



## **An Action Plan for Fun**

**Community**

**Law Department Management**



It was a bright, warm summer day outside, but the office on the floor where most of the Telstra legal team in Melbourne *usually* sit together was dark and quiet. The sign on the door told me the level was closed, but I scanned my pass and the electronic chirp and green light told me I could push open the door and enter the stuffy silent level.

As I made my way towards my locker for the first time in over nine months, the sensor lights above me flickered to life. Now brightly lit, the muted office level was even eerier. I had been in this office many times over the past four years, many times early in the mornings, more times late at night.

Without thinking, I called out “Hello?” I obviously got no response.

While intellectually I had known “*The office is empty,*” thinking it and then seeing and feeling it were very different things. The weight of the absence of my work colleagues struck me even more when I was here, looking around at where they should all be typing away.

I knew I missed being around my colleagues, but it surprised me that I hadn't noticed the extent of this until I was in the presence of their empty desks. As much as we love our friends and family, many of us build a strong support network in our jobs.

Like me, you might not even perceive the importance of the multiple mini-interactions we used to have. I missed the jokes in the kitchen, the random after work catch up invites, the team lunches, the social get togethers! I missed the fun!

You know the saying, “*All work and no play makes Jacqui a dull girl.*” Well, at the end of last year (and, let's be honest, even the start of this year), I was feeling some serious lack of play!

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**Sources and further reading on the importance of playfulness:**

[Association of enjoyable leisure activities with psychological and physical well-being](#)

[Project Play and Culture Hero](#)

[Specialists on Play keynote speeches](#)

[The well-being of playful adults: Adult playfulness, subjective well-being, physical well-being, and the pursuit of enjoyable activities](#)

Now I am planning on turning that around. Together, we make the most of 2021. More fun with our family and friends. More fun projects and achievements for ourselves. More fun making a meaningful difference on issues we care about. And, perhaps even more fun at work!

Below, I'll give you some tips and a planning guide to creating more fun in your daily, weekly, and monthly life.

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## **Why is fun important?**

Why bother with fun, I have work to get done...

While there are always difficulties and once in a lifetime problems, research consistently shows the importance of play and having fun for grown-ups, as well as kids. Importantly, for lawyers, there are many benefits in the areas of mental well-being also.

### **Benefits of fun**

- Less stress and more energy
- Better sleep
- Better relationships
- Lower blood pressure and cortisol levels
- Lower levels of depression
- More confidence
- Greater quality of life
- More intrinsic motivation
- Positive attitudes towards the workplace or job satisfaction

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- More creativity, spontaneity, and better problem solving
  - Better writing skills

Apparently you can even laugh off a little of your latte. It might take a while, but laughing for 10 minutes can burn up to 40 calories, so perhaps make stand-up comedy your new exercise routine. There are so many benefits for work, life, and family to seek out and cultivate fun and playfulness!

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## What kind of fun is your fun?

We each have different tastes in food and different tastes in fun. One person's best-loved activity might bore another person to tears.

You might have some ideas that instantly spring to mind. Perhaps you have always wanted to learn to dance salsa, or you used to paint but stopped.

One type of fun I am looking forward to (tentatively) this year, is seeing live gigs, especially comedy, again. I am starting to look at the different shows and options available and planning around them.

What if I don't have any "fun" hobbies?

You don't have to be a professional athlete or be an expert in crochet to have hobbies you find fun.

Enjoy your kind of self-care. Self-care is sensible maintenance for the engine and body of the vehicle you've got to drive for a long time.

For me, fun is also re-designing a contract so that it's easy to read (sometimes even enjoyable to read). In the legal team at Telstra, there are so many opportunities to explore ideas in legal innovation, making the "not as fun" parts of the day-to-day work more enjoyable. I also have a boutique law firm where I work with amazing female founders and help legal leaders innovate. While technically it's "work," it definitely invigorates and re-ignites my passion for the law and legal practice.

Work through the below list and start to generate ideas of "fun for you" things.

### Activities

What are you doing when you feel in "flow"? What gets your creative juices going? What activities could you do for hours? What skills do you have that others marvel at?

*Examples: Sewing, painting, baking, DIY renovating, car maintenance, podcasting, writing*

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## Physical

What physical sports or exercises do you enjoy? Have you always wanted to try something new? Does a friend do a physical activity who you could ask to show you the ropes?

*Examples: Salsa dancing, Pilates, power walking, surfing, stretching*

## People

Who do you miss? Who makes you smile when you think about them? Who would love to talk to you? Who could you help?

*Examples: Family, friends, current colleagues, past colleagues, extended family, mentors, mentees.*

## Places

While the globetrotting opportunities at present might be limited, there are lots of ways to find fun in your own backyard. Do you prefer warm or cool places? What suburbs do you love? Where have you not been in ages? Where have you never been before in your town... city... state... country? Where would you love to live? Where can you go so that you'll be surrounded by trees?

*Examples: Find a forest (or any greenery) to walk through, go to the library, stroll through an old neighbourhood you used to live in, visit a "touristy" place in your own town, try out a co-working office, go to the beach... the river... a lake... a mountain... a valley!*

## Self-care

Enjoy your kind of self-care. Self-care is sensible maintenance for the engine and body of the vehicle you've got to drive for a long time. What relaxes you and makes you feel refreshed? What have you been 'putting off' that you know you "should" do for yourself?

*Examples: Get a massage, grooming (pedicure, manicure, haircut), book in multiple physio appointments, meditation, breathing exercises, create a medical fun day and get all your doctor, dentist, and other appointments done on the one day and then have a massage to top it off.*

## Work tasks

What parts of your workday do you enjoy? Who do you like working with? What do you wish you could "fix" about your work or workplace? How social is your workplace? Who would you like to learn more from at work?

*Examples: Create a new project idea in an area you love, do the thing you like most about work first thing in the morning, get the thing you like least out of the way first thing, create or join the social club, start or join the diversity and inclusion committee.*

## Wish list

Big dreams time! What is a *big* fun thing that you wish could happen? It might be unrealistic or hard or completely out of reach (for now), but write it down anyway! If money or time or family commitments were no issue, what would be an amazing way for you to have fun?

*Examples: Perform in a musical, run a marathon, change jobs to work in your dream industry, start a nonprofit, volunteer, live on a beach, a fortnight-long extended family holiday.*

## Making work (more) fun



Lawyers work a lot. In 2019, the ACC In-house Counsel Trends Report found that **20 percent** of in-house counsel worked between 51 hours and 60 hours, and **40 percent** worked between 41 hours and 50 hours per week, whereas **seven percent** worked over 60 hours each week.

Given we spend so much time at work, perhaps we could dedicate some of that time to fun!

## Buzzword bingo

Corporate and legal jargon fills the contracts we read and the emails we write. Jargon can confuse readers and frustrate clients. If jargon is a killjoy in your team, think about creating a Buzzword Bingo.

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## Fun meetings

A fun meeting might sound like an oxymoron but ensuring that meetings are efficient and effective with a dash of fun can leave team members feeling refreshed instead of drained:

- Purpose + Agenda: *A purposeful meeting is always more enjoyable. Even for a short meeting, it only takes a moment to set out the purpose and a few dot point agenda items, but this can help people prepare, so the meeting will progress better.*
- Deliberately start late: *Deliberately set meeting times five or 10 minutes past the hour to give people a chance to refresh between meetings instead of rushing.*
- Themes: *With the ability to change backdrops or add headgear, themes can add an element of fun to more informal team meetings.*
- Put fun on the agenda: *Leave a spot on the agenda for a playful activity of some kind, this could be a dedicated joke space, an amusing discussion topic, a cat video, etc, something that the entire team can enjoy and contribute to.*

## Explore the law

There are so many exciting areas of the law emerging and old areas of law that need dusting off and re-examining. Legal operations, client experience, and legal design are all fascinating areas to investigate. Often, we get caught up in executing our work, and we forget we used to read and learn about things because we wanted to.

Are you drawn to particular areas of law or legal practice? Perhaps you have always wanted to learn more about a particular area of law or would like to look into evolving spaces such as automation or contract design. Explore the law without a specific end purpose in mind. Read and learn or attend an ACC event on an area of law that calls to you.

## Other ideas

- Put a recurring task in your to do list with a quote or joke that makes you smile
- Start a monthly activity with work colleagues — sports, reading, wine tasting; there are lots of options depending on what your fun is, and it can involve just two people to begin with
- Try to reduce the amount of time you have to spend with “unfun” people and increase the time you spend with playful, fun people

If someone asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up, we didn't say 'I want to be busy'.

[DARA SIMKIN](#), PLAY SPECIALIST IN WORKPLACE PLAYFULNESS

- Refresh your feed! If you have professional or work-based social media, like Yammer or LinkedIn, mix up your feed by seeking out fun, playful accounts (e.g., Legal Cheek, Very Legal Problems, or whatever fun things you want to focus on this year)

## How to plan for year-round fun

If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail to have fun!

I've made the planning easy for you with the 2021 Year of Fun Planner.

### Step one: Why is fun important to you?

Think about the benefits of play and laughter. Consider some of the previous stresses you'd like to avoid this year. Write down a few reasons why fun is important to you.

*Example: Work gets serious so I need to take a break to lighten my mood. To enjoy time with my family.*

2021 Year of Fun Planner	
Why is fun important to you?	
Your secret ingredients for a fun year	
	How often?
Activities:	
Physical:	
People:	
Places:	
Self-care:	
Work tasks:	
Wish list:	
Other:	
Explore the law	
What new area of law or legal practice will you explore for fun this year?	
Fun at work	
What will you do at work this year to make weekdays more fun for you, your team, and your clients?	
Actions	
What is the very next step you will take to kick off the Year of Fun?	

Use the **Fun Planner** to help spark ideas of the things you find fun.

Use the **Fun**

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## Step two: Secret recipe for fun success

As I mentioned earlier, you have your own special combination of activities that creates fun for you. It might change over time, but it is up to you to know what you enjoy and to try new things if you aren't sure. Look over the different categories and think of things you like doing in each category. Then list how often you'd like to do that activity. Once you have your special combination of activities that make up a fun year, month, week, day, **add** them to your to do list and make specific time for them on your calendar.

*Example: Dance cardio (once a week), Contract design (once per week), Massage (once a month), Work drinks catch up (once a month), Beach holiday (once a year)*

## Step three: Explore the law

All of us have Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points or Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits we need to get. Why not spend your CPD points exploring a new area of the law? Write down the areas you have always been interested in, but that might not be your current practice area or even an area you will ever work in. There could be lots of fun waiting for you to explore the law and your career from a different perspective.

*Example: Learn about current approaches to Intellectual Property around collaboration*

## Step four: Fun at work

How can you make work more enjoyable for yourself? For your colleagues? For your clients? What aspects of your work are painful or "unfun" at the moment? How could you tweak them to make them more enjoyable (or stop doing them altogether)? Write down your ideas for making work fun.

*Example: I will start a monthly themed catch up with my female work colleagues.*

## Step five: Lights, camera, action it!

Huzzah, you have a list of fun ideas to fill 2021 with mood-boosting endorphins and create better relationships at home and work. So, how will you action your new list of fun ingredients? Do you need to research different exercise classes or register for upcoming [ACC events](#)? Add that very next action item to your to do list.

*Example: Ask Melanie if she wants to present on contract design with me; Put the time in your calendar to reach out to work colleagues past and present*

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## Share the fun!

One of my fun activities is making and testing (and *testing!*) different cocktails. So, here is a virtual 'cheers' to you and the year of fun you will have, as well as the many benefits that playfulness and enjoyment will bring the rest of your colleagues, family, and friends! I can't wait to hear the fun you will have this year and share your ideas for a 2021 filled with fun.

Let me know about your #2021yearoffun!

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