



## THE HSE STRESS CODE IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

How do you create a motivated workforce? Some argue that it's about providing a stress-free environment. Others say that employees need to be allowed to achieve their goals and see that their contribution is valued. But whatever your view there's no denying that stress is an increasingly important issue for HR.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is running a pilot study "aimed at developing standard practice against which employers can measure their performance in tackling six key stressors". The draft code of conduct is to be published next month.

If employers expect greater commitment from staff they need to provide a working environment that encourages this commitment. But the HSE has missed an opportunity in identifying what employers need to measure. The code's recommendations are focused on removing "negatives". It also covers issues such as providing clear direction for employees

and procedures to deal with stress-related problems. But it doesn't measure the effectiveness of firms in introducing "positives" – HR policies that help to engage and motivate staff and so reduce stress.

The code tackles causes of stress arising from ill-defined roles but omits the issue of how firms should be setting an individual's goals; allowing people to understand what they can gain from their job. If people are given challenging but realisable objectives their performance improves and they feel a greater sense of achievement and engagement. The HSE's model also ignores the extent to which staff receive feedback and recognition. Job satisfaction is strongly associated with a feeling of recognition and is the most important factor in employee engagement. The code could bring significant benefits if it helps employers get the "positives" right. And if staff become more engaged, profitability will be improved.

**Roger Coveney**  
Kaisen Consulting

### POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS

Guy Browning's article (*"How to manage men"*, 24 July) was not only numbingly banal but also a five-star example of the crass reverse political correctness that is damaging working relationships. I found it offensive.

If such a cliché-ridden article about women or members of an ethnic minority had been submitted to *PM* it would (as I suspect will this letter) never have seen the light of day. An article called "How to manage women" or "How to manage black people" that included (as Browning's did about men) a statement such as "Never forget that most women/black people have the sexual sophistication of a small dog" would have catapulted *PM* into the high court.

This Islington-hackery is out of place in a magazine that aims to focus on the genuine interests of HR professionals. Lampooning white, professional, heterosexual males has become the domain of the brainless.

Do the following research (as I have done many times): ask female employees who have experienced being managed by men and women which they prefer and note the overwhelming response. If we are to have a serious discourse about

working relationships in this magazine I would suggest that the content is considered more carefully.

**Brian Thomas**  
Managing director,  
Human Factors Associates

### A RAPID RESPONSE

Further to Guy Browning's article (*"How to manage men"*), please be advised that my eight second presentation to my board this week elicited immediate buy-in, leaving me with 29 minutes 52 seconds to put forward proposals as to which pub we should hold the next board meeting in – also met with immediate approval.

An astonishing result. His advice was much appreciated!

**Linda Parrott**  
Director of HR, Interdean.Interconex

### PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING

In Bob Garrett's excellent account of how HR practitioners might better influence good corporate governance (*"Board game"*, 10 July) he compares the US "tick-box" approach to regulating governance with the UK principles-based approach which involves ticking boxes but then encourages taking a step back and asking: "Is this a true, accurate picture of the whole?"

When I then read of the Royal Mail's bite-sized training (*"Fast-track learning"*) it occurred to me that the principle of "stepping back" could be used by HR to make decisions about methods to facilitate learning.

In the drive towards efficiency in matching delivery methods to learning needs, is it not more important to focus on connecting the responses of the learner and how far they can contextualise learning within a "picture of the whole", rather than the choice between this method or that? In a third feature (*"The thinking performer"*) Fiona Beddoes-Jones refers to this process as "meta-cognitive awareness". If a link is to be made between individual learning and good corporate governance should we not do what Garrett advocates and encourage learners to step back and ask: "Is this a true and accurate picture of the whole?"

**Peter Critten**  
Principal lecturer,  
Middlesex University Business School

### CORRECTION

In *"A break with tradition"* (*PM*, 10 July), the name of the company on page 40 should have read:

Legal & Human Resources

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Email:  
letters@peoplemanagement.co.uk  
Write: Letters to the editor  
People Management  
Personnel Publications  
1 Benjamin Street  
London EC1M 5EA  
Fax: 020 7296 4214