



The Counselor's Corner

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June, 2007



You have to *want* to laugh

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Most people enjoy a good laugh now and then. But many of us may not realize all the positive effects from that laughter. Although the results have been somewhat mixed, some studies have shown that laughter, and humor in general, have significant benefits to our health and wellbeing. Laughter has been studied to help with stress reduction, chronic pain, immune system function, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, chronic disease management, mental health treatment, and many other areas.

Beyond the benefits to each of us personally, laughter is certainly a social bonding activity. There is some evidence to suggest that women are attracted to men who make them laugh. We all know that laughter is contagious. When you are around people who are laughing you are naturally drawn into the "laughing state of mind." Once you are there your perceptions shift and a great deal of life just seems funny.

Given that laughter is so enjoyable and has many benefits, you might think that we would be laughing all the time. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Human beings have the capacity to interpret the information that comes to their senses in a variety of ways. Each of us has different "rules" by which we make sense of the information that comes to us. Some of us naturally look for the ways in which a situation is humorous. Others tend to de-emphasize those things that could be funny. Some of us rarely get into the laughing mindset.

Do you want to find the world more humorous? There are a few steps that can help. First, recognize that you have some choice in how you view life events. You can choose to always view them seriously or give yourself permission to chuckle once in a while when life throws you a curve. Believe it or not, you have a great deal of control over your perceptions and how you react to what happens around you in the mental choices that you make.

Second, you might want to start asking yourself the question "how is this funny?" every chance you get. Notice the question is NOT "is this funny?" which gives you a yes or no answer. Much of life can be viewed in a humorous light if you just set your perceptual filters to look and/or listen for it. The "how" question presumes that the situation IS funny, and the only thing left for your mind to do is to find out in what way can it be viewed as humorous. In order for this to work, you need to ask this question of yourself frequently (several times a day). While you will not find humor in everything (nor should you), constantly asking yourself "how is this funny?" will begin to shift your perceptions to look for something that will help you laugh.

Third, when you find something funny it is time to laugh. Often times our greatest barrier to enjoying the benefits of a good laugh is our own resistance to the act of laughing. Certainly there are some situations where laughter is inappropriate, but far too often we inhibit ourselves unnecessarily. If you really want to change this, take some time to observe the people around you in the various areas of your life. Find a few that have a good sense of humor and laugh frequently in appropriate situations. Notice the effect their humor has on others. Do they allow themselves to laugh in situations that you would not? If so, maybe it is time to adopt their "laughter mindset" and loosen up a bit.

Finally, put yourself in a position to laugh. Surround yourself with people who enjoy frequent laughter. Laughter is contagious and enjoying the company of those who laugh will help to shift your perceptual filters toward the "laughter/humor mindset."

Maybe it's time to put a little more humor in your life. It doesn't cost anything, it's not fattening, it's healthy, and it feels good. Few things in life come with that kind of guarantee.

So, a guy walks into a bar with a duck and a water buffalo...