

WHAT IS HUMOUR?

Humour can be defined as “*the quality of being amusing, or comic; the ability to express humour or make other people laugh; a mood or state of mind, or an inclination or whim.*” Sounds enjoyable, so why are so many people missing it from their lives?

WHERE DID ALL THE LAUGHTER GO?

Jobs are becoming scarce, there are more workplace demands, and the threat of another recession looms. It’s not funny; and it’s easy to see how humour and our ability to laugh has sadly slipped away. Simply growing up and facing adult stressors seems to be a significant reason for loss of humour as we age. Did you know the average preschooler laughs or smiles 400 times a day? That number drops to 15 by the time people are 35 years old. What also gets lost as we age isn’t just laughter, but our emotional range. Four-year olds have dozens of facial expressions; however, most adults only have two or three. I once worked for someone, who I swear, only had one!

“Eat a live toad
in the morning
and nothing worse
will happen to you
for the rest of the day.”

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the ability to play, laugh, and find humour in our day seems to be replaced with a no-nonsense

seriousness, seen as a “nose to the grindstone” workplace mentality. How’s that for funny? Not so much? Our culture has deemed a hard worker as one that is disciplined, has unquestioning obedience to authority and who has full concentration on tasks. Not exactly Mr. or Ms. Personality.

Perhaps it is during school that kids begin to learn this “new” way of life. As students, we are bombarded with the idea that life is full of tasks and that laughter and fun only get in the way of accomplishing anything. Think about it – have you asked your students “What’s so funny?” lately? Or perhaps, told a child to “grow up” or “wipe that grin off your face”?

RE-KINDLING THE HUMOUR IN YOUR DAY

All babies are born with the ability to smile and laugh within weeks of birth, therefore, even if you grew up in a home where laughter wasn’t common, it is possible to learn to laugh at any stage of life.

- The first step to laughter is smiling; like laughter, smiling is contagious. You don’t need to have something funny to get you started, just practice smiling.
- Seek laughter and move towards it. If you hear people laughing, typically people are very happy to share in the humour.
- Spend time with fun and playful people. Laughter is infectious, and those that can laugh at themselves and at life in general, can help you see the absurdities of life.
- Insert more play into your life. Play should be for play’s sake, not

IT TAKES 16 MUSCLES TO FROWN AND ONLY THREE MUSCLES TO SMILE. WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER?

to achieve a goal. We can re-ignite imagination, creativity, and sheer pleasure, setting the stage for finding opportunities for laughter.

- List the good things in your life. This helps us move away from our negative thoughts and stress which are barriers to humour and laughter.
- See the big picture and find incongruities in life. By looking at ourselves objectively, we’re no longer the centre of the universe and it’s easier to see the humour in our life and even our death. Don’t fret over the things you can’t change.
- Practice distancing. When things look terrible, ask yourself how it would look to a person from another part of the world, or to Candid Camera. Or think of what it will look like to you next week, year, or in 10 years. Ask yourself – how important will this problem be “x” amount of time from now? If the answer is “Not very,” let it go. A great deal of our heartiest laughter comes from reminiscing about past unfortunate events.

LAUGHTER IN THE WORKPLACE

The benefits of laughter on our health have been well-documented and companies are beginning to recognize the value of humour in the workplace. Improved physical and mental health, a sense of happiness, and better co-worker relations lead to a more productive, creative, and efficient environment.

Within the school setting, better physical and mental health would lead to fewer sick leave days, increased creativity, and overall healthier relationships between staff, students and administration.

Injecting humour into the school day may take the form of:

- A humour bulletin board or area in the staff room filled with joke books, fun props, caption contests of funny pictures taken of staff; or put up photos of the staff when they were children.
- Dress-up days where everyone is encouraged to wear a silly tie, shoes, shirt, etc.
- Have a “food joke of the week” box outside the cafeteria, with the winner posted (and perhaps a free lunch included?)
- Open or close a staff meeting with a funny, on-the-job incident, or share a joke if no funny incidents occurred.
- Have a tension-release area – for example, stuffed animals that can be squeezed, kicked or man-handled, hula-hoops, or a putting area.
- Acknowledge moodiness with a “Mood-O-Meter” outside your door. Everyone can take turns forecasting your mood: from fire-breathing to periodic eruptions to variable clouds. Don’t underestimate the power of self-effacing humour for making yourself more accessible and liked.

BENEFITS OF LAUGHTER

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| Physical Health Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boosts immunity/energy• Lowers stress hormones• Decreases pain• Relaxes your muscles• Prevents heart disease• Burns calories! | Mental Health Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eases anxiety and fear• Relieves stress• Improves mood/adds joy to life• Enhances resilience• Helps rid the mind of negativity• Increases productivity/creativity | Social Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthens relationships• Attracts others and increases intimacy• Enhances teamwork and team spirit• Helps defuse conflict• Promotes group bonding |
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did you KNOW?

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@staff.nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The Be_Well@nstu.ca list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

