

# Building Resilience in Leadership: A Laugh a Day Brings Joy Your Way

BY BARB VOLPE

**Q:** *Why did Dracula become a vegetarian?*

**A:** *Because he heard steak was bad for his heart.*

Every time my granddaughter told this joke, she would howl with laughter!

How do we bring more laughter into our lives? During one of my recent [Ready to Lead](#) sessions, I asked a group of early childhood administrators, “When was the last time something struck you as funny, and you laughed out loud?” It was an interesting conversation. Several participants shared that they found it difficult to recall the last time they laughed out loud. This was not surprising; staffing issues and managing early childhood programs create a lot of stress and anxiety. While laughter will not solve the most significant issues, bringing more laughter into your life may help relieve some stress and improve your mental and physical health.

## LAUGHTER IS GOOD FOR YOU!

There are several [physical and mental benefits](#) to laughter. It can enhance your intake of oxygen-rich air and increase the endorphins (neurotransmitters that make you feel good) released by your brain. That relaxed feeling after a good belly laugh is actually due to laughter activating and relieving your stress response and decreasing your heart rate and blood pressure. When you laugh, it eases tension, increases circulation, and relaxes your muscles. Over time, a life rich with laughter can strengthen your immune system, improve your mental health, ease stress, and build resilience.

Consider laughter a key ingredient in helping to increase your mental and physical well-being. In addition, laughter at work can improve the work climate and increase collegiality. It is reported that the average four-year-old laughs 400 times a day; the average 40-year-old averages only four! This means we must be mindful about finding moments of humor in our daily lives.

## FIVE TIPS TO ADD MORE LAUGHTER INTO YOUR LIFE

1. **Find your funny.** Reflect on what makes you laugh. What do you find funny? What is funny to one may not be funny to another. We all have different ideas about what may make us laugh. Explore the various forms and types of humor - funny television shows or movies, a variety of comedy shows, cartoons, a bookstore’s humor section, funny podcasts, and YouTube videos - to discover what makes you laugh.

2. **Laugh at yourself.** As humans, we do funny and foolish things all the time. Instead of being upset or taking yourself too seriously when you make mistakes or missteps, learn to laugh at yourself. Make it into a funny story! One time, I was in a meeting, and we were discussing snacks. I said, “We could serve cook and milkies.” The others in the group looked at me, and one person said in a questioning tone, “Cook and milkies?” In an annoyed tone, I said, “Yes, cook and milkies, cook and milkies!” At this point, I realized my mistake with what I was saying, and I laughed so hard I cried! This story might not have you doubled over in laughter, but that just reinforces tip number one.
3. **Give yourself something funny to look at.** Decorate your life, especially your work area, with things that bring out your humor. Follow a funny meme account to look at when you need a quick laugh. Put a screensaver on your computer that makes you smile or laugh. My colleague loves research and has a cartoon about data hanging above her computer screen. She says it helps her laugh, especially when working with a really complex data set.
4. **Spend time with fun, playful adults.** Be intentional about spending time and connecting with the funny people in your life. Maybe this means having your funniest friend over to dinner or chatting a few extra minutes with a coworker with a great sense of humor.
5. **Spend time with children.** Children are live comedies, and all the world is their stage. Be intentional about spending time laughing with children. This may mean spending a few extra minutes observing in the toddler room, reading a funny story to the preschoolers, or Facetiming a niece or nephew to tell each other some ‘knock-knock’ jokes. Small children are incredibly talented at making nonsensical jokes into moments of comedic gold.

Find something to smile about every day. It is your daily vitamin to manage stress and increase your well-being.

Charles Dickens said, *“There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor.”*

*Some questions to consider:*

1. What might happen as you begin to smile more, find the humor in the things around you, and make it a practice to laugh more?
2. How could you intentionally bring more moments of adult laughter into your program?
3. Why did the chicken cross the playground?\*

*\*to get to the other slide.*

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