

Cultivating Creativity: Whimsy in the Workplace

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While the global and U.S. economy faces uncertainty in 2026, the healthcare industry stands at an inflection point. Competition is fierce—not just for patients, but for people. Staffing shortages, employee burnout, and wage wars all contribute to dis-ease in your organization. Stress is poison and the antidote is humor. Mark Twain once said, “humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.” The organizations that will lead the next decade are not those with the newest technology or the biggest budgets, but those that *invest in their managers* as stewards of culture, performance, humanity and yes, whimsy!

Healthcare is serious business but even the stoic philosopher Seneca knew the importance of whimsy when he said, “No one becomes a laughing stock who laughs at himself.” Yet, too many executives still see management training as a “soft” expense. It isn’t. It’s a competitive advantage in disguise. When you invest in your managers’ skills, you invest in five critical levers that will shape your organization’s growth and your people’s resilience.

1. Whimsy as a Strategic Asset.

Healthcare is serious work—but the human spirit needs levity to thrive. Whimsy in the workplace isn’t frivolous; it’s fuel for creativity, empathy, and collaboration. When managers learn how to model curiosity, playfulness, and humor, they build psychological safety. A culture that can laugh together can also innovate together—and innovation, in healthcare, saves both lives and margins.

2. Guilt Creates Stress, and Stress Erodes Excellence.

Managers who lead through guilt - whether by pressure, perfectionism, or fear of failure - unintentionally create chronic stress. Stress, in turn, hijacks focus, reduces emotional intelligence, and burns out talent before it blooms. Skilled managers learn to replace guilt with accountability and compassion by creating a covenant of transparency, vulnerability and trust. They coach performance without shame, leading teams that are both disciplined and joyful.

3. Stress Masks Talent.

Every organization has hidden stars whose brilliance is dulled by stress. A capable manager knows how to uncover and develop that talent by creating calm amidst chaos. When your managers are trained to recognize burnout signals and coach employees through them, you unlock performance levels that quarterly reports can't yet measure—but will soon reflect.

4. Competitive Advantage Begins with People.

Your competitors can copy your equipment, your service lines, and even your strategy—but they cannot copy your culture. When managers are equipped to coach, communicate, and inspire, they transform your workforce into an engine of innovation. Competitive advantage isn't found in what you do, but how your people feel about doing it.

5. A Healthy Culture Attracts and Retains Top Performers.

The best clinicians, administrators, and technicians don't just want jobs—they want to belong to something meaningful. A culture that values balance, growth, and humanity becomes magnetic. When your managers know how to nurture that culture, recruitment becomes easier, retention improves, and engagement translates directly into patient satisfaction and profitability.

In 2026, leadership isn't about control - it's about cultivation. The wisest investment you can make isn't in the latest technology or facilities, but in the men and women who guide your teams every day. Train your managers to lead with skill, soul and whimsy, and you won't just build a better workplace—you'll build a lasting advantage.

In conclusion, if we truly value our people, we must cultivate a culture of creativity and whimsy where people thrive. People believe what they see, not what they read or hear. We must embody and cascade those deeply held beliefs etched on our walls and websites down through our managers and to the front line. Here's the litmus test. Where are your company values most visible in the workplace by your customers; By your employees? What skills do your leaders need to acquire for 2026 to make the workplace more attractive, fun, collaborative and creative?

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