

# Smiles and jokes can help good managers boost hotel staff performance

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Hotel managers who share a smile and a joke with their teams are more likely to see staff 'going the extra mile' when engaging with customers, a new study reveals.

Using [humor](#) has the effect of raising team energy and prompting more positive staff behavior towards guests—particularly among 'less-traditional' workers and [employees](#) who prefer to have different experiences.

An international team of researchers studied data collected from employees in teams across China's hotel industry—discovering that 'more-traditional' staff members responded less well to humor from their leaders.

Publishing their findings in *Tourism Management*, the team notes that employees in the hospitality sector are typically under a great deal of stress and organizations must find effective ways to re-energize them, as their behavior can determine [customer satisfaction](#).

The researchers offer a range of practical suggestions to managers in hospitality organizations, including:

- Use humor more when managing staff—helping employees to better engage with customers;
- Hire managerial candidates who have a good sense of humor—building 'humor questionnaires' into the recruitment process;
- Encourage co-workers to evaluate managers' sense of humor as supporting information for promotions; and

- Provide managers with training programs that emphasize the importance of humor for an effective leader.

Co-author Dr. Ahmed Shaalan, from the University of Birmingham Dubai commented, "We found a strong link between leader humor and hotel staff engaging positively with customers, as well as enhanced levels of energy among these employees—confirming that leader humor could enhance customer service."

"We would, therefore, recommend that managers should consider using humor when they engage with their staff. Given the hospitality sector's significant contribution to the [global economy](#), leader humor can make a valuable contribution to the performance of a key industry."

As humor has a greater impact on less traditional employees, the researchers recommend that managers should adopt different strategies to ensure they interact appropriately with employees. This approach helps to re-energize each employee and motivate them to ensure a high level of work efficiency.

Co-author Dr. Marwa Tourky, from Cranfield School of Management, commented, "We highlight how cultural values alter the effect of leader humor, by explaining how less traditional employees are more likely to accept leader humor as a form of communication."

"Employees who experience leader humor can obtain additional interpersonal and emotional resources via humorous interaction with their leaders. For example, sharing interesting stories or jokes by leaders can make employees feel relaxed, happy, and give them more energy to fulfill [customer](#) needs and offer extra assistance not required by the organization."

The team notes that leader humor can make a valuable contribution to

the performance of a key global industry, whose most distinctive feature is its ability to create enjoyment for customers by providing high-quality service and meeting the needs of customers.

Employees play an important role in this process, but the hospitality industry has a higher incidence of stress because of the work-related tasks involved. For example, employees are expected to smile and behave professionally even when dealing with uncivilized customers.

In turn, this reduces their ability to perform at their best in the workplace and it becomes necessary to re-energize employees after serving such customers.

**More information:** Bao Cheng et al, When and how does leader humor promote customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior in hotel employees?, *Tourism Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104693](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104693)

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