



● NEWS

SHOW A LITTLE LOVE

Overcoming shyness through flirting training may help improve career prospects. **Report: Kath Walters**

● If you want the edge in your next job interview, why not try a “flirt workshop”. Katia Loisel-Furey, “flirt coach” and author of a new two-sided dating guide, *How to get the man you want, How to get the woman you want* (Inner Kiss, \$29.95), says the skills needed to flirt are valuable in understanding other people, their body language, feelings and reactions, and ways to put them at ease – skills that are just as useful in a job interview and in the workplace as they are in a bar.

At its simplest, flirting is the art of being genuinely interested in other people. Loisel-Furey, who was once acutely shy, has conducted about 50 two-day flirt workshops in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Each has between 30 and 50 participants. Based on five years of research, she contends that many people feel so insecure about themselves and their own abilities that they sabotage their own success.

As many men as women go to the workshops, which they see as a personal development activity, whereas men are in short supply for most other dating activities such as speed dating, matching-making services and on-line sites.

As a schoolgirl, Loisel-Furey spent lunch in the library, convinced that being short (less than 152 centimetres) meant she was destined for personal and professional failure. When someone told her that she came across as a “stuck-up bitch”, she was baffled.

“It was heartbreaking,” Loisel-Furey says. “I was very angry for a short period. But it made me think about why they were saying that, and address it.”

It is not about pouting or hip-swinging – well, maybe it is. It all depends on the kind of person you are. “We call it flirting, but it is about getting in touch with who you are, being the way you are with friends,” Loisel-Furey says.

“When you are out and about with your friends, you are playful, you flirt, you’re a bit cheeky, you are yourself – you don’t care what your friends think because you know they love you.”

Instead, most people are worried and anxious about themselves. “In a job interview, we fill our heads with negative

thoughts about ourselves and our ability to communicate, and that affects our body language,” she says.

Kym (not her real name) is a case in point. Kym was so shy that she found it difficult to look anyone in the eye and wanted to hide whenever she walked into a crowded room. Her shyness was part of the reason she was single at the age of 35. Two years ago, at the behest of her friends, she took the flirt workshop.

After a lesson on the theory of body language, Kym got to work, practising flirting with the other participants in the workshop. It was confronting and difficult but it helped her to change. “It bought things to my attention, and then I could catch myself doing negative things,” she says.

Two years later, Kym has a new job and a new relationship. “I am still a shy person but [the workshop] gave me the confidence to go out and try for something a bit out of my reach.”

Loisel-Furey’s focus on body language and positive psychology is part of a broader trend of advice and coaching stemming from new scientific research on how the brain works – called brain plasticity.

There is growing evidence to show that the brain establishes habits of thinking, but these can be consciously changed with dramatic results.

Neuroscientist Dr Norman Doidge, author of *The Brain that Changes Itself*, illustrated his theories of brain plasticity with powerful examples of patients who had recovered from disabling accidents and illnesses by “rewiring” their brain.

It is possible to get flirting wrong. Using body-language techniques and flirting to manipulate other people is easy to see through because most people have a fine-tuned ability to read body language.

People instinctively pick-up inconsistencies between body language and facial expressions and this sends an “alarm” signal to our brain, and we get a “gut feeling” that something is wrong, research from Tilburg University in the Netherlands published in 2005 shows.

Used wisely, however, conscious changes in body language can be helpful. “If you have an argument with your boss, everyone gets tense, they cross their arms,” Loisel-Furey says. “Just by letting your arms go, letting them fall to your side, you can change the dynamics of that conversation, release the pressure.” **BRW**