As I am increasingly hearing how practices are struggling with the impact of the current financial downturn, it brings to mind the words of Ella Wheeler Wilcox’s “Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone”. The advice in her words is as potent in today’s troubled times, as they were 117 years ago, which is sure proof that their underpinning philosophy is sound.

In some of the dental teams I have met laughter is a natural, spontaneous part of their team culture. This is usually due to the blend of personalities involved; life coaches often categorise people as ‘drains’ and ‘radiators’. They consider that productivity and energy are directly linked to the balance of drains and radiators in the team. So how can you identify the balance in your team?

The radiators have a ‘cup half full’ mentality; these people put the life into the saying ‘smile and the world smiles with you’. Their optimism is infectious because they are able to make people feel good about themselves. They radiate their energy and enthusiasm like rays from the sun. They are inquisitive and playful but focused too.

The drains on the other hand are people who one way or another leave you feeling diminished after you’ve been with them. You know the feeling - you started off a conversation bright and positive and you came out of it dull, negative and frustrated.

When working through difficult times it is important to ensure any drains in your team are not allowed to pull the rest down. The more difficult the times you are working through the more important it is to allow the radiators to radiate. If you want to be problem focused, think badly of yourself and everyone else, look for the cloud in every silver lining and surround yourself with drains.

The sad things about drains is that seldom realise they are a drain. It is not as though they gain from the energy; they drain energy from others and they drain their own energy too. One cure for the problems they bring could be found in laughology. Laughter can raise the spirits more than anything else. It has proven psychological and physiological benefits. This is surely why at this time when the world is in the doldrums, one of the boom businesses are the Comedy Clubs, where people can spend an evening of laughter to build up their reserves, before they go back out into the real world. Why should this be the case? Well this is what we know:

- Every time you have a good hearty laugh, you burn up 5 1/2 calories
- Laughing increases oxygen intake, thereby replenishing and invigorating cells. It also increases the pain threshold, boosts immunity and relieves stress

The teams that laugh together are the ones who will come through the current problems in the best shape. Laughter breaks up boredom and fatigue, fulfils human social needs, increases creativity and willingness to help, improves communication and breaks up conflict and tension, so go on; when appropriate have a good laugh.

Are you having a laugh?

Glenys Bridges looks at ‘radiators’ and ‘drains’ as a way to laugh your way through the day