

# Learn to laugh

THREE LESSONS TO RESTORE YOUR PERSPECTIVE AND RENEW YOUR SPIRIT



I was excited to speak to the class of newly hired employees. As CEO, I had always taken pride in personally relating the company's history as well as its strong values-based culture to each new hire class. Approaching the room, I could hear the program leader introducing me, recounting the many successes the company was enjoying and letting the class know how special my opening message would be. I felt my chest swell with pride as I listened outside the door.

Smiling and confident, I entered the room with a sense of importance. Holding my morning coffee, I walked to the front and welcomed everyone to his or her first day with the company. After placing my mug on one of the classroom tables, I casually sat on the corner of that same table, adopting the relaxed posture that I imagined a CEO should take, and started my message.

Instantly, the world turned upside down. I had failed to realize that putting my entire body weight on the end of that table would cause the other end to flip skyward. Within seconds, the table was literally soaring, accompanied by a dark waterfall of steaming coffee, and both were flying straight toward me. I sprawled helplessly on the floor with my legs splayed in the air and uttered a high-pitched shriek while the class looked on in disbelief. Although the table

missed me, the coffee didn't, and I was bathed from head to toe in scalding java.

I will never forget the image of each newly hired employee, astonished and immobile, looking down at the CEO who had just screamed like a child. Clearly, it was not my best moment. But then, a miracle happened.

The absurdity of how I looked and what they must be thinking became so clear I started to laugh. It began as a chuckle but quickly grew into a doubled-over belly laugh as I crawled to my knees wiping coffee from my face. Within seconds, the class started laughing with me and soon we were roaring so loudly that people from other offices were coming to see what was happening.

In more than a decade of giving the welcoming address, this particular session is the one I will remember because it taught me again the power of laughter.

Learn to laugh at yourself. Regardless of your role or title, it's easy to take yourself and what you do too seriously. If you're not careful, you will cross the line that divides responsibility and obsession, and you will find that the price of pursuing perfection is much too high. Laughing at your mishaps and mistakes reminds you that you aren't

perfect and aren't expected to be. Like an instant vacation, laughter restores your sense of perspective and enables you to relax, making you not only happier but also more effective.

Learn to laugh at life. Over time, your day-to-day worries can be like too much spyware, clogging your mind's ability to function. Your imagined consequences will almost always be greater than your real ones. But when you really laugh, you sweep away all the debris of your difficulties, both real and imagined, and return to your day with a new ability to tackle your challenges.

Learn to laugh with others. The ability to laugh makes you more vulnerable and approachable — as a leader and as a person. These qualities enable the people in your life to connect with you more easily and, in the end, help you to build a greater sense of unity in your team, your community or your family. Whatever else my new hires learned that day, they knew they could always laugh with me, and I believe it made me a better leader.

In the survival kit of life, laughter is surely one of your greatest tools. Use it today, and every day, to uplift your spirit and connect to the people who matter most. <<

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