

## "Lighten Up"

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Every day, when we pick up a newspaper, turn on the television, listen to the radio or go online, we're bombarded with difficult issues: drugs, violence, scandals in Washington, economic turmoil, child abuse, armed conflicts around the globe—the list is endless. It's a wonder we're not all on Prozac.

Ratcheting this phenomenon down a level and applying it to you and your everyday work, I suspect that the bulk of items that cross your desk are also stress-inducing problems and demands from others. Definitely not the types of things that make you smile.

Given all the seriousness that surrounds us, isn't it about time we lightened up a bit?

People in business today are exposed to more printed, electronic and promotional material than ever before. The advent of desktop publishing and the Internet has created a whole new corps of individuals cranking out this stuff, seeking to gain your attention and persuade you to take their preferred course of action, which usually translates to buying the products or services they're selling. Take newsletters, for example. I'm willing to bet that you receive a minimum of three or four every week. I'm also willing to wager that few, if any, receive more than a cursory glance. Why? Because you have a limited amount of time, and unless you quickly perceive some personal benefit, it's in the can and you're on to something else.

One of the ways to "hook" somebody—get them to see some value in reading what you have to say, is to make them laugh. If you can entertain someone, while at the same time imparting a bit of useful knowledge, you're virtually guaranteed to get your promotional message across, too.

If you're publishing a quarterly newsletter, include a cartoon, along with a joke or cute story. Though it's nice if they relate to your field of business in some manner, it's not a prerequisite.

When writing a letter or memo, don't begin with that stuffy, "In response to your letter of July 14..." or "This letter is to introduce my company, Woody's Widgets..."

Is that the way you talk? Of course not. Then don't write that way!

Some of the best, and most acceptable humor is that which is self-deprecating. It sends a signal to others that you don't take yourself too seriously. You're also unlikely to offend anyone when you make fun of yourself. A line such as, "Though it's easy for a guy with a honker the size of mine to sniff out a good opportunity, I have no doubt that someone like you, with a more modest proboscis, can sense the possibilities too." It should be noted that one can employ this type of humor without sacrificing one's professionalism.

Think for a minute about your favorite sales reps and others with whom you do business. Aren't those who top the list the same ones whose company you most enjoy—and who make you smile the most?

Studies have shown that not only does humor reduce stress (it even adds to your life span), but it also sells. We usually choose our companions—both on the job and off—by those who make us

feel good. And we almost always feel good about people who make us laugh.

Life may not be a joke, but nor is it a tragedy. Look for ways to lighten up your interactions with othersâ€”written and spokenâ€”and you'll not only feel better, but your business will be healthier, too.

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