



Monkey Business

Better Business Practices Learned Through Monkeys

“Uh-Uh”

“To Cross the Line” means to change from being acceptable to being unacceptable. When we have crossed the line with a dog, the first sign we may observe is a growl. If we don’t back off, the next thing we see is a snarl, with teeth showing. If we still don’t back off, we get bitten. When we cross the line with a monkey, we may see a number of different warning signals. Different breeds have different signals. Often, you will observe a “warrior like” stance, stillness, and a stare. The jaw may drop leaving the canine teeth displayed. Some will jump to the back of the enclosure to avoid confrontation--others will come to the front of the enclosure and grab the bars. These are clear warning signals. If you move closer, they are likely to reach out and grab, scratch, or bite.

Dawson, a Java Macaque Monkey born in April of 2001, lunges forward when he feels threatened. He will grab the bars and begin shaking them. Any sensible human knows that this means Back Off! The sign above his enclosure reads, “No Visitors Allowed in Here”. Funny enough, Dawson will actually grab a hold of the sign and shake it. How’s that for clarity? He has done this so often that the sign is showing signs of wear on the sides. One can arrest the aggression by simply moving out of the room.



Dawson

Humans can certainly cross lines with other humans. In her article entitled *Crossing the Line: Guarding against Inappropriate Workplace Behavior*, Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti says this:

Humor is a natural part of everyday communication, but what is funny to one person may be insulting to another. Jokes about physical appearance, personality traits, (gender), social characteristics and personal hygiene can all be hurtful to the person to whom they are directed, while other topics trip regional or cultural landmines. .

"Humor can be especially dangerous when working in a mixed environment of adults where you don't know everyone's background or experiences. An otherwise-normal joke about needing therapy or a past experience could unwittingly offend or hurt a coworker," explains Dianne Daniels, AICI, of Image & Color Services in Norwich, Conn. Even poking fun at a public figure can be inappropriate. "Political humor is always risky, and unless the

joke is about something totally unrelated to work or personal characteristics, there is always the risk of offending someone," she says.

In November 2009, I attended World Laughter Tours Advanced Laughter Leader Workshop in Columbus, Ohio. Steve Wilson, Psychologist, Psychotherapist, and founder of World Laughter Tour, gave a lecture on *Putting Up With Put-Down Humor*. He shared a story about a group gathered for a meeting. To include some laughter, they began telling jokes which poked fun at the state of Kentucky. After a few jokes were shared, Kevin, who was not laughing, simply voiced "Uh-Uh". The joking subsided and everyone turned to Kevin. He explained "Uh-Uh" is the warning signal he uses when someone has "crossed the line". The group had no idea that they had. You see, the line is invisible. People don't usually cross them on purpose. Nobody said, "What's the matter, you can't take a joke?" Responding in this way makes one a "Humor Abuser." A Humor Abuser blames the victim. The group respected his view and discontinued the jokes about Kentucky. Steve ended the story with "Kevin raised the group consciousness."

Humor is Destructive when it :

lowers self esteem, belittles someone, perpetuates a stereotype, closes off creative thought, stimulates laughter at someone, creates defensiveness, excludes someone

Humor is Constructive when it:

Includes people, reduces tension, stimulates laughter *with* someone, Breaks down barriers, stimulates new ideas, is supportive, creates a positive atmosphere

World Laughter Tour trains people in leading and creating positive environments. The methods used are not based on joke telling. A non-threatening, playful approach is used. Through mirthful laughter, people connect, a sense of belonging is achieved, creativity is increased, blood pressure is lowered, and numerous other physical and emotional benefits are received. Oxytocin, also known as "the bonding" hormone, is released when we laugh *with* others. Professor Gareth Leng, a neuroscientist at the University of Edinburgh says, "Oxytocin has been associated with an apparent reduction in stress, and encourages social interaction." A study done at the University of Zurich showed that Oxytocin also increases levels of trust (Thomas Baumgartner, Center for the Study of Social and Neural Systems, University of Zurich, Switzerland). Perhaps this is why people feel connected when they laugh together.

Using jokes in the workplace to induce laughter can be very risky business. Steve Wilson says, "There are two sure rules for making something funny; however, nobody knows what they are." When someone crosses the line, trust is threatened. The dog growls; Darwin grabs the bars and displays his canines; Kevin says, "Uh-Uh"---What is your warning signal?

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