

DAILY REPORT

LAW INC

Develop your ability to turn on a smile. It won't make you sick. and it might make help you build relationships.



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Fake it till you make it

FORCING A SMILE will help you start a new habit and project a positive image

I READ RECENTLY about a German study saying that forcing yourself to smile can make you sick. The study disturbed me because I force people to smile a lot.

Last week I was coaching a lawyer during a workshop. "I want you to force a smile," I said as she prepared to deliver a presentation on camera. "It probably won't feel good. But do it anyway."

I urge people to smile because smiling is one of our most powerful tools as communicators. Learning how to turn on a smile can help you connect with people and build relationships.

Smiling over rage can harm you

The study on forced smiling is from Dieter Zapf of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Professor Zapf studied 4,000 volunteers working in a fake call center. Half were allowed to respond in kind to abuse on the other end of the line while the other half had to suck it up and smile.

Volunteers that could respond in kind had a brief increase in heart rate. Those who had to force a smile and suppress their feelings had stress symptoms that lasted much longer.

"Every time a person is forced to repress his true feelings there are negative consequences," Zapf told United Press International. "We are all able to rein in our emotions, but it becomes difficult to do this over a protracted period."

Now let's be clear. I don't urge people to suppress rage. But I do get objections that I'm asking them to be phony. "I don't want to come across as a used car salesman," people say.

But what if the fake smile is genuine?

When I hear these objections, I'm tempted to recount the "Seinfeld" episode when Jerry Seinfeld asks his friend George Costanza how to beat a lie detector. George, who is considered by Jerry to be a great liar, looks at

Jerry and, with an air of goofy mysticism, says something like "It's not a lie if you believe it's true."

I want to say the same thing about forcing a smile. "It's not fake if you really mean it."

In business, most people wear dull expressions out of habit. yet, we can train ourselves to smile and vary our expression in the same way that we train ourselves to swing a golf club.

When I left the practice of law and got into this business, I was told that I needed to smile more, that I came across as flat and dull. I had no idea. Like most people, I never really paid attention to the image I projected.

So I practiced smiling for a month. I smiled at the Starbucks guy, my dry cleaner, my kids, everyone. My zygomatic muscles—the "smiler" muscles—ached.

I didn't get sick. I connected with people better. I was happier and it showed. The lady who cuts my hair said, "there is something different about you. Did you lose weight?"

When I urge people to force a smile, I'm helping them start a new habit and project a more positive image.

Smiling is a powerful connector

Smiling is a powerful way to connect with people. Babies know it. Your dog knows it. (When my dog Rocko smiles at me I can't resist scratching his ears.) Political candidates know it. (Jimmy Carter's smile arguably won him the presidency.)

Develop your ability to turn on a smile. It won't make you sick. And it might make help you build relationships. ☎