



Notes from the Consultant's Corner

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Let's Play Dress Up!

Does your pet hospital feel tense lately? Do you deal with the same problems over and over again? Do think of your workday as something to “get through” and look forward to the time when it’s all over? Why not break up the routine and go have fun? Yes... research shows that employees with greater satisfaction in their jobs have more fun. Now I’m willing to bet that most of you are very fun people, you’ve just forgotten how because you’ve lost your creativity.

You all know what creativity is. It’s the spark that allows us to see life in new ways and from different perspectives. The bad news is that the more stressed we become, the less creative we are with our thinking. We lose our ability to solve problems even if they are staring us right in the face. Have you ever repeatedly picked up and dropped the same piece of fuzz off the carpet just to “make” the vacuum pick it up? In the same amount of time, you could have thrown the fuzz away in the trashcan several times over.

Why does this happen? It seems that stress makes us cranky and single-minded. Once we’re in that mindset, it’s really hard to remember how to have fun. I’m sure you know what I mean. You see a problem, you think you know what the answer is and you decide to make it work **NO MATTER WHAT!** What happens, though, is that your perfect answer doesn’t solve the problem and then you feel even worse. This robs more of your creativity and the cycle goes on and on.

I realized this in myself a few months ago when I was preparing a lecture and watching my kids play in the next room. I was getting frustrated with my material and it didn’t take long for me to get into a grumpy mood. I didn’t like the format of my lecture but was stuck on how to change it. The tenser I became, the more rigid I became in my thinking.

Out of the blue my kids turned on some music and decided that they were superheroes (Wonder Woman and Batman). Once fully into their imaginations, they started finding suitable clothes to play dress-up. They finally settled upon sandals, beach towels for their capes, a woman’s scarf for Batman’s mask, and a plastic Barbie crown for Wonder Woman’s headband. Did they care what these outfits looked like? Of course not, the outfits worked perfectly because it was their creativity that inspired the fun. Any of you who have children, or have watched children play, know what I’m talking about. There are very few limits to what they can do because it’s all just one big part of this amazing “kid world.”

I started wondering why we grown-ups have to lose the fun of life. Yes...we have more responsibility and all, but why do we have to suddenly view life as one big thing to *get through*? Why does our work have to become something to endure? *There’s an old story about a college professor who drew a single dot on a blackboard and asked the class what it was. “A dot of chalk” was the only answer. The professor said “I did this exercise with a group of kindergartners and they thought of 50 different things it could be: an owl’s eye, a squashed bug, a cow’s head....”

I’m sure many of you have issues with all the usual things in your hospitals----staff scheduling, staff conflict, space considerations, etc. I’m wondering how these problems would be viewed if a six-year-old came through and looked at them. What resources or solutions are right in front of you but you can’t see them?

Veterinary medicine is already a very serious profession. You see sick or dying animals every day and deal with highly charged emotions. When it comes to relieving your stress, it is easy to lose perspective and become stuck in a rut. I’m guessing that all of us lose our ability to think like a child when we get really stressed out.

After my children started playing dress-up and I played with them for a while, I was able to return to my lecture and see it from a different perspective. Once I had some fun, I was able to connect with my creativity. If I hadn’t taken the time to play, I might still be hung up on that one single problem.

A colleague of mine co-owns an emergency hospital with her husband. Every once and awhile they take their entire staff out to the mall. They give the employees a small amount of money and tell them to go out and buy something “fun.” They regroup later at the food court and share their purchases with each other. What an ingenious way to have fun with a staff and provide a time for team building! I would bet that when they are having fun, they come up with innovative solutions to problems at their hospital.

It’s easy to get stuck in a rut when you work every day at the same hospital, face the same people, and see the same problems. If you feel you’ve lost creativity from too much stress, I encourage you to put on some music and go play dress-up for a while.

* “Think Like a Kid.” Roger von Oech. [Creative Whack Pack](#), 1992.