

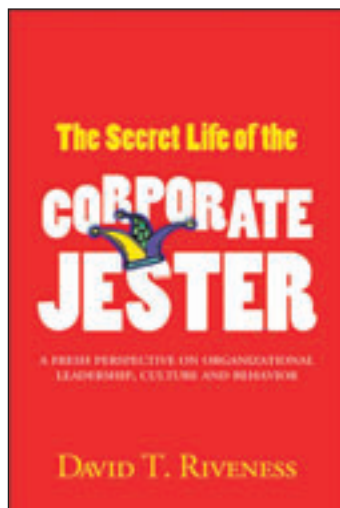
Humor at work isn't always a laughing matter

■ Sometimes it takes a clown to bring serious issues to the forefront. And other times, stroking the boss' ego is the best way to ensure your survival.

BY RICHARD PACTHER
rap@WordsOnWords.com

Playing the class clown may be briefly energizing, but when you're sweating in the principal's office and no one is laughing, the benefits are ephemeral. In the workplace, humor is a delicate commodity. It can be disruptive, of course, and going one-on-one with your boss, especially when he is dull-witted or thin-skinned, will likely prove a bad career move. And if your target or a bystander takes offense, your repartee could constitute harassment or worse. See your company's human resources policies for further illumination.

Yet humor is a ubiquitous element in the workplace; the setting for about half the sitcoms on TV (the others are domestic comedies, naturally), and any office, factory, farm or shop devoid of laughter is probably automated.



Still, humor-in-the-office books are usually not very funny. For the most part, you had to be there, apparently. Yet, somehow, against all odds, here are two recent books dealing with occupational hilarity that are worthy of your consideration.

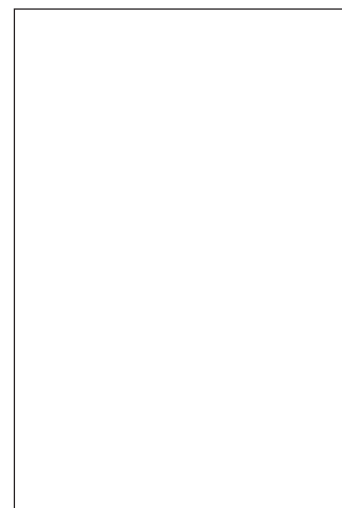
The Secret Life of the Corporate Jester. David T. Riveness. Jardin. 112 pages. \$14.95.

The jester is apparently more than just a clown or the butt of all jokes. A jester is in

the unique position of communicating often unpleasant verities to his patron, with nuance, tact and proper timing — lest his head become separated from his torso, figuratively or literally.

Riveness takes this business of jesting quite seriously, in fact, and defines it as an heroic and important role requiring leadership skills, honesty and wisdom. He makes his case with anecdotes, stories, poetry and bullet points.

What he's trying to do here, mostly successfully, is stake out a role for the outspoken and fearless individual — an in-house prophet, perhaps — that possesses a highly attuned sensitivity for nonsense of both the good and bad kind. Ideally, everyone in the organization would be similarly empowered. But in most business settings, there's scant tolerance for steady streams of brave truthfulness and unsolicited honesty, though managers often pretend otherwise. But Riveness' offbeat and clever little book is a cheerful reminder that humor can be a serious resource.



Ass Kisser's Manual: The Art of Keeping Your Boss Happy. Ademar Gomes, Beckham Publications Group. 72 pages. \$7.95.

Originally published in Brazil (in Portuguese), this tart tome was written by journalist and author Ademar Gomes, who has a wicked eye for human behavior. His faux-manual describes deeds we've observed nearly every day in and out of the office. The English translation is a little funky, yet the universal truth it con-

veys transcends the boundaries of grammar.

Gomes' lusty and hilarious instructions for sucking up to the boss are, at times, tasteless, but such vulgarity is rarely absent from most offices on a permanent basis, and half of the humor in this book comes from such authenticity. My only complaint is that each page is laid out at an odd angle, so to read it, you must tilt your head like a startled cat. But maybe such mischief was intended by the rascally Gomes.

If you have a boss with a bent sense of humor or a co-worker to whom you wish to deliver a message, this devilish tome might be the perfect gift, despite admonitions from HR.

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