

Humor in the Workplace: **Some Helpful Considerations.**

"Good" & "Bad" Humor

1. **Appropriate** workplace humor is not only permissible, but often smart, helpful and necessary to assure a loyal and productive workforce.
2. **Inappropriate** humor is not only unprofessional, dumb and potentially illegal, but it can also damage the loyalty and productivity of the workforce.

A Humor Self-Contract

1. I *WILL* use humor that is likely to make colleagues feel better about:
 - me • themselves • others • the work they do
2. I *WILL NOT* use humor that is likely to offend, divide rather than unite colleagues, or increase stress.

Before Telling That Ethnic Joke, Ask Yourself:

1. Would I be saying or telling this **if members of the group** mentioned in the joke were **in the room**?
2. **If I substituted my own group** for those mentioned in my joke would I, or others of my group be offended?
3. Might this comment or joke **reinforce and strengthen negative stereotypes and prejudices**, offend members of a group, or ridicule or further weaken those who are already disempowered?
4. Does this comment or joke **rely on stereotypes or prejudices that laugh at** members of already discriminated groups, (as opposed to laughing at the absurdity of prejudice)?
5. Is there a fair possibility that, after the "telling," **others will be offended, embarrassed, uncomfortable, stressed, or feel negative** towards the jokester, themselves, or others with whom they must work?

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A New, 2-Way Social Contract

The diversity of our current workforce, including race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, education, family life and personality, seem to be obstacles to using humor in the workplace.

Part 1: For the Humorist/Perpetrator:

- a. When a manager or employee **uses humor** towards a customer or employee in a way that has a negative impact, (intentionally or not,) that person **agrees to pay attention to the merits of the feedback**, not just to the merits of the feedback-giver.
- b. The humorist **agrees to** consider the feedback as a gift, and prove trustworthiness by respecting the feedback, taking no reprisals, and **changing their behavior** to have a more positive impact.

Part 2: For the Humoree/Victim:

- a. When someone **experiences humor** that has a negative impact, that person agrees to **give clear and timely feedback** on the merits of the humor behavior (not the merits of the humorist) and how it has negatively impacted on them or their work.
- b. The "Humoree" **agrees to treat the humorist as innocent until proven guilty** by giving feedback to unwelcomed humor without attacking the humorist. The humoree also agrees to **recognize positive change** when the humorist demonstrates more professional behavior.