



MANAGE YOUR BUSY SEASON WITH A DOSE OF HUMOR

I'll be the first one to tell you improv isn't all about comedy and making people laugh. However, my introduction to improv was a result of finding and using comedy as a coping mechanism to deal with a number of challenges life threw my way.

There is great power in being able to leverage comedy, laughter, and improv. The principles of improvisation have been a literal life saver for me in dealing with extremely stressful situations throughout my life. The fact is, stress is a part of our everyday lives – it can come from so many sources, some are the result of the daily frustrations of life including our jobs, others from unexpected challenges, such as major health issues. And as accountants we are all too aware of the big looming event – “busy season” – which introduces A LOT of stress at work...which can seep into your life outside of work.

A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down

Mary Poppins was definitely onto something here: to digest something undesirable, but necessary – add something sweet to go with it! I am definitely in favor of taking this advice literally – sweets and snacks made available during the long, endless hours of busy season can certainly go a long way...but so can humor.

Is there anything better than experiencing a really good laugh? It's one of those sensations that lightens your mood and makes you want more. When something is funny, it feels good – it's the sweet that can make medicine taste a little better. So, why are so many workplaces seemingly devoid of humor? I often ask my audiences, "When was the last time your coworkers burst out into laughter and it wasn't at your expense?" The answer definitely depends on your culture and your colleagues. But all too often, that humor isn't as common and present as it should be...and stress can be a big reason for that.

But, a regular dose of laughter reduces stress, and it's desirable. In fact, a Forbes article written by Jacquelyn Smith cited a few statistics that validate the importance of humor, "A Robert Half International survey, for instance, found that 91% of executives believe a sense of humor is important for career advancement; while 84% feel that people with a good sense of humor do a better job. Another study by Bell Leadership Institute found that the two most desirable traits in leaders were a strong work ethic and a good sense of humor."

I get it though, people are in survival mode, just trying to get through till quitting time. In fact, when you're facing a tough deadline or enduring an impossible task, the last thing you probably want to hear is some joker saying, "Hey, did you hear the one about the priest, the rabbi, and Bill Clinton walking into a bar?" You want to rip their tonsils out. However, humor need not be stand-up routine – it can be present in how you finish a request in an email, or a brief quip in passing to a colleague in the lunch room. It can also take more sophisticated forms that take more time – such as [kind] pranks when it's someone's birthday, or someone reaches a career milestone, or if your college football team beat your colleague's football team.

What Do You Get When You Have a Room of Accountants During Busy Season?

A group of stressed out accountants. There's no punch line to that question – just the unfortunate reality of far too many workplaces in and out of busy season. So, how do you be a part of the change? The following are a handful of ways you can help decrease stress and hopefully increase humor and fun (all while being incredibly efficient and productive):

- **Smile.** It seems so simple, but body language – especially a smile – can dramatically impact how you and all your co-workers feel. It takes the edge off tense moments; it

communicates that you aren't consumed with negative feelings; it makes you more approachable and others will feel comfortable around you; it invites positive emotions.

- **Be prepared.** No one is amused by the clown at work that isn't pulling their weight, shows up late to meetings and can't be relied on. Having humor in the workplace doesn't mean you shirk your responsibilities. In fact, humor is best enjoyed with you and those around you are confident – and that confidence, especially in the workplace, comes with being prepared for your job. Preparation for the days and weeks ahead will allow you to be less stressed and more confident – which will not only help you and your clients, it'll help your colleagues.
- **Adapt.** Adaptability is a HUGE part of improvisational humor – it IS improv. A lot of things in life can be stressful, but we have the ability to "go with the flow." Adapting is simply the ability to readjust as you experience things – whether that be readjust your sales pitch, or the time in the morning you give a presentation or having to select a different menu item when your first choice is sold out. No matter the situation, it takes flexibility and confidence to address change head-on – and let's face it, things are always changing, things rarely go as planned.
- **Have the right attitude.** Your attitude affects everything. We've been told this since being little children – depending on our attitude, we'll see the world a certain way which can either be positive or negative. It's also incredibly contagious. No matter the source of your stress, your success to overcome depends on your ability to perceive things positively. You either can see your situation as a challenge and make the most of it, or you can succumb to it and let the stress win. Your ability to positively approach the workday will dramatically affect the vibe of your group – even if you have some Debbie Downers. Perhaps you won't be able to win everyone over, but there will be plenty who will positively respond to your cheerful and witty vibes.

Be the Stress Antidote

So you're committed to bringing more levity to busy season – good, you all need it! As you make the effort to get to know your team members and engage with them, you'll soon be able to determine your comedic boundaries. Most of you probably know your colleagues well enough to already you're your boundaries – but consider times where you need to collaborate with other teams, new clients, outside resources, etc. Just remember, wit and humor is appreciated, and it's needed! So, let yourself laugh, doing so will reduce your stress and helps others reduce theirs. Laughter is the proven antidote, and it comes naturally when the company culture is conducive to it – so, be a part of it!