



TAPMI

NURTURING WEALTH CREATOR SERIES



Humour: The Leveller in Management

By R. Chidambara Natarajan

What can we learn from fables in history books, other than strategies and tactics? Is there something in the stories of Birbal and Tenali Rama? Kings kept jesters in their courts because they recognised the need for humour in their assemblies. Where serious deliberations could make tempers fly high, often at the cost of a few lives! It is an indication of the sportive kings, who allowed themselves to be commandeered by humour and brought back sense into discussions.

Nurturing a humorous culture in the organisation is the top management's responsibility. My senior colleague, Shyam, was known for his fine sense of humour and created ripples of laughter, rescuing "victims" from the firing line. Once, the CEO, facing executives'

stubbornness, said with exasperation, "Thank God, I'm off to Japan tomorrow! You guys do whatever you want and enjoy yourselves." Shyam

politely reminded him, "But sir, you WILL come back..." The CEO relented with a smile, and the team deliberated more enthusiastically. If people at the top exhibit it, the rest will follow. Bill Clinton once said, "If only we learn to deal with ourselves with our heads and others with our hearts, the world will be a great place to live in."

Humor serves more than one purpose. It enlivens a tense or boring situation. It equalises. It instills a sense of importance in the person who provides it. A team filled with humor can work much more cohesively than a team with serious and task-minded members. When something goes wrong, the humorous team is much more likely to solve the problem better and faster, and the tendency to play the blame game will be far less.

Business schools and training houses have stretched management learning to adventure sport,

appreciation of arts, yoga, workouts and even martial arts. We have even read of Japanese companies keeping a punch bag with a painted face in the lounge, with the inscription "The Boss" for resentful employees to throw a few punches. What can be more enjoyable and energising than the ability to laugh at work? Then, why don't organisations give humor its due? Ask yourself: Can I narrate a joke without laughing myself, but can be sure of creating laughter? If the answer is yes, then can your team members do it too? If the answer is no, you have a job in your hand.

The first step to encourage humour in your team, is to take the joke upon yourself and avoid humour at others' expense. If you do come across

When something goes wrong, the team with a sense of humour is more likely to solve problems better.

a situation when one member jokes at another's cost, your compliment to the "victim" will not only assuage the hurt feelings but also signal clearly, the difference

between humour and wit. Over time, humour will become a culture.

I use humour in my teaching and trainings with a great degree of success. I have found students improving in their confidence and getting rid of stage fright. It helps liven up presentation sessions, especially at times when eyelids get heavier. It has its risks too. Once a student commented during his presentation, that I missed my kindergarten sessions when they taught the letters A and B - an attack on my grading their assignments. Another student started her presentation with, "There is a thin line between genius and nutty", a pun on my nickname. It is easy and enjoyable to live up to that name.

Prof. R. Chidambara Natarajan is an Associate Professor at T.A.Pai Management Institute, Manipal and can be contacted at cnutraj@mail.tapmi.org



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