

Making things fun

**“For every Way,
there’s a way of following that Way that’s fun.”**

- the Oaqui

If fun changes the way that we do things... how can we add more fun to what we do?

What more could I do if I looked for ways to add more fun to the everyday?

How can I make things fun?

My first suggestion: start with the fun that is already there. Before trying to add more fun, slow down enough to see the fun you are actually already having. When you were a kid, you could have fun going down stairs on your bottom or rolling a ball down the stairs or trying to bounce a ball up the stairs or trying to go up the stairs backwards or walk down the stairs two-at-a-time. Same with reading and running and counting and painting and dancing and hugging. That fun never goes away.

What goes away is our willingness to choose to have the fun that is offered us. We have too many other things to do. We're not in the subway because we want to play. We don't take the escalator because it's more fun. We are there because we want to get somewhere else. So we aren't, in fact, totally there. And because we aren't, we don't see the fun.

Or, you could find other ways to remind your self. Keep a ball in your purse. A super ball, just in case.

Or a yo-yo. Or better yet, a paddle ball – you don't even need the paddle, just the ball and elastic.

Or make your self a list of games you could play on the way – on the stairs, in the subway, on the sidewalk.

Seven ways to make almost anything more fun

1. If there are two sides, add a third or take one away.
2. Every now and then, change sides: when someone is ahead by two somethings or when someone throws a 9, or when somebody has to go to the bathroom.
3. If there are turns (checkers, gin rummy, serving the ball in ping pong or volleyball), take them together, at the same time, as in “1, 2, 3...go,” or every now and then skip a turn.
4. If there is score, keep playing until you discover who’s the second winner, and the third, and the next, and the last. Or give each other points, or play pointlessly.
5. If it’s not fun, change it: add another ball, or a rule, or a goal, or take a rule away, or change a rule, or borrow a rule from another game, or add a whole game and play them both at once, or do something playful.
6. If it’s still not fun, change your self: try it with your eyes closed, or with your “wrong” hand, or tie your self to someone else.

If it makes the game better, for everybody, cheat.

The forgetting

Fun things are always fun. But we aren't. It's a beautiful day in a beautiful part of a beautiful place. You're beautiful. The people you're with are beautiful. And you see this piece of garbage on your potentially pristine path, and all of a sudden it all gets ugly. The place is really just as beautiful as it was before. And yet, the fun drops out of life as if the whole world were nothing but one big dark hole.

Sometimes forgetting is a good thing. Sometimes it's better that we forget how much pain hurts, how much hurt we have given or received. Sometimes forgetting is part of forgiving. Sometimes, we even forget our selves.

Unless we find some way to remind our selves, we stay inside, and outside things stop being fun, we stop being fun. Even our jobs. Even our lives.

The reminding

Which brings me to the purpose of this book, and my general life. So we can remind each other why we got into this in the first place, and what we can be getting out of it, as well.

See, I happen to believe that it really is fun. I mean just about everything. What we do. Why we do it. I think that fun is the natural state of, um, nature. And the only reason that things stop being fun, is because we don't let our selves out to play.

The list

**“Ask not what fun does for you.
Ask rather what you do for fun.”**

-The Oaqui

Finding and following your playful path is all about letting your self out to play. This explains why if you were to ask me to help you bring more fun into your life one of the things I'd most likely suggest is that you start making a list of as many things as you can think of that you already do for fun - *start* making, because this is the kind of thing you can do for the rest of your life.

Rocky, my very significant other, and I, in keeping with my oft-given advice, decided to create such a list, just for, you know, fun. It was the first time we tried to do this as and for a couple - as a couple, who, by chance, happen to be married for more than 47 years. It turned out to be a remarkably loving, far-reaching exercise – helping us surface aspects of our relationship that, even though they are central, are as subtle as they are profound in keeping us as close as we have become.

Here's our list (to date):

Between us

Paying attention to each other

Thanking each other (we do this a lot)

Admiring each other's talents

Encouraging each other to do what each of us most wants to do

Accepting each other's differences, limits

Listening to each other, asking questions, getting clear

Appreciating each other

Sometimes, just because

Sometimes, for the help, support, caring, effort

Making each other laugh

Being funny

Doing playful things

Little acts of improvisation, spontaneous skits

Doing things together

Helping each other

Making bread together

Dancing – spontaneously, sometimes without music

Sharing memories

Touching each other

Planning

Trusting each other

Respecting each other

When one of us looks happy

(singing, humming or smiling) it makes the other happier

Playing games

Generally, not keeping score

Appreciating each other's success

Being kind to each other

Changing the rules

Surprising each other

Who ever gets up first makes breakfast in bed for the other

When Bernie finishes using the electric toothbrush he replaces his brush-head with Rocky's, and vice versa

Making meals for each other

Making a face out of raisins and bananas

Appearing in an outrageous outfit

Leaving notes

Between us and the world

Learning something new together

Solving household dilemmas

Experimenting

Inventing

Trying new spices, fruits,
foods, etc

Trying out new restaurants,
grocery stores, parks,
neighborhoods to visit,
roads to travel

New ways to "make do"

New uses for common
objects

Walking together

Speaking in accents

Pretend conversations as we
walk by people, e.g.: "Where
did we leave that body?"

Exploring different paths

Walking and talking

Building junk sculptures on
our walks

Noticing flowers, smelling,
touching

Listening to bird songs,
trying to sing along

Sharing chores – keeping things fair,
in balance

Being with the kids and grandkids

Helping together

Being kind to others

Pointing out things to each other that
we think the other would enjoy

To other people (family,
friends, strangers)

To animals, insects, plants

Bringing new people into each
other's lives

Deciding together about how to
spend and save

Pretending

The School o' Fun

Let's start with something like a nursery school – a place of learning where, as far as the students are concerned, you spend all day having fun. I would have suggested that we start with a kindergarten, but, sadly, the fun part is not so true any more.

Let's imagine that this something-like-a-nursery-school is a high school, or a college, or an elementary school. All for fun, and fun for all. Taught by people who are having fun teaching. Attended by people who are having fun learning.

This place that we're imagining probably has no grades – there's no K-12, freshman to post-graduate, there's no A-F, failing or magna cum summa. Kids, students of all ages can be found together, talking, painting, building, reading, writing, experimenting, playing, even. There aren't any teachers – but rather people who have found deep, profound fun in doing whatever it is that they do: artists, scientists, mathematicians, healers, thinkers, each brought to their station in life by the fun they find in their work.

Let's dare to imagine that the whole school isn't even about learning, but about fun. Not even about games or play or art. And if there's a learning component to it all, it's about having fun, finding fun, creating fun, discovering fun. About discovering what is really fun for you – really, really fun. And then discovering what is really fun for other people. And then about discovering what is really fun for you and the people around you.

Suppose that the closest equivalent you can find to a math class is a conversation you have between you and someone who loves math, who spends as much time as she can find playing with numbers and theories of numbers and, OK, so maybe she does have a Nobel Prize in, what, topology? But she's in it for the fun, entirely. And when you talk with her about math, she talks with you about the fun of it all.

And the people you do art with, and read literature with, and explore dance with, and science with, and politics, and, well, you get the picture. All for fun.

I think this would be a place where a lot of learning would happen. A lot more than the learning that supposedly happens in our accredited institutions of learning. I think this kind of learning would be far more profound than the actual topics or disciplines that people play with together. I think the learning would be about our selves as much as it would be about the world, about each other as much as about a field of study. I think it would be a place where a lot of inventing would be happening – inventing of new fields of study, of new ways of teaching and learning and sharing, of new paths to play, new definitions for what it means to become a fully functioning human being.

I think that the people who graduate this School o'Fun would achieve new levels of awareness and compassion, happiness and devotion. That for them fun would be a spiritual thing, a guide to greater consciousness, deeper humanity. It's not that they would transcend fun, but that they would realize fun, in themselves, in their friendships, in their community. Fun in its fullness.

It's difficult to imagine. Primarily because we don't have fun like this. Not as adults. We had it for a few years, maybe, if we were lucky enough to be loved and cared for and well fed. And then we graduated nursery school. And then, day by day, year by year, fun became something else. Just as learning became something other than play. And art became something other. And work became something very much other.

It's worth imagining though. Even if it's just for pretend. Because if we imagine hard enough we just might get a glimpse of what fun can become, of what we can become, being fun.

Fun work

I'm not convinced that efforts to make work fun are destined for success. I think the same thing about efforts to make learning fun, or writing fun, or just about anything else that we want to make fun fun.

Because, now that you ask, most human endeavors are already fun. Because the thing that keeps the best of us as good as we are is the fun we find in doing what we do, whether the thing we are doing is building a house or a game or a community, making plans or music or medicines, fixing the plumbing or a computer network or a school system, writing poems or proposals. Engineers, mathematicians, surgeons, dancers, architects, so many of the truly accomplished many readily confess to how much fun they are having doing whatever it is that they do. Gamification? They don't need no stinkin' gamification. They don't need to keep score, to get trophies. What they need is the opportunity to do the work they do best. It's not the teambuilding, not the motivational lectures, not the causal dress day, not the snacks in the break room. It's the fun that comes from doing the work you are good at. Of doing good work. Of the work you do when you do it well.

These people, the ones who are already having fun, these are the best people to teach us how to make work more fun, because they already know what it's like when work works. They know what it means, this idea of work being fun, because they're already having it. They can tell us about the things that help them have the fun they are having, and the things that keep them from it. About the leaders that give them the chance to work at their best and the leaders who keep them from it. About the good meetings, the good teams, about the good job, the genuine joy of the job well-done.

We always need fun – in the workplace, in the meeting place, by the fireplace... (actually, any place you can think of). But in the workplace, the absence of fun is more telling, more, shall we say, costly. In the not-so-good times, it's not so easy to have the kind of fun we have in the very good times. Hard to invest in a spiral sliding board – especially right after you've had to downsize again. So a different kind of fun is needed.

As things have slowed down for so many of us, there's a kind of fun whose value and benefits becomes ever vivid, the slower things get. This fun is the fun of having a job, at all. In a sad way, it's a good thing, because it points us to something even more sustaining. It's what I call "the fun of work."

From time to time, at any time, really, work can actually and honestly feel something very much like fun. When you are working well. When you are engaged, involved, challenged, interested. When what you are doing becomes so interesting to you that you lose track of time,

that you stop thinking about all those crazy things you think about when you're bored and worried, and find your self thinking totally and completely about the job at hand. This may not be fun of the haha kind. But it is fun, genuine fun, deep fun.

We all know people who find fun working. Sometimes it's a janitor or secretary, sometimes a foreman or manager. We all know times at work when we are actually having fun working. Like when we're part of a really good meeting, and everyone's really listening to each other, and everyone who has something to contribute has a real contribution to make.

So to make work more fun, we need to follow those people, and make note of those times. Those are our guides. They can show us the way.

When we are having fun together, especially when we are having fun working together, we are taking part in a mutually supportive relationship. Whether we are making a plan or getting a room ready for a meeting, if we are doing it together, and having fun, we feel together, individually and collectively.

We are at our best, together. We even look nicer, together. We listen to each other more closely, less critically, and we listen to our selves more closely, less critically. We increase each other's productivity, confidence, abilities. We increase our team's productivity, confidence, abilities. We increase our company's productivity, confidence, abilities. And when we extend that relationship to our customers, when we have fun, together, with our customers, we all become more successful. Because we enjoy the relationship we have created. We enjoy working with each other. We enjoy the things we do together and the way we do them together. We succeed more often. And when we don't succeed as much as we had hoped to succeed, we just get a little closer to each other so we can figure out how to make the game better, more fun.

Of fun and games

The world that we think we understand today has changed, fundamentally, from the world we thought we understood 50 years ago. Fundamentally.

Much of that change has been driven by technology and those who drive technology, which, by now, has become just about all of us.

Now, when we talk about “social games,” we’re not talking about the kinds of games we play with our friends or families in the playground or street or family room. We’re talking about games we play, together, sure, like the social games we used to play, only now we play them online. And online, they’re something fundamentally different. And so are we.

It’s the same for most of us when we talk about community. We’re not talking about our neighbors, our neighborhood. We’re talking about the people we are connected with online.

And, for more and more of us, even when we talk about work, real work, we’re talking about a kind of work that takes place somewhere else – not in any particular office, but everywhere and anywhere we connect with, we are connected by. And not the kind of work where you have one job and one team and one boss and a regular paycheck with benefits, even. But more like the kind of work musicians call “gigs.” A little job here, a little job there, working for and with different people on different things, sometimes for a day, sometimes for maybe a couple years, off and on. Like games.

Like games, the institution of work has changed, fundamentally. In retrospect, what we had once defined as business, as sustainably cooperative ventures characterized by a collective identity, has become more characterizable as a condition of codependence, co-oppression, of tribalism, fragmentation and internal rivalry. As the pace of change has increased, the institutions of business have become truly profitable only for a dwindling few. And what was once understood as a cooperative venture has, for the most part, become riddled with internal competition, sabotage, stratified, unresponsive to the individual, where oppression has become institutionalized and, as Paulo Friere observed in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “the oppressed oppress each other.”

We can’t predict what work, or the societies that sustain that work, will become. Working harder won’t help. Just like we are learning to play differently, we need to learn how to work differently. To find work differently. To think of our selves differently.

While we go about redefining and being redefined by our technologies, what we call games and what we call work and what we call community is changing at an increasing pace.

As the pace of change increases, games become an increasingly attractive occupation, playfulness an increasingly valuable asset. Play is how we have learned to learn. Instructions? We don't need no stinkin' instructions. We play our way to understanding. We learn how to use a new browser, not by reading about it, but by using it, playing with it. That's how we learn how to work our smartphones and iPads, microwaves and multi-function thermostats. We use them, we play with them.

When we play, especially when we are playful, we are most able to respond to change, to changes in our selves, in our community, in our environment. When we play playfully even failure becomes part of the game. Just like when we were kids playing with blocks, we keep building, block-by-block, until it all falls down, then start over. Sure, you can build on what's still standing. Sure, you can knock them down, too.

This is why play is traditionally identified as childish, as what children do. Childhood is a state of continuous, rapid change, of having to adapt to a changing body, a growing mind, with changing needs, changing purposes, changing abilities. Of falling down and getting up again and falling down again. Of making messes and sometimes even breaking things on purpose just so you can see what's inside.

Children seem to be almost always at play, because this is how they can best engage with a world they don't understand, because this is how they have the most fun.

Fun itself hasn't changed. What's fun might have, but the fun of fun, the attraction, the need for fun is the same as it has always been. And neither has the fun of playing changed. And neither has the fun of playing alone, nor the fun of playing together, nor even the fun of work, even. Games have changed and will continue to change. The nature of work has changed and will continue to change. But fun is fun, as much fun now as it was then. Forever.

By understanding fun in all its many meanings and manifestations, we can build a solid foundation for understanding games, in all their meanings and manifestations.

By examining games, as they were, and as they are becoming, in the light of fun, as it has always and will always be, we can build a better understanding of how games help us adapt to the increasingly rapid pace of change.

If I were the One and the One were me

What I'd want from My creations – especially the conscious ones:

A) Appreciating. Not of Me, per Se, but of the world I make for them. I don't think I'd be the kind of One Who'd need thanks. I'd be the kind Who'd want to see My creatures enjoying My creation. As much of it they can possibly enjoy. As many moments and movements of it they can perceive. I'd want My creatures to be more and more intelligent so they could perceive more and more of My creation, and delight in it, completely.

B) Enjoying themselves. As deeply, as thoroughly as they can possibly perceive My creation, I'd want my Creatures to enjoy it. I'd want even more for them to enjoy themselves. That, for me, would be all the praise I'd require, all the prayer I'd want to hear. Not sacrifice. Not ceremony. Not even thanks. Just enjoyment.

C) Enjoying each other. In the same way that they enjoy themselves, I'd want them to enjoy each other. As many and much of each other as they can embrace. In fact, the wider their embrace, the more they'd be fulfilling My purpose. Embracing family, friends, neighborhood, community, strangers, people of different abilities and languages, cultures, traditions, values, status.

D) Enjoying the other. As much of else that is not their selves as humanly possible. All My creation. My clouds and lightning bugs. My mountains and mud puddles. My wildness. My tameness. Appreciating. Enjoying. As much as they possibly can.

No, of course not, I don't expect all of them to enjoy all of it, or all of themselves, even. But the more they do, the closer they'd be to being the beings I made them to be.

E) Loving. At least loving themselves. Loving the intricacy, the harmony between the parts and the whole, the mind and the body. Loving even the selves they find themselves with. The selves of animals, of trees, grass, even. Enough to keep themselves healthy, make themselves healthier. Enough to heal themselves. To heal the others.

So, all right. Maybe that's expecting too much. So maybe if they were just having fun, being fun, creating fun – it would be enough for Me. Better than gratitude or sacrifice or prayer.