

# NEED TO LEARN? IT'S OK TO LOL

An L&D expert tells **John Hilton** that laughter really is the best medicine when it comes to learning

"If you don't like the jokes today there are six ways out of this aeroplane. Feel free to use them."

"Now, folks. Please, this is a life vest, not a toilet seat cover."

"If I can pretend to have your attention for just a few moments, my ex-husband, my new boyfriend and their divorce attorney are going to show you the safety features aboard this 737 800 series."

The above quotes are just a taste of the wisecracks used by flight attendants at the major US airline Southwest Airlines. Indeed, it's a technique the carrier uses to effectively engage an audience likely to zone out from the standard monotonous and repetitive safety instructions.

In fact, generating laughs is part of the official corporate motto at Southwest Airlines. They also test for humour as part of the recruitment process.

Humour is one tool leaders can use in all interactions with staff, but especially in learning situations, says Yamini Naidu, director of Yamini Naidu Consulting and author of the new book, *Power Play*.

"Humour power is

appropriately to influence," she tells *HRD*.

"I believe in the world of influence humour is the new frontier. And as leaders we are often afraid to use storytelling and humour because we think it might be unprofessional or it might be unsuited to the work context. But both of these are skills that can be taught and learned."

Naidu also quoted a 2014 article by Alison Beard of the *Harvard Business Review*, which said that laughter "relieves stress and boredom, boosts engagement and well-being, and spurs not only creativity and collaboration but also analytic precision and productivity".

**"Humour power is about using humour skilfully, purposefully and appropriately to influence"**

The article also stated that on average babies laugh 400 times a day, yet for people over 35 the figure was just 15. This was in addition to a Gallup survey which showed people laugh much more on weekends than they do on weekdays when they're at work.

"Humour is the Trojan horse of influence, and it allows leaders, for their difficult messages, to bypass the audiences' defences," says Naidu.

the near future. The World Bank, the IMF, GE and several major government ministries are licensing MOOCs content for their constituents.

