

Putting the Fun Back Into Home Health Care

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By Clifford Kuhn, MD (The Laugh Doctor)

“Health care just isn’t as much fun as it used to be!” If I had a nickel for every time I’ve heard those words lately, I might be able to afford my malpractice insurance.

How about you? As a home health care professional, are you having very much fun at work these days? Are you having as much fun as you were having five years ago? Or ten years ago? Are you having as much fun as you thought you’d be having by this time in your career?

These are very important questions, because there is now proof that if we are not having fun, we have no hope of being as successful or as healthy as we could possibly be. No matter what we try to accomplish – delivering excellent health care, getting over a devastating loss, earning a bigger income, becoming a better parent or spouse, or simply telling a joke successfully at a party – if we’re not having fun at it, we’re settling for less than our best.

What proof do we have for this statement? First let’s acknowledge that this is not a new idea. Mankind has long recognized a sense of humor as an essential ingredient for our success as a species. In the Book of Proverbs we read that “a happy heart is good medicine; a cheerful mind works healing.” This sentiment has been echoed again and again down through the ages. But now we have proof.

Over the last two or three decades, as science has begun to take humor seriously, there has been an avalanche of research on humor and laughter. This has resulted in documentation for

at least ten measurable benefits we can get from fun. We know that an active sense of humor can reduce stress, boost immunity, relieve pain, decrease anxiety, prevent depression, rest the brain, enhance communication, inspire creativity, maintain hope and bolster morale. That's quite an impressive list of ways that fun can make us better.

So, how did you answer the questions in the second paragraph? Regardless of where you stand, whether you're having no fun or a lot of it, if you would like to put more fun into your work, I have some great news for you. You'll never max out on fun. You can always have more, if you want it. You can always turn fun up another notch. How is that possible? It involves recognizing fun for what it really is. First, and most important, fun is not funny. Being funny involves behavior designed to bring about laughter – jokes and comedy. Having fun is not a behavior. It's an attitude. Funny is a performance; fun is a state of mind. Funny takes effort; fun requires only willingness. Funny is often impossible in health care work; fun is a constant possibility.

Which leads to the second thing to remember about fun. Fun is nothing more (or less) than energy – the most positive energy in the world. When we say we don't need more fun in our work, we're really saying we have no need of more energy. There are really only two energies available to motivate our behavior – fun or fear. We either do what we do because it feels good and is the right thing (fun), or we do it because we are afraid of the consequences of not doing it (fear).

Both are strong motivations, but of the two, only one will sustain excellence over time. As strong as fear can be in the short run, it will eventually break us down and burn us out, because it is an unnatural energy. We were not born fearful. We had to be taught to be afraid, and it takes constant effort to keep our fears alive, effort that detracts from our success.

Fun, on the other hand, is our natural energy. We were born knowing how to have fun. The very first interpersonal communication you made in this life occurred when you were about eight weeks old, and it was a smile. Your smile was there before you had any words or conscious thoughts. Nobody had to teach it to you.

Humor is our inborn natural energy. Therefore, when we allow ourselves to have fun, we are collaborating with nature. We are enhancing skills, not limiting them.

All of which leads to the third thing we must know about fun. Fun does not originate in the world that surrounds us. It is not a part of the circumstance in which we find ourselves. Fun comes from within each and every one of us. It is indeed the natural energy with which we were born. Fun is the essence of humor nature.

That means if we're waiting for our work circumstances to change before we can have more fun, we're looking at it wrong. We need to look more to ourselves, because we are the source of our own fun. To have more fun, all we need do is get out of our own way and allow nature to take its course.

So, how do we do that? How can we bring more fun into serious work, when everything around us seems so "unfunny?" I thought you'd never ask. If you want more fun, you've got to know what you're doing. There are specific strategies involved. These strategies, which I call the Fun Commandments, will enable you to have more fun, at any time, even on your worst day. Let's look at them one at a time.

Fun Commandment One – Have Fun Above All

This is critical because it forces us to remember that our goal is to have more fun, rather than to be funny.

Fun Commandment Two – Always Go The Extra Smile

A wise man once said, “A smile is the shortest distance between two people.” The expression on your face has a powerful influence on your inner physiology, as well as the quality of your social relationships. Even when you don’t feel like smiling, it’s a good idea to fake it until you do.

Fun Commandment Three – Believe In Yourself

Your humor nature is an inner voice that will not mislead you. Unfortunately most of us have been taught to mistrust it. It deserves more respect.

Fun Commandment Four – Tell The Truth

That inner humor nature will not lie for you. It loves you too much for that. Therefore it is not helpful when you are trying to be someone or something you are not. Being yourself is a role for which you are uniquely gifted. No one has ever been, or ever will be, more qualified than you.

Fun Commandment Five – Listen Very Carefully

We miss out on a lot of things because we are not paying close attention. Listening carefully focuses us on the here and now, which is where all the fun is to be found. Seeking to understand is more important to our success than seeking to be understood.

Fun Commandment Six – Laugh With Yourself

The word is “with,” not “at.” Laughing at ourselves is mean-spirited and demeaning. Laughing with ourselves is a form of affirmation. None of us is perfect. Taking ourselves less seriously makes a lot of sense.

Fun Commandment Seven – Welcome Your Mistakes

Far from a formula for mediocrity, this strategy is a recipe for excellence. Mistakes become our best teachers, if we are willing to face up to them. Your humor nature will help you turn your perils into “pearls.”

Fun Commandment Eight – Challenge All Assumptions

Another wise man once said, “The only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.” Asking the question “What if?” breaks down prejudice and opens us to opportunities for creative growth. Get out of your rut.

Fun Commandment Nine – Expect The Unexpected

If you become willing to challenge your assumptions, you must be prepared for the unexpected. Once again you will find that your humor nature is capable of handling this for you. The unexpected is the lifeblood of humor.

Fun Commandment Ten – Let Go Frequently

Holding onto a grudge or resentment is a sure way to drain personal energy away from more effective pursuits. Forgiveness always benefits the forgiver more than the one who is forgiven. Letting go frees us to move forward and expand our horizons.

Fun Commandment Eleven – Stay Focused, But Remain Flexible

At first blush, this seems to be an assignment for a contortionist, but it is really quite simple. If we lose focus we can drift aimlessly. On the other hand, lacking flexibility, we may become brittle and easily broken.

Fun Commandment Twelve – Reach Out to Others

Health and success are more likely to result from a network of relationships, than from a solo effort. Even the Lone Ranger, the quintessential rugged individualist, would have been stymied without Tonto at his side.

Fun Commandment Thirteen – Take Action Promptly

Life is not a spectator event. Success requires action. A failed action is much more valuable, than a failure to act.

Fun Commandment Fourteen – Embrace Failure

Striving for excellence means increasing the risk of failure. We must accommodate this reality and learn to live comfortably with it, in order to enjoy maximal success.

Fun Commandment Fifteen – Don't Look Down

Your humor nature can take you to dizzying heights. Sometimes it is important for the right hand not to know too much about what the left hand is doing.

Fun Commandment Sixteen – Don't Look Back

The past is over. Although that seems self evident, we often find ourselves treating it as though it was still in play. Trying to “fix” the past is a losers game. As we've already observed, fun is to be found in only one place – the present.

Fun Commandment Seventeen – Celebrate Everything

This involves the determination to find opportunity in every setback, a pony in every pile of manure. Frequent celebration produces constant gratitude. If you want more joy, begin each moment with gratitude.

There you have 17 strategies guaranteed to unleash more fun in your work, as well as your life. Put them into practice and discover that you can live and work more successfully, more healthfully and, yes, more happily over laughter.

Information about the author:

Dr. Clifford Kuhn is both a psychiatrist and a comedian. He is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Louisville School of Medicine. His book, The Fun Factor: Unleashing the Power of Humor at Home and on the Job, is available in bookstores and on his web site. A professional member of the National Speakers Association, he offers entertaining workshops and presentations on humor skills, and is available to anyone interested in enhancing performance, productivity and health by creating and sustaining an atmosphere of fun. Results are guaranteed. Dr. Kuhn may be reached by phone (502-722-8732), e-mail (laffdr@aol.com) or by visiting his web site (www.humorbeing.com).