

"Advancing with wit: Humour in the business world", by Andree Martens, *managerSeminare*, December 2010

managerSeminare is a magazine providing news and tips for managers. The topic of this article are different uses of humour in the business world and in everyday working life, e.g., using humour for team building or to communicate criticism gently.

Original article in German:

http://www.humorinstitut.de/media/managerSeminare-12_2010_klein.pdf

Here are some extracts in English:

In the US, humour has long been considered a crucial soft skill for managers. This realization is slowly starting to seep through around here as well: a person who can place jokes at the right time and with the right dosage can signal authority, motivate employees and offer constructive criticism. Which kind of humour helps managers move forward in which situations? *managerSeminare* discussed this topic with scientists and coaches.

[...] Managers in the US like to ask candidates in job interviews to describe how they mastered a difficult situation with humour.

[...] This may still sound strange to German ears, but even around here, some rethinking is currently taking place. "Lately, humour is being practiced more seriously in the business world," states Eva Ullmann, communication expert. Her training academy in Leipzig, which she, tongue-in-cheek, called German Institute for Humour, receives an increasing amount of enquiries regarding methods for using humour as a management technique.

"Managers who are able to laugh about themselves are taken far more seriously than those who cannot." – Eva Ullmann, humour coach and director of the German Institute for Humour in Leipzig

[...] *Humour fosters leadership abilities*

What is clear is what happens at the relationship level when using humour – at least if one uses a mild form of humour and cracks jokes at one's own expense: "If you make others laugh about you, you lower your status at this particular moment, thereby raising the status of others", explains communication expert Ullmann. You offer others the gift of status, as it were.

[...] The point is that, on the one hand, the distance created by status and which impedes communication can be bridged with humour. On the other hand, one's own status is being reinforced. Humour has to do with self-confidence, says [humour researcher] Barbara Wild.

[...] Generally, humour is useful for voicing criticism. [...] Eva Ullmann relates a clever and amusing anecdote: she reports the case of the owner of a bakery in Leipzig who was growing increasingly desperate because of the constant unpunctuality of an apprentice. Any criticism on the topic seemed entirely in vain. Finally, the bakery owner organized a competition. She asked all other employees to guess how many minutes the apprentice in question would be late the next day. She promised 50 Euros to the person whose estimate was closest. "The next morning, when the apprentice arrived late, as usual, there was much hooting and shouting," Ullmann relates. "The apprentice was never late again."

The most important rule when employees are made fun of: "The boss himself has to refrain from laughing," states conflict manager [Gerhard] Schwarz.

[...] The next step consists of making fun of yourself – and to do so with ease. [...] Communication expert Eva Ullmann is convinced: "Managers who are able to laugh about themselves are taken far more seriously than those who cannot."

Many executives have difficulty doing this. "People of authority have always rightly feared laughter because it challenges their power", says the philosopher Schwarz. "Yet I see no other possibility of coping with the loss of authority than putting it to the test and sending it through the purgatory of comedy."

"Sun salutation and angels' laughter", *managerSeminare*, April 2006

managerSeminare is a magazine providing news and tips for managers. This article discusses the benefits of humour trainings, business yoga and laughter yoga.

Original article in German:

<http://www.humorinstitut.de/media/managerSeminare-Ostdeutschland-04-20061.pdf>

Here are some extracts in English:

[...] Laughter research has proven: One minute of hearty laughter has the same refreshing effect as 45 minutes of relaxation training and is as stimulating as a short endurance run. Relaxation is also the aim of laughter yoga. It works because laughter disrupts the flow of daily thoughts.

[...] Eva Ullmann also recommends taking the daily work routine with more humour. Half a year ago, the certified social pedagogue founded the German Institute for Humour in Leipzig. Since then she's been busy acquiring customers from the business world. She offers presentations and seminars to companies in which she underscores the positive effects of humour in the workplace with scientific facts, and illustrates the advantages with practical exercises. Her motto: People with a sense of humour are likeable, open-minded and appear self-confident. Humour improves the work atmosphere and optimizes workflows and processes.

Ullmann argues that small mistakes and annoyances in daily life should not be taken all too seriously. This helps to protect oneself against self-damaging stress, the humour expert explains. She shows how this works in an exercise: participants relate an incident which has annoyed them. Typically, people again become annoyed about this incident when talking about it. Then, the incident is related once again, but the speaker has to omit the letter "s" when speaking. The effect: "The story sounds weird, people reflect on it and think: It wasn't that bad, after all," explains Katja Leistikow, personnel development manager at SachsenLB in Leipzig, who recently booked Eva Ullmann for a keynote on humour.

Apart from humour trainings, Ullmann wants to promote unusual interventions in companies. She relates the story of a financial institution which had great problems with customer-friendly service. Instead of convening a serious meeting, the bank started a competition: the employees reported their experiences with clients and the worst client was elected at regular intervals. The consequence: the employees had great fun during this campaign, their perspective towards the clients changed – and the problem disappeared.

Although companies could profit from offers such as her presentations and seminars, Ullmann is still taking the first steps in the private sector. So far, she's mainly had requests from schools and hospitals.