

You've got to laugh

Adding humour and positive thinking in the workplace is a simple solution to stress.

Nicola Doughty reports

"Hi. I'm Kate," a loud Canadian voice resounded around the room. "Hi. I'm Kate," she repeated and striking a pose grinned inanely at row upon row of surprised business people all expecting to hear all about how to relieve stress in the workplace.

But anyone expecting to just sit back and listen to a dull corporate speech about work practices would certainly have been disappointed. This humour consultant (yes, humour consultant) wasn't what you'd call run-of-the-mill.

Within minutes Kate Hull Rodgers was urging her audience to pull faces and pretend to rock with laughter. And, wierder still, after a few shocked minutes they were all doing it and the room was transformed by a giggling mass of business people.

This was just one of one of many seminars that Kate regularly carries out as she helps business-ees look at ways of bringing humour to the workplace.

With her Sheffield-based business HumourUs, which she runs with husband Bill, she holds seminars and courses about how to develop communication, teamwork and motivation through humour. It's not so much about telling jokes but about lightening up the atmosphere.

"By being positive and adding humour to the office it boosts morale and increases productivity," says Kate.

Research has shown that employees who enjoy their work produce more and managers who cultivate a happy work environment get more staff loyalty.

And a happy environment is good for the health too. A good belly laugh lowers the blood pressure for 45 minutes and gives our lungs and cardiovascular system a good work-out. It also releases those good old stress fighters - endorphins - which make us feel better and makes us better to work with, no doubt.

"We all see the statistics about stress and about how it accounts for one in three sick days," says Kate, "And laughter really is the best remedy."

"Stress is a huge issue these days...We've heard about road rage and now we have desk rage and stand up arguments between colleagues."

Lightening up the work environment and being positive is important to relieve frictions in the office. Combining her expertise as an award winning comedienne with her personal experience in mental health, Kate trains people through her interactive workshops and seminars on how to look at the brighter side to things.

Over the past ten years her skills have been called upon by governments, health organisations and businesses across the globe. She has worked with a variety of businesses including Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, Sheffield City Council, First Direct Bank and the NHS and as wide ranging as the Canadian High Commission of Human Rights and Universal Studios in LA.

"Many companies are beginning to see the affects of stress in the workplace but it's only recently that they have begun to realise that it is a health and safety issue," Kate said. "Adding humour and positive thinking is a simple solution to stress."

