Workplace Fun: Learning from Google, Southwest Airlines, and Facebook

Arthur M. Baldonado, Ph.D

Ashford University, 13831 W. Peck Drive, Litchfield Park, AZ 85340

ABSTRACT

Are you having fun at work yet? Workplace fun has become a popular topic in business today. This article depicts lessons that can be extracted from fun corporations—Google, Southwest Airlines, and Facebook. These organizations thrived despite the current economic turmoil because of their unique organizational culture. Workplace fun has become a staple in business today.

Keywords: Workplace fun, Google, Facebook, Southwest.

INTRODUCTION

"Wacky Fridays", karaoke competitions, and laughter workshops are some examples of workplace fun. Fun is an important part of organizational life. Companies such as Southwest Airlines and Pike Place Fish have shown that the integration of fun and work improves not only the day-to-day relationships and workplace atmosphere, but that it can positively improve the company's net worth (Yerkes, 2003).

Workplace fun is defined as "purposefully designed fun activities that are expected to imporve organziational outcomes" (Choi, Kwon and Kim, 2013, p. 413). Scientific studies indicate that laughter increases endorphins leading to a sense of wellbeing, relaxation, and a positive outlook (Rockman, 2003)

A growing number of business researchers maintain that fun at work is essential for enhancing employee motivation and productivity while reducing stress (Choi, Kwon & Kim, 2013). Plato noted that life should be lived as play while the Bible reminded us that a merry heart does wonders (Everett, 2011). Some companies have explored creative ways to motivate and engage workers. In this article, we will focus on three companies well-known for their fun culture.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND & CULTURE—GOOGLE, SOUTHWEST, FACEBOOK

Google

Larry Page and Sergey Brin met at Stanford University in 1995 and founded Google. Google was derived from "googol," the mathematical term for a 1 followed by 100 zeros (Google, 2015). Google is a search engine listed results based on popularity of pages. After launching Google in 1998, the company purchased YouTube in 2006 making Google the most popular search engine, averaging nearly 6 billion searches daily in 2013. By 2011, Google was the world's most valuable brand generating almost $30 billion annual revenue ("Google grows..", 2013). Google is ranked #1 in Fortune's magazine "Top Companies to Work for." Larry Page currently serves as Google's CEO and is headquartered in Mountain View, California (Helft, 2014).

Google is known for innovation creating new products and entering new business ventures. Google employees are known as "Googlers", ranking "culture and the strength of Google's people as the most important factors behind its success, with shared beliefs, values, norms, and priorities crucial for innovativeness" ("Google grows..", 2013, p. 16). It is no secret that Google thrived on bring fun in the workplace and mixing business with pleasure so staff can relax and refuel during breaks. Some well-

*Address for correspondence:

abaldo1212@hotmail.com

known perks include on-site free haircut, on-site daycare, gyms and swimming pool, game tables, video games, laundry facilities, on-site medical care, subsidized massage program, and free food. Finally, Googlers have the oppurtunity for the 80/20 rule—spending 80% on their primary job and 20% on special projects (Strickland, 2015).

Southwest Airlines

In its 44th year of service, Southwest Airlines is a major U.S. airline and one of the world's largest low-cost carriers headquartered in Dallas, Texas. It was founded by Rollin King and Herb Kelleher in 1971 and has served more than 1.5 billion customers with annual revenue of $1.1 billion. Gary Kelly is currently its CEO. It has consistently ranked in Fortune Magazine's World's Most Admired Companies (Corporate Fact Sheet: Southwest Airlines, 2015).

Southwest airlines are well-known for its fun corporate culture where its employees have never gone out on strike. The culture is referred to as "goofiness" where there are no rigid rules within the work environment, in fact employees often announce a free flight for the first customer to present socks with holes. Employees are mandated to have fun at work while allowing its people to travel economically and obtain financial security (Anonymous, 2005). Humor is often part of the experience while flying at Southwest. Southwest also offers training through University of people enhancing creativity and learning, financial security, and healthy benefits. "Happy Employees=Happy Customers" is proudly displayed in its website (Southwest Airlines, 2015)

Facebook

An online social networking website, Mark Zuckerberg and his classmates founded Facebook in 2004. Currently headquartered in Menlo Park, California, Facebook is the world's largest social network with over 1 billion users worldwide (Deahl, 2015). Mark Zuckerberg currently serves as CEO with annual revenue of $12 billion dollars in 2014. Facebook ranked #1 in Business Insider's "50 Best Companies to Work for in America" in 2015 (Elkins, 2015).

Working at Facebook, innovation and creativity are encouraged. The social networking site knows how to take care of its employees with emphasis on high quality work environment. Some of the perks working at Facebook include free bikes everywhere, free computer accessory vending machines, stand-up desks, parental paid leave, write on the walls, free meals, on-site barber shop, and classic video arcade (Rajan, 2012).

ANALYSIS OF GOOGLE, SOUTHWEST, & FACEBOOK'S' FUN CULTURE

Although these three companies are unique and separate in their own ways, it is interesting to note the similarities:

➢ Taking care of its employees is a priority

➢ Culture of fun encouraged and known company-wide

➢ Unique perks offered to employees

➢ No rigid rules

➢ Innovation and creativity are crucial

➢ Fun starts at top-level leadership

Choi, Kwon and Kim (2013) found that top management's role is crucial in creating a fun work environment because the new stream of American workforce—Generation Y—is a fun-motivated generation. Leaders must lead by example and set a positive example of fun in the workplace. Bolton and Houlihan (2009) stated that workplace fun pradigm is no longer a passing fad but has become an established and accepted contributor to good people managment and the bottom line. In fact, Bolton and Houlihan (2009) futher noted that many individuals express pleasure in working for fun companies.

MAKING WORKPLACE FUN AGAIN

Fun is an important part of organizational life. Geller (2003) stated that one can increase morale and productivity and decrease burnout and turnover by interjecting more fun and playfulness into work

routines such as safety activities. Baudville (2011) listed some creative and fun ways to have fun at work:

➢ Music soothes the soul as it can affect moods, emotion, and creativity

➢ Lighten up presentations such as puppet show or skit

➢ Surround your office with joy usch as family/pet photos or fresh plants

➢ Laughter is contagious—add a joke to newsletter or meetings

➢ Take short breaks and re-energize

➢ Make a game of training such as prizes for positive participation

➢ Food=FUN (have potlucks or catered breakfast/lunch)

➢ Volunteer for fun such as Habitat for Humanity

➢ Supply an on-site workout room

➢ Seasonal contest such as Halloween Hoopla costume contest

➢ Celebrate birthdays by wheel of good fortune prizes such as t-shirt or tickets

➢ Hire a clown once a month

➢ Silly dress-up days

➢ Put fun games or activities in break room (p. 9)

CONCLUSION

In a lifetime, an average person will spend more than 90,000 hours on the the job—too much time not to have fun at work (Everett, 2011). Successfully integrating fun at work requires a leader setting the vision and tone for the journey. Finally, Yerkes (2003) enumerated the benefits of fun integrated with work which can:

➢ Stimulate creativity and innovation

➢ Foster commitment and ownership among all members of organization

➢ Create and secure the morale of employees

➢ Positively impact productivity

➢ Counter the effects of stress

➢ Act as a vaccination for burnout

➢ Become the glue for social relationships

➢ Mend conflicts and heal hurt

➢ Stimulate renewal and activity

➢ Reduce absenteeism

➢ Create stronger, deeper, longer lasting customer relationships

➢ Attract and retain peak performers (p. 50)

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Baldonado, is an adjunct faculty at Ashford University and University of Phoenix. His areas of expertise include human resources, work motivation and diversity, business administration, and management. Dr. Baldonado has over 10 years of human resources experience and has published in his field.