



TOOLKIT 26 – MAKING WORK FUN AND ENJOYABLE

- ❖ **Increase motivation, commitment and creativity.**
- ❖ **Achieve a better work/life balance.**
- ❖ **Put a smile on people's faces at work.**

'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' according to the old adage.

There seems to be a correlation between businesses where people enjoy what they do and a high level of productivity, creativity, commitment and even willingness to change.

STORY – NORTHERN FOODS PLC

Mike Morgan the Personnel Director of Northern Foods cherished what he believed to be one of his business's key values, 'Let's not take ourselves too seriously. It's hard to pin down our culture, but it's something about asking questions, in all directions and working hard at listening to people. We want to have a bit of fun too.'

Unsurprising then that the internationally renowned management consultant Professor Gerard Egan described the Northern people culture as one of the healthiest he had seen.

Why is making work enjoyable in business important today? Why does it seem to make good business sense? Here are some observations from recent studies:

- Stress in the workplace has never been higher.
- People are more affluent today yet there are more depressed people than ever.
- People are working longer hours and in many areas much harder.
- Increasing competition rather than collaboration between people at work.
- A high percentage of people report that they do not enjoy their work anymore.
- Many large companies are downsizing and changing structures, creating uncertainty.
- In many cases people have lost faith with leaders. Note the record low turn out in the 2001 UK general election.

Consequently some businesses have to pay well over the odds i.e., bribe their staff to stay with them.

- We business people have a responsibility to restore some fun and sanity in people's lives. It can also make good business sense.

Example

Dr Peter Honey, a management trainer, found that when he was running ideas generation workshops for American Express the quality and quantity of ideas increased significantly in those groups which were laughing, joking and generally have a good time.

- Having fun engages the right side of the brain, which unleashes creativity, innovation, intuition and entrepreneurial thinking.

You don't get the impression there is much right brain working going on in some of the turgid management meetings which I occasionally have to suffer...

Example

I once visited a UK clearing bank who told me they wanted to increase innovation and creativity and make work more fun.

Perhaps typically as a left brain rational thinking institution they initiated 'the happy half hour' between 9.30 and 10.00 am every Wednesday morning. People were made to put up balloons and streamers, take off their ties, wear silly hats and loosen up...

In all honestly I felt embarrassed for them, they looked extremely uncomfortable and couldn't wait for the half-hour to end.

This kind of 'planned spontaneity' rarely seems to work in practice.

So what does work?

Get your team together and tell them that fun is compulsory and anyone who is not constantly telling jokes will be sacked ... only joking (hope it put a smile on your face).

STORY – KEEPMOAT PLC

Keepmoat are a construction group who regularly entertains customers at their box at the Doncaster Racecourse. They also hold golf days for customers. However, they also use their entertaining facilities to entertain their staff at all levels including labourers, bricklayers as well as management. Everybody gets treated with respect and exactly the same regardless of rank. Everybody has a great time and it is very much appreciated by all concerned.

Guess who is the market leader and the most profitable business in their sector...

It's a bit difficult to produce a sequential step by step guide to fun but here are some steps you can take to make the workplace more enjoyable for everyone.

STEP 1 Include fun and enjoying work in your vision and values.

- Learn from Northern Foods – 'let's not take ourselves too seriously.'
- Balance the stakeholder benefits in your vision and values, include your people values i.e.,
 - Make 'x' an enjoyable place to work.
 - A culture where people want to come to work.
E.g., the MD of Redland Brick told me his vision was that his people came to work happy. I asked what he meant, he told me to look out of the window. It was 8.45 am and people were coming into work looking as if they were attending a funeral. I didn't think they would be killing for Redland that day ...
- A business that encourages people to become the best they can be.
- A friendly place to work.

STEP 2 Be a 'fun' role model.

- Make time to have a laugh and a joke with people.
- Make sure you treat everyone the same i.e., like you wish people treated you.
- Feel able to laugh at yourself sometimes

Example

Keepmoat Plc held a charity day with all staff. The Chairman, Terry Bramall put himself in the stocks for people to throw wet sponges at him.

- Make somebody's day. Do something special for somebody e.g. a very special award for 20 years service.

STEP 3 Try to lighten meetings and events.

- Make sure you have a laugh and a joke during management meetings.
- Keep meetings as short as possible – try putting an end, as well as a start time on meetings.
- Change the venue for meetings, meet in a hotel and arrange lunch afterwards. This changes the rhythm and people enjoy it.

STEP 4 Smarten up the workplace.

- Tidy up the public areas at work.

Example

An advertising agency decided to upgrade the coffee area. Traditionally it had plastic chairs, an ancient coffee machine with worn lino on the floor.

They redecorated, including some nice soft furnishings, including settees and a TV with Teletext. They made several types of tea and coffee available free. People enjoyed meeting in the new café facility.

But there was also an unexpected bonus. Advertising is a knowledge business. People met in the new café facility and exchanged ideas and shaped up new opportunities. They had

created an informal knowledge sharing facility – the basis of most entrepreneurial activity.

- Make sure the toilets and washroom facilities are up to five star standard with nice soap and towels.

Example

The Cavendish Hotel at Baslow has brilliant washroom facilities with cartoons and jokes on the tiles to amuse people.

- Make sure people have really comfortable chairs to sit on all day.

Example

The Hilton 2000 conference centre has invested in 24-hour comfortable swivel conference chairs. After 10 hours you still feel really fresh. I personally don't want to go to any other conference facility anymore.

STEP 5

Hold fun events.

- Take people out for a beer after work, ban talking about work and have some fun.
- Take staff to the races or to play golf perhaps with some customer's staff. You get the double benefit of networking and having fun.
- Dare to be different. Do something different from the boring Christmas party. E.g., Steetley took their people on the Orient Express for Christmas Dinner. Staff talked about the brilliant time they had for years afterwards.

STEP 6

Remove the bureaucracy and time wasters from people's work.

- It has been estimated that between 40–70% of white-collar workers' efforts add no value. Increasingly people are asked to attend more meetings, deal with more paperwork and handle a plethora of e-mails daily.

How can you reduce some of this burden and make work much more fun and be more productive?

- Get a paperwork audit carried out in the office and reduce some of the paperwork.

Example

One architectural business found that they were filling in contract values on 27 different documents.

- Businesses find that they can reduce the paperwork by at least 50% with no negative impact on the business.
- Get the e-mail system reviewed.

Some Managers are spending up to 1½ hours a day reviewing hundreds of internal e-mails, most of which are rubbish. If you multiply this by the number of Managers, the cost is into millions of pounds wasted.

Example

A food manufacturer installed some simple guidelines on the use of internal e-mails. This included banning the use of 'copy to all' internal e-mails reduced from an average of 150 to 10 per day, releasing up to one hour per person.

- Reduce reportage and planning bureaucracy.

A builder reduced the business planning process from a 50 to a 3 page document. This had the additional benefit of allowing the Managers to focus upon the really important strategic priorities in the plan.

STEP 7

Make change an adventure, not a trauma.

The blockages to change and growth in business are:

- The top management believes and acts as if everybody in the business needs to change but them.

Action: Act as role models for change, make sure you show your personal commitment to doing things differently.

- No process to encourage people to change.

Action: Use the toolkits in this book to involve your people in the change plan.

- Resistance to change is created when the command and control culture is used to try to force change through the business.

Action: Engage people in the change process, work with the people who have energy and commitment. Get some quick wins. Use the 'Working on the business' toolkit 7.

STEP 8

Look after yourself.

- Make sure you keep a balance between work and having fun in order to recharge your batteries. You can't be a fun role model if you are a workaholic.

Example

The MD at Steetley used to come to work every morning looking as if he had the trouble of the world on his shoulders, grunting at people. People used to ask me 'Are we going bust?' 'Is the share price about to dive?' They were genuinely concerned by what they read into his body language.

Eventually I persuaded the MD to come to work wearing a smile and no matter how he felt to say good morning pleasantly. People then stopped asking the worried questions.

- Make time to play golf, take decent holidays, and take up the invitation to the races. You can always justify to yourself if you have to; it's 'networking'.
- If you have become a workaholic (like I did) and you have given up on your hobbies and interests, think about the things that you used to enjoy when you were younger.

Example

My brother used to love cycling and playing cricket in his youth. He recently at 50 purchased a bike and started playing cricket again in his son's Sunday team. He is like a new man.