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## Learning to Have Fun

by Barry Koren, AIA, PhD



**Jim Meisenheimer, a professional** speaker whom I admire, says of himself: "I was born serious. I'm just now learning to have fun."

A funny business. At Southwest Airlines, they don't take having fun lightly. It's an integral part of how they've gone from an upstart airline with three planes to being the seventh largest domestic airline. They also win awards for best on-time performance, best baggage handling, and lowest customer complaints. In addition, they're recognized as one of the ten best companies to work for in America.

I'm a fan of Southwest Airlines, as you can see. I like the way they use fun and humor-- whether in the Halloween costumes of their ticket agents, the quips of their flight attendants, or their recorded telephone messages--to distinguish themselves from other airlines. It helps me enjoy the flight and boosts my confidence in them. And the fun and distinction doesn't cost me anything. I don't pay extra for fancy terminals or fancy anything. It all fits together with the message I get from them-- a low-price airline that is fun to fly.

How does Southwest develop this funny side? By valuing fun and

hiring people who have a sense of humor. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Spinoffs from having fun. Fun is fun, but besides that it has some pretty significant productive spinoffs that enable people to do a better job for their clients. Fun reduces tension. It draws people together. It helps people understand each other. It helps teams strive to achieve a common goal that enhances the quality of the services that clients receive.

One of the team goals at Southwest is quick turnaround of a plane from landing to departure. They achieve an incredible 15-minute turnaround when the industry average is double that. Working in teams that excel like this sounds like a lot of fun to me. And likely to result in happy clients. What could be better?

Stretching your capabilities. Another spinoff of fun is that it enhances problem-solving ability. Fun creates a wonderland for your right brain. And you need your right brain. If you're only solving problems using your analytical left brain and not your intuitive right brain, you're handicapping your best efforts.

You experience the fruit of your right brain when you brainstorm. You also experience it when, in a flash, a solution comes to you. Have you ever been faced with a tough problem that you've struggled with, trying to resolve it to little avail? And then you put it aside, and suddenly, out of nowhere comes the answer. Maybe it comes after you take a leisurely walk, or awaken in the morning, or after a shower. It's like a gift from heaven. Some call this an aha experience.

Action. How can you have more fun?

Look for fun and for ways it can help you as it has Southwest Airlines. Read funny things. Hang out with funny people. Filter out negativity.

Listen to music, play it, sing, or dance. Doodle with computer graphics, magic markers, or water color. Play with a frisbee or a tennis ball. Give compliments and other small treasures.

Try fun in this way or that. Experiment with it. See what works for you and the people you know. A hearty laugh is one of life's greatest pleasures

And now I have a question for you. Is there room for improvement in your firm's services? Are there any actions you can take now? By commenting, please let all of us know your reactions, or if you have any stories, news, or marketing tips that you want to share.

You can reach me in any of the following ways:

- Phone: (708) 445-0000
- E-mail: [barrykoren@homesandvillages.com](mailto:barrykoren@homesandvillages.com)
- Mail: Barry Koren, HomesandVillages, 312 N. Grove Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302.

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