

**CAREER WISE**

## Lighten up and take yourself less seriously

**W**e all work with someone who takes himself or herself too seriously. You know the type – the know-it-all who always has to be right or the person who repeats the same long-suffering achievement story over and over again. Or perhaps, you seem to get angry at every real or imagined slight, or immediately withdraw into a passive-aggressive silence. Are you the person who takes yourself too seriously?



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Jim Smith, a professional certified coach and principle with The Executive Happiness Coach®, said there are several things you can do to alleviate these types of situations. First, recognize that your opinion is only one opinion. You may be right, and others may be equally correct. There may be multiple valid paths to success.

Take a deep breath if you get upset. Practice getting to the calm space between anger and withdrawal. It is much easier to be objective about yourself when you are not hyperventilating about everything.

“Lean back,” Smith suggested. “People who are feeling particularly self-important will tend to lean forward, coming across as aggressive or argumentative. Sit back, ground your feet and open up your hands. You will feel more open to others, and your body language will reflect that.”

Be sure to check your assumptions regarding the situation, he added. Before you blow up, check with a friend and ask, “Could I be making up a story?” Finally, listen first – those around you have equally valid ideas and experience, so hear them out. And be curious. Instead of making everything about you, Smith said, ask questions to understand what others are thinking and why.

Smith said it also may be time to add some levity or lightness to relieve the tension in the room during complex or difficult conversations. The question is how much humor is the right amount. Used poorly, humor can shut down conversation or create a dark mood.

“Tread carefully the line between levity and inappropriate humor,” Smith advised. He offered some quick guidelines to help determine the difference.

- Start with you. Self-deprecating humor will always be safer than making fun of others. When you can laugh at your own eccentricities, you make it okay for others to laugh at theirs.
- Respect others. Even in the realm of humor, it is important to honor diversity and inclusion, so refrain from using language or stereotypes that may offend a reasonable person.
- Sarcasm is never appropriate. Smith likes to remind people that sarcasm comes from the Greek sarkazein, meaning “tear flesh.” Don’t go there.
- Focus on we. Telling stories that allow everyone to laugh together (e.g., “Can you believe we did that?!”) helps build a team; stories that direct laughter at “those people” creates division.

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