

MAKING A LIVING

Funny business is his trade

By **CRISSA SHOEMAKER**

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Avish Parashar isn't your average business speaker.

His goal isn't just to make sure employees learn how to work together. The 31-year-old improvisational comedian also wants to make them laugh.

Parashar, 31, realized he was on to something when it came to comedy at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was studying computer science.

Friends encouraged him to join an improv comedy group, so he tried out and was accepted. After graduating with a computer science degree, Parashar and a group of others formed Polywumpus, an improv comedy troupe that disbanded in 2002. It was toward the end of his time with the group that he realized the power of comedy when it came to dealing with businesses.

He began bringing his comedy skills to companies, offering himself as a speaker who will not only train employees, but entertain them as well.

"A lot of people like it as a break or as a retreat," Parashar said. "It's still valuable. It's still training. It's not sitting there while someone lectures at you for two hours."

Parashar held his first business seminar about two years ago. Former clients include Xerox, AstraZeneca and several educational institutions in the Philadelphia area.

He had an audience of about 50 people at the Holiday Inn Select in Trevose rolling in the aisles one recent Tuesday, when he and other improv comedians performed for a group of businessmen and women who had been invited to the show.

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Avish Parashar is all business. He just sees humor as way to help businesses.
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Travel agency owner Paula Goldsmith, who hosted the show, said she not only wanted Parashar and the others to entertain, but also to educate the guests. Their high-energy presentation delivered, she said.

The group called for a volunteer in the audience, then asked her to choose a topic in which she would be an expert. The woman chose rivers, and for the next several minutes audience members fired questions at her about rivers. Parashar urged her not to think, just to respond.

"A lot of times we think too hard in situations, or think too hard on reactions instead of just going with the flow," Goldsmith said. "That was the whole idea. We think things through too much. He was showing how if we just let go, our creativity comes through on it. We can usually do better."

Parashar, who served as both artistic director and busi-

ness manager of Polywumpus, tailors his presentations to his clients. He might conduct a less hands-on presentation for a large group or more interactivity with smaller groups. But he always addresses two main fundamentals: creativity and communication.

"The comedy is more of the vehicle of delivery than the objective," he said. "What comedy does is keep the energy up. People learn better when they're laughing and enjoying themselves."

Parashar insists he's not a workplace comedian, someone who will come in and do standup to lighten the workday.

"I don't want to be seen as a humorist," he said. "I like going in and helping businesses obtain real objectives, instead of somebody who's going in to make people laugh for three hours."

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