Laughter: the best medicine?

Joggie Hattingh, President: SAAHIP

We often see the quote “Laughter: the best medicine” and yes, quite often you change a miserable day by having a good laugh.

Then follows the question: How often do we laugh in the workplace? Is it still perceived to be a taboo? As a young intern, I did not dare to laugh at work! What I have experienced as a manager is that in pharmacies where there is coherence amongst staff and where people care about each other, they tend to laugh more often. And not only do they laugh more often, they will tell you that they love their work. From my side of the fence I find that these pharmacies fare a lot better when put under pressure. Their work rate is higher and the number of mistakes made fewer.

On the other hand, facilities where there is strife amongst pharmacy personnel tend to have a higher level of absenteeism and quite often you will hear staff complaining about workload and working conditions. Their work seems to be a burden and they will find any excuse to be out of the pharmacy during the day. From where I stand, I often see no correlation between complaints and actual workload, as pharmacies with a higher workload will often not complain.

Do we really know what makes us happy or unhappy in our workplace? We know for certain that a bigger salary will not keep you happy for long. It usually takes two to three months for your lifestyle to catch up with an increased salary and there will be nothing left to show for it! We also know that working in the best resourced facility will also not keep you happy for ever, though working in the worst resourced facility may greatly contribute to unhappiness. So, how much of our private problems do we bring to work? I would presume a lot more than 30 years ago! Thirty years ago you could leave your problems at home, as communication was limited to a telephone and that was reserved for work-related calls only. Yet now our problems seem to follow us! Kids can contact you 24/7 via WhatsApp and Twitter, whilst the bank, attorneys and creditors can catch you anywhere and anytime on your cell phone and should you prefer not to answer, they will SMS you. So, I take it for granted that all your personal and financial problems follow you to work.

It gets even worse if we have interpersonal problems in the work environment. We start dreading getting up in the morning and hate our work! Then how do we address the problem?

Firstly sort out the interpersonal differences you have in the workplace. Communication is the only option, as ignoring the underlying problems will not resolve anything. By the way, a pressure cooker works on the same principle. If needed, bring in a third party, preferably a professional, to help resolve the problem and to prevent discussions from becoming personal insults. A second option is to reduce the use of personal cell phones to tea- and lunch-breaks – it will also improve concentration and work-output!

Also remember not to allow work problems to follow you home! I want to quote the former CEO of Coca Cola, Bryan Dyson’s 30 second speech.

“Imagine life as a game where you are juggling some five balls in the air. They are Work, Family, Friends, Health and Spirit.

“You will soon understand that Work is a rubber ball, if you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls, Family, Friends, Health and Spirit are made of glass. If you drop one of these they will irrevocably be scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same! You must understand that and strive for a balanced life.

“Work efficiently during office time, and leave on time. Give the required time to your family and friends and have proper rest.”

And yes!!! Bring laughter back into the workplace. Once the negativity is gone, the workplace can be a very positive, rewarding and fun environment to be in, even when we are doing very serious work. You may even find that you are able to achieve so much more in the limited time available. Enjoy!!!