



Funny Business

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"The most wasted of all days is one without laughter" so says the American poet, E.E. Cummings. Being in business is serious stuff. There's money to be made, customers to look after, invoices to be paid. Our business is where many of us spend a large proportion of our waking hours, whether we're at the office or not. But that doesn't mean we can't inject a whole lot of fun into it everyday. Once you bring a sense of fun and joy and celebration to your work place, you will become a more valuable manager, team member or professional, and one who is less likely to suffer from burnout. Yours will be a work place that is filled with joy and celebration and a resurgence of energy. So how do we bring fun into such serious undertakings?

Let's look at the big picture first. Be in a business you are passionate about to begin with. So many of us buy or start up a business because we think we should, or we think that's where the money is. What we often forget to consider is whether there is anything exciting about the core business to us. If we can delve into ourselves and pull out the things that we love to do before we even consider a business, think how much more fun we would have every day. Some of you may be thinking "well it's too late now". I don't believe it's ever too late. It may not be easy, but there is always a way to either change the focus of your current business, or take a stand, and start again. John Kehoe says *"No amount of money, no matter how much it is, will ever compensate you sufficiently for remaining in a job that is drudgery and robs you of your spirit, or one that prevents you from fulfilling a dream.."* Life is too short to be running a business that is no fun, particularly if fun is one of your core values.

Lets take a closer look at your values. For a business to be fun it is important for your business values and your personal values to be in sync. Let's say that honesty, cooperation and fair play are high on your values list. Could you be happy running a business where in order to survive you have to "smash the competition; do whatever it takes to win?" The answer is "probably not for long" IF your success depended on adopting that attitude.

I'd like to share a story with you about one of my clients. 'Louise' came to coaching because she had a new business, where she had the technical ability, but didn't feel like she had enough business skills. During our sessions it became apparent that Louise had started in this business because a lot of people had told him how good he'd be at it. Unfortunately, Louise wasn't having any fun. As part of the coaching process, we discovered that Louise had personal values that included providing excellent service, and being in control of the whole process. These values were not in line with the business, where Louise had no control of the process after a certain point, and repeatedly found that customer service standards were not even close to being met. Louise also reconnected with her passions of cooking, and being connected with people. The end result was she actually finished up the business she was in, and is currently working on a new on-location catering business that allows her to be true to both her values and her passions.

Now, it doesn't always have to be this dramatic. Sometimes there is a lot of energy and money tied up in your existing business, that it makes it difficult to let go. But some refocusing, and a lot of soul searching can go a long way. For those of you that find yourself in this situation, I would like to offer you a challenge. Now in the coaching world, you have a choice with any challenge given to you. You can choose to accept it, decline it, or negotiate it. My challenge to you today is to put down on paper, whether in words or with pictures, what your idea of a perfect business would look like and feel like. Some questions you might like to answer are:

What would you be doing?

Who are your perfect customers?

How many hours would you spend in your business, and how many on your business?

Would you have staff, and what would your relationship be with them?

The second part of my challenge to you, is to start incorporating some of those elements into your business right now. It may seem daunting to have to give up on your business and start over, but if you can incorporate some of your perfect business into your existing business, think how much more fun you would be having!

Now it's time to get into the nitty gritty, the day to day ways in which we can have a whole lot more fun. Now I ask for your open-mindedness here. These are some radical ideas, and they may feel uncomfortable at first. But I ask that you humour me, and give at least one of them a try. So with that little warning, let's open the vault, and have a look at what's inside!!

Reward yourself. A lot of us work to 'to-do' lists, and those of you that aren't, know you probably should be. Unfortunately what happens all too often is we get to the end of the day, and beat ourselves up for the things we haven't got through on our list.

How many of you get home at the end of the evening and wonder what on earth you've done all day. If you really stopped to think about it, you're likely to have done an awful lot. One way to remember this is to recognize each accomplishment, whether big or small, as you achieve it. If you have down on your list to call that prospect you haven't managed to get around to yet, and you actually pick up the phone and dial, whether you make contact or not, mentally congratulate yourself. If you handle a complaint from a customer, and the customer ends up walking away happy, do a little dance – preferably after they've walked out the door. There are many small ways to reward your-self, from a nice cup of coffee, to a stroll outside in the fresh air. Then when you achieve something a bit bigger, like that large order you just won off your main competitors, splash out. Take the whole office out to lunch, book yourself in for a massage, or take the kids to the movies.

The benefits from these rewards are two-fold. Not only does it make your day more fun, you will also find you attract more success. You are training your mind to look for more opportunities to accomplish things so you can be rewarded again. Don't take my word for it – try it for yourself.

Theme-of-the-week. Some people will take this and turn it into a fancy dress week, or dress the retail shop up with different themes each week. This is great if you are up to it. It creates a fun atmosphere for you, your staff, and your customers, and you will find your customers visiting more often, just to find out what you are up to this week.

The theme doesn't have to be that obvious though for it to be fun. It might just be a particular aspect that you are going to focus on for the week, or even the month. Let's

see how many customers we can sell a muffin to, who normally just buy a coffee. Let's see how many prospects we can get to agree just to that first, no obligation meeting. You could even have a quote of the week, like laughter is the best medicine, plaster it all over the walls of your home office, and see how much more fun your week will be.

These are just a few ways to lighten the load of our business lives. It's by no means an exhaustive list, but if you start by implementing even one of these, you may just find you come up with a few more. After all, laughter is infectious and smiles are contagious, and what's more they're free!!

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