

Ten minute call to...

Canadian **Kate Hull Rodgers**

is an actress turned management consultant who uses 'humourbics' and 'laughtercise' to make the workplace a more humorous place to be.

Humour at work





Licensed to have fun at one of Kate's workshops

Kate, why humour? Isn't the workplace supposed to be about serious business?

Humour isn't just about telling jokes or clowning around. Good humour is about being happy, thinking positively and enjoying what you do. You know, the word humour comes from the Latin for 'fluid' or 'flexible' – and in the Middle Ages people thought of humour as being healthy.

The biggest cause of staff absenteeism is no longer the common cold, it's stress, and stress comes from people feeling under pressure, bracing themselves against change instead of embracing it. Helping staff to be happy about their work helps combat stress and reduces staff turnover – happy staff stay. What's more, happy staff learn more easily, which reduces training costs, and they have better morale, improving teamwork.

Are you saying that humour brings financial benefits to the workplace?

Exactly. Happy staff work better, learn more, are off work less often and stay in their jobs. All this brings real benefits to the bottom line. Far too many workplaces are dehumanised, with staff working the longest hours in the developed world – that doesn't mean that they are effective. If people feel too pressured they stop being productive – humour is a safety valve that helps them keep going.

So, what is your role?

I'm there to start the ball rolling, present ideas, encourage people to work on ways to make their workplace more fun, and then to make myself redundant – they need to take the ideas away and use them themselves.

Managers can't do it on their own or make their teams have fun. Humour is democratic and organic, it grows from within the team. I give a team the license to have fun, encourage them to introduce things like 'random acts of kindness' or establish an end of the day ritual that is fun. This helps people leave their work where it belongs – at work. My program is now part of the services offered by NTP Meridian Management Consultants. Because they are well-respected and well-established business strategists, our clients are open when I introduce ideas that might seem daring. We tend to deal with very forward thinking management teams.

How did you get into to doing this?

I was having a hard time as an actress several years ago and that led to a nervous breakdown – I'd lost my sense of humour – the world seemed to be against me – and I was in hospital for a year and a half, taking drugs and being told I would never function properly again. But I managed to write a play about it called 'Cracked Up' which toured around the world, and in New Zealand someone said I should be running workshops to pass on my message about the healing power of laughter.

From workshops with people with mental health problems I gradually moved to working with managers (some would say not a big step!) and found that humour is a universal tool for helping people overcome their problems and take control of their lives.

Laughter is like physical exercise, it tones up the mind just like a visit to the gym tones up the body.

Is there any evidence to support the value of humour?

Yes. There's an increasing body of scientific research to prove how important humour is to our daily lives and its value in making the workplace a more effective environment for people. More importantly, I offer people my own authority. I used humour to overcome my own problems, and I can show how effective it is.

So how do people harness the power of humour?

They can come to one of the seminars I run for NTP Meridian (www.ntpmeridian.co.uk), or visit my website at www.humourus.org.uk, and invite me to come into their workplace.