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**FIRM MANAGEMENT**

# How Humor Can Create a Positive Culture in Client Service

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Apr. 27, 2022



If you work in a client services profession – for instance, an accounting or consulting firm – you understand that you need to wear many hats (at least to be successful within the company). But, what some may not understand prior to entering the business, and ingratiating themselves in the day-to-day, is that you also need to try on many different *personalities* as well.

Of course, this isn't on the level of James McAvoy in the movie *Split* – employees aren't changing who they are as people, but there is indeed a level of morphing that needs to happen day-in and day-out.

Given the number of clients that employees are working with at any given time, there is a constant need to adjust how you communicate, how you approach situations, and ultimately how you solve problems. Some clients may prefer witty banter, others are straight to the point; some may prefer to give you the reins, while others will want to be more involved in processes.

With all of that said, it can be difficult to maintain one holistic culture separate from clients. Fortunately, this is something an agency and/or firm can cultivate through different actions, including using humor and levity (when appropriate) as a way to build bonds, strengthen empathy and enhance “chameleon-like” capabilities.

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Here are a few ways in which humor not only enhances culture, but builds strong employees on an individual level as well

- **Better listening skills.**
  - Humor, due to the connective nature required, encourages active listening. People not only have to listen intently to what others are saying, but continue the conversation in a relevant and engaging way. This not only makes people better listeners, but encourages them to be better conversationalists and creatives as well. They can read the room and therefore understand the needs those within the room as well, including colleagues, employees and clients.
- **Magnifies leadership skills.**

- Ultimately, leadership skills are rooted in finding common ground, and the ability to adjust based on what any given audience wants or needs. In any given moment, it's about reading the room and pivoting when need be. This is exactly the same as comedy, except as it relates to improv. These kinds of “redirecting” leadership skills – including those that take bits and pieces of input and strategies to make one, cohesive plan – all which can quite directly stem from humor training, can be the reason an agency wins (and keeps) new business.
- **Builds resilience.**
  - Taking into consideration lingering and latent after-shocks of the pandemic, as well as the great resignation, creating a more resilient workforce is a top concern among many leaders – a big question on executives' minds is, how can our people bounce back from setbacks and learn from mistakes? Well, as we all know from seeing comedians flop on stage, resiliency is a key part of their set, and their overall business success. Using pivoting skills inherent in humor, employees and leaders can become more resilient in the face of disapproval and adversity; furthermore, it also encourages them to become more self-reflective in a constructive way. This is key for leading a winning business, particularly throughout disruptive moments in time.

Overall, the most important skill that can be learned from humor is the ability to recover (and subsequently excel) from failure; to take things that have gone wrong, and right them in the future. In client services, this can be spread across an agency or company and applied to both new business and future clients, and ultimately become part of the fabric of the company.

And while the above aren't the only ways to maintain culture in a client services business, they are certainly helpful in providing a foundation to do so. Using humor as a bedrock for all staff to stand on, during both times of success and times of disruption – and despite a deluge of different clients with different personalities and values – guarantees a way to always bring them back “home.”

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*As Chief Innovation Officer at [Peppercomm](#), Jackie Kolek is responsible for identifying challenges and opportunities clients are facing and developing new solutions and services to help them mitigate risks and capitalize on changes to drive their business forward. Kolek leads key client accounts and drives new business acquisition. She currently leads the firm's financial and professional services sector, developing and executing fully-integrated*

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