

SOLVING YOUR HR AND PEOPLE ISSUES

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2nd issue of *The People Factor*.

As businesses start to get going again, what exactly does that mean for you and other employers and employees? Is there still a job for you and, if so, can you physically return to your place of work? Perhaps working from home is now the norm for you. Either way, things will be different to before. The question is, to what extent?

This month's newsletter focuses on returning to work and the different challenges that

brings, along with a special focus on mental health and well-being – and the aesthetic and emotional labour that often involves.

We hope you find it useful and do let us know what you think!

Until next time.



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> LATEST NEWS

The UK goes back to work

In a bid to kick-start the economy, Boris Johnson has sanctioned a rapid easing of lockdown restrictions. Although people should continue to work from home if possible, more and more businesses resumed trading earlier in June, including the reopening of non-essential retail outlets from 15 June (with a range of social distancing and protective measures in place).

Furlough scheme to wind down

A new flexible coronavirus job retention scheme (CJRS) now applies from 1 July, allowing businesses already using CJRS to bring furloughed employees back part-time. Even if they don't, the government will continue to pay 80% of staff salaries during July as before (up to a £2,500 cap plus Employers' NIC and 3% pension costs on furloughed hours).

There will be tapered government support for employers from August. From August to October, the amount the state pays will be reduced each month (from 80% to 70% to 60%), with employers expected to contribute towards furloughed employees' employment costs. So, from 1st October, the government will pay 60% of wages (up to a cap of £1,875), while employers will have to contribute 20% (plus NICs and pension). The scheme is still due to end on 31 October 2020.

Outlook: redundancies expected

As the government gradually reduces CJRS support, businesses will soon have to decide whether they can afford to keep staff on furlough or bring them back to work. With the likelihood that many sectors of the economy will cut jobs than hire people in the coming months, a wave of redundancies can be expected as businesses decide that they've little other option than to let people go. Redundancy consultations require between 30 and 45 days (depending on the number of staff affected), so companies deciding this will need to start the process soon.

Workers worried about return

Despite the easing of lockdown measures, many workers remain concerned about exposure to Covid-19 on their return to work, especially for jobs that require them to interact with members of the public.

Over the past two months, nearly 5,000 people have contacted the health and safety regulator about Covid-19 workplace safety. And although many deem it far too soon to return, they're doing so out of company loyalty and fear of redundancy.

Burnout and drinking increased during lockdown

Recent research from Glint reports that employee well-being suffered during lockdown with burnout figures doubling between March and April alone.

As such, employers and HR departments should become more mindful of how well people are coping remotely, especially without their usual work routines.

Contributing factors were attempts to balance personal and professional life (of which childcare and home-schooling were prominent), unmanageable workloads, poor support and job security.

In a different poll by charity Drinkaware, it was found that 36% of furloughed workers increased their alcohol consumption during the lockdown (compared to a nationwide average of 24%). The number of people working from home also reported increased consumption and around 15% of both groups reported having their first drink of the day earlier than previously.

> HR HEADACHES

Returning to Work Safely

Where do employers stand ensuring the workplace is safe to return to?

There are plenty of existing laws around health and safety as well as some detailed government guidance on working practices. Essentially, putting your people first and ensuring you're providing a safe environment that supports both their physical and mental well-being is paramount.

How can employers protect staff?

Every business is different in how it operates so there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. However, some common practices that will apply to many are:

- *Making the wearing of masks on site mandatory.*
- *Use of additional PPE (e.g. face shields and gloves) if social distancing isn't possible.*
- *Staggering breacktimes to reduce the number of staff gathering.*
- *Setting up sanitary stations.*
- *Increasing the frequency and intensity of cleaning.*
- *Installing protective screens for customer-facing staff.*
- *Clear and frequent signage to remind staff and customers.*

And what about staff working from home?

Although it's a completely different environment, the same principles around physical and mental well-being apply:

- *Ensure staff have the correct equipment, training and support to do their job from home.*
- *Discuss expectations on new ways of working.*
- *Help maintain manageable workloads.*
- *Respect non-availability outside of traditional working hours.*
- *Allow flexible working schedules if required.*
- *Keep in touch regularly.*

Coping with Working from Home

Why is burnout so prevalent amongst remote workers?

Working from home can easily blur the lines between job and family and if it ends up disrupting the overall work-life balance too much, it can lead to burnout.

Because burnout affects productivity and engagement, it's often characterised by;

- *Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion.*
- *Feeling disconnected, indifferent and negative towards your job.*
- *Reduced engagement and efficacy.*

How can employers help to prevent burnout?

Because of different needs and circumstances, it's unrealistic to expect to be able to treat everyone the same. However, the following are always likely to be appreciated:

- *Being mindful of workers' home situations, especially those juggling work with young children and/or home-schooling.*
- *Engaging frequently and communicating clearly and transparently.*
- *Introducing well-being and healthy lifestyle initiatives (e.g. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)).*
- *Encouraging employees to ask for support if they're struggling.*
- *Ensuring line managers are adequately trained and feel confident to support staff in a non-judgemental way.*

> AESTHETIC & EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Putting on Your Game Face

Has working from home been a big act?

Dressed only from the waist up, the 3pm G&T out of sight and Zooming from the top of the laundry basket in the bathroom because it's the quietest room in the house... Unconventional, perhaps, but it works – despite you having lost track of what day it is.

Because ever since you started working from home, your whole routine and any semblance of structure behind the scenes went right out of the window. But you're getting stuff done and everything looks okay to the outside world, so it's all good.

If none of this sounds familiar, then you clearly haven't been working from home 'properly'! And yet, it relates to

something that many of us may never have heard of, but all do...

Aesthetic and emotional what?!

It's more common than people realise. Aesthetic and emotional labour refers to how we project our appearance, emotions and behaviours to play up to what we think others want and expect to see. Or to put it academically: 'induce or suppress feeling to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'.

Academics may describe it that way; most normal people would just say it's 'giving off the right signals' or 'putting on your game face'.



QUICK FACTS

The concept of aesthetic and emotional labour is nothing new. In fact, lots has been written about it, including titles like:

- *Looking Good and Sounding Right*
- *Keeping Up Appearances*
- *It's Just Acting*

It applies to both men and women and plays a huge part in style labour markets (such as hospitality) and sales and travel industries. The types of people recruited for these roles will typically be highly sociable and charismatic – smiley, bubbly, dynamic individuals who ooze confidence, warmth and personality. They're also likely to be recruited based on their age and for their physical attributes, i.e. young and good-looking with good figures/in good shape, well-dressed and well-groomed.

In a hospitality industry research study:

- 100% of employees and management rated good interpersonal skills as essential.
- 83% acknowledged that being good-looking is important.
- 80% agreed that specific ways of looking and behaving were driven not just by the organisation and its management but also by industry expectations and customers.



Zoom call? More like a Doom call...

So, was this you or someone you know?

All that's in a perfect world, though. And although working from home may gain popularity and become the 'new normal' in time, it most certainly hasn't been that straightforward for many over the past few months – especially when there's a flurry of daily video-conferencing calls in the diary.

Zoom call? More like a Doom call. Oh, the pressure of not getting your angles right and being caught out half-naked (or having a fully naked partner unwittingly photobomb your call on their way to or from the shower). Or even worse, chipped nails...

Then there's the other personal grooming stuff. All the men decided it was Movember again and pretty much every woman who didn't have access to an underground hairdresser and colourist (it's a thing, you know) ended up sporting 2020's most common style: The Nouvelle Skunk.

As for room settings, not everyone had the luxury of a high-brow bookcase behind them, proudly displaying their Tiddlywinks Regional Championships trophy from 1987. So, thank God for Zoom backgrounds, even if one of them did make it look like you were hosting a call from the

middle of the Amazon jungle. At least no one could see your towel hanging off the door or the fact that you were visiting Barnard Castle for the day.

Oh, and don't forget usernames. Whoever would have thought that, thanks to name bias, some people will see you as more successful than you really are – just because of your name! So why bother signing in to a Zoom call as plain old Mary Jones or Roger Smith when you can try and get away with a much more exotic-sounding moniker that might impress? Like Tamara Squiffsworth or Alphonsé Rompo The Third. Go on, try it...

Ultimately, whatever your WFH style is, the most important thing is that you're seen to appear professional and have everything under control. And when asked how things are going, to sound perfectly normal and continually say that everything's fine.

Why? Because that's what aesthetic and emotional labour is.

And that's what putting on our game face makes us do. Whether it's true or not.



BOOK A FREE CHAT

If you have a HR issue or concern, why not talk it through with us? Choose a callback time that suits you and we'll do the rest.

BOOK YOUR SLOT



> IN FOCUS: EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Comment: Beware the Brave Face

There's no doubt that having to juggle home, life and work throughout Covid-19 has had a profound effect on many people. Those laid off are worried about their next pay packet, those on furlough are concerned about whether there's going to be a job to return to, and those working from home are taking on more emotional labour than ever before. That's why looking after ourselves and our staff has never been more important.

It's also why putting on a brave face at work can sometimes be counterproductive; faking positive emotions and pretending everything's okay when it isn't rarely helps to improve things. In fact, masking true feelings actually adds to the psychological strain.

Behind the mask

It can be difficult enough to know how well someone is coping in person, let alone when they're working remotely. So, ensuring ways of recognising this and facilitating discussion around it is

essential – especially when you consider how uncomfortable many people feel broaching the subject of mental health. Except that it shouldn't be like that and it needn't be like that. Being able to express yourself openly to someone who's listening openly is key when dealing with emotional labour issues.

And there has to be the right conditions. For someone to feel able to speak about their mental health, they have to feel like they're working in a supportive culture where they can do just that.

Genuine support

Employers have a big part to play in this. Building trust and compassion can reap so many benefits. You'd be amazed at how grateful employees are at simply being asked how they're doing and whether they need any support.

And how, now that the nationwide WFH experiment has proved that it can work (quashing much of the scepticism, distrust and micromanagement that

said it couldn't), trust and goodwill has increased. In turn, that can encourage more authentic 2-way conversation and communication that focuses as much on quality as it does on quantity – and help to open up more sensitive dialogues, even ones that the employee feels confident enough to initiate.

Giving all line managers access to mental health resources and the appropriate training to manage them is invaluable. As is making a point of enquiring about an employee's well-being during calls, virtual meetings and catch-ups so that it becomes regarded as a sincere and normal question. (The government's *Thriving at Work* report is worth a read, recommending six core standards for employers to implement.)

As we move into a more flexible-working world, the demands that emotional labour puts on staff will remain. But that's no reason not to be better at recognising and supporting what's really going on with someone's well-being. That's even more brave.



Meet the Team: 60 seconds with Jo Sullivan *Client Engagement Director*

Ooh, Client Engagement Director – sounds a bit fancy!

Oh, it is! Because I've lots of HR experience working in different industries and sectors, I'm pretty well attuned to the various issues and challenges that businesses face. That's why I'm always looking to speak to CEOs and senior teams to let them know I can help them.

Really? How?

Well, I've worked in every HR role from HR administrator to HR Director so there's very little I've not seen, and covered sectors such as hospitality, legal, insurance and even demolition! I now specialise in training and coaching leadership teams, running development programmes and workshops; basically, helping organisations ensure that their 'people strategy' is set up to bring the best out of the business.

What sort of advice and projects are you involved in?

Clearly, there's a lot going on at the

moment so I'm being asked to help with things like crisis management and restructures, Return to Work Leadership Programmes and 'Welcome Back' campaigns. Then there's health and safety reviews and risk assessments, WFH initiatives, mental health and well-being questionnaires, and Employee Assistance Programmes.

What are some of the pressing issues facing employers right now?

It's not so much about *how* to reopen but more the logistics of getting people back to work. For instance, foreign staff still needing to return from abroad and implications for staff living with vulnerable or shielding people.

What do you think the future holds for the workplace?

I'd say the traditional Head Office is finished and that remote working and virtual team meetings are here to stay.

And two of the biggest myths around at the moment?

It's very easy to assume that people working from home are okay when they're actually not, even if you're speaking to them every week. Also, the idea of automatically knowing what to do from a HR standpoint – mainly because businesses tend to focus more on operations than people.

If I have a business concern and need some advice, can I call you?

Of course! You can book a free 15 or 30-min chat with me via Calendly: www.calendly.com/thepeoplefactor

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Building trust and compassion
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