

It's not all work, work, work

WHAT makes a successful manager? Leadership qualities, intellectual capacity, pragmatic skills? No. According to recent research undertaken by Gwyn Rodgers of Bristol-based business psychologists Kaisen Consulting, the ability to appear sensitive is a key factor. The findings, widely reported in various regional newspapers, reveal that managers with an aggressive, boorish style are less likely to reach the top of their profession than bosses who are more sensitive. A survey of 140 senior managers across industry found the most successful managers were aware that their staff wanted to be treated well. They were likely to be good communicators and made sure that employees concerns were answered. So for those aiming to reach the top of the managerial ladder, a word of advice – be nice to your subordinates on the way up!

But while sensitivity may be crucial to success, flexibility would also appear to play an important role. Indeed, in contrast to common perception, the findings of a survey (featured in the *Financial Times* and *The Independent*), indicate that senior managers who cut down their hours or work from home are significantly outperforming those managers who put in a traditional nine-to-five day.

Given these findings it is perhaps ironic that a new study has confirmed that Britain's work and home environments are merging, negatively affecting family life. Reported in Basildon's *Evening Echo*, it would appear that the success spawned through flexible working arrangements has its price. While drawing boundaries between work and leisure home is viewed as vital, this may prove difficult as individuals working from home (given the lack of physical separation between the two roles) may never really switch off.

This leads us nicely to the buzzword of our time: stress. The ever-increasing occurrence of work-related stress has led some companies to take drastic measures. Some firms even allow 'duvet days' for

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employees who just can't face work. This scheme allows employees to take an unscheduled day off when the idea of work



Have you heard the latest? Gossip can be integral to a productive environment

is just too much to bear. According to an article in the *Colchester Evening Gazette*, British workers get fewer holidays than their continental counterparts and some experts claim this leads to increased stress and ill health. Forget the annual three-week summer break: Cary Cooper (UMIST) suggests that individuals take more frequent, shorter holidays instead.

But despite repeated reference to office stress, not everyone believes that this syndrome even exists. Indeed, the *Birmingham Post* reported the comments of Rob Briner (Birkbeck College), who asserts: 'There is no diagnostic condition of stress. There is no psychological condition of stress. You can't measure stress.'

In today's stress-aware climate it is nevertheless difficult to turn our backs on the fact that a lot of British people are overworked. Interestingly, however, research conducted by Clive Fletcher (Goldsmiths College) and Kathryn Waddington (London City University) has indicated that office gossip can make workers feel better by allowing individuals to get their troubles off their chest. The study reported in the *Southern Daily Echo*, the *Leicester Mercury*, *Sandwell Express & Star* and *Walsall Express & Star*, showed that while office gossip was often considered bad news, it could also be

integral to a productive environment. So the next time you share some gossip with a colleague, remember the valuable role you are playing in the creation of a stress-free productive environment!

And finally, it would appear that the workplace is not the only stress trigger. According to Rosalind Gill (London School of Economics), reported in the *Chester Evening Leader* and based on a talk from the London Conference, our male population is becoming increasingly stressed and frustrated by the 'perfect male' phenomenon as promoted by glossy magazine images of male models with rippling muscles and six-pack stomachs. The tables have well and truly turned!

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