

Changing the Game of Work

Tim Gard

How to Change the Game of Work

Are you a winner, loser or spectator?

Life is a game. Business is a game. Everything is a game that involves winners, losers and spectators. Each day, we choose which of these three we want to be.

Once, everyone believed the Earth was flat and the sun revolved around it. But there were those who believed differently. These thought leaders decided to “change the game” in order to catch up and grasp the new reality.

Another misconception that is often applied and enforced in the workplace is that if you are having fun or enjoying your work, you aren't actually working. It took thought leaders like Norman Cousins and C. W. Metcalf to prove everyone wrong. They, too, changed the game for all of us and opened up a new reality for a truly productive and fulfilling work experience.

It's been proven that positive humor serves to improve morale, self-esteem and productivity in the workplace. I challenge you to change the game by establishing and reinforcing a good humor environment in your organization.

Humor Is a Business Skill—Really!

The best business leaders openly endorse humor as a necessary skill that should be developed and perfected. They understand they must employ and polish every tool available. It is the only way to be the best and thrive, rather than merely survive.

Using humor as a business skill isn't about telling jokes or acting like a comedian. Having fun in the workplace refers to the times when a level of competence has been achieved within everyone's respective roles and in working collaboratively. This balance of internal and external influences allows for the accomplishment of truly incredible things.

What's Fun to Me?

My job has made me a 2-million-mile traveler, yet the travel experience has not lost its charm on me. Given the inherent difficulties and frequent frustrations, it is vital that I use good humor to control my perspective and shape my experiences.

For example, when I lost my baggage because another traveler took my suitcase by mistake at the baggage claim carousel, I didn't grumble. What good would that do? Instead, I made the conscious choice to shift my perspective and find a way to change the game. Before my next trip, I plastered a sign across the entire side of my bag that read, “This is not your bag!” The result was pure perfection. No one ever takes my bag anymore.

In another example, I was constantly dealing with other travelers repositioning my carry-on bag in the overhead bin in such a way that it would no longer fit. This routinely forced the flight attendants to check my bag, which created unnecessary, and sometimes problematic, delays for me.

I changed the game by placing a full-sized rubber chicken in my bag with the feet sticking out. Now, when someone tries to move my bag to accommodate their own, they see chicken legs sticking out and they leave my bag alone. Not only is this funny, but it produces my desired result. Now, I no longer have to check my carry-on bag. I must have fun when I work, and quite frankly, no one can—or will—stop me from enjoying my work.

Act, But Don't Overreact

It's important to act, rather than react, to the everyday stresses all around us. Humor allows us to do this by simply combining ideas not normally associated with one another. The best part of this approach is that you get to use lots of creativity, which is a lot of fun! Conversely, when you stifle humor, which is the very heart of creativity, you inhibit new ideas and fresh perspectives that can help in any situation, and that's certainly not fun.

There's one caveat, however. When I use humor, it's not to make light of serious situations. Using humor helps me to shine a light on previously unseen solutions and reveal hidden possibilities, which is a vital skill everyone can benefit from.

3 Ways to Change the Game of Work

To start changing the “Restaurant Facility Management Game,” I suggest the following three easy steps:

Encourage employees to be the best they can be.

In my experience, being the best I can be is the No. 1 stress reliever. Being extremely good at one's job naturally reduces anxiety because it increases confidence. This means when you make sincere attempts in obtaining the tools and providing the support needed to assist your employees to be their very best, you are being your very best. Your stress will simply melt away and work will feel, and truly be, more fun for you and those around you.

For example, even though I am an expert in airline travel, I still avoid placing myself in stressful situations by avoiding weather delays or other flying challenges. Of course, all my tools and efforts to create a seamless travel experience don't completely insulate me from every flying challenge. There's always the possibility of a chatty seatmate who won't stop talking to me even though I have my laptop open and am clearly working. So, I had to change the game again. When I want to concentrate and avoid chitchatting, I simply pull out my own coloring book and crayons and start coloring pictures of myself. Guess what happens? People leave me alone. It works every single time!

Recognize and celebrate humor when it happens, while enhancing—never diminishing—a person's individual value while doing so.

Everyone smiles and laughs in the same language. Once, while staying at a hotel in Florida, I woke up just before midnight because my room was uncomfortably hot. I called the front desk but before I could say a word, the clerk blurted out, “Can't talk right now.

We had a transformer blow up outside the hotel!” Before I could stop myself, I asked, “Oh, no! Is it the Decepticons? (Referring, of course, to the “Transformers” movie.) Which Transformer blew up? Not Bumblebee, I hope. He's my favorite!” The clerk paused for a moment then answered, “Um, no, sir, not transformers plural—just one.”

I could tell this young man was overwhelmed with anxiety and reacting to the workplace crisis, rather than taking control and acting. To help him out, I amped it up and said in an urgent tone, “But you know, it only takes one. Megatron didn't attack us, did he? Have you called Optimus Prime?” He paused again and replied, “No, I haven't called Optimus Prime yet, sir.” Now highly animated, I commanded, “What are you waiting for? We need help!” The young man began to chuckle, and in a calmer, more controlled demeanor he thanked me for my patience as they worked to resolve the problem. Word about this conversation found its way to the hotel manager, who covered the cost of my room. His note thanked me for helping his employees make it through the ominous transformer crisis with a smile and laughter.

Establish your own good humor ritual to close out your day.

At the end of every day, it's important to leave work at work. Too often, people carry negative energy of the day's problems and frustrations home with them. This pattern must be stopped and replaced with something more productive. Conversely, I am a firm believer in leaving home stresses at home.

Imagine that your work problems are piled high on an office chair. Then picture dragging that chair home with you like a toy wagon. How often you do this? If you don't know the answer, ask the person who knows you best. If you regularly relive the stresses of work at home, change the game. Make leaving work a defining moment and take control of your perspective. To do this, pretend to be a gymnast. When your workday is done and you are ready to go home, throw your arms up in the air and do your best impression of a gymnastic dismount.

Then, as you begin to walk out of the facility, point back at your chair of problems and clearly state, "And you stay!" This exercise will encourage your ability to mentally leave your work where it belongs: at work. This simple method not only helps you but also your colleagues, friends and family. They will appreciate the quality time they get to spend with you, rather than hear about your work.

Applying these ideas will change the game for you and your employees forever. You'll create a positive work experience for yourself and others, plus you'll be able to refresh and renew yourself between the stressful situations that inevitably occur.

Tim Gard is a professional speaker and author. Learn more from Tim about how to "Change the Game" when you encounter situational stressors, toxic people and the challenges inherent to your everyday work life, during his breakout session at RFMA 2014, Feb. 16-18 in Grapevine, Texas.