Maintaining a Sense of Humor

For my fourth cornerstone I have chosen maintaining a sense of humor. By definition a sense of humor is “the ability to perceive humor or appreciate a joke, the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement, to be amused, to smile or laugh at something funny”. In general people agree that we all have a sense of humor, the results of humor- induced behavior is healthy, and it contributes to positive social interaction. I was once told that one should laugh at least three or four times a day at work and have one belly laugh at least once a week for a positive work environment. Apparently that “gut-busting” laugh engages all 43 facial muscles and the belly, thus exercising them and keeping them functional. Carl Reiner said in an interview on Sunday Morning that you get more out of people when they are happy.

Unfortunately for our purposes in pursuing civil communication, we need to better define humor. Often individuals have used humor to hurt, harm, put down, or threaten others. We have heard racial, blond, sexist, ethnic, lawyer, and religious jokes and probably without thinking have laughed at some. Slapstick comedy has at times been very popular; it was funny to see someone get hit or hurt themselves. This humor is for malice. The humor I am suggesting to maintain is being called “benign humor”. For something to be funny while it breaks your expectations, social taboos or even personal space, it is benign, not dark, relatively inoffensive, and ultimately non-threatening.

Maintaining this sense of humor, I believe, will help to keep our focus on using the tools of civility with the help of the other three cornerstones. I know that some of us have seemed to have lost our sense of humor. Others have used too much of the hurtful humor. Here are some suggestions to get back that healthy sense of humor. First you need to make laughter a priority. When was the last time you had a good belly laugh. Believe me they can go a long way to keep you in a positive and happy mood. All it takes is the attitude that life would be better with a laugh. If you are not laughing much, you can easily put some laughter opportunities in your laugh. There are many comedy shows on TV, the internet has a many ways that you can find a joke or something funny, there are comedy clubs, and cartoons and comic book. One of my bridge friends gets several jokes a month from her friend and shares them at our game. We all get some good laughs from them.

Secondly, you can start to laugh at yourself. Our normal approach is to criticize ourselves, let those negative feelings fester until that is all we see in ourselves as well as others. If you let yourself laugh at a mistake or an imperfection, you are taking that step over and over of accepting yourself. This allows you to let go of the negative and embrace the whole person that you are. Others will follow your lead. They, too, can begin to laugh at themselves. Now in a supportive way we each can laugh at each other.

Thirdly, you need to use humor in your communication with others. It is good to have a joke or two that you know well to share. Probably the best humor is telling a personal story of an embarrassing moment where you and others can laugh at your humanity. Certainly you can share someone’s story if you have their permission. Often it is great to share a funny happening that the person/s you are with were there also. I know that my friends relate stories of all us over the many years if our friendship. There will be times that a little sense of humor in the discussion can calm emotions and help get everyone back to completing the task.

REMEMBER Laugher is contagious! And Smiles are the next best thing.

Hey did you hear the one about….

Orlaine I. Gabert

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