

Using Laughter To Build Trust At Work

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Post written by

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I deeply believe in changing the course of leadership; to create a world where work is truly fun. Learn how at bmhallmark.com.

Laughter and trust are intertwined at both a primitive and genetic level. Think of the physical responses of laughter. A deep laugh will raise your head back, exposing the neck. That's one of the most vulnerable parts of our body because of the carotid arteries, the cranial vagus nerves and the jugular vein that carries blood and important signals to our brain.

Laughter, for those reasons, is a physical signal of trust. You don't laugh with people who threaten your safety -- just the opposite. You laugh with the people you trust. Laughter can also be used to quickly create trust. The deeper the laugh, the greater the potential for trust will be.

Did you know that [oxytocin](#), also known as the "love hormone" or the "bonding molecule," is released during laughter? It was also named the "trust molecule" by Paul Zak for the *Wall Street Journal* (subscription required). He has conducted extensive research into oxytocin as a social behavior moderator because of its significant implications in business and global commerce.

How To Use Humor To Build Trust

Humor is a [multipurpose leadership skill](#) that should be used often and frequently to reduce stress, improve communication and creativity, increase group cohesiveness, and impact organizational culture. I would also argue that the same element of humor that helps initiate laughter, the element of surprise, can also be an ironic catalyst of change. Humor at work can be used to shock the system, sending the element of surprise into real action. Here's how to let the good vibes flow.

- **Jokes:** Listening helps with two things. On its own it builds trust, but it also gives you the opportunity to respond with something funny. If you're really paying attention, you have an opportunity to respond with a joke. Yesterday, someone told me they were tired, so I said, "Why can't a bike stand up? It was two-tired!" You should always have four to five jokes in your arsenal ready to go. Make sure they are child-appropriate so there's no confusion on crossing any boundaries.

- **Activities:** How can you use humor to build creativity? At the beginning of your next brainstorming meeting, ask your team to solve the age-old riddle: You need to save the world from Godzilla, but all you have is a tray of large apples and a gigantic bottle of sunscreen; what

do you do?

• **Stories:** My favorite funny story for work is about a guy I avoided for two years who ended up becoming my best friend. I always use a Shrek impersonation to make it funny. "I don't want the donkey, I just want my swamp back." Shrek hated the donkey at first, but they became best friends, eventually. By using funny characters and voices, almost any story becomes funny. In my story, I can encourage people to make friends with their co-workers in a funny way.

Stories are great because they have a purpose that you can use as an analogy for what you're really trying to say. The other great thing about funny stories? You can always ask someone, "Want to hear a funny story?" It's the greatest question on Earth.

Oxytocin Vs. Testosterone

Trust is about reliability. For example, I rely heavily on people whom I trust. Did you know that testosterone has almost the opposite effects of oxytocin in regards to people's propensity to build trust?

No need to act macho. Instead, do the opposite. Don't puff up your body or chest. Rather, be vulnerable and open up your body language so that your heart faces the people you're speaking with. For a list of other things to do and not to do, check out my previous article, [Using Humor To Build A High-Performing Workplace.](#)

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