

# Risk Happens: Bring Snacks and a Sense of Humor



## By Rachel Sams

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When was the last time you really laughed at work?

I don't mean tittered, chuckled, or even giggled. I'm talking about a guffaw. A belly laugh. The kind that makes your eyes and nose run.

If it's been a while, maybe it's time to seek out some laughter.

In their book *Humor Seriously: Why Humor is a Secret Weapon in Business and Life*, Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas challenge what they call a "false dichotomy between gravity and levity," writing that "If there's one thing our research makes clear, it's that we don't need to take ourselves seriously to grapple with serious things."

Thank goodness.

Nonprofits and their risk leaders are grappling with a lot of serious things right now, from funding cuts and executive orders to attacks on communities they serve.

But we don't have to lose our sense of humor to meet the many challenges our organizations face. In fact, this might be a more important time than ever to hone that sense.

Aaker and Bagdonas explore the role of humor in building trust. Since the NRMC team has found that candor and vulnerability are fundamental to a healthy, risk-aware culture, we were intrigued to learn that "Shared laughter quickens the path to candor and vulnerability" as well as "Humor also helps us remember. By flooding our reward center with the neurotransmitter dopamine, humor engenders deeper levels of focus and long-term retention."

Those are all things nonprofit professionals and other humans could use more of right now.

If you'd like help, or some practice, using humor to strengthen your risk management work, consider joining NRMC this summer for a new course I'll be teaching, ["The Lighter Side of Risk Management—Using Humor to](#)

[Build Engagement and Insight.](#)” (While we are publishing this April 1, it’s not a joke! We really created and are enrolling for this class.)

This three-hour virtual class at 2 pm Eastern on August 4<sup>th</sup> will provide strategies for using humor in your risk role. Worried you’ll say the wrong thing? We’ll discuss ways to make sure we’re staying inclusive and respecting boundaries in your use of humor. We’ll have time to practice in small groups in a welcoming environment. I’ve hung out with enough risk managers that I’m confident someone in the class will be funny, though I can’t promise it will be me.

NRMC can’t wave a wand and disappear all the pressures and worrisome risks nonprofits face. These are challenging times, and they’re likely to stay that way for quite a while. We encourage you to embrace opportunities for humor when it’s appropriate and let laughter help you build your resilience. Laughter can [help you complete your stress response](#) and release the cortisol buildup that comes from stress. It can also bring team members closer and help you evaluate risk from a place of curiosity rather than fear. If that laughter happens because there’s ketchup on your shirt, thank the universe and McDonald’s for making you stronger and more resilient in your risk management practice.

*Rachel Sams is a Lead Consultant and Editor at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She enjoys learning and laughing with her students in NRMC’s Emerging Risk Leaders Certificate Program. Share your questions about the new class or favorite risk management jokes with her at [Rachel@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:Rachel@nonprofitrisk.org) or 505-456-4045.*