tipton, vice president of small business marketing for Spring Business, said its purpose was, "to renew our associates' commitment to the strength of teamwork, as well as the use of creativity to increase their productivity."

Have those beliefs produced measurable results? Noting that the company has done a

number of team building exercises that incorporate and encourage fun, Edith Esquerra, public relations program manager for Sprint Business said, "Since implementing them, we have noticed that employee attention, retention, morale and most importantly, productivity, are up."

Weinstein believes reduced health care costs can also be a byproduct for companies whose employees have more fun at work. "Dr. Lee Berk at Loma Linda University Medical Center in Loma Linda, California has been cutting edge research which has proven that spontaneous lymphocyte blastogenesis occurs during laughter and play," says Weinstein. "That means that during times of prolonged laughter, T cells, which are an important part of your immune system, are produced in much greater numbers." Happier employees, asserts Weinstein, are likely to be healthier employees.

When asked if any of his clients have seen laughter produce a measurable impact on their health expenditures, Weinstein pointed to an incident involving the Bank of America.

"After the bank initiated a 'Laugh a Day Challenge' to its Northern California employees, the human resource department received

a complaint letter from an employee who felt the 'Challenge' was a waste of employee time and company resources," recounted Weinstein. "The bank's vice president of compensation and benefits responded to the letter by writing, 'The monthly Be Your Best Challenge has no joke. They are specifically designed to help bank profitability by improving employee health, productivity, and morale...More and more health research now shows that laughter is one of the best stress releases, and stress is our fastest-growing workers' compensation cost.'"

If you're not a supervisor or manager, can you be a catalyst for fun without getting yourself in trouble? Weinstein says "yes," and illustrates with the story of an employee who worked on the line at Morton Thinskel. The employee, says Weinstein, proposed various fun activities to his boss, making each a reward for meeting a specific production goal. Although the boss was initially skeptical, Weinstein says he ended up cooperating enthusiastically after seeing each proposed incentive produce the desired result.

Sheryl Silver may be contacted by writing to her at Career Source, P.O. Box 65754, Washington, DC 20005-5744.

## Leave policy pays off for ad firm

own advertising agency in 1982, she vowed that her employees would never have to go through the same unpleasant situations.

Buck & Pullen, she says, "If you're sick, you stay home. If your kid is sick and you can't find a nitter, you stay home. If you have a baby, you decide how much time you'll need. If your parents need you in an emergency, if there's a death, you handle your work like a professional but you take care of your family responsibilities. Any you never feel you have to lie about it."

Karen McCredy, an assistant account executive, is one of Pullen's happy employees. "I had originally worked out a three-month maternity leave with the company when I was pregnant with my son," said McCredy, mother of two. "But when Scott came early, I was told to take as much time as I needed, no questions asked. I came back after six months and was reminded that if I needed more time, I could have it."

great work done because we understand about families."

But Pullen's progressive personnel policy of letting employees decide how much time they need to be absent for such personal matters as a birth or illness, child care, elder care or a death far exceeded any governmental regulations.

"Our philosophy is that families come first," she said. "After all, we require a great deal of our people, especially in times of pressure. We save money by retaining good people and get

AIDS, the desktop publisher took "two-to-three hour lunches every day I could tend to him."

"Chris Lyons, creative supervisor, asked about the firm's maternity leave when his daughter was born. He was told to come back to work when his wife was "strong enough to go it alone." He did.

"Lauri Richards, office manager, took a two-day personal leave to help out with her grandchild.

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