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HEALTH

HOW TO MAKE WORK A LAUGH

Laughing at work pays off, it's said, and laughter classes are the best fun you'll have all week. **Report: Emily Chantiri**

● The next time you're in a job interview, it may pay you to laugh more.

According to a study conducted by employment agency Hay Group, called *Predicting Executives' Performance from Spontaneous Humour During Job Interviews*, executives who laugh more during the interview obtain larger bonuses one year later.

Hay Group studied 40 executives who were being interviewed by the same organisation. They counted the number of times they laughed during the interview process and then measured how the executives used humour during that process. They found the size of their bonuses correlated positively with the

use of humour during the interviews. In other words, the funnier the executives were, the bigger the bonuses.

Cris Popp, of "corporate laughter providers" Laughter Works, runs laughter sessions for organisations and says laughter works because it has a positive effect. When you're laughing, your body relaxes, your endorphins are flowing and you associate laughter with fun times. Laughter works really well for breaking down barriers; particularly when there are new people coming on board, a merger or just boosting staff moral.

"People are under a lot of stress and they have become too serious and they have forgotten how to enjoy themselves," Popp says.

The first point he discusses in his workshops is the notion that if you're not stressed then you're not doing a good job. Popp cites an example from US sitcom *Seinfeld* where one of the characters, George, is working for the New York Yankees baseball team.

"George did nothing all day," Popp says. "When *Seinfeld* asks him how he got away with doing nothing, his reply was 'Every time someone comes to my desk, I start to look really worried and they leave me alone because they think I

Lighten up: Laughter sessions at work have been found to boost team-building

have too much to do'. That's the notion we have in the workplace and it's just not true. It's the opposite – when you are not stressed, you're much more imaginative, memory works better and it's easy to make decisions. People who laugh more are easier to work with.

"When we see someone walking around relaxed and with a smile on their face we think they've got nothing to worry about," he says. "In reality, who would you rather deal with: Fred in payroll who is always grumpy or John who is always laughing? You wait until Fred goes to lunch and then you go down to payroll."

Popp is typically called in when a team has a pressing deadline, a new internal direction or a need to work together. Usually the session will last no more than two hours. "I get them moving and laughing," he says. "When you hear someone laugh, it's infectious – you can't help but feel better. To get a team to work together, the barriers need to be broken down, then you've got more chance of achieving goals together."

Apart from physical laughter, the sessions include team-building games to encourage trust and that's when teams start to bond, says Popp.

After some internal reorganisation within Nokia Siemens, customer operations manager Ian Halliday got the sales and service delivery teams to go to a laughter session in Melbourne.

"We had a new team and several new appointments," he says. "We wanted something that was short, sharp, to the point. We took part in activities which helped staff to engage with one another; some for the first time. It helped create relationships where they didn't exist. Cris took us out of our comfort zone and we had tears streaming from laughter. It was welcome relief from day-to-day work."

You don't have to be in a good mood to get the benefit of laughter, Popp says. It crosses all cultures and when you hear laughter, it puts you in a good mood.

Jim Carlton, from Moreland Hall, an alcohol and drug treatment and education centre in Melbourne's north, held a laughter session for his staff as part of a yearly team-building initiative.

"The nature of our work is that we deal with complex personal issues," he says. "It was an opportunity for our staff to work and laugh together; the session freed up the group. We learnt how important it was for us to smile and take that back into our work." **BRW**