



Boost the Holiday Spirit *with* Purposeful Laughter

By Stacey Morgan

Photo taken by Rachael Siegleman

We've all heard the saying "laughter is the best medicine," and there's some serious truth to that! Minneapolis-based laugh therapist Sarah Routman recently led a laughter yoga session with the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce Women's Business Bridge networking group. The session involved sharing the many health benefits of laughter, plus intentional exercises prompting laughter. Sarah took a moment to share with us how choosing to laugh every day can be a life-changing practice.

Tell us a bit about the start of laugh therapy as an industry. How did the concept get started?

Dr. Annette Goodheart, a psychologist from California, specialized in "laughter therapy" in the late 1960s. She was the first to develop a theoretical structure for using voluntary simulated laughter to help clients release strong or repressed feelings. The movement is now practiced in over 100 countries around the world, with thousands of free laughter clubs available across the globe.

Laughter is a unique business! How did you begin in the profession? What type of clients do you work with?

Once I experienced Laughter Yoga myself, I began to immediately incorporate it into my own work (at the time I was running a non-profit for college students). The more I shared it, the more I realized how little adults tend to laugh, and how laughter as a health and wellness tool needs to be taken more seriously. Now I speak to health care professionals, students, teachers, seniors, and even jail programmers, empowering people with the incredible tools of purposeful playful laughter. My sessions bring a sense of connectedness, well-being, and FUN into our lives with a few well-placed chuckles that will inevitably lead to belly laughs that everyone can readily feel—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

We've been facing unprecedented times. How can laughter help us right now? What are the health benefits?

Since laughter of any kind sends endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine rushing into your body, everyone feels better when they laugh. In fact, laughter can decrease stress, anxiety, depression, pain, and inflammation. Laughter increases oxygen and blood flow in the body, is great exercise, and when combined with deep breathing, can boost the immune system. And, on top of everything else, it's FUN!

What about those days when you don't feel like laughing. What do you do to engage? What advice do you have for others to open up to laughter?

When life is hard, when you don't feel like laughing, when nothing is funny, and you feel most challenged, that's when you need laughter the most. I take my own advice when I'm not feeling up to the task. I start by looking at myself in the mirror and smiling. Of course, that feels a bit awkward and silly, but it immediately sends endorphins to the brain and causes me to feel better. Like anything else you want to master, you have to practice purposeful laughter. I suggest people think of a time they laughed really hard. That usually brings at least a smile to their face. Watching funny videos is a perfectly legitimate trigger for laughter. The main idea is to laugh—no matter how or where you find the laughter. You'll feel better as soon as you do.

Do you have a special message to share with readers? Or anything else you'd like to add?

If you let your inhibitions go and give laughter a try, your life will never be the same. My favorite quote by Irving Berlin is, "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond." I believe laughter is the best response. I hope every day you'll put laughter into your life. You'll be glad you did.

Routman's non-fiction book, Ha Ha Ha! A Radical Guide for Laughter will be published in early 2022. Visit laughhealthy.com for notifications on when the book is available.