

The serious side of laughter yoga

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I'm not disputing that laughter coach Phillipa Challis knows how to make people in the straight-laced corporate climate quickly lapse into bouts of laughter but Challis isn't satisfied just to tell me that. Now it's time for a brief experiment.

I can hear her over the phone speaker telling me to inhale deeply through my nose and exhale out my mouth. For the following breath, she tells me she wants to hear me. We both proceed to breathe loudly over the phone until I follow Challis' instructions to perform a type of shortened breathing that sounds like panting.

After one last extra-deep breath, I hold it, as I'm told. Challis' laughter, which is reminiscent of a Bingo lady's (in a warm way), starts to fill the room via my tinny phone speaker. She's right when she says laughter is contagious.

I break into a laughter that makes my lungs whistle.

"So I imagine now you're sitting there with a smile on your face already," Challis says.

Challis is the owner of corporate training, mentoring and development business Live Life Laughter. She uses laughter coaching in the interactive workshops and presentations she stages to teach corporations how to improve productivity and profitability through healthier and happier workforces.

Her clients have included ANZ Bank, MinterEllison Lawyers and

Ericsson Australia.

"There are those who laugh easily and those who are embarrassed by it but even they will laugh at some stage," Challis says. "What I see in those organisations is the camaraderie that comes about instantly and the physiological benefits of laughter." Before founding Live Life Laughter, Challis had a PR/marketing career that included roles as director of Geelong Chamber of Commerce and chairman of its marketing and membership services.

She trained to become a certified laughter yoga teacher and trainer under Dr Madan Kataria, a physician credited with putting laughter on the map as a movement to address all manner of psychological, physical and spiritual ailments.

Despite the funny side of laughter, Challis says her role has seen her visit some pretty challenging environments for some pretty serious reasons. She has provided relief after disasters such as the Black Saturday bushfires and droughts in Victoria.

One of her next big goals is to advance advocacy for better recognition of laughter as a valuable antidote to ill-health.

In 2015, a Deakin University study found that all dialysis nurses interviewed agreed or strongly agreed laughter had a positive impact on their patients' moods and that it was a feasible intervention worthy of recommending to patients.

"Thirty years ago people pooh-poohed yoga," Challis says. "And now it's seen as a modality.

"I do believe we're right on the cusp of everyone embracing the laughter."