

101!

**“Fake it, fake it,
till you make it.
Like
orgasm.”**

Lenny Ravich, with a tip for those
who cannot find a reason to laugh.



Can you feel the rhythm? The dynamics between Ravich (left) and Liran (right), energetic laughter gurus, are hard to miss

Photos Courtesy of Avi Liran



The Marriott team letting it loose

Mr. Lenny Ravich, 72, recalls vividly his mother's somber tales on her experience of nearly getting raped by Cossacks (Ukrainian militants) and other painful incidences in his life surrounding his childhood and family. And before sinking into a mellow mood, he deftly swerves into a self-deprecating joke about being Jewish. The director of Gestalt Institute of Tel Aviv was here last month to conduct optimism workshops using humour and laughter as tools for better stress management. But his life journey was anything but a ball of laughs. In seventh grade he was placed in a special class after being diagnosed as a "disturbed" child. His anecdotes of woes and joys are chronicled in his best-selling book, "A funny thing happened on the way to enlightenment."

During his stay here, he, together with Avi Liran, a local-based optimism teacher, also conducted a session that involved the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) team. It was held at Singapore Marriott Hotel and this five-star establishment had provided the venue and catering complimentary for the CCF team as part of the hotel's "Spirit to serve the community" initiative.

With his partner-in-crime, Mr. Liran, 45, they hosted the lessons that involve more than just a session of jokes and jibes. They teach people how to use laughter as a tool to deal with stressful situations at work and in life generally. The dynamic between the duo was formidable, and it seemed like they've been pairing for a long time; but the truth reveals that they only met recently. "He charges me. He has so much life. He disguises himself, his exterior. He's really a ball of energy. I haven't laughed as hard as I did last year in the sessions we did together," confesses Avi on the natural chemistry that exists between them.

Greg Allan, Marriot Hotel's General Manager, was in Jakarta when he met Mr. Liran, who was doing a community service there. It was divine intervention as Mr. Allan had been avidly reading on the medical and psychological effects of laughter. One thing led to another, and it was a matter of time before the Marriott team was in stitches, dancing and singing.

"The whole team experienced a buzz and such a high out of the day. I think the lesson taught us to take ourselves less seriously and by opening our minds we can really release the energy and creativity hidden within," recalls Mr. Allan of the workshop his team had with laughter duo.

"Marriott is a people-oriented business and we employ to people to provide exceptional service and experiences to other people. Our associates have a choice each time they interact with a guest. They can make the interaction an exceptional experience or they can make it mundane process. Our goal is to motivate our associates to feel passionate about seizing every opportunity to "wow" our guests and our colleagues," he explains on why such let-loose sessions are important for his team.

Laugh Till Your Stomach Hurts

Remember how our mothers enjoyed casting this gloomy warning upon us when we were a gaggle of giggly children: "If you laugh too much, you will end up crying." While this hand-me-down omen bears little traces of truth, executives with pent-up stress and frustrations seldom indulge in tummy tickles for reasons unknown. Laughter has solid, scientific-based benefits which are hard to, well, laugh off. Gelotology, which is the study of humour and laughter and its effects on the human body, gathers that laughing protects the heart from common maladies like heart attacks. Mental stress cripples our endothelium, which is the heart's protective barrier lining the person's blood vessels. Its impairment can cause the cholesterol to build up in our arteries and this may lead to heart attacks or strokes. Laughter, according to Professor Steve Sultanoff who is the president of The Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor, increases the body's antibodies. The benefit of laughing is not rocket science, but people do tend to forget the lighter side of life when life throws constant curveballs mercilessly.

"Humour heals. Don't take life too seriously since you won't get out of it alive anyway. With gentleness and understanding we convince some people that the happiness option is a good and healthy one," Mr. Ravich conveys, with a tinge of tongue-in-cheek element in his advice.

In fact, laughter therapy is catching on in Singapore, albeit it being a slow-burning trend. While there are over 5,000 laughter clubs around the world, there is one official laughter club here, headed by Ms. Zareena Bana. Mr. Liran is one of the few local certified laughter yoga teachers. He reveals that though Singaporeans tend to be tougher nuts to crack because of inhibitions compared to Westerners and Indians, once they embrace optimism, they "soar higher" than those from other cultures. "What Lenny and I experienced in Singapore was phenomenal," Mr. Liran tells The Executive.



Mr. Ravich (in centre, wearing black) teaching the Marriott team how to let go of their serious selves.

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

The Executive had a chat with Avi Liran and Lenny Ravich over coffee, after a laughter session they conducted at Marriott Hotel. With huge doses of laughter, the irrepressible duo was tickled into revealing the real deal behind laughter therapy.

So do Singaporeans have a sense of humour?

MR. RAVICH:

Amazing! We were warned that Singaporeans will remain closed up and not laugh. My experience is that once Singaporeans are given the permission to be free to choose laughter, they become the most energetic and fun participants I have ever worked with in my entire life. This is the absolute truth! I was in awe!

What is the biggest challenge you face in your laughter workshops?

MR. RAVICH:

Some people resist because of old mottos that were handed down from generation to generation like "Easier said than done". We say, change that around to "Easier done than said." Or (the saying), "If you laugh in the morning you'll cry at night." Why not change that belief to, "If I laugh in the morning I'll feel wonderful at night"? With gentleness and understanding we convince some people that the happiness option is a good and healthy one.

Getting people to smile and laugh must be an energy-busting task. How do you personally recharge yourself for each intensive session?

MR. LIRAN:

After I do a workshop in Singapore, I need to rest for two days. We charge ourselves with everything we recommend others to do. Find the things that make you happy, seek them out actively.

If it's comedy that you need it, go find it. If it's a joke you need, use technology, go to Youtube, maybe. If it's proximity with your loved ones that you need, go be with them.

MR. RAVICH:

When I come out of a workshop, I feel like I went on a week's vacation. I go on real vacations and get tired. The worst suffering in the world for me is going on vacation. Every performer is rejuvenated by the close of a successful show. Recharging can sometimes be by getting together and getting inspiration and wisdom from other people.

Is laughter truly the best medicine?

MR. RAVICH:

Yes. Once, my wife fell ill and I took her to the hospital's emergency ward. I told her jokes so that she would die laughing. She said, "Yes, I may die, it's true. If I die, please marry a good woman for the children." I said, "If you die I will marry who I damn please." She immediately decided to get well. The colour came back to her face and she said, "Take me out of this hospital. We are going home." We did, and she is still well and healthy.

Avi Liran is a certified laughter therapy based in Singapore. For more information, go to www.ha-p.com. Contact him at 6339 6889. Get to know Lenny Ravich at www.lennyravich.com.