

Does your business have a sense of humor?

A couple of years ago a European bank held a company-wide weekend event at a countryside hotel as a token of appreciation to its employees. Unbeknownst to the bank's top executives, but with their implied consent, the organizers orchestrated a practical joke on them. Phony policemen flagged down each senior manager one by one on the highway leading to the hotel, scolding them for reckless driving, and issuing them traffic violations. Because the charges were bogus, the incidents were filmed by a hidden camera to capture the indignant reactions of the executives. The resulting humorous footage was played on a large screen in front of the bank's entire staff at the hotel.

What do you think is the effect of doing something like this on an organization? It sends the message that fun is allowed, and that even top executives are not immune to laughing at themselves and allowing others to do the same. It builds a company-wide emotional alignment and a foundation for open, creative thinking. It enriches the work experience and environment of employees. In turn, more content and more engaged employees serve to make the organization itself more successful.

So ask yourself: Does your business have a sense of humor? Put another way, do you encourage playfulness and laughter among your staff and in your workplace? Or is your business environment rather serious, stiff, and bland? In which case how can you expect your employees to be creative, to continuously innovate, to come up with new solutions?

As a way of developing a sense of humor for your business, I encourage you to honor the one publicly recognized, annual celebration of childish frolic: April Fools' Day. What a great concept. The 1st of April is the one day each year when adults have full license to be impish and playful. The act of planning and executing a ruse helps to reconnect you and your colleagues with your inner child, so take advantage of it. The best April Fools' pranks are not unkind or nasty, nor are they designed to mock but

rather to challenge our perception of reality and the limits of conventionality. What is absurd and what is sensible? How can these artificial boundaries be overstepped or even reversed through a hoax? You should partake in reality-bending April Fools' activities and encourage those you work with to do the same. It is liberating and opens up channels of unconventional thinking.

It's no surprise that the most innovative companies pull off provocative April Fools pranks year after year. Here are a few highlights from this year's assortment, as compiled by NBCSanDiego.com:

- ✔ Google revealed "Google Nose Beta", enabling users to search for smells via a vast online database of scents.
- ✔ Twitter announced the launch of a new



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service "Twtttr," which limits users to tweets with consonants only. But for \$5 a month, Twitter would enable the use of vowels.

- ✔ Procter and Gamble introduced the Bacon Scope mouthwash. The product "just tastes like bacon but leaves your breath smelling minty fresh five times longer than brushing alone".
- ✔ YouTube made a video to announce that it is shutting down, and no longer accepting entries.
- ✔ American Eagle Outfitters said that it is launching the Skinny Skinny Jeans, a new line of denim wear that shoppers can spray paint onto their bodies.

These companies all consider playfulness to be part of the very fabric of their culture. This should not surprise you. Work is not the opposite of play. The opposite of play is boredom. In fact play goes very naturally with work, while boredom suffocates performance. So go on, mix in some fun and humor with your business. ✔