

HOW TO CREATE POSITIVE PEOPLE IN YOUR WORKPLACE

WHEN YOU AREN'T THE BOSS

Part of the Humor Hint Series

by Patt Schwab, Ph.D.

Positive, humorous people make life worth living and work worth doing well. If your clients and colleagues are not already positively funny, here are some ways to encourage them without becoming a clown yourself:

1. Ask your co-workers to tell you something funny, or to share a success that happened for them that week.

We have become so programmed to share only bad news, that this request may draw blank looks the first dozen times you make it! Keep at it. Eventually, wonderful things will happen: someone will call you to share a joke, or fax you a cartoon, or stop by your desk to share a funny anecdote from a staff meeting or to relate a cute thing his or her toddler did that morning.

Allowing others to share their humor with you is a gift from you to them. It is as important to respond to the humor in others as it is to create that humor in the first place.

2. Create positive activities in your workplace.

Make a big deal over birthdays and special events. Hold pot lucks, award ceremonies, ice cream feeds, dress down days—any activity that gives staff a chance to interact positively together.

Find reasons to congratulate people or to make them feel proud of a group accomplishment. One state government office I worked with has monthly charity lunches where staff donate food and then pay to eat it. By Christmas they have collected hundreds of dollars to give to shelters and charities. Another company gives out "Spark Plug Awards" (an actual spark

plug encased in a plastic rectangle) to the employees who have most "sparked" their teams to work well together.

3. Share the positive things that happen in your workplace.

When good things happen, talk about them! So often we dwell on the disappointments instead of retelling our group's successes. Did someone give a speech or win an award or have a new baby? Mention it when you are in another department so that the good news gets around.

4. Share your humor with your clients and colleagues.

Slip them cartoons, point out funny signs, headlines or events. Send outrageous postcards from your vacations or bring back "tacky tourist" gifts to share. I've worked in offices that held contests to see who could bring back the tackiest gifts. (The grand prize went to the tequila lollipop with a worm inside.) This is also an inexpensive way to let clients or support staff know that you were thinking of them.

5. Do a co-worker transplant.

You've read the literature: Winners don't hang out with losers. If you don't have enough positive people in your workplace, set out to meet people in other departments or nearby offices who have a positive attitude, enjoy life and have a flair for the absurd. If you are in a position to influence hiring decisions, hire staff who are upbeat and humorous. (Since humor and creativity are closely linked, this is a great way to get new ideas into your organization as well.) Have lunch with these new friends and co-workers, share ideas with them, swap jokes, start a guerrilla organizational change movement to create a more upbeat, friendly work environment. Gradually let the snivelers, the complainers and the losers slip out of your life.

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