THAT’S NOT FUNNY!

HOW TO USE HUMOR APPROPRIATELY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Ground Rules

• It is impossible to discuss appropriate humor without discussing inappropriate humor. In these discussion we ask participants to be thoughtful about what they share, but understand that there will be moments when people discuss inappropriate material that they have found humorous. Be kind to others and thoughtful about what you share and endeavor to hear the person’s learning through these topics. It is 100% okay to opt out of a discussion if you need to take care of yourself.
Overview

How Humor Works  Why we need humor in the workplace  Targets

Risk  Assessing the factors at play  What to do when it works

What to do when it doesn’t
Who are you to tell me about this?

- Actor
- Director
- Writer
- Professional Stand-up Comedian
- Student Affairs Professional
How Humor Works
How Humor Works

• Physiologically – Brain connects two unrelated concepts in an unpredictable way, resulting in an instant of euphoria.

• Socially – People connect with each other over shared experience of trauma, embarrassment, self-acknowledgement, relief.

• Spiritual – Humor allows you to cause a physical response in another human being without physically touching them.
Violation Theory

• The presence of some sort of norm violation, be it a moral norm violation (robbing a retirement home), social norm violation (breaking up with a long-term boyfriend via text message) or physical norm violation (purposefully sneezing directly on a child).

• A “benign” or “safe” context in which the violation takes place (this can take many forms).

• The interpretation of the first two points simultaneously. In other words, one must view, read or otherwise interpret a violation as relatively harmless.
Breakout Group

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH? WHAT MADE YOU LAUGH THAT YOU WERE SURPRISED THAT YOU WERE AMUSED BY?
Why We Need Humor in the Workplace
What it does for us

CONNECTS US TO EACH OTHER
RELIEVES TENSE SITUATIONS
MAKES POINTS IN AN INTRIGUING AND COMPELLING MANNER
SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER
Universality of Humor

Much humor is based in the universality of experience. This video could easily be about how many emails I get.
DISCUSS A TIME SOMEONE SAID SOMETHING AT WORK THAT MADE YOU REALLY LAUGH.
Targets
Who is the target of the humor

- Avoid humor at the expense of someone’s (Including your own)
  - Race
  - Gender or Perceived Gender
  - Color
  - National Origin
  - Religion
  - Age
  - Disability

- Avoid humor that intends to
  - Shame another
  - Paint someone as a target of ridicule
  - Ridicule financial means
  - Questions deeply held beliefs
  - Make light of important issues
Breakout Group

Discuss a time someone made an attempt at humor that was inappropriate or offensive and how the target responded.
Risks
What we risk with inappropriate humor

GENUINE OFFENSE
TAKING THE SPOTLIGHT
PRIORITIZING OUR OWN NEEDS AND EMOTION OVER OTHERS
CAUSING GENUINE HARM
Assessing the Factors at Play
The need to be on the edge

• The closer to the edge of violation, the richer the result. People laugh harder at things that violate norms, but there is a thin line between laughter and offense.
How to be sure you don’t offend.

• There is no way to assure you won’t offend someone with your attempt at humor.
• What is funny to one person, may not be funny for another and they get to decide for themselves.
• The only way to be sure you don’t offend is don’t attempt to be funny, but you still might offend people soooooo . ..
When it works!
When it fails.
Questions & Answers