

# Creating a Culture of

# FUN

Instill joy in the workplace on a day-to-day basis

By Audrey Finer, PT, DPT



UPON STARTING MY FIRST JOB AS A NEW graduate from physical therapy school, I got roped into being the lead of the social committee. What a great way to connect with my new coworkers, right? Little did I know planning and implementing “fun” for the company would be exhausting and one of the more challenging volunteer positions I have taken.

Fun and joy always seemed to be planned events, and I quickly learned that not everyone wanted to attend a baseball game or enjoy donuts on Friday morning. It often seemed that fun was often forced and didn’t suit everyone.

So how do you weave fun/joy into your everyday work routine, and most importantly, how do you have your team participate and not experience a “burnout” from fun?

## A FUN AND JOYFUL ENVIRONMENT

First and foremost, creating a fun and joyful environment requires your team to feel like their work environment is a place where they can have fun and joy. The self-determination theory developed by Dr. Richard M. Ryan and Dr. Edward L.

Deci suggest that both motivation and learning peak when we are fulfilling three basic human needs — autonomy (independence and space), confidence and/or competence (the ability for the employee to feel that they complete their tasks successfully on a consistent basis), and affinity (the ability for the employee to feel connected to the clinic and their teammates).<sup>1</sup> These three conditions will set the stage for a happy

and joyful employee thus fostering an environment where fun can flourish. Here are five ideas to help build a culture of fun, starting with your employees and expanding to the community in which you practice.

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# 1

## Task Pairing

Task pairing allows multi-tasking specific to your employees’ desires. Pairing not-so-fun activities (documentation, crunching numbers, clinic deep clean, CEU) with a positive or an affirming activity could diminish the negative energy that the mundane but often necessary tasks create. An example could be a coffee treat, allowing that employee to pick the radio station, or allowing the employee to pick the time of day that they feel is best for them to attack the task at hand.

# 2

## Team Timeout

One hour of the week, allow your employees to pick an activity for themselves. This could be going for a walk or just zoning out. The goal is for that the employee to pick the activity versus being forced into something that they don’t enjoy — i.e., “forced fun.” This also allows the employee to vary their activity based on their current need — i.e., alone time versus with coworkers, documentation time versus reading outside). Aside from this one hour dedicated to “self-care” it is also important to stress to your employees to leave work at work and to take their break in full and as intended. An employee who can reset often will re-energize the clinic and allow fun to flourish.

# 3

## ***Interest Inclusions***

Allowing your employee to highlight their interests or passions in unique ways often establishes a fun environment. A previous coworker in a pediatrics setting would wear different belt buckles (Elmo, Superman, Spider-Man) every day. This would entertain his patients and was a great way of incorporating fun and joy into a regular day that was simple yet effective. This could also be a much larger task such as hosting a “weightlifting 101” women’s health ladies’ night for current and future patients. Again, allowing your employees to self-select a project in an area that they specialize in will not only allow fun to bloom but also promote their skills as a physical therapist.

# 4

## ***Patient Pearls***

One of the best ways of incorporating fun into your daily routine is involving your patients or clients. Some ideas include a celebratory bell ring when they reach their ROM goal, incorporating trivia on the media slideshow that is running in your office, or even celebrating the “national” day of the month (i.e. national ice cream day).

# 5

## ***Community Connection***

Support other small business owners in your area by incorporating them into your fun. Some ideas include establishing a cross-business scavenger hunt or pairing with a local yoga studio to demo the best stretches to decrease stress. You can always think along the philanthropy route and brainstorm different ideas where your employees go out to the community. Giving back creates happiness, which then will foster more fun.

Establishing a fun culture doesn’t have to be planned out and forced by you as the owner or lead therapist. Encouraging and growing the environment from each of your teammates will cultivate an atmosphere of fun and connectedness.

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## WORK AND PLAY HARD

Remind yourself as an owner, a boss, an employee, a physical therapist — you can work hard and play hard at the same time. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music... sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry.” In short, it is how you approach your work each day that can set the stage for a culture of fun. **1**

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## REFERENCE

1. Ryan RM, Deci EL. “Self-Determination Theory Overview.” *Self-Determination Theory*. [selfdeterminationtheory.org/theor](http://selfdeterminationtheory.org/theor)



### ACTION ITEM

Brainstorm work activities that are negative (energy drain) versus uplifting (energy boost). Find commonalities among your staff and focus on incorporating fun into each.



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