



Twelve Ideas to Lead Change; Communicate with Success; and Build Passion

By Joel Zeff

It's hard to have fun at work during stressful times. Your stress builds after each media report about the recession. You start hearing whispers of a merger, layoff or the all encompassing "restructuring." Your manager does not listen. Your customers don't listen. The guy that sells sandwiches in the lobby does not listen. Maybe it is just easier to be cranky.

We are all facing challenges. Today, the economy is our main concern. Tomorrow, there will be other obstacles. How do we continue to motivate and energize our employees during difficult times?

First, we need to stop worrying and relax. Give yourself a break. Stop letting the media feed your fears with the dreaded "r" word. Even during an "r" people work. Companies manufacture, transport, distribute, sell, market, advertise, produce, grow, research, develop, entertain, build and purchase. We have to figure out a way to do it without being cranky and stressed. Yes, we need to have more fun. More importantly, we need to motivate and energize our employees to have more fun and increase their passion.

I sense that many of you have thrown this magazine down on the table, rearing back from these words with a shriek. How dare we have fun during a merger/recession/layoff/restructure/something else that takes up time before retirement? Fun is scary. Fun doesn't work. We are not allowed to have fun.



Yes, you can have fun. And in the process, reduce your stress and help create a more productive, innovative and fun work environment. First, we have to create a foundation so that fun can exist. Here are twelve simple ideas to reduce your stress, help motivate your employees and create a foundation to have more fun.

1. Be patient and positive in your tone of voice. Sounds simple, but a reassuring and patient tone in your voice will do wonders for teamwork and for helping reduce stress. You will rarely see a stressed, impatient person having fun. Watch people stand in line at the airport. The guy in the suit with three carry on bags and a phone hooked into the Matrix is not having fun. The guy in the Hawaiian shirt and hat made from palm reeds is relaxed and having fun. Same standing in line. Different attitude. As a manager, your employees will take their cues from you. If you are stressed and worried, they will be stressed and worried. Be positive. Be happy. Be the guy that brings blueberry muffins to work.
2. Take a break. Again, a simple idea but something that has very real results. Ever try and assemble something from the store? Ever get frustrated? Ever throw the directions across the room in frustration? Stop, take a break, and then reassess. Just a few moments away will give you the energy to move forward. Your employees need a break just like you. Take a minute out of the day and recognize a manager or employee for having fun and creating spirit. Give them a funny spirit trophy. As a surprise,



take five minutes and have everyone walk around the building. Even a break that lasts only a minute will refresh our minds and give us the energy and motivation to take on the next task.

3. Think about what makes a great day at work. The next time you have fun at work, take a moment to reflect. Write down what happened that made the day so great. What did you do? What did you say? You now have your “great day” list. You know what you need. Work toward it. Fun is different for everyone. Remember the kid in your high school algebra class who got really excited when he solved a complex math problem? That is fun for him. For me, math is the equivalent of jury duty, going to the dentist, and cleaning the garage all in the same day. Take a few moments each day, gather your team, and ask your employees to share something on their “fun” list. Not only will the group enjoy the experience, but will gain appreciation for each other.
4. Sometimes you have to ask. If something is bothering you and causing stress, then speak up and say something. Most people will just stew or whine in the break room rather than speak up. They don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. Guess what? Someone’s feelings are being hurt – your feelings. If you ask nicely, most people would be happy to oblige and help. They probably don’t even know their words or actions are bothering you.



5. Be in the moment with your co-workers. Working in the moment means being focused and connected. Listen to each other. Make eye contact. Engage in the communication process. Try something new: put your e-mail enabled phone down and communicate with the living, breathing person sitting in your office.

6. Tell your co-workers you appreciate them. We all want positive support at work. When we don't receive appreciation and thanks, we are not very happy. You know how you feel when someone says, "You made a difference," or "Great job," or "I really appreciate your help." You get an incredible feeling right in the middle of your chest. Giving that feeling is a gift. And it doesn't take a budget, plan, or approval. It just takes a few seconds from your day. When you go home from work, think about all of the people you had contact with that day. Did you give all of them the appreciation and positive support they deserved? If you didn't, there is always tomorrow.

7. Create opportunity. We all want the same things from our jobs: opportunity and positive support. We may want the opportunity to be creative; to be a leader; to help people; or to make more money. When we don't receive opportunity and positive support, we are not very happy. Figure out what kind of opportunity you want from your job. Make sure your employer understands what you need to be happy. Again, stand up and say something. As a manager, talk to your employees about the opportunities they



want today, next month and next year. Together, figure out a way to give them those opportunities.

8. Be a better listener. Everyone thinks they are good listeners. In reality, we get into bad habits that prevent us from being good, active listeners. We multi-task. We wait to talk. We play solitaire on our computer during a conference call. Pay attention to your listening skills. When we listen, we are more effective as a team; we are better communicators; we are more productive; and we have more fun. Listening to each other every day will change our work environment faster than any pizza party, softball game or team building event where you make boats out of cardboard boxes, aluminum foil and paper towels.
9. Be flexible to change. When change happens, ask yourself two important questions: Does this change affect my ability to be happy and successful in my job? Does this change affect the ability of those around me – my family, colleagues, clients, and vendors – to be happy and successful in their jobs? If both answers are no, then you know the change is not worth creating stress. No matter what happens to the economy, there is going to be change. Most of these changes are out of your control. We may not control the change, but we always control our reaction and attitude. Help your employees take ownership of their attitude and reaction to change. How you deal with change determines your success, productivity, creativity, passion and stress. Focus your energies on what really matters. Be open. Be flexible. Live healthier.



It is easy during a recession to give up control. You may have to do more work and stay late. You might have to do more with fewer resources. Your best manager might leave for a better opportunity. Would you, as a normal, sane person, really make the choice to wake up in the morning, comb your hair, brush your teeth and say, “Man, I am bitter, frustrated and angry. I can’t wait to get to work.” No, you wouldn’t. Yet, people do that every day. We do have a choice to wake up every morning happier and more energized. And happy people get to work early when there are still blueberry muffins.

When we are happy and having fun, we are more creative, productive and effective. We are better leaders. The choice to take ownership of your attitude is an important key to everyone’s success.

10. If you really want to reduce your stress, make a list of everything that caused you stress and frustration in the last week. Take a really hard look at what you wrote. You will giggle. Why? Because most of the things on that list don’t matter. Sure, there are some very important items on the list. Most of the items, though, we will forget about in a short time. Why do we forget? Because they really were not that important. When you are in the middle of a stressful and frustrating situation, take a moment and ask, “Am I going to giggle about this in a week?”



11. Stay in the game. Anyone can quit. You don't even have to go to school to learn how to quit. And I am not talking about quitting your job. I am talking about quitting goals, challenges, and initiatives. Think about your role models. Think about the great men and women of history. They all dealt with mistakes, failures, and challenges. The difference is how they dealt with those issues. They didn't quit; they stayed in the game. There are many issues during a recession, and the only way you are going to fail is if you quit. If you stay in the game, you might have to communicate, work harder, find a common ground, learn something new or get out of your comfort zone. If you stay in the game, the only thing you have to look forward to is success.

12. Don't be afraid to make a mistake. During my presentations, I use improvisation as a tool to communicate my messages. The audience participants engage in the process with passion and energy. They have fun. They are relaxed. Because they are enjoying the process, they are more creative and productive. Why? They are not afraid of making a mistake. They understand they are working in a positive and supportive environment. We are all going to make mistakes. We want to minimize our mistakes and learn from them. If we take some of the pressure off, and support each other, we will figure out that we will make fewer mistakes. We will also have more fun.

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I hope these twelve ideas will help you reduce your stress and motivate each other to have fun. Fun helps create the energy and passion that fuels our productivity, creativity and effectiveness. Without fun, we don't have any fuel. Just like everything, fun is a choice. We each have to take responsibility and ownership of our fun and our goal to reduce stress. Remember, it is always your choice.

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