

Behavioural Scientist Warns: 'Fun Days' Don't Fix Team Morale

Research shows why morale boosters flop — and why playfulness drives real performance.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM,
September 17, 2025 /

EINPresswire.com/ -- Away days. Icebreakers. Team-building retreats. Companies keep investing in “fun”; but the results rarely last.

A growing body of research shows why: most morale boosters simply don't work. In some cases, they even harm performance. “The bigger the group, the longer the programme, the weaker the effect,” says [Chris Marshall](#), behavioural scientist and founder of [The Playfulness Lab](#). “And yet organisations keep repeating them. Why?”



The answer lies not in the events themselves, but in the assumptions beneath them. For centuries, organisations have been built for efficiency: standardisation, process, predictability. These are excellent for machines, but far less so for people. Layered on top of this is a lingering belief that emotions are a distraction and playfulness a perk. The result is a culture where joy is bolted on rather than built in.

Fun days are the product of this mindset. Leaders chase the outcomes of playfulness - innovation, collaboration, resilience - without creating the conditions that produce them. But playfulness is not something that can be scheduled once a quarter. It is a state people enter when they feel safe, curious, and connected. And it is not sparked by herding employees into another spaghetti tower exercise.

This points to a fundamental misunderstanding: play is an activity, while playfulness is a mindset. Playfulness is what happens when teams feel safe enough to ask “what if?”, brave enough to challenge assumptions, and energised enough to care. It is not simply enjoyable; it is a high-performance state, especially under pressure.

At The Playfulness Lab, Marshall and his team work with leaders to bring playfulness into the flow of everyday work, not just into the margins around it. The method is not about adding more “fun” but about removing the blockers that stifle curiosity and adaptability: fear of mistakes, pressure without purpose, and rigid cultures where seriousness is confused with value. When playfulness is present, performance lifts. When it disappears, it is usually a sign that something deeper in the organisation is broken.

The case for this shift is urgent. The pace of disruption is relentless. Markets change quickly. Pressure is constant. Certainty is rare. In such conditions, old leadership reflexes - control, caution, overplanning - do not just fail; they backfire. What teams need is not another away day, but leaders who know how to unlock adaptability, creativity, and connection when circumstances are toughest.

In times of disruption, rigid teams break. Playful ones bend, adapt, and thrive. The challenge now is not to make work more fun, but to make it more playful: because playfulness is not a distraction from performance. It is what makes high performance possible.

About The Playfulness Lab

Founded in 2025 by behavioural scientist, applied psychologist, and former athlete Chris Marshall, The Playfulness Lab exists to help leaders build exceptional teams that love what they do and thrive in times of disruption.

At the Lab, playfulness isn't treated as personality or perk, but as a science-backed leadership state. One that unlocks energy, creativity, and trust when the pressure is on. Through its tiered learning pathway, from the Foundation Course (a practical introduction for leaders looking to re-energise teams and shift culture) to the Practitioner Programme (an intensive six-month journey to embed playful leadership under real-world pressure), the Lab equips managers, coaches, and executives with the tools to transform how they lead.

Emma London
The Playfulness Lab
7921773224 ext.

[email us here](#)

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