

ARE YOU HAVING FUN AT WORK?

BY ANNE SCARLETT

Eight tips to boost the fun factor.

"I NEED TO HAVE MORE FUN AT WORK!"

I hear this sentiment often—whether from a partner in an engineering firm, or a head of compliance at an accounting firm, or an adjunct professor. The desire to truly enjoy one's work engulfs us all, regardless of salaries, titles or degrees.

So, is one of *your* perpetual resolutions to inject fun and humor into your business development efforts (and into work in general)?

Some firms—namely the hot, young, tech-savvy organizations—make a concerted effort to weave fun into their physical and cultural work environment. Advertising agency mcgarrybowen clearly works hard and plays even harder; their fun is loaded with clever pranks, parties and unique extracurricular activities. Chicago-based Groupon, another example, is a pleasure to tour. Abundant laughter rings through their open office environment. Oversized headshots—almost caricature in nature—hover above each person's workstation. Small teams gather in the 'forest' or other playfully designed areas in their workspace and hold quirky contests that require creativity and brainwork. Even the morning commute is fun for Groupon employees, as it culminates with a ride on their dedicated "Party Elevator," complete with music and dancing. While I'm sure these "fun firms" have their own issues, stresses, and conflicts, they certainly do their part to encourage an element of fun into their work!

Many AEC firms also work to boost their own esprit de corps. Senior leadership, together with human resources and the business development team, often brainstorm ideas to keep staff engaged and productive. Our industry recognizes that happy employees equals productive employees which in turn equals loyal, long-lasting employees. Perhaps most important, we know that fun-filled employees will often jive with clients. (Hey, clients want to have fun, too!)

All of this is a given. But perhaps some of those company-driven efforts are too campy or contrived for your taste. No problem. It's a matter of figuring out your own definition of "fun" and how you can make it happen. So let's focus on the micro-level things that you can do for yourself to make sure you have more fun as a business developer, working through your sales process and beyond.

Outwardly exude positivity. (It will eventually shift inward.) When you feel disenchanted (with your company, your business unit or your immediate work), you must monitor your verbal and non-verbal expressions. For every gripe, why not also share at least two positive things—whether they be complimenting your direct report, or giving a shout out for an existing client. Offering up kudos helps create a respectful, positive vibe. Positivity, in turn, is uplifting and fun.

Gravitate towards (or emulate) colleagues that are having fun. Depending upon your firm size, you may have options for observing others. Who is having fun? Is it a group dynamic or evoked by key individuals? What's their secret sauce? If you feel comfortable, ask them directly what it is that makes them experience such joy at work. Otherwise, feel free to be silently observant and see if there's anything you can borrow

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from their "fun playbook."

Laugh. Just laugh. I used to have a boss that would say he enjoyed making me laugh (I have a goofy laugh, apparently!). If people around me aren't making me laugh, then I turn to other sources for quick amusement: *New Yorker* cartoons, *Key & Peele* sketches, even The "Ultimate Dog Tease" video, which gets me every time! Children may laugh hundreds of times a day. What's your daily dose of laughter? Levity matters, and it can honestly change your entire outlook on your work.

Lighten up. In addition to genuinely smiling and laughing, it's helpful to be less intense. I'm intense by nature. Intensity can be an asset when things need to get done, and done well.

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business issues

But the intensity can be off-putting to those with a less intense demeanor. I learned this the hard way, in the classroom. My undergraduates have taught me that there's a fine line between intensity equating to motivational and energetic, versus intensity equating to scary and overpowering. I have adjusted, so that I only dial up the intensity regarding topmost priorities.

Get stuff done! When you are stuck and you look back and ask, "What in the world did I get done today?" it might bring you down. For me, I have more fun at work when I'm accomplishing and producing. Think about when you move a sales prospect one step closer to a signed contract. Or you finally wrap up your strategic business development planning for the year. Or you hire someone new. These things feel good.

Find your go-to goof. Whether your style of humor is dry and subtle, slapstick and silly or somewhere in between, there's likely someone in your firm (or else in your professional network) that shares your humor. It doesn't matter if it's someone you work with directly or not, but it does help if they work within your firm (for context). Locate that person and have frequent touch points with them to get a laugh.

Shake it off (à la Taylor Swift). When you take bad news hard, it's a challenge to have fun. Losing a client to a competitor is hands down one of the worst feelings in the business devel-

oper role. But there's also internal politics, budget cuts, leadership inconsistencies and an array of other things that could be fodder for moping at work. For me, I use a lot of shake-it-off self-talk. My message typically revolves around the fact that I did the very best I could to impact a positive outcome. Or I'll reflect on something crappy that happened in the past and then note how we were able to get through it.

Shake it up: Sometimes, we discover that even when we are doing well—attaining our business development goals, collecting kudos during reviews, being on track for a promotion—something is off. Perhaps your work process is redundant, lacking the excitement that comes with fresh new challenges. It becomes same-same-same rather than the oft-used term "same-same, but different." In the business developer's role, locating new challenges is fairly easy. Your firm is likely to support an interest in additional, different twists to your internal responsibilities or a newfound commitment to external activities such as professional organizations—particularly if your efforts will strengthen your position with the prospective clients.

Figuring out ways to have fun at work is worthy of your attention and should be revisited more than once a year! It's an endless process—but one that makes all the difference for life balance and success. ■