

# Bringing Back the Happy



As the COVID-19 crisis continues, how can we inject some much-needed joy into our work?

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

**To Our Readers:** *There are no foolish questions. Chances are...if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to lynn@soshms.com which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.*

## Re: Bringing Back the Happy

Dear Lynn,

*Help! Going to work was always fun for me. I've been fortunate in that I've enjoyed being with my patients, and my staff always seemed so happy-go-lucky. Until now. With coronavirus turning everything upside down, our once-upbeat office is more subdued, and the new atmosphere is starting to take its toll. All our patients seem to want to talk about*

*revolve around politics or the virus (neither topic a lighthearted one), smiles are not given as generously as they once were, and the overall*

*edented" is one of those words that in recent times, you don't ever want to use in a drinking game.) There is no doubt that we could all use a little*

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*weariness that is 2020 has replaced what was a fun environment. I am certain we WILL get through this, but in the meantime, any ideas on how we can inject some much-needed joy back into our work?*

more joy these days, and if we allow ourselves to concentrate on what we can do, instead of what we can't, we might eventually begin to see our way out.

These are unprecedented times for sure. (Word to the wise: "unprec-

If you are willing to make the effort, here are five ideas (little, if any  
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cost; little effort) that can help get the happy juices flowing back into your workspace.

## 1) Focus on Well-being (Definition: The State of Being Comfortable, Healthy, or Happy)

The fact that there is so much despair surrounding the many lives that the coronavirus has touched worldwide, taking better care of ourselves should be especially high on everyone's priority list. It's easy to say "build your immunity" to avoid being the next target of this virus or to reduce the severity. Immunity is not solely reliant on any one activity (e.g., exercising, getting enough sleep, reducing stress, taking proper vitamins, improving nutrition). It is a combination of all the above.

Committing to a healthier lifestyle is a rewarding goal and probably one of the best things you can do for yourself—pandemic or not. Why not take it a step further? Start a new tradition and organize a work challenge that involves the entire staff. Chart, recognize, and applaud each other when steps forward have been made; have an in-house "healthy lunch day" one day a week or reward a "no-sugar" day. Hold your own team walk-a-thon or sponsor one seeking community participation. (Great marketing opportunity) The possibilities are endless. One bonus of doing more things together is that it inspires better work relationships leading to an improved office culture. Another is a healthier, more energetic team. There is no downside to being healthy. None. (Well, other than possibly needing a new wardrobe).



**At Halloween, patients were encouraged to guess how many candy corns were in the jar and the lab tech that drew my blood was dressed as none other than Dracula.**

## 3) Inject Some FUN into Your Day

Hard to think of FUN and PANDEMIC in the same sentence; however, it is likely to be more important now than ever before. Most patients would agree that medical offices should at the very least be clean, run on time, and be HIPAA-compliant. But does that mean they can't also be FUN?

Permit me to share my own experience to shed some light on this point. My medical doctor is one who never held back in the FUN department—one of the many reasons I have not left him for another. If my appointment were on a Friday during football season here in Seahawk territory, I could expect to see him and his entire staff in "Friday Hawk" gear. Recently, during my annual medical exam, I sat in the treatment room awaiting his entrance. To my surprise (and cheerful laughter), in he walked, not in his normal "white coat" attire, but sporting a black t-shirt and a BRIGHT, *blinding* orange jacket, in celebration of Halloween Eve. The office was decorated to match the holiday, staff masks inscribed with "boo" sayings, and a sign that pointed to a pail of candy set off to the side that read, "Help yourself to Trick or Treat, at a safe distance of 6+ feet". There was a contest (with prize) encouraging patients to guess how many candy corns were in the jar and the lab tech that drew my blood was dressed as none other than Dracula.

It was obvious that everyone just seemed to really enjoy being at work. It was almost as if fun and laughter were the main contagions here and at least for the moment, COVID had taken a back seat. The benefit of

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## 2) Communicate

It's not hard to imagine that there are those among us who wonder, "What's going to happen? Is our practice going to survive this pandemic? Will I have a job 3 or 6 months from now?" Staff are looking for hopeful answers specifically in today's unstable job climate. And while worrying is non-productive, it is hard not to go there, under the circumstances. Likewise, it becomes difficult for employers to put on their leadership hats and address the anxieties while having concerns of their own. They may not have all the answers, but offering empathy and truth can help calm fears at a time when it is most needed and appreciated. The fact that doctors are willing to make the time to reach out to their employees and say to them, "We're going to get through this just fine!" or, "We have a plan moving forward and will tackle whatever bumps in the road we face." or, "I feel pretty confident we'll be just fine." are statements that can be comforting and supportive, and can put troubled minds at ease.

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having fun at work is a tremendous motivator. Employees are more likely to learn from and help each other, energizing overall morale and performance. If you struggle to dream up innovative ways to inject some fun into your

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workday—ask your staff for ideas. For sure, they can help. Be open to their suggestions.

By the way, the medical care and attention I received was never, nor should it have been, compromised. In fact, my doctor comprehensively addressed everything he needed to, listened to, and answered all my questions. The good-spirited atmosphere was a great big plus.

**4) Smile More**

Did you know that children, on average, smile more than 400 times a day? Adults—not so much. Is it possible we outgrow them to some degree the more we age? We know that smiling releases Serotonin (a major neurotransmitter) responsible for stimulating happy thoughts. Imagine the possibilities of living a world with more smiles? Let's take the workplace for example. Happy thoughts lead to happy employees and happy employees lead to more productivity. Sometimes all it takes is a smile to get the positive vibes rolling.

If you are one who thinks that wearing a mask during COVID-19 hides the smiles on our faces, think again. Some offices made sure to keep their smiles ever-present while also remaining mask-compliant and SAFE! One wore masks that displayed a plastic window in the front allowing their own beautiful smiles to be visible, while another had a variety of humorous smiles professionally printed on theirs. Still another used colored markers to manually draw smiley faces right on the mask. Everyone agreed that although their own version of *designer* masks became the hottest topic of conversation with their patients, they were quick to point out that they were always able to see the concealed smiles behind their patients' face coverings. "All you have to do", they said, "is look in a person's eyes. When someone genuinely smiles, their eyes automatically light up. Their eyes never lie!"

**5) Change the Topic of Conversation**

Topics that are sure to cause conflict are those that revolve around politics and religion. That has never been truer than in this politically charged environment. So, do everyone a favor and avoid unnecessary confrontation by simply and politely changing the subject to a more neutral one. Make it an office policy if that will ensure compliance. When unwanted topics come up, address it before it takes flight. "Mrs. Jones, \_\_\_ fill in the topic \_\_\_

has proven not to be a friendly topic for discussion. I'd be much more interested in hearing what's new with you or how your family is doing." or "How 'bout those Dodgers?!" (World Series Champions) (As an aside, did you ever wonder why they call it the *World Series* when it involves only the USA and one team from Canada?)

To be clear, it is not the doctor's duty to make the workplace fun. It is their responsibility, however, to allow fun to happen. So go ahead—LOL, LYAO, FOTFL... It's never too late to release those endorphins and spread good vibes through the office. For everyone's sake.

*"There is little success where there is little laughter."*  
—Andrew Carnegie **PM**



**Ms. Lynn Homisak**, President of SOS Healthcare Management Solutions, carries a Certificate in Human Resource Studies from Cornell University School of Industry and Labor Relations. She is the 2010 recipient of Podiatry Management's Lifetime Achievement Award and was inducted into the PM Hall of Fame. She is also an Editorial Advisor for Podiatry Management Magazine and is recognized nationwide as a speaker, writer, and expert in staff and human resource management.

