



FOOD FUN: Helen Paige with gourmet cook Emma Reeves.

Pictures, cover and this page: CHRIS MANGAN

How to stir the corporate pot

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ADELAIDE corporate coach Helen Paige says making the most of staff knowledge, both learnt and inherent, is not fully understood in many workplaces.

Companies can save money and time, reward and motivate employees and lift productivity by capturing and developing the full potential of staff, she says.

One easy method of testing such knowledge management – or KM – is through a cooking session with her service company Fun.Food.Focus.

Sessions can revolve around making sushi, Italian fare, exotic Thai or Indian dishes, or French crepes. Big-four banks and accounting firms, through to small to medium enterprises, have tried the service.

“It’s not reinventing the wheel,” says Dr Paige, the director of Fun.Food.Focus.

“At the moment, bosses should be asking how to maximise all this informal knowledge and make the most of their people. We look to capitalise on information technology – now it’s time to concentrate on the human side.”

With this in mind, Dr Paige – also a university lecturer and mature-age university student with several degrees (social work, policy and administration, and law) and a doctorate in education – began Fun.Food.Focus last year.

It gives workers an opportunity to get together in an informal setting to push the boundaries.

Her own love of cooking, and plumbing individuals’ personal and professional strengths, come together in the corporate sessions.

“It was my lifelong commitment to learning and love of cooking which made me bring the two things together,” Dr Paige says.

“From all those years at uni, I know people who go to seminars just sit all day, and I wonder what they have

actually retained when they leave.

“My feeling is there is room to allow a bit of fun back into the learning process to allow people to rediscover or discover their creative side.”

By doing simple cooking classes together in a team environment, “many things can happen – enabling changes in motivation, time management, leadership or creative thinking” to come through.

“Working together as a team preparing food can just be for fun but it also can be used to reinforce certain strategies, such as resolving workplace conflict or improving workplace communications,” Dr Paige says.

Outside their normal comfort zones, people can relax and begin to reassess their performance in a constructive way.

After all, as Dr Paige stresses, work-

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places are now very much into an era where the majority of skills are knowledge-based.

As such, knowledge workers require a different management approach, she says.

This concept is a difficult one to sell in Adelaide but some larger companies have taken the plunge and appointed knowledge managers or a chief knowledge officer.

“We have moved from an agrarian to a manufacturing to a knowledge-services society,” Dr Paige says.

“Most workers have done tertiary studies and are used to working on their own.

“Their expectations are very much higher. They want to be autonomous and not be told what to do.”

The younger generations, as well as older people, do not want to be put into a box. They will “want to negotiate their own outcomes”.

“It all depends on how much you value yourself and how you see your-

self,” Dr Paige says. “Managers should get to know the ‘total package’ – the workers’ outside interests and personal concerns which shape the way they behave in the work environment.”

Empowering them to use their own initiative can help to liberate workers.

“A lot of people aren’t encouraged to think creatively in business,” Dr Paige says.

“Corporates should be using their capacity to encourage their people to think differently.

“In many work environments we are just so busy, and there are so many complex requirements, we tend to concentrate on just getting the work done rather than thinking of better ways to get jobs done.”

At all stages of life, workers have an abundance of untapped knowledge, she believes.

Even at retirement, highly experienced veterans should be encouraged to mentor or work next to younger workers to impart some of their knowledge.

Dr Paige, as well as running her corporate cooking classes which promote self-discovery, also is director of business service provider Timemaker. She also is a director of Advance Knowledge Networks – a meeting point for advocates of KM to get together.

These days, the proponent of international KM guru David Gurteen still has time to pursue her passion for cooking – Dr Paige is going to Paris this year for a master class in petit fours.

“I just love cupcakes and high tea,” she says.

The daughter of a Murray Bridge butcher, she only ventured into university life with some trepidation as a mature woman after several years as a secretary.

“I really didn’t know how I’d go but it soon developed into a lifelong commitment to learning,” she says.

□ For more information visit the website www.timemaker.com.au