

Sometimes You Gotta Laugh

by **Lou Stoops**

There sure are a lot of things to be stressed-out about. Pressures in the workplace, in the home and even in areas that are supposed to be leisure experiences. Sometimes all the pressure can seem overwhelming. What can you do about it? Well, try laughing more!

Many people remember Dan Jansen, 1994 Winter Olympic gold medalist. He wanted to succeed in his quest for achievement, so he did the things that are normally associated with excelling sports performance. But sometimes doing what normally works isn't enough. For Jansen, that meant consulting sports psychologist, James Loehr.

Armed with the knowledge that humor relaxes and relieves stress, Dr. Loehr recommended that Jansen loosen-up and laugh more.

Research from the University of Colorado reveals that when we laugh, our brain releases chemicals that have pain-reduction benefits. Laughter also promotes healing. During periods of intense stress and fearfulness, another chemical works to block the healing chemicals, and thus, we become more prone to long-term illness.

Dr. Norman Cousins, an editor many years ago for the noted Saturday Review, was struck with a disease that doctors had no cure for. It was the early 1960's, and it seemed that a sentence of death had been given to him. Dr. Cousin's however, understood the effects of negative emotions on the human body and reasoned that positive emotions could have a healing quality. He set out on a grand experiment that consisted of watching hours of Marx Brother movies and "Candid Camera" reruns.

He learned about his disease and he learned to laugh. He wrote about his experiences in his book, *Anatomy of An Illness As Perceived By the Patient*. One of the things he discovered that benefited him was that a ten minute belly laugh could give him two hours of painless sleep. No small gain for someone in pain!

Another interesting finding that's recently been discovered is that children laugh an average of 400 times a day, whereas adults laugh only 15 times a day! Apparently, life knocks the fun out of us as we grow older. The bright side of life, the essence of humor in every situation, has the ability to take the sting out of stressful experiences. So, we need to laugh more.

We take life so seriously because of the circumstances and events that come into our path; our feelings are errant guides to surviving those hard moments. We must lighten up and look at life with humor. It takes a willful choice. Some will find it easier than others, but all of us can do it.

I remember so well the day President Ronald Reagan was shot by a would-be assassin. I was holding a funeral in a small town in east-central Indiana. The television happened to be on in the funeral director's office and there, replayed for our eyes, was the tragic event. What stood out most to me, as I later digested the many details of the shooting, was the President's humorous attitude as he was being wheeled into the emergency room, and then on into surgery. It is reported that the President looked up at the doctors that were scurrying to give him care, and said, "I hope all of you are Republicans!" While I don't discount the skillful medical expertise of the doctors attending to Mr. Reagan, I can't help but believe that it was his attitude that had the decisive role in his recovery.



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Developing Leaders from the Inside Out

When you're stressed-out and feeling overwhelmed, try laughing out loud. It won't make your problems go away, you'll just be able to weather them better. Refuse the rule of circumstances and embrace the lighter side. Hugh Downs made the point well when he said, "A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes."