

Professional insight

Dealing with those everyday issues

By Doug McCarthy

LIGHTEN THE LOAD WITH HUMOUR

Have you noticed that when you enter a school or workplace, you can easily tell whether or not that community has been graced with good humour? There is just ‘something in the air.’ When I was a young teacher, I was admonished by a very stern-mannered school inspector for laughing at something that happened during a lesson. “Educating children is a serious matter,” he told me. “There is nothing to laugh about.” I believe he was half right.

Education is a serious business – and so is humour. Garrison Keillor, storyteller, humourist, and radio personality, says that humour is not a trick, or a prank, or even a joke. Humour is a presence in the world – like grace – and it shines on everyone. Laughter increases honesty and the capacity for telling others good things. As Victor Borge says, “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.”

Ken Blanchard, who has written many books on organizational culture, says it is possible to be a serious professional without being a solemn professional. One of his postings is entitled: *Lack of Humour in the Workplace is No Laughing Matter*. In it he says, “A sense of humor serves as a pressure valve that can keep you enjoying your work even when times are stressful.” Mother Teresa insisted her workers have a time set aside for laughter at the end of each day, in spite of the broken humanity they encountered regularly. She understood that when we laugh at what we endure, then our troubles assume manageable proportions.

The fact that laughter is good medicine is nothing new. But it is worth repeating and Kathryn Rose, a freelance writer, says it well: “Mirth, especially when directed at ourselves, imparts a sense of control, puts distance between ourselves and our pain, gives us perspective, relieves tension, and allows us to take a break.”

In his book *Between Heaven and Mirth*, Rev. James Martin, SJ, says, “Humour is an essential requirement of spirituality. Most of the saints had a terrific sense of humour and could easily laugh at themselves.” And to paraphrase actress Shirley MacLaine, if we learn to laugh at ourselves, we will never cease to be amused.

So let’s get serious and open our spirits to allow good humour to grace our lives.
