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# Is Humor An Effective Motivational Tool In The Workplace?

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**IS HUMOR AN EFFECTIVE MOTIVATIONAL TOOL IN THE WORKPLACE?**

**BY**

**ILENE REYNOLDS**

**Thesis Advisor**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication  
Seton Hall University**

**2001**

*For my mother Pearl McFarlane  
who first showed me how to laugh.  
Mama, I wish you could have stayed with us longer.  
You inspire me and I miss you.*

### Author's Note

The author wishes to acknowledge friends and colleagues for their help in supporting her study. Special thanks and appreciation to Dr. Michael McGraw, Dr. Donald Lombardi, and thanks to the Cendant Corporation managers and coworkers who took the time to do the survey for this research. The author is especially grateful to her -- sister Karen McFarlane -- for her constant encouragement, patience, and support throughout the research and writing of this thesis.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Humor has varied effects on men and women. Individuals interpret humor in different ways and the receiver's own sense of humor, as well as his/her individual values, play an important role in their interpretations. As Honeycutt and Brown (1998) and Futch and Edwards (1999) concluded, there are factors such as gender, philosophies, and beliefs that affect how receptive a person is to humor. Hof, Rebello, and Burrows, and Katz (1996, as cited by Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999) found that many organizations have attributed more commitment from their employees to leaders' use of humor in their cultures.

Similarly, Gruner (1997, as cited by Avolio et al., 1999) claims that the use of humor in organizations is associated with the improvement of morale among workers, and can create a more positive organizational culture. Duncan (1982, as cited by Avolio et al., 1999) claims that if people laugh at other people's jokes a lot, they have a sense of humor and it promotes and enhances group cohesiveness. Furthermore, Clouse and Spurgeon and Duncan and Feisal (1995, as cited by Avolio et al., 1999) say the use of humor has been associated with high levels of productivity among employees.

Many workplaces are male dominated and often, humor creativity tends to be attributed to males, the idea being that telling jokes is a masculine trait. Humor appreciation tends to be attributed to females with the idea that females have the

mentality to appreciate humor more than males do (Honeycutt & Brown, 1998). Research by Ziv (1984) also shows that women laugh more than men do and score higher in humor appreciation whereas men score higher in humor creativity. Futch and Edwards (1999) said that research on gender identifies differences in the humorous responses of men and women. Men tend to see aggressive humor as funnier than women do and men who support male supremacy prefer male protagonists in their jokes. Women on the other hand tend to appreciate humor that advocates sexual equality and they favor female protagonists in their jokes.

Humor can certainly have positive effects on relationships in the workplace and it can certainly lighten the general work atmosphere. Humor can be useful when avoiding uncomfortable topics and, according to Honeycutt and Brown (1998), can serve several functions including "the expression of positive attitudes and masking hostility" (p. 342).

Graham, Papa, and Brooks (1992) have found that negativity was one of the major functions of humor and that it may be used to demean others especially when the relationship between the male and female is not going well. Production in the workplace suffers when there is negativity connected to humor and joke-tellers take on a sense of power when their humor targets other people's weaknesses and/or flaws. Furthermore, tearing others down strengthens a joke-teller's ego.

Males and females communicate better when humor is a part of their relationship and their social life. Futch and Edwards (1999) state: "a good sense of humor is a socially



desirable trait and it is associated with communication competence" (p.82). Both males and females that are perceived as humorous are regarded as more socially attractive. Graham et al. (1992) found that there is a positive relationship between males and females when the positive effect function of humor (i.e. playfulness, friendliness, and making light of a situation) exists between them. Whether at the workplace or at a party, people tend to move toward those who have a good sense of humor, as they are more fun. It is evident that a good sense of humor, between males and females, plays an important role in interpersonal communication.

This study focuses on the role of humor as motivation in the workplace and its communication between employees whether managers, supervisors, and subordinates. The author believes that the use of humor is an effective motivational tool within the workplace, and serves to promote production and maintain good working relations necessary for the effective running of any business.

#### Research Question

Is humor communication an effective tool in motivating workers in the workplace thus promoting job satisfaction and enhancing production? This study explores that question by examining how 100 employees from Cendant Corporation in New Jersey rate their coworkers and managers/supervisors on humor communication.

### Subsidiary Questions

In attempting to find a correlation between the use of humor and motivation of workers in the workplace, this study will also work to address the following questions:

1. What is effective humor?
2. How can humor motivate workers?
3. Is there a place for humor in the workplace?
4. Does the use of humor promote positive relationships among employees?

The author answers these questions by reviewing literature related to the use of humor in different situations and by surveying a select group of workers of both genders in a work culture. The data from the survey are used to measure the effectiveness of using humor to motivate workers thus promoting production and job satisfaction.

### Need for the Study

Avolio et al have concluded that organizations could train leaders to use humor in ways that will be motivational for workers in light of the culture that they want to create, and as a result promote productivity. However, the implication here is that the leaders may find it necessary to model their humor styles in light of their followers' expectations in order to have a more positive impact on the performance they expect. Avolio et al. (1999) claims that there are different styles of leadership, and there are different styles of humor. Humor can be more or less effective depending on the group composition with regard to ethnicity, gender, history of interactions, stage of development, and the circumstances in which the group operates. After reviewing the literature, the author

agrees that research is necessary to determine whether humor between genders and different work cultures could moderate leadership styles and employee performance in the workplace.

Over the years, many organizations have had training for managers and employees alike and one major concern of most employers is job satisfaction for their employees. The study of humor in management and employee relation's needs to be taken more seriously and the author hopes to present stimulating thoughts on the subject in this study.

#### Definition of Terms

Humor: The quality of being amusing or comic.

Effective: Having a definite or desired effect.

Motivational: A factor or circumstance that induces a person to act in a particular way.

Tool: Any device or implement used to carry out a function.

Workplace: A place at which a person works; factory, office, and so forth.

Gender: Sociologically corresponding with the sexes; male and female.

Self-deprecation: The use of humor to mask one's shortcomings.

Sexist humor: Humor that favors one gender at the expense of the other.

### Limitations

A limitation to this study is the select nature of the sample, as the survey is limited to the surveying of employees in one corporate organization. Many workplaces, both formal and informal, use humor for different reasons. For the purpose of this study, the author finds it necessary to limit the research to the situation worked in and one to which the author has access.

Although the author is successful in gathering perspectives on humor in the workplace through her survey, these opinions cannot, statistically, in any way reflect the thoughts of Americans nationwide. It is also important to note that humor in the corporate workplaces does not reflect corporate culture overall, as each entity has its own unique culture and, its own approach to humor. In addition, there were fewer men than women that completed the survey therefore, there is a natural bias in the data being presented.

The literature specifically related to humor and the workplace is limited. Few online sources had information on the topic and literature in the form of books tends to address humor in situations other than the workplace. Literature was also limited in other topics of interest the author wanted to cover such as, humor on culture.

Another possible limitation to this study is the manner in which the survey was deployed: via email. While this distribution of the survey is not a known practice which has been tested and proven, the author recognizes that more research is necessary to examine the validity and reliability of data which is collected through this approach.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Humor: A Historical Perspective

Anyone looking to get ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will obviously need to employ the use of different tools than their counterparts did in the last century. Brady (2000) said the days of the well-pressed flannel suits and the passion for issuing orders are gone and we now need " ...eclectic visionary with a sense of humor" (paragraph 1). The Industrial Age was machine oriented and the Information Age relies on the skills and ideas inside worker's heads, therefore, the core qualities of intelligence, passion and an ability to motivate will be fundamental. Managers in the new millennium will also need humor, spontaneity, and team orientations for the intangible needs of their employees in their corporations (Brady 2000).

In the October 9, 2000 edition of Newsweek, Sharon Begley explained that philosophers such as Darwin, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Freud have all tried to fathom laughter. Plato feared that laughter could cause disruption and Kant theorized that laughter arises from the unexpected. This could be why punch lines are effective although, in essence these thinkers have much to say philosophically instead of scientifically.

### Perspectives on the Effective Use of Humor

Fahlman (1997) says it is likely there will be three to five career changes as well as 10 job changes in one's lifetime, many involuntary. The stress of job and career changes can have ill effects on one's health and can alter work performance as a result. The website [<http://library.northernlight.com/UU20000912150000826.HTML?cb=0&sc=0>] of the Orthopedic Nursing Journal documents that from the time of Florence Nightingale, humor has been an important aspect of nursing as laughter helps patients breathe easier and feel less pain and tension. Similarly, Cousins (1983, as cited by Fahlman, 1997) documents the importance of humor and laughter in the reduction of pain and the general improvement of health. The general idea is that humor helps to keep a worker healthy, which makes for a productive worker.

The workplace needs employees who will perform their duties and make sure that production is their major focus. Fahlman (1997) states that if humor is useful in improving the personal well being, physical, and mental health of the employee, the result will be lower health care costs and will "bode well for people, even those who employ people" (p. 35). Similarly, Klein (1989) states we are often unable to control the events of our lives. Sometimes there is not much we can do to stop the things that upset us but we can use humor to "help soothe the rough edges of our day or the most trying moments of our lives" (p. 5).

Burns (1953, as cited by Barreca, 1991) states that the shortcut to consensus is humor and suggests that humor can reinforce the rules and boundaries in an established group, and can help remove the boundaries in a group to which one wants to be accepted as well as ease the tensions between groups. Similarly, Barreca (1991) affirms that humor can be used to confirm the rules and boundaries of one's in-group "through its tacit delineation of mutually accepted norms of behavior" (p. 134). For example, if there is always a member of a group who spends more time at lunch than their counterparts, it can cause some tension in the group. The "good-natured" joking about the time taken for lunch which should not be more than an hour can serve to reinforce the consensus of the group that lunch should in fact take no more than an hour.

#### Results of Effective and Ineffective Use of Humor

Researchers have often neglected humor, as it does not lend itself to experimental procedures very easily because it is hard to measure and control. Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) contend that the use of humor to motivate is now a topic of interest. Furthermore, researchers are becoming increasingly aware that humor can effectively play an important role in human relations and are now learning how to "describe, predict, and control humor at work" (p. 1). In addition to the impact humor has on individual's lives, it also provides numerous benefits in professional settings. In the February 14, 2001 edition of The New York Times, Jobert E. Abueva, writer for the Workplace section, reports that smart managers have used humor to soften up customers and placate restive

employees. Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) also report that humor can resolve conflicts and promote teamwork.

Klein (1989) says humor gives us power and "in laughter, we transcend our predicaments" (p. 4). One of the psychological benefits of humor is helping people to cope in all sorts of situations. Vailaint (1987, as cited by Klein, 1989) says, "along with anticipation, altruism, suppression and sublimation, humor was one of the five 'mature coping mechanisms' used by professional men in stressful times" (p. 7). In addition, Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) point out that, "good human relations can be translated into dollars" (p. 2). People who work for the same organization depend on the same business for their livelihood, therefore, it is cost-effective for all concerned to avoid strife and tension even though their backgrounds and lifestyles outside of the office are often drastically different.

McGhee (2000) says the lack of humor in corporate culture is a shame and "employees who laugh together, so the theory goes, have fun and contribute to a workplace where people tend to stick around" (p. 1). As one's career progresses, it seems prudent that humor skills be acquired in order to boost the ability to lead effectively. According to McGhee (2000), humor is one of the most powerful stress-management tools available as laughter helps to reduce muscle tension, release anger, increase the sense of control and the benefits to physical health include a higher immunity level. Additionally, Barreca (1991) concludes that humor can help to break the boundaries of a group from which one is excluded and can serve to signal readiness to be accepted into another group without seeming to betray the group of which one is already a member.



It is important to note that something said that may offend one person could in turn amuse another person. Therefore, one prerequisite to joke telling is that the joke teller should know the audience for whom the joke is intended. Many skills are often misused and humor is no exception. Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) note that the skill of joke telling comes with knowing what is socially acceptable and what is not. For example:

It is no longer considered funny to torture animals, nor is it fashionable to make fun of people with mental disabilities. So the tasteless "moron jokes" of the past have become disguised as "ethnic jokes." Both types reinforce negative stereotypes. The jokes are the same, only the group maligned has changed. Ethnic, religious, or racial jokes can embody all the qualities of stress-producing humor. Because prejudice is at the core of much of this type of humor, it can be destructive and especially hazardous at work. (pp. 25-26)

When humor is used ineffectively, it usually causes strife and tension. If the use of humor produces feelings of embarrassment, attacks ethnicity, targets sexual preferences, and makes fun of other people's physical shortcomings, it is worthwhile to think the comments through before they are said. Klein (1989) says there is appropriate as well as inappropriate humor and whether the humor is used to ease the speaker's dilemma or someone else's, one should make sure it is "appropriate, timely and tasteful" (p. 36).

### Self Deprecation

One basic feeling an individual has is the desire to protect one's self from any form of humiliation or embarrassment. Ironically, self-deprecation is often used as a form of protection. According to Klein (1989) "keeping our sense of humor in spite of our disadvantage means that we are able to maintain enough distance between us and our circumstances so that we do not get caught up in our own melodramas" (p. 143).

The ability to laugh at oneself helps with the process of living through the daily quota of errors. Paulson (1989) states that "being able to laugh at yourself helps let go of mistakes and bounce back to attack the problem anew" (p. 14). On the other hand, Barreca (1991) says that laughing at oneself can also turn the glare of attention away from someone being a winner without taking the shine off of an achievement. Furthermore, Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) say if you can laugh at your self, you are a grown up and "...if you don't like who you are, perhaps you have been too rigid about focusing on your own real or perceived imperfections. It is time to lighten up on yourself" (p. 19).

### Humor and Gender

Barreca (1991) says there are "differences between the way men and women deal with humor" (p. 1). According to Barreca, humor between men and women is depicted in totally opposite ways and it is evidenced in some television shows where men are portrayed as worldly and witty while the women are shown as being shallow and naïve by the funny responses they are allowed to give. Barreca states that if the women react to

the comments the men make in such a way, which could be interpreted that they understood their comments, it would reveal something about her to the audience that she probably would not want to be public knowledge. The audience on the other hand, men and women, has the unspoken permission to interpret the double meanings of the clean/dirty jokes.

One dark side of humor and gender is sexist humor and Ryan (1998) says men enjoy jokes that belittle women especially jokes that depict sexual domination on the part of the male. McGhee (2000) says that when males make remarks about themselves it tends to be done in an impersonal way rather than at their own expense but females tend to engage in self directed put downs rather than directing put-downs at others. Furthermore, Barreca (1991) says that humor can be viewed as control as occasionally humor directed at oneself allows some measure of control over a situation.

### Humor in the Workplace

Humor in the workplace is not a topic that appears to have much literature. The author has worked to find everything published related to this topic and it is highlighted here in this review of the literature. In addition, the author shares other select literature related to humor.

Since humor plays an important role in human relations, and human relations deal with the ways people in organizations behave toward each other, Blumenfeld and Alpern

(1994) state that researchers are becoming increasingly interested in learning how to control humor at work. Taking the job seriously and oneself lightly can make a difference in the workplace. Paulson (1989) points out that there is a daily bombardment of depressing local, national, and world news which the media guarantees to bring to one's doorstep the same day they occur. It is no better on the job, as there are reorganizations, corporate buyouts, and world competitions that cause workers to work harder, change, or even fall behind. As a result, many people have "lost touch with the importance of fun in the workplace and move steadily through life with flat expressions on their faces" (Paulson, 1989, p.1).

Often people are offended by something someone else may consider a joke, and in the workplace there is no exception. According to Fahlman (1997) "bad humor does more harm than no humor at all " (p. 147). There are aspects of humor such as dirty jokes and ethnic or crass jokes that do not belong anywhere at all, especially in the workplace and should be avoided at all costs. Fahlman points out that in the workplace, ethnic and off color jokes can "...provide the opportunity to hurt feelings, cause resentment and anger as well as close the door for creativity, openness, and trust" (p. 147).

Steven M. Sultanoff (2001) questions the seriousness of humor in the workplace and how serious can one be about the seriousness found in the workplace. Humor has become a recognized asset in the workplace according to Sultanoff and it facilitates communication, builds relationship, reduces stress, and provides perspective.

Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) state that on the job, "humor provides temporary relief

from society's restrictive regulations" (p.9). Fahlman (1997) points out that one of the keys to introducing humor and laughter in the workplace is to first celebrate organization successes which improve the bottom line, and even the toughest boss will understand and give approval but make sure the boss is included in the celebration.

Dealing with customers in the workplace can be a challenge and it can also be a rewarding experience. People have different experiences and backgrounds; hence, there are different perspectives on different subjects. Fahlman (1997) states, "processing complex transactions and dealing with difficult customers are bearable when you know the team is on your side and you can laugh together later" (p. 95).

Tensions, which arise from promotions in the workplace, are a reality and the employee needs to form a strategy for dealing with individuals who have to adjust to the new states. Barreca (1991) purports that "we have already seen that humor allows us to vent or deflect aggression, and it is important to underscore that humor also plays a role in our coping with other forms of stress" (p. 140). Barreca also adds that humor in the workplace will allow colleagues to express approval, envy or even some resentment without disrupting workflow.

April Fool's Day provides the usual exchanges of jokes with colleagues at work but aside from that, business people tend to take things seriously and companies are realizing that the success of a business can and should be a laughing matter according to Erickson (1995, as cited by Robertshaw 2001). The list of companies trying to incorporate humor in the workplace is growing according to Erickson and corporate

giants such as General Electric, AT&T, Kodak, IBM and even the Internal Revenue Service have taken steps to inject laughter into the workplace.

According to University of Wisconsin-La Crosse professor Stu Robertshaw, also known as "Dr. Humor," laughter is good for the health of a business and there have been at least a few studies to prove this. Robertshaw (2001) noted that one corporate study showed that after a trial period where humor was incorporated into the workplace in a variety of ways -- including everything from a special humor bulletin board to silly hat days -- the company shows a 21 percent decrease in staff turnover and a 38 percent decrease in Friday absenteeism. Creating and sharing inside jokes help coworkers feel closer to one another and this closeness enhances teamwork through a sense of common history (Robertshaw 2001).

In the February 14, 2001 edition of The New York Times, writer, Jobert E. Abueva reports that laughter therapy is used in one bank in Illinois and after the sessions, the employees were motivated to work harder and be friendlier to their customers. According to Abueva, (2001) the bank in Illinois continues to use the services of a laughter therapist for weekly exercises as the employees felt more invigorated after each session and felt ready to face the rest of the work day.

### Summary

The author's review of literature related to humor as an effective motivational tool in the workplace provides valuable insight to the questions raised in chapter one of this thesis. The author examined characteristics of effective humor and the results of effective

as well as ineffective humor, self-deprecation, and humor and gender as well as humor in the workplace and how it contributes to job performance and ultimately job satisfaction. Studies conducted on humor and how it relieves stress associated with some activities led the author to look at the relationship between humor in the workplace and its use in motivating employees.

## Chapter III

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

#### Population and Sample

This survey (see Appendix A) helped the author determine if humor is an effective motivational tool in the workplace. The author analyzed employees' responses to find out how they perceive their coworkers and managers or supervisors. The responses to the survey also helped in determining if humor has a place in the workplace and if it motivates workers, therefore enhancing production and promoting job satisfaction. Data were collected electronically through email.

The author, with the help of the thesis adviser, developed the survey. For this study, the author created a survey, which poses as an electronic copy to be distributed via electronic mail to employees in Cendant Corporation in the United States and Canada. Participants completed the survey in a word document by entering their response in the inserted text boxes then forwarding them to the author.

Cendant Corporation was selected as the workplace within which to have the survey completed as the author is an employee and finds that there is a lot of daily interaction between managers, supervisors, and subordinates. The population of Cendant Corporation covers a broad age range from 20-60 years old, which the author finds suitable for this survey. Cendant was also chosen as the corporation because it is large enough to have a good feedback on the completed surveys, furthermore, the company



possesses a diverse makeup of employees and also provides the email capabilities with which to complete and forward the survey back to the author.

As a Training Coordinator, the author reports to the Director of Call Center Training at Cendant Corporation. The Director found the author's topic interesting and was interested in the feedback, which will provide her with some insight into the makeup of future training modules for the employees within the company. More importantly, the Director was interested in finding out if the use of humor in the workplace impact performance in any way and in turn heightens job satisfaction, which is one of Cendant's goals in employee relations.

### Survey

The thesis adviser approved the survey (see Appendix A) and on February 20, 2001 it was deployed in a word document to seven managers within Cendant Corporation located in several states throughout the United States and Canada. Initially, the author wanted to have 100 surveys returned, but the manner in which the survey was deployed left to chance the amount returned. The managers in turn sent the document to employees who report to them. Several employees took the process a step further by emailing the survey to other employees who might not necessarily be in their particular department with instructions to them to send the completed surveys back to the author.

The email sent to the managers with the attached survey assured them that the responses of the employees would be confidential and would in no way be used to jeopardize their positions within Cendant. The participants were also assured of

confidentiality before they completed the survey and were also instructed to return the surveys to the author's personal home e-mail address for confidentiality purposes.

The respondents were instructed to rate their organization and themselves on the role humor plays in their everyday interactions with their co-workers, managers, and supervisors. The responses to these questions should be noted by clicking on the response that best describes their answers and highlight it or change the font color. Section two, which was an open input section, had text boxes inserted for the respondents to type in their answers. Many were interested in the topic so there were prompt responses with a few requests for follow up on the results. The author contacts the managers via e-mail to thank and inform them of the response rate.

#### Data Collection

The survey was used to collect data for this thesis. The author spoke with the Director of Call Center Training in Cendant Corporation, on February 19, 2001 for instruction and permission to deploy the survey within the corporation. The director read the survey and was satisfied with the subject as well as the method and confidentiality issues. The director gave the author permission on February 20, 2001 to send the surveys out to managers in different locations in the United States and Canada.

In addition to measuring humor as an effective motivational tool in the workplace, the survey also helped the author to gain insight into the employee's satisfaction with their jobs or their work arrangements. The survey also examines the effects humor has on

the relationships between the employee and their coworkers as well as their manager and/or supervisor with relationship to how they feel about their jobs.

The author's intent was to have 100 surveys completed, which would give a good reflection of the use of humor as an effective motivational tool in Cendant Corporation. Because the author agreed to allow the survey to be shared among employees within units, it is not possible to ascertain the exact number of surveys distributed. However, she estimated the number to be 120. There were 87 surveys completed and returned, therefore, the author estimates a response rate of 72%. Gathering of the completed surveys was done via e-mail as the original was deployed electronically in a Word document. The instructions were for the respondents to insert their responses in text boxes provided in the open input section of the document and highlight their choice of response and change the color of the font to record their responses in the objective section of the survey.

The respondents were given the option of returning the survey directly to the author's off site email address or mailing the completed document to the author for confidentiality reasons. This helped the author as well as the respondents to feel secure that the responses were used solely for the purpose with which it was intended. No one except the author could track the responses to specific managers or divisions. For the purpose of the study the author was primarily interested in collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data from the Cendant Corporation population. Having the respondents send the surveys back to the author from their work email addresses or mailed with a return address, helped the author ensure that only one survey came from each respondent.

## Chapter IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Introduction

The author's primary assumption was that humor is an effective motivational tool in the workplace and the use of humor would also impact job satisfaction for the employees. Based on the literature research, review, and some professional experience, the author had a few expectations as to what these data would show. The author felt that the respondent who reports that they are comfortable with humorous comments made by their manager, supervisor and or coworker would report that they are satisfied with their jobs. On the other hand, the author felt that respondents reporting that they were uncomfortable with humorous comments made by their manager, supervisor and or coworkers would report dissatisfaction with their jobs. This assumption came from some key findings in the literature review.

The author's primary assumption was based on a study of the use of humor to motivate students in a classroom. Since Wanzer, (1995, as cited by Annandale, 1999) says that in the classroom, students use humor to gain liking from their professors, the author felt that incorporating humor in teaching modules for Call Center Training as well as in the general workplace at Cendant Corporation can motivate employees which ultimately result in job satisfaction.

### Data Review

The author's hypothesis that effective humor impacts employee job performance and job satisfaction was supported as indicated in Table 1. In analyzing the data, the author found that among the 71% of respondents reporting high job satisfaction, 76% felt motivated by humor. The author believes that this figure suggests a close link between the use of humor as motivation in the workplace and job satisfaction for employees. The author is satisfied that the assumption is proven and there is a definite link between the use of humor in the workplace as motivation which ultimately leads to job satisfaction.

Table 2 shows that high job satisfaction and effective humor go hand in hand. Of the 87 respondents, 73% reported that humor in the workplace is effective and 71% attribute high job satisfaction to effective humor. Finally, in Table 3, there is evidence that ineffective humor in the workplace affects job satisfaction, as only 2% of respondents reported to have high job satisfaction with ineffective humor. The author concludes that there is a definite link between humor motivating employees in the workplace and there is a definite link to job satisfaction as well.

Table 1

#### Humor Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
High Job Satisfaction	62	71%
Feel Motivated by Humor in the Workplace	66	76%
High Job Satisfaction/Humor Motivation	49	56%

Table 2

Effective Humor and High Job Satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
High Job Satisfaction	62	71%
Effective Humor in the Workplace	64	73%
High Job Satisfaction / Effective Humor	62	71%

Table 3

Ineffective Humor and High Job satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
High Job Satisfaction	62	71%
Ineffective Humor in the Workplace	23	26%
High Job Satisfaction/ Ineffective Humor	2	2%

The author also examined the impact of ineffective humor and low job satisfaction among employees (see Table 4). Only 6% of the respondents indicated low job satisfaction and 26% reported that humor in the workplace is ineffective. While this result is not as marked as the result of effective humor and job satisfaction ratings, the author still believes that the data provide evidence suggesting a relationship between ineffective humor and low job satisfaction among employees.

Table 4

Ineffective Humor and Low Job Satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Low Job Satisfaction	5	6%
Ineffective Humor in the Workplace	23	26%
Low Job Satisfaction/ Ineffective Humor	5	6%

To further examine the hypothesis that humor is motivating in the workplace and subsequently promotes job satisfaction, the author also looked at effective humor and low job satisfaction (see Table 5). There is evidence that effective humor has very little to do with low job satisfaction, as 73% of respondents reported effective humor in the workplace, 3% responded that there is low job satisfaction with effective humor.

Table 5

Effective Humor and Low Job Satisfaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Low Job Satisfaction	5	6%
Effective Humor in the Workplace	64	73%
Low Job Satisfaction/ Effective Humor	3	3%

For both males and females, similarities were found in the scores for job satisfaction and humor motivation. The author wanted to find out if the claim made by

Ziv (1984), that women laugh more than men in humor appreciation hence would feel more motivation, would prove true in Cendant Corporation, bearing in mind that this experiment is being done in one work culture. Of the 29 male respondents, 69% felt motivated by humor and of the 58 female respondents, there is also a score of 69% who feel motivated by humor (see Table 6). The author feels that this shows that both males and females in Cendant appreciate humor on the same level. Regarding high job satisfaction, 59% of males respondents and 57% of females respondents reported high job satisfaction, showing that both genders having about the same feeling regarding humor and job satisfaction in the workplace. Employees at Cendant Corporation both males and females had below 10% in the score of low job satisfaction indicating that over 75% of the employees seem satisfied with their jobs.

Table 6

Humor and Gender

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Feel Motivated by Humor -- Males	20	69%
High Job Satisfaction -- Males	17	59%
Low Job Satisfaction -- Males	2	7%
Feel Motivated by Humor -- Females	40	69%
High Job Satisfaction -- Females	33	57%
Low Job Satisfaction -- Females	5	9%



While examining the link between humor as motivation in the workplace and job satisfaction, the survey helped the author to look at associated behaviors. Table 7 indicates that of the 76 respondents, 87% reported that they feel more commitment to their jobs while 88% enjoy positive relationships on the job. This works for better working relations all around and would certainly promote job satisfaction and productivity. On the other hand, some results of ineffective humor in the workplace, as recorded in Table 8, show 5% of respondents having no job commitment, 10% reported lack of motivation, and 6% had rigid work atmosphere.

Table 7

Behaviors (Results) of Effective Humor in the Workplace

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Feel More Commitment to Job	76	87%
Feel Motivated by Humor in the Workplace	66	76%
Enjoy Positive Relationships on the job	77	88%

Table 8

Behaviors (Results) of Ineffective Humor in the Workplace

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Ineffective Humor in the Workplace	23	26%
No Job Commitment	4	5%
Lack of Motivation	9	10%
Rigid Work Atmosphere	5	6%

While the electronic version of this survey has not been proven to be a reliable tool for collecting this kind of data, the author has taken care to ensure that the information provided is as reliable as possible. When the surveys were returned by email, the author checked to ensure that there is one survey from one participant and that there were no repeats.

To further ensure that the survey could find the result, which the author seeks, the author tested the hypothesis that humor is motivational in the workplace and also promotes job satisfaction. The findings obtained by the author are consistent with the findings made by Blumenfeld and Alpern (1994) that humor promotes job satisfaction as well as motivates in the workplace.

As a result of the findings of the survey, the author feels that the behaviors associated with the use of humor, as a motivational tool in the workplace is consistent with previous findings on the topic.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the beginning of this research, the author sought to find evidence to support her theory that humor in the workplace impacts job satisfaction as well as production. Through the review of relevant literature, the author found a correlation between the use of effective humor in the workplace to motivate employees and job satisfaction.

The data, as well as the literature reviewed, revealed that effective humor in the workplace is a motivational tool for the employees. This is evidenced from the survey in that the majority of respondents who reported high job satisfaction also rated humor as motivation for them. On the other hand, the small number of employees who had low job satisfaction indicated that they were not motivated by humor.

Both the literature and the data show that employees respond favorably to effective humor in the workplace. Some behaviors attributed to effective humor are the reduction of stress, positive relationships in the workplace between managers/supervisors and subordinates, and the motivation to work more. There is also more job commitment and a more enjoyable work atmosphere associated with effective humor in the workplace. The author deduced from the survey that ineffective humor has negative effects in the workplace resulting in low job commitment, lack of motivation and the work atmosphere is rigid. This conclusion needs more research for validation as the survey was done in one corporation.

In providing insight into the use of humor as motivation in the workplace, the research and data presented in this thesis revealed that humor promoted job satisfaction and enhanced productivity. The author feels that by incorporating the use of humor as motivation into the curriculum of any training and development department, trainer and workers would improve their performance as well as contribute to their organizations in more positive ways.

#### Future Study

The author believes that the review of the literature and the survey done for this research have made contributions to information being gathered related to humor in the workplace. Researchers must continue to probe the question, "Is humor an effective motivational tool in the workplace?" Furthermore, the author believes it is very important that future studies explore the impact of humor on job satisfaction in the success of other organizations bearing in mind factors such as productivity, morale, and the retention of their employees.

The confirmation of humor as an effective motivational tool in the workplace and its contribution to success in the organization can trigger willingness to invest more time, effort, and money to help trainers build and enhance the use of humor as a skill to be developed. The author hopes that employees everywhere will ultimately answer in the affirmative when the question, "Is humor an effective motivational tool in the workplace?" is posed.

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Appendixes

**Appendix A**

**Survey**

## The Use of Humor in the Workplace

Male ..... Female.....

Age Range - 20-25...26-30 .....31-35...36-40.....41-45...46-50.....51 and above.....

**Please rate your organization on the following dimensions using the rating scale provided. (SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; N-Neutral; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree). Highlight your choice and change the font color.**

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. My company has a relaxed atmosphere  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. My company has a rigid atmosphere  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. People work better when they have a good rapport with their employer and coworkers | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Humor plays an important role in fostering positive relationships in my workplace  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. The use of humor in the workplace by men and women is motivating                   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. Humor is perceived differently based on the person's own background/culture        | SA | A | N | D | SD |

**Rate yourself on the following dimensions using the rating scale provided. (SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; N-Neutral; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree).**

- |  |    |   |   |   |    |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. I feel motivated by humor   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. I feel commitment to my job                                       | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. I experience job related stress                                   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Humorous comments made by my supervisor sometimes offend me       | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. Humorous comments made by my fellow employees sometimes offend me | SA | A | N | D | SD |

6. I have been accused of making  
an inappropriate humorous  
comment at some time

SA    A    N    D    SD

### Open Input

Click for text box and fill in

1. Three "best" things I appreciate about humor while working are:
  - a.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c.
  
2. Three "worst" things are:
  - a.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c.
  
3. The most important thing about "humor in the workplace" that people should remember is:

**Appendix B**  
**Cendant Overview**

Cendant Corporation was established in 1997 when CUC International merged with HFS Inc. One of the foremost providers of travel-related, real estate related and direct-marketing consumer and business services in the world, Cendant is the world's largest hotel franchisor, vacation exchange organization and the world's second largest general used car rental agency.

Cendant is a direct marketer of insurance, travel, shopping, auto and other services to more than 75 million customers and is also the second largest tax preparation service in the United States. The owner of the largest non-municipal car park operator in the UK, Cendant is also the leader in reservation transaction processing for the hotel and car rental industries. Among Cendant's varied functions is the world's largest corporate employee relocation company and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest retail mortgage originator in the United States.

At a glance, Cendant's real estate franchises include; Century 21®, Coldwell Banker® and ERA®. The hotel franchises include brands such as; Days Inn®, Howard Johnson®, Knights Inn®, Ramada Inn®, Super 8®, Travelodge®, Villager® and Wingate Inn®. For car rental there is AVIS® and Cendant's Direct Marketing Division provides access to insurance, travel, shopping, auto and other services to over 75 million consumers through Autovantage®, Credit Card Guardian®, FISFI- Madison Financial®, Privacyguard®, Shoppers Advantage® and Travelers Advantage®.