

The background is a textured, light beige paper with various whimsical doodles and torn paper edges. In the top left, there's a dark red torn edge and a green leafy branch. In the top right, there's a green torn edge, a white ghost-like figure, and a curved arrow. In the bottom left, there's a green torn edge, a speech bubble, and a star. In the bottom right, there's a dark red torn edge with a plant sprig, a star, and a ghost-like figure. The text is centered on the page.

# WHIMSY IN THE WORKPLACE

+  
Strengthening Team Bonds Through Unconventional Methods

Zoe Shanahan

# A Very Serious Solution

Hide plastic  
eggs.






# The work did not change

But the atmosphere did

There were still...

- 
- deadlines
  - reviews
  - compliance
  - client expectations

What changed

- communication opened
- collaboration softened
- the office felt more like a team



Proposal work has a  
pressure setting

and it is  
usually turned  
up to high

**When pressure is the  
only emotional setting,  
people armor up.**

So... whimsy....

not forced fun. not fake culture.

***Genuine moments of lightness that let people exhale.***

Not

smiley-face sticker  
on burnout

Not

mandatory  
team fun

Yes

lightness  
with purpose



# Strong teams feel safe enough...

To be honest

ask





admit

share

disagree

try


***Psychological safety is built through repeated interactions — not mission statements.***





# Whimsy lowers fear

Not standards

## Low-stakes imperfect

- bad Photoshop
  - ridiculous jokes
  - trying out loud
- 

## High-value behavior

- ask the question
  - share the half-formed idea
  - try the layout
  - speak up earlier
- 
- 

imperfection is survivable



Fear is expensive

pressure without  
recovery becomes  
friction

**Play is not the opposite  
of productivity. It  
makes sustained  
productivity possible.**

# Permission, not performance

This is not mandatory fun

## Forced fun

- mandatory
- performative
- everyone has to be “on”

## Real whimsy

- voluntary
- authentic
- many ways to participate

quiet observation counts



dry humor counts



loud chaos not required



# The hot dog question

low-stakes questions reveal high-value thinking

***Psychological safety is built through repeated interactions — not mission statements.***

branding

customer experience

operations

off the rails

absurd opening → real perspective

# Culture is built in micro-moments

human connection supports performance

## **Pressure-only**

urgency without recovery

efficiency without warmth

seriousness mistaken for professionalism



## **Whimsy-capable**



trust built before crisis

small moments protected

laughter allowed to finish

Every interaction sends  
a signal

**Leaders shape  
emotional climate.**



☆ **Small. Voluntary. Low-stakes. Human.**

what whimsy looks like in practice



**silly opener**



**inside joke**



**puzzle table**



**bad Photoshop**



**tiny celebration**

***“You are allowed to be a person here.”***



Teams that recover  
together

perform better  
together

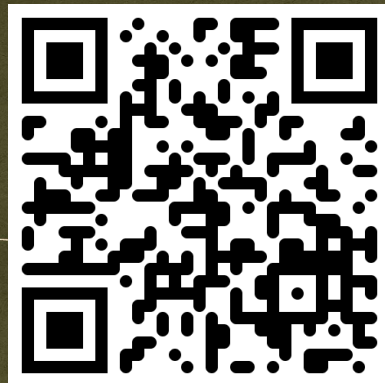
**Build teams that can  
move through it without  
losing trust.**

**Make room for  
something  
ridiculous.**



THANK YOU!

STAY IN TOUCH



[zoecs.j.substack.com](https://zoecs.j.substack.com)

