



## **Adding Humor to Training**

### ***Adapted From: Training For Dummies***

Thomas Edison once said that he had never worked a day in his life. It was all fun! Wouldn't it be great if you could always say that? Adding humor to your training is one way in which you can add fun to your participants' days.

#### **Start off on a funny foot**

Establish the atmosphere right from the start. Every session should start off on a high note to set the stage for the rest of the session. Be positive. You want to send the message that this will be fun.

Why add humor to the opening of a training session?

- Relieves nervousness participants may feel
- Establishes the environment for the rest of the session
- Gets participants' attention
- Models that although the session is serious, the trainer does not necessarily believe in being glum

#### **I'm lost!**

Use humor to defuse unexpected situations. Here are some examples you may want to try.

- If you lose your place or pause too long, you can say, "I just wanted to wait a moment in case any of you have lost your place." Steve Martin's favorite for this situation, "Where was I? Oh yes! I was here!" (Take a step to the side.)
- When you garble a sentence, you can say, "Later on I'll pass out a printed translation of that sentence."
- If you tell a joke and it bombs you could say, "Okay, I'll just go back to my desk (Wisconsin, home office, or wherever you call "home") now!"
- If you are using a microphone and it goes dead, you can say, "Evidently someone has heard this presentation before."
- If people are talking during your presentation, you can say, "Feel free to talk among yourselves." Or, "I see you're starting to break up into small discussion groups ahead of me."
- If someone points out you misspelled a word, you could say, "Mark Twain once said he never respected anyone who couldn't spell a word more than one way!" Another response when informed you have misspelled a word is to look around the flipchart as if you are missing

something and then say, "Does anyone know where the spell check is on one of these?"

- If you give incorrect instructions, say, "Does everyone understand? Good. Now forget it. That was just a test to see if you can follow instructions. Now I will give you the actual instructions."
- If a participant answers a question incorrectly, you could say, "right answer, wrong question!" (Be careful with this one. You certainly don't want to insult a participant)
- If the lights go out, you can say, "Why do I have the feeling that when the lights come back on, I'll be alone?" or "You thought you were in the dark before this session!"

Humor can turn an awkward situation into an enjoyable experience. The participants laugh. The laughter makes them feel good and eases the tension of a difficult situation for the trainer.

### **Get participants in on the act**

Don't feel as if you need to be the one responsible for all the laughs. Get participants in the act so all enjoy themselves. How can you do that?

Many games and energizers exist where everyone is laughing at the end. Relay races can have that effect on participants. "All Tied Up" is an energizer in which participants stand in close proximity to one another. Everyone grasps everyone else's hand in no particular order. Next participants begin to untangle themselves.

One game that results in everyone laughing is called "Did You Shower Today?" Place one chair for each participant in a circle. Have all participants sit in the chairs. Begin giving directions for participants to change chairs. Here's a few to start with, but you can add, or change them to personalize for your group. This activity helps participants get to know each other better and leaves them laughing because at times four or five people may be trying to sit on the same chair.

- If you showered today, move 3 chairs to the left.
- If you read a newspaper regularly, move 2 chairs to the right.
- If you traveled abroad within the past year, move 1 chair to the right.
- If you like chocolate, move 2 chairs to the left.
- If you have a pet, move 3 chairs to the right.
- If you like snow and winter weather, move 1 chair to the right.
- If you are a gourmet cook, move 2 chairs to the left.
- If you like to paint, move 3 chairs to the left.
- If you play a sport, move 1 chair to the right.

- If you are involved in a sport that does not require a ball, move 1 chair to the left.
- If you like Mexican food, move 5 chairs to the left.
- . . . add your own ideas.

When participants say something funny, be sure that the entire group has heard it so everyone feels a part of the humor.

### **Funny props**

Add fun with props. Sometimes a prop can represent a concept within your training session.



You can't just add props without making a point. For example, using a rubber chicken to point to content on the flipchart serves no purpose, except to make people laugh. There are many other ways you can make people laugh that relates to the training content.

Props may be used to review content material and increase energy. Many trainers have participants get in a circle and toss a tennis ball or a koosh ball as they review material. In addition to relating to content, props can be used as prizes during the session after games or activities or as rewards when someone volunteers to be a leader or observer or to play another role that goes above and beyond expectations.

Another logical prop is anything that has a yellow smiley face on it. Smiley faces have become quite commonplace, so items displaying them are easy to locate. They do make people smile. Whatever you use, try to tie it to the topic, the area, or your audience.

### **Austere attitudes**

Everyone who walks into your training session will not be interested in being humored. Some will bring attitudes that are barriers to having a good time.

- Training is serious business — just like work.
- Humor is a waste of time.
- Employees who have fun at work are not productive.
- We can't possibly accomplish our goals with all this raucous laughter.

What can you do to try to turn these attitudes around? Well, nothing new: Build trust, encourage participation, respect others' opinions, and ensure that participants take responsibility for their own learning. When using humor it should flow naturally from the content. Humor should support, not replace, the learning objectives. Always have alternatives to humorous activities available if the humor isn't right for a particular group of participant.