

## Laughing is the shortest distance between two people

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There were many occasions during my college superintendent days when I'd walk into my assistant's office for routine daily business and we'd end up laughing about something. Not that we didn't take our roles at the college seriously, we just tried to keep things light and stress free. It didn't matter how the day was going or what crazy hoop we were trying to jump through, some how, some way, we'd find something to smile or laugh about.

Having good mood chemistry with my assistant probably helped but more importantly, either I initiated our interaction with a smile or she did, and from that second on we were in an upbeat mood and instantly understood each other. This happens because positive and cheerful emotions put people in sync with each other faster than anything else.

Emotions can spread like a virus. Have you ever felt energy in a room expanded or deflated by someone else without a single word being uttered? How did it, in turn, affect your mood? It's quite evident that a person's spirit or attitude can rise or fall on surrounding emotions. Positive energy spreads much

faster, though, and can have a better outcome for people and organizations.

A study at the Yale University School of Management found that among working groups, cheerfulness and warmth spread most easily, creating an atmosphere where upbeat moods boosted cooperation, fairness, and business performance. The study further revealed that upbeat employees more often went the extra mile to please customers and therefore improved the bottom line. In fact, according to research conducted by Lyle Spencer for the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence, there's actually a logarithm that predicts that relationship: For every 1 percent improvement in the service climate, there's a 2 percent increase in revenue.

Laughter, it was found, is most contagious and typically spreads almost instantly. When you hear someone cracking up with laughter, aren't you immediately tempted to laugh as well? Even if you don't know what they're laughing about?

In a neurological sense, laughing represents the shortest distance between two people because it instantly interlocks limbic systems. However, there are some conditions when limbic systems

don't naturally interlock. According to Robert Provine, author of *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, “It is no surprise that people who relish each other's company laugh easily and often; those who distrust or dislike each other, or who are otherwise at odds, laugh little together, if at all.” Understanding this, you can see there's a direct correlation between laughter and group cohesion.

In any work setting, therefore, the sound of laughter signals the group's emotional temperature, offering one sure sign that people's hearts as well as their minds are engaging. A good laugh sends a reassuring message: We're on the same wavelength, we get along. It signals trust, comfort, and a shared sense of the world. As a rhythm in a conversation, laughing signals that all is well for the moment. And if you don't hear much laughter within a group, well, you can surmise there may be problems or issues below the surface.

So smile and laugh often. Be the upbeat person or leader who is open to good humor on a moment's notice. In no time, those around you will be and feel the same way. Life is short--get in as many smiles and laughs as you can!

~ The End ~