

All Work and No Play?



Creating fun environment enhances bottom line

By Robert Manolson

There are two key decision-makers we encounter on a daily basis: those ready to make things happen and those who prefer to watch things happen.

Embracing the value of fun, the power of “play” and the joy of laughter at work are for those ready to make it happen. The sheer magic of “playing” together creates a feeling of community in which employees and employers are truly connected, where they operate more effectively with each other and celebrate their achievements – both individually and as a group – to positively impact productivity. The play’s the thing that unites co-workers. Gone are the days when working for a paycheck was enough motivation to keep us going back each day and keep productivity levels up.

When “play” is encouraged and integrated within the work community, it is received as permission for a timeout to regenerate and rebuild energy and as motivation to complete the next big task. “Play” helps us to feel engaged, manage stressors, open lines of communication and foster employee relationships... all created through fun and laughter. “Play” achieves the goal of bringing people together and allowing them to interact in an extremely unique experience where the atmosphere at work becomes much more appealing and people begin to see, as well as appreciate, qualities in colleagues they had never witnessed before.

Nothing else compares!

Raising Fun Levels

Check out the number of companies and organizations who are committed to the whole new attitude toward “play” at work. Position your company as the “Employer of Choice.” It’s no surprise to HR professionals that creating a healthy and balanced “work/play” organization is fast becoming a competitive advantage. Embracing the value of fun, the power of “play” and the joy of laughter at work is your

commitment to raising motivational levels while empowering people to embrace a whole new attitude. Building better workplace teams and strengthening workplace organizations is the desired outcome.

I’m absolutely convinced this is the ideal marriage between the bottom line and a workplace culture which resonates of wellness and well-being. Without a doubt, “play” at work is an innovative leading-edge practice that factors into shaping your company’s success. Your company is a great place to work, right? Your goal is to get employees to be happy where they are and to all pull in the same direction. When we invite fun, play and laughter into the daily grind, it allows us the power to de-stress in a hectic work environment. It is not only important to encourage the activity of play, but to also make people feel good about playing.

Incorporating Play at Work... “What Do I Do?”

Many HR departments have recognized strength in the new attitude toward a “play at work” strategy and have fully integrated it into their best practices model. The outdated incentive programs like a three-week vacation for every 11-and-a-half months of work, or coffee breaks or gym time before or after work hours are being replaced by alternating “work tasks” with “play tasks” on a daily or at least weekly basis. This strategy is quite fundamental and will pay huge dividends, whether you’re responsible for training and development, staff retreats, conferences, team-building sessions or any other organizational and/or employee-wellness programs. It gives employees the sense of reward immediately following the task.

1 The first step to best address incorporating play at work is to organize a set of standards in your best practices model around the driving belief that we all need to have more fun at work. Make it an annual or biannual commitment to check in as a team, to continue to remain open

to “play,” to break down any social or professional barriers and to remember to remain flexible. As an HR professional, focus on enhancing the value of your department’s services by integrating this attitude into your best practices model now and in the future. AGMs, staff meetings, staff appreciation events, etc., will all become more appealing and at the same time invigorate your staff. This type of approach will be viewed as leading edge for your organization, the work days will be more meaningful and your employees will enjoy the total work experience.

2 Over the past few years, it has been quite encouraging to see more and more companies want to rediscover the joy of play at work. They believe in the value of “play” as a solution to problems. While there may be different objectives why, there are several common threads. We can streamline these common threads to fit nicely into a workplace strategy where, in your planning meetings, you will be better able to capture your true intent, gain clarity and then clearly communicate one or more of the following intentions:

- Create a productive workplace environment
- Keep valued employees
- Opportunities for staff training & development
- Employee communication & participation
- Meaningful staff recognition & rewards

3 It is extremely important to perform due diligence. Rediscovering the joy of “play” at work is a whole new attitude and a perfect vehicle for affecting positive change within your work environment. Respect that if you’re going to take this message to your staff, ultimately it starts with you. You need to embrace a refreshing, personal philosophy towards “play.” So look at yourself in the mirror and repeat after me:

- I invite playfulness into the routine work day
- I empower people to stretch their imaginations through creative play
- The capacity exists within me to maintain play’s momentum
- I play, and feel good about playing
- I don’t need any special equipment – heck, I don’t even have to be in shape

When it comes to embracing the value of fun, the power of play and the joy of laughter at work, the range of service providers and techniques they apply continues to grow. There’s been a noticeable increase in adventure activities, extreme sports and creative variations on the deluge of reality shows that we see on television. How complex does this have to be?

My general rule of thumb is to involve a broad range of staff and management in the planning process, yet keep the process simple and filled with lightheartedness and imagination. Most significantly, rediscovering the joy of “play” at work should never compromise others’ concerns for physical



I have team members that have been pushed into leadership roles in the last few years...How can I help these new leaders and their teams to be successful?

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and emotional safety. A safe and playful workshop experience is one that is carried out with a responsibility to the well-being of all. After all, at the end of the day, it's all about a smile on everyone's face.

I know what you're thinking. If there's a simple example people can incorporate at their workplace, what would that be? I was recently approached by a prominent employee

of a multi-national company who shared with me his "All Work & No Play" story. "I fully endorse taking steps to increasing my play footprint at my particular workplace environment and vow to leave my mark by organizing Fake Moustache Day," he said.

"Yes. Let the true spirit of fun, laughter and playfulness shine through in all that you do. But why Fake Moustache Day?" I asked.

"As a baby I was unable to grow a moustache due to a very rare genetic disorder - Nomoustachia Untilpubertyosis. I grew up with the constant feeling of being incomplete. Eventually I filled this dark, desolate void when I discovered a passion for drawing moustaches onto photographs of small children and cats. Sure they were only photographs but I honestly believed how much more fun the subjects were having with their new found lady-ticklers.

"In my late teen years through hard work and determination, I overcame my debilitating disorder and grew my own crumb-catcher. However, as my youth slipped away, so did my passion for the moustache photos. Then abruptly at age 32, it was completely crushed when I was thrust out of my parents' basement and forced into the cold, cruel world called life. I had to get a job.

"Years passed and I survived. My job became a big part of my life, in fact my job was great, but something was missing from the workplace – fun. Suddenly my inner child was reignited as I recalled painting a nicely waxed Fu-Manchu onto my sister's baby portraits. Of course! FAKE MOUSTACHE DAY! Where my co-workers would be able to experience the same fun as my touched up portraits; relax, laugh, and play, all with the help of a tiny piece of plastic."

Now, go ahead. Make it happen! Have fun! Play! Show your staff how important they are. It's amazing how people will look past professional differences, communication conflicts, social status and personality style differences when they are enjoying themselves at work.

And your company will prosper. ■

Robert Manolson is creator and facilitator of Powerful Play Experiences (www.powerfulplayexperiences.ca) and is in the business of facilitating highly engaging and highly uplifting workplace fun & wellness workshops. Robert can be reached at (780) 929-5949 or by e-mail at robert@powerfulplay.ca.



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