

The effort it takes to deliver superior customer satisfaction can be serious business. After all, there's an awful lot at stake. We know from our 29 years of working with clients across a myriad of industries that organizations' fortunes ~~can literally~~ rise and fall based on how well they are satisfying their customers.

*There is no time to joke around if we want to keep our shareholders happy and all keep our jobs, right?!*

*Or is there?*

The Wall Street Journal recently highlighted how workplace humor is an integral part of the NBA champion Golden State Warriors' success. A basketball team, you say? *Please*, that's not a real business! Maybe not exactly like yours and mine, but the Warriors are an organization with incredibly high customer (i.e., fan) expectations, a workplace full of highly paid experts in their craft who work under extremely stressful conditions, day-in and day-out. Your company may be comprised of more 5'8"ers than seven footers, but in other respects there is ~~probably some correlation~~ likely a good deal of similarity.

Of course, the Warriors have immensely talented players, ~~but~~ the WSJ highlights how the team attributes much of their success to their workplace culture, ~~which is~~ driven by an environment—led by coach Steve Kerr ~~—of not where people don't take~~ing themselves seriously all the time and ~~always often~~ are looking for the next prank, good-natured insult, or joke. ~~—~~Losing streaks don't last long, in part, because the team stays loose at all times, knowing that fingers are not going to be pointed, even though they understand that they are accountable to each other.

The humor that goes on in NBA locker rooms (or at Dunder-Mifflin for that matter) is probably not appropriate for most workplaces, and care certainly does need to be taken so that a culture of funniness does not devolve into turning the office into a harassment zone.

But creating a culture where employees feel relaxed, empowered, and confident can translate to happier and more productive employees who will take more pride in their work and deliver better service for your customers. Successful workplaces and businesses are built on relationships, and those ~~that who~~ are on solid ground with colleagues and customers can use appropriate humor to enhance those relationships. The linkage between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is something we have observed for years in our work with clients, and this has been ~~proven demonstrated~~ in ~~many~~ numerous other studies, as well.

The *Wall Street Journal* piece states that "One way to think about professional basketball players is as co-workers who spend all their time together. They might have hated each other if the Warriors didn't have a way of diffusing such tension: laughing at it.

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Scholars researchers have found that employees in funnier business environments are better at their jobs and happier when they're in the office.

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Jessica Mesmer-Magnus, a professor of management at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington ~~management professor, was the~~ co-authored of a study published by the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* that showed humor positively correlates with work performance. "One conclusion derived

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from these findings," according to the paper ~~says~~, "might be that organizations should attempt to cultivate humor within the workplace."

Some organizations have made humor part of their customer-facing identity with great success. Consider Southwest Airlines, traditionally at or near the top of the ACSI's airline customer satisfaction rankings. Customers obviously know that flying 200 people across the country in a jet aircraft is a serious proposition, yet Southwest's flight attendants are well-known for lightening the mood with remarks ~~like~~ such as: "We'll be dimming the lights in the cabin. Pushing the light-bulb button will turn your reading light on. However, pushing the flight-attendant button will not turn your flight attendant on." ~~(not sure if we need to cite this, but I got it here: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/southwest-airlines-jokes-1652775>)~~

The lighthearted atmosphere Southwest creates also may ~~also~~ serve to proactively diffuse difficult customer situations. Customers may think, "I can't be too mad at them – they're so funny!" ~~;-~~ Of course, this only works when the company is consistently delivering on its core promise; in this case getting passengers safely and comfortably to their destination on time and at a fair price.

So, keep it within bounds, but go ahead and try out that dumb joke you've been practicing on an unsuspecting colleague, and you might just start something big!