

## ADOPTING A PLAYFUL MINDSET

The year was 2006. Millions of Americans began their normal daily routines, eating breakfast, getting in some morning exercise, or watching Saturday morning cartoons with their family. By all accounts, 01 April was just like any other day that year...until we then searched for a random video on YouTube, and—regardless of the search criteria entered—we were greeted with this:



That's a screencap of Rick Astley in his 1987 music video "Never Gonna Give You Up." (Apologies for those of you who now have this song stuck in your head). Why? No one knows for sure; but the trend of redirecting links to this video, known as "Rick-Rolling," was born, and it's arguably one of the greatest April Fools pranks of all time.

We've been pranking each other since the early days of the Roman Empire, where an annual festival called Hilaria encouraged folks to let loose, be silly, and make fun of each other. As it turns out, they were on to something: *humor is essential to our good health*. It points out the absurdity of the human condition, it allows us to cope with heartache and tragedy, and it has the potential to bring people together as a community. Physiologically, it produces endorphins ("happy" brain chemicals), strengthens your abdominal muscles, and reduces the effects of stress! This may also explain the "nervous laughter" some people exhibit in uncomfortable situations, like a non-conscious mechanism for managing emotional discomfort. But regardless of how you laugh, having a good sense of humor is found in people who are most adaptable, congenial, satisfied with their lives, and—believe it or not—deemed attractive by others!

While I'm *not officially* condoning office pranks (*a la* Jim vs. Dwight), many of us could stand to inject a little more playfulness in our daily lives. Here are some things you might try out:

- **Find the humor in the absurd.** Oftentimes, life doesn't make any sense. Things we expected to happen went in the opposite direction, seemingly defying reason. Try to think of parallel metaphorical circumstances with an equal level of absurdity: i.e. a person waiting 15 min for a parking spot (to "save time") is like sitting outside a hospital and waiting to become sick!
- **Sarcasm.** Tonal exaggerations help us imply our true feelings about a situation, but they tend to come off as more humorous than as whining. Just make sure the setting is appropriate!
- **Enjoy the comedic arts.** Humor comes in many shapes and forms, and sometimes it's more enjoyable to be on the receiving end. Watch a funny YouTube video or a comedy film with people who have a good sense of humor. Or visit a comedy club for an open-mic night; if you don't enjoy the performers' brand of humor, you can—discretely—make fun of the comics.
- **Prank your friends.** Create a set of circumstances that violate expectations (i.e. salt in the sugar shaker), and watch the reaction. **DISCLAIMER:** Your selection of methods and specific people to prank must be done judiciously...and always be prepared for payback!