

THE JOKER

HARMLESS or HARMFUL

If it hasn't happened to you, then you must have done it to someone else.

BY CLAUDIA REIZNER

Leaving a fake phone message to call 'Mr Bear' (at the zoo) – come on, you've definitely had that one in your office. Harmless fun hey? Yes, when it's like that. The anticipation of waiting to see the hapless victim fall foul of your joke, the peels of laughter ringing through the office. It all amounts to lightening the atmosphere, bringing everyone a little closer together, and breaking the stress of a busy workload.

What amazes me is the lengths some people will go to. And more often than not, using the company unwittingly as the vehicle to deliver them. Because what jokers know is that for some reason, intelligent people can become incredibly gullible when it comes to communication from the powers above. And this, makes the joke all the more worth relishing! I heard a story of a prankster who moved the name plates from his colleagues' doors around and then sent an email from his absent boss saying there was a reorganisation of the department. They had to find their

name plate and move offices, and if there wasn't one then they were redundant. Surely that would be obvious? Not in this company. They actually believed management would approach a situation with such insensitivity!

IF you do something to someone, the chances are they will do something back – and perhaps worse.

Practical jokes seem to happen mostly on April Fools Day (obviously) but also when tensions are running high and someone feels the need to take action. All credit to them. Laughing (particularly at someone else's expense) is excellent sport. But take heed. A little bit of knowledge could make all the difference in whether people laugh or you are shown the door. I was told of a story of a manager's furniture being moved

out of his office and into the men's room - hilarious. No, what they didn't know was that his wife had kicked him out of the house that morning. Ah.

Jokes can of course back-fire. A friend of mine was the first to get a job after university. We were very envious of him until one day. In his office they were all leaving prank messages. Phil came back from lunch to find a message for him. He called it and a man with the stupidest, put-on voice said he wanted to ask the company to pitch for an enormous account. Phil, believing it a prank laughed at the man, teased him and told him how stupid his voice was. Upon putting the phone down, he then discovered to his horror **i)** the call was genuine and **ii)** it was only a matter of time before he was thrown out on his backside.

But what you must remember is the relationship between cause and effect. If you do something to someone, the chances are they will do something back – and perhaps worse. ■



