

Introduction

*Improvisation is the greatest form of therapy
and so much more fun than lying on the couch.*

Robin Williams

Play is a powerful tool. It relaxes people, gets their creative juices flowing, makes them better team members. Corporate America recognizes this. All over the country, CEO's are hiring experts to conduct workshops geared toward lightening up middle management. In a series of group games, employees play and laugh together -- and in the process, see themselves and each other in new ways. Employers aim to unleash creative thinking and raise the thought process "outside the box" of conformity. This stance is the polar opposite of old-guard leaders who wanted "yes-men" (and presumably "yes-women.") The new corporate managers want to encourage the best a worker has to offer: originality, resourcefulness, flexibility, concentration. The cheerfully balanced employee, they believe, is the key to productivity.

The Healing Power of Play is tailor-made for modern corporate goals. But its appeal extends far beyond the board room. The same qualities that enliven the workplace add richness to everyday life as well. People everywhere are actively searching for ways to improve health, to look better, to feel better, to deepen human relationships. We think play can go a long way toward reaching those goals.

We've shown thousands of people how to have more fun. Remarkably, in the lightening-up process, stress levels drop and people feel more creative, physically healthy and energetic.

The games in *The Healing Power of Play* are “healing” because laughing and having fun are great for you. Even scientists agree. Over many years of using these activities, we’ve watched people feel better. The playfulness they take away carries over into daily life -- improving jobs, health and relationships of all kinds.

The Healing Power of Play is an instruction book for anyone who wants to have more fun. Take the lively collection of improvisational games, flip to a page, study the playful line drawings and easy-to-follow directions, and you’re ready to enjoy yourself -- with a partner, with a dozen or more friends, or even by yourself.

The games are “improvisational” because they are funny little mini-plays -- complete with characters, action and scenes. But, unlike theater dramas, they’re easy to perform. They don’t require special equipment or any acting skills. You don’t even have to learn your lines. We will set the scene for you and offer some great ideas. But we leave plenty of room for you to expand and embellish our suggestions and invent your own versions. You can add lots of your own style and flavor, and even change the rules if you wish.

We think it makes a lot of sense to engage in nonsense.

Overview

*Man (sic!) is never more human than when he plays.
In order to be truly adult, a person must renew some of the
playfulness of childhood.*

Erik Erikson

No book on the market teaches how to use improvisational games to add fun, laughter and spontaneous play to people's lives. The illustrated childlike format and easy-to-follow instructions of The Healing Power of Play set it apart from any book in the field. Its expressed goals are to reduce stress, stimulate creative thinking, induce laughter and bring back the balance of lightness to our daily lives.

The Healing Power of Play is designed to help recall the time in life when we laughed easily: childhood. Kids everywhere know that life is meant to be fun. Recent research has shown that the average six year old laughs 300 times a day; world-weary adults -- whittled down by the Type-A West's worship of money and power-- chuckle as few as twenty times in twenty-four hours.

Between first grade and first job, we amassed a long list of deterrents to playfulness: embarrassment, pain, anger, rejection, worry, anxiety, risk, fear, criticism. There's little wonder. How many times did we hear, "Wipe that smile off your face," "When are you going to grow up?" Obediently, we "settled down," but we paid a price. We laughed less.

People's overwhelmingly joyful response to my workshops convinced me of the importance of play. I developed a series of exercises designed to activate of spontaneous fun. Time and again

I watched the delight in people's faces as they rediscovered the pure joy of play. Word spread and I was invited to conduct icebreakers for college students, "looseners" for corporate managers, classes for amateur theater groups.

Over the years, in one thousand workshops, my students have been lawyers and plumbers, scientists and painters, six year olds and grandfathers nearing ninety.

With great pleasure, I have seen people look and feel better; I have watched as lives improve. It became clear to me that we need to add play to the list of common human needs -- right up there with food and shelter. I'm delighted that now hard science supports the view: we're better off laughing.

Who Will Welcome this Book?

The Healing Power of Play will have great appeal to the general reader who can play the games alone or with friends. The form is simple and childlike, the mood jubilant. Each page is easy to follow and inviting.

Beyond individual use, the book will be a boon to professionals who work with groups. Because the games are grounded in non-competitive support, a spirit of cooperation is built among the players. Teachers, social workers, human resources managers, amateur theater directors, camp counselors, recreation leaders and more will welcome its long list of easy-to-learn games that are appropriate for all ages and types.

Even corporate America -- which has contributed so heavily to our acceptance of seriousness as godliness -- is learning to play. All over America, CEOs are hiring experts like Claude Samton to conduct workshops to help lighten up middle management. They recognize that fun gets the creative juices flowing, helps problem solving and improves team work. It contributes to thinking "out of the box." They have discovered that punch lines and bottom lines overlap; an employee who is free to think playfully becomes more productive.

Every time Claude leads corporate workshops, managers comment on how useful a book like The Healing Power of Play would be. For this reason, we count corporate America as a potential market for the book.

Over the past several years, Claude and his colleagues have conducted workshops at: Corning Glass, At&T, Forbes, Inc., Time, Inc., IBM, Hewlett Packer, Polaroid, ABC-TV, American Brass, Marsh McLennon. In each case improvisational games helped to:

Improve employee relations.
Bring play, spontaneity and increased energy to the workplace.
Expand creative problem -solving abilities.
Reduce stress and tension in the workplace.
Build better team work.
Overcome fear or risk-taking and public speaking.

Following is a detailed listing of who will buy this book:

Readers who want more fun and laughter in their lives, who want to manage stress, tap creativity, promote health and improve communication skills.

Groups leaders of all types:

Teachers, for classes of all ages.
Therapists, for individual and group situations.
Social workers.
Camp counselors.
Amateur theater group leaders.
Party-givers.
Recreation directors.
Directors of special events
(freshman class icebreakers and the like)
Human resources directors

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