



“Almost all creativity involves purposeful play.”
– Abraham Maslow

We’ve all heard the saying about ‘All Work and No Play’ and we usually associate it with playing *outside* of the workplace. However, research has shown that playing at work has numerous benefits for employees, teams, and organizations.

Play at work is linked with less fatigue, boredom, stress, and burnout in individuals. Play is also positively associated with job satisfaction, sense of competence, and creativity. And, studies show that when a participant receives a task that is presented playfully, they are more involved and spend more time on the task. People are more interested in doing what’s fun.

Research also suggests that the upsides of play extend to workgroups and departments. Teams benefit from play via increased trust, bonding and social interaction, sense of solidarity, and a decreased sense of hierarchy.

Furthermore, findings suggest that play at work can benefit whole organizations by creating a friendlier work atmosphere, higher employee commitment to work, more flexible organization-wide decision making, and increased organizational creativity.

So, what are you waiting for? Time to get to work ... I mean play!

Top 10 Ways to Play More at Work

1. Fun Ice-Breakers

Most people dread regular staff meetings. They're long, they're boring, they're (usually) a waste of time. Who says they have to be that way? Kick off your next meeting or event with a fun ice-breaker.

Simple ice-breakers that are playful and fun get people loosen-up and relaxed. They can literally 'break the ice' for groups that don't know each other well or create some laughter for those that do! There are many different types of ice-breakers for every type of meeting.

Here's are some of my favorites:

1. **Handshake Mingle & Giggle:** Have the group greet each other with a unique greeting. By the time they get to the 4th. or 5th. person, most people have to get creative and that's when the laughter really takes over.
2. **What Animal Am I:** Each person acts out what animal describes them best and the group must guess what it is.
3. **Moving Machinery:** This involves groups of about 4-5 people. They must create a machine or appliance with sound and moving parts. Each person is a unique component of the machine. Then the entire group of people must guess what they are.
4. **'M&M's Bingo:** Give 3 different colored candies to each person. Then reveal the 'key' that indicates what each color stands for. They then must provide a statement for each color. For example: Red = most embarrassing moment, Blue = most proud moment, Green = Bucket-List item, etc.
5. **Storycubes:** These are a great way to get your creative juices flowing. They can be used in several ways. There are 9 cubes with symbols and pictures on each side. People roll the cubes and make up a story that somehow link all the images.

2. Decorate your Office, Cube or Desk

Over the years I've accumulated quite a few 'toys' that I've picked up at trade shows and different events. Not only are they great conversation starters but they are fun to play with too!

I have a Walking Nose, talking Wind-up Cow, springy 'Aliens' and numerous stress balls in various shapes and sizes. My favorite is the troll with flaming orange hair! They're all an integral part of my stress-management strategy.

Office toys lighten the atmosphere and create a warm and welcoming space. Just like having a candy jar on your desk invites fellow co-workers to stop by, a strategically placed office toy will do the same!

3. Celebrate Wacky Holidays

Did you know there's a 'Learn your name in Morse Code' holiday? How about 'Eat Ice-cream for Breakfast' or my favorite, 'Make-up your own Holiday' holiday!

One of my clients was celebrating 'Pirate Day' during one of our workshops, so I showed up in my best 'walk the plank' attire and incorporated a lot of 'Arrrrrrs' in the training! It was great fun for everyone! And the perfect complement to the team-building session.

Check out the lists of wacky, fun and trivial holidays for your organization. Decide to incorporate some or all of them into your workplace. You're guaranteed to create a more playful environment!

4. Get Physical

Many organizations have annual picnics where everyone comes together to enjoy the great outdoors, toss around a frisbee or play games.

Why wait until summer? Start a league of different sports and activities that you can play at work. Maybe you have a warehouse or long hallway that

can be converted to a bowling alley? How about setting up some nets for badminton, volleyball, or basketball? Obviously, safety needs to be considered as well as location. You don't want to bowl down your CEO!

Consider creating a dedicated space that's just for play. Many organizations set up places to allow people to blow off steam, have some fun, and create community and camaraderie at work.

I recently received a game that entails wearing a net basket on your head. The goal is to sink as many baskets as you can in one minute. There are multiple variations of this game to play at work. How about replacing the plastic balls with ideas that are written on paper and crumbled into a ball shape! Whichever ones make it into the basket will be considered!

5. Crayons, Markers, Stickers and Glitter

Everything we need to be successful we learned in Kindergarten ... well almost everything! One thing we got right back then was the use of crayons, markers and the like. Why reserve them just for the classroom?

Pass around flipchart paper and crayons at your next meeting and have people draw the ideas they want to present. Give every employee a coloring book along with the usual company policies and procedures.

Create a gallery where people can post their artwork and have awards for the best use of color, who colored outside the lines, most creative use of glitter, etc. Make sure everyone can win an award for something!

You can also use virtual tools to color your communications! The sky and your imagination is the limit! The point is to have more fun with all the boring and mundane pieces of regular communication!

6. Backwards Dress Day

Borrowing an activity from elementary school, let people come to work with their clothes on backwards, inside out, upside down, and everything in-between. While your clothes may be designed one way, it doesn't mean you can't wear them a different way!

This is an offshoot of casual Friday and not for the conservative! However, utilizing common-sense dress code conduct, backwards dress day can be a playful way to spend the day.

You can even make it day specific; Messy Mondays, Tie-dye Tuesdays, Woolen Wednesdays, etc. Make-up your own 'dress-up' or 'dress down' days! Pajama day isn't just for those that work from home!

7. Superhero or Character for a Day

Everyone wants their 15-mins of fame! Who do you want to be today? Come to work as that person and make everyone call you by their name!

One of my clients spent the day as 'Queen Mother', another as 'Mr. T.' Some were famous actors, historians, politicians and of course Super Heroes! You can even make-up your own! Instead of 'SpongeBob' there's 'Squeegie Sam' or instead of 'The Flash' how about 'The Snail'!

To be or not to be? That is the question and answer for this playful activity!

8. Humor Bulletin Board

Humor is in the eye of the beholder but there are so many things that are 'tastefully' funny out in the world! Invite people to bring in comics, quotes, advertisements, and the like that are humorous to post on the board.

It is important though to have someone monitor the board and take down anything that might be construed as sexual in nature, off-color humor or disparaging. You don't want people being brought up on harassment charges!

Keep it clean. Keep it P.C. Keep it playful!

9. Fun Breaks

Instead of working through your breaks, which many of us do, use them to reconnect with your inner-child. In addition to some of the other ideas listed here, you can use your break to just have fun!

Watch funny videos & memes. Look-up jokes and funny sayings. Skip down the hall to visit a co-worker. Share your smile and self with people you don't know very well at work.

Another way to spend your breaks and lunch hour that is fun and playful is to enjoy a favorite childhood meal. Have 'Mac & Cheese' or a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich! Eat a Happy Meal! Be happy eating your meal! Bring homemade cookies to work or sponsor an ice-cream social! Pop popcorn to watch with your funny videos!

What could be better than that! Takes turns and get everyone in on the fun!

10. Self-Care

Lastly, to have more fun at work, feel more playful, more engaged and happier, you must take care of yourself!

Self-care isn't a 'nice-to' it's a 'must do'! You must get enough sleep. You must eat nutritionally healthy meals (*ice-cream has many great nutrients*). You must move your body. You must rest your body. You must relax your mind. You must enjoy your life!

I could go on, but you get the point. Just as you wouldn't run your car without gas (unless you have an electric car), but even then, you need to recharge the battery.

Without energy we have little reserves left to do what we need to, let alone enjoy it. Put yourself on the top of your 'To-Do' list every day. You will feel better. Work better and have more fun!

Now ... Go Play! There's no time like the Present!