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**Recipe for
success**

The company that cooks together, bonds together – at least that's the thinking behind the newest method of corporate team building. And the wine probably helps too. **Rachel Lebihan** reports in Work Space, **page 58**.

Photo: JIM RICE

Fun recipes for

From cooking classes to making cheese and wine, tastes are changing in corporate bonding, writes **Rachel Lebihan**.

Traditionally, treaties and bargains were ratified over meals, alliances forged and sworn enemies reconciled over a banquet. Today, businesses are rallying the troops through a range of gourmet events intended to help workers bond.

More than a century ago William Robertson Smith, an editor of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, observed: "Those who eat and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship and mutual obligation."

Corporate bonding wasn't what he had in mind, but those in epicurean circles are tapping the corporate appetite for innovative ways to motivate staff by rolling out everything from cooking classes to cheese-making programs.

Perfectly situated in one of the country's prime gastronomic regions, McLaren Vale outfit Gourmet Events Australia has just launched the Four Seasons team-building program, which offers a novelty food or drink event each quarter of the year.

In spring, participants will hand-milk a cow and spend the day making camembert and fetta from its milk. A quarter acre of shiraz grapes will be harvested and pressed at the Redheads winery in summer.

In autumn, Kalamata olives will be harvested and pressed for oil, and beer making at a commercial brewery is the winter theme.

Participants will help produce 50 cases of wine, 50 cases of beer, 50 bottles of olive oil, 50 bottles of olives, and five kilograms of cheese, all labelled with their own business's logo and delivered when ready.

"Traditionally, business deals were done over a meal or a glass of



Appetite for change: corporate bonding is on

wine. The price for oats, sheaves of wool, third daughters, negotiated over a glass of ale, or the fatted lamb," says Gourmet Events founder Mark Potter.

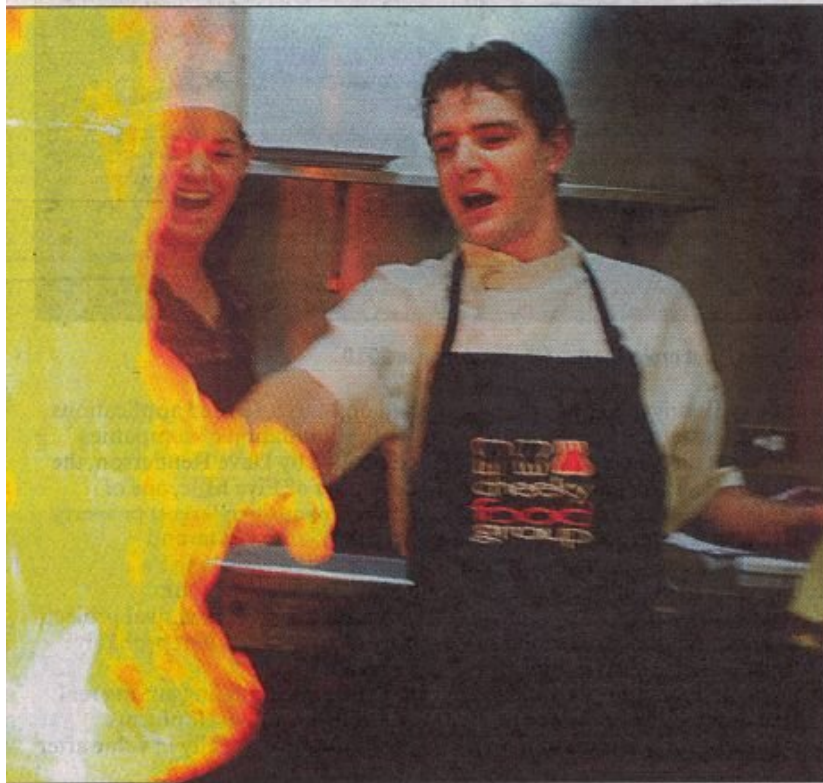
"While our corporate outlook might have changed, the basics still hold true. A new client is courted, an excellent staff member rewarded, a team of workers incentivised, by engaging in a meal, or working with food and wine."

Potter says food and wine make the perfect team-building material because they put people at ease.

Around food, people tend to let down their guard and "talk business without being so stiff about it".

But team building also needs to be challenging. "With us, it's not like you're just cooking an egg, it's complicated stuff and inspiring, too. You walk away from cheese making

successful teamwork



on the menu at Cheeky Food Group teamwork exercises.

Photo: JAMES ALCOCK

knowing a little about lactose and calcium," he says. "It's stimulating and challenging."

Leona Watson, one of the founders of the Cheeky Food Group, agrees that team building should be a challenge, but says it shouldn't be overly competitive.

"They've been abseiling, gone go-carting, and done paintball, which are often quite competitive," Watson says.

"But if there's a winner, there have got to be people who feel like more a loser. Cooking as a team-building option is very successful because everyone is a winner."

The company focuses on team cooking events and caters for small groups as well as companies with hundreds of staff.

The full spectrum of commercial sectors have been through the

Cheeky Food kitchen, from banks, to pharmaceutical companies. A recent Royal Bank of Scotland event on Hayman Island consisted of three groups of 50 bank staff each preparing a buffet lunch.

Staff at Sydney-based events venue hire company D250 were also put through the Cheeky group's paces recently.

Watson stresses that the events are more than just cooking demonstrations. Participants are given some instructions but have to do most of the work themselves. Meeting team objectives, based on analogies from their workplace, are built into the exercise.

Cooking works as a team-building exercise because "every single celebration we have in life normally involves food and/or wine", she says. "The whole thing with food is

everyone ends up in the kitchen at a party... it's the natural place, the natural hub of any home."

NSW-based Convivial Times runs gastronomic tours, cooking classes, and taste workshops in conjunction with food aficionado and cookbook author Sydney Pemberton, who also runs her food workshops.

Pemberton says taste workshops, covering subjects such as olive oil, wagyu beef, and oysters create a level playing field.

"Food tasting is a way to break down barriers," she says. "Some people don't drink or are embarrassed that they don't know much about wine, but food is a great leveller."

Sally Broom organised one of Pemberton's food workshops for a group of 25 staff at the talent management firm she works for.

Split into four groups, they prepared, and then ate, a four-course meal.

Broom says the success of the evening was due in part to the novelty of the program.

"Having a gentle competitive element by displaying the courses at the front of the class and hearing feedback from the instructors also helped with the atmosphere and team environment, encouraging people to work together in their groups," she says.

For Geoff Stalley, a partner in Ernst & Young's business advisory area, a Cheeky Food Group event was a good way for staff to bond, but it also helped bring out the skills important in the workplace.

"Consultants tend to think they know the answer to everything — so putting them in an environment where they didn't... was fascinating. Also a lot of fun," he says.

"They were working in teams, having to experience an environment they weren't familiar with, listening to advice from the experts, actually helping one another, and taking that through to an end product."