

# peopleperformance

IT'S ABOUT YOU, YOUR CAREER AND YOUR BUSINESS - NOVEMBER 2001



**Will leaders ever listen?**  
**Courting disaster**  
**Managing remote teams**

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## peopleperformance magazine

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## Settling our differences

It may be no coincidence given recent global events but in this issue of People Performance there is a significant emphasis on conflict, how it manifests and how it can be addressed in business.

This theme is first apparent in Tony Page's provocative story/poem on how leaders need to face up to the stress that change induces in employees - see page 12. What Page does so well is highlight what feelings people often have about those decisions that seem out of their control. His answer and challenge is for leaders and employees to be more authentic and honest with each other.

You will also find an illuminating feature about what conflict can cost in direct financial terms in the feature written by Colin Everson on Employment Tribunals. The awards being made against companies may well scare you into reviewing your existing practices and procedures.

Finally there is a case study on the fantasy war games company Games Workshop - see page 22 - where ironically, given the nature of their business, they are challenging adversarial thinking. A questioning approach appears to provide a way forward here.

ANTHONY LANDALE, EDITOR

## FEATURES

### *Innovation: no more fighting*

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Co-opetition is the way ahead for the Halifax. Mike Bagshaw looks at a new trend.

### *Leadership: bloody well listen*

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Tony Page writes a story about fear, trust and change. Is he being over dramatic?

### *Workplace: on remote*

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At the Prudential there's been a significant emphasis on remote team working.

### *HR issues: courting disaster*

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Employment Tribunals are on the increase. How at risk is your company?

### *Communicate:*

*don't call me baby.*

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Games Workshop is into fantasy war games. But they are also prioritising communication.

### *Directions: do it discreetly*

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Influencing is vitally important at corporate entertainment events

### *e-performance: clear roads*

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At BMW a new partnership is showing the way ahead for learning management.

### *Front-line: value added*

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A successful training initiative at Sage has helped managers navigate culture change.



Tony Page is a consultant, change agent and author. The story he has written here highlights issues of fear, trust and change. Is he over dramatic or has he articulated what is really going on in most companies?

# bloody well listen will you!

Don't try to shut me up!  
Said the service worker to the startled CEO in the staff canteen.  
In a voice, loud, enraged, passionate, indignant, threatening.  
Yes, possibly drunken, eyeball to eyeball, like an animal, attacked, cornered, in terror, desperate not to die.  
Don't turn away, don't ignore me.

You assume we're a well run ship  
And you come down from on high and pay us a visit.  
Why? To boost our morale?  
And we put on a show. Nice. Polite hellos. Smiles. False questions. Best behaviour.  
Well I've conformed, smiled, pretended, kept the peace, treated you as my customer. For the last 2 years I've tried to keep you happy. Mockingly. Is everything all right sir? Well guess what? No it's not alright!

CEO forcing a smile glances towards the exit. But being on public show is rooted to the spot.  
Worker, animated in this moment of truth, has trapped the CEO and demands to be heard.  
Don't laugh, make fun or make me smaller than I feel already.  
Don't divert me, and don't interrupt, or pull the rug from under me.  
I've let you do this before.

Don't give me your polite voice, your patronising air, your politician's answers.  
Don't spin me in your babble of missions and visions and values.  
I'd rather you knocked me flat or sacked me. At least that would be an

honest reaction.  
You have been cold, distant, unknowable. Until you respect me then I cannot trust where you're taking us.

A frozen nightmare moment while outside life goes on, revealing the stakes. The organisation in play. Worker, surrounded by colleagues, betting a job and a livelihood. CEO risking reputation, career and the value of stock options, unusually struck dumb, nods to let the worker continue. And don't clam up either like I'm mad and you're scared of me.  
I've just been silent too long.  
This way of running things, it is eating me up.  
The pressure of one way traffic has been killing me. While I rant and rage like this, I might make no sense to you, but at least for once I feel tinglingly, brilliantly alive.  
Distractedly. Don't call security yet. I know I'm breaking the rules and this seems out of order.  
Then more animated. But I'm bringing you something and maybe it's right to bring you this.  
Then we must argue, fight and find out directly.  
Distractedly again. But find out what?

Facing the CEO squarely. Your face is set now and I see fear behind your rigid smile. What is the truth behind your fear? Give me your anger, your sadness, your truth. If it's complicated make it simple for me. Is the truth too terrible to voice? What is your hidden agenda? Yet more stock options? Are you on my

side? Are you trying to save us, sell us or break us up?

Well, I'm bringing you... what?  
A wake-up call.  
Look at our organisation, our call centres, labs, factories and offices. Yes we're different for sure, global now, but where's the feeling gone? We remember the blood, the work, and the worry that got us here. But we're not sure you remember us, the people inside and outside who keep you here.  
This game of roulette you're playing doesn't make sense to us.  
Have you noticed the lights are on but no one's at home?

As if possessed, I speak for those people, inside and outside and I have set you a trap.  
I will keep you here in a repeating Groundhog Day until you listen. And the deal is two way, I will listen too. But ignore me and I won't go away. I am not a lone voice, so don't even try to get rid of me.

Like a devil, I am the voice of the mad, bad, scared and stupid, those you ignore.  
I am your call centre operator, delivery driver, waiter or machine operator. I am your confused HR Director, your switched off Head of





law, a disloyal friend.  
 Ignore me and I'll kick up fuss  
 Like a virus. I'll spoil your life.  
 I'll sabotage your finest plans, mess  
 up your tidiest rooms, graffiti your  
 proudest, whitest walls, hack in and  
 threaten your security, riot at your  
 orderly meetings, corrode your  
 certainty, disturb your sanity.  
 I am your worst enemy, your most  
 shameful, darkest secret.  
 I will harm you, your family and  
 friends.

I am in you. Part of you.  
 You will find me in all the people you  
 meet. You can cut me out, but then  
 you lose yourself.  
 You put yourself apart, alone behind  
 a screen.

Silence.

The CEO recovering, as if from a  
 trance.  
 Ashen, tentative at first, found his  
 voice.  
 I'm shocked at how strongly you feel  
 about this and I'm still listening and  
 taking in the strong reactions.  
 I ask myself what binds us? I know  
 what should, but no answer comes...  
 and I'm terrified until I realise we're  
 in this together.  
 We shut no one up. We must talk  
 until an answer comes, until we  
 make sense, directly, eyeball to  
 eyeball, like this.  
 We may fight, not to destroy  
 ourselves but... to take us down  
 again to the ground.  
 We'll go out to our furthest  
 boundaries to listen to voices we're  
 ignoring. To release truth, energy,  
 passion, to find out what we believe  
 and stand for.

We'll bind many voices into one way  
 forward. We'll learn and trust that  
 synthesis will happen.

The governing lesson from today is  
 clear. As leader first I listen, then  
 declare a future for our organisation.  
 The very tough decisions I must  
 take create very strong reactions in  
 you.

So next I listen, not just to happy  
 and hoped for reactions but also like  
 today to raw emotion, anger, rage  
 and doubt.

I have the guts to face your  
 reactions, knowing they do not go  
 away if I ignore them.

And leading is a moving process of  
 finding out, including and binding  
 our voices together.

Last, but not least, I have heart.  
 I care about us, our organisation  
 And our future here.

I want us all to care about each  
 other and about the work.

You are not sacked or blamed for  
 speaking out.

I respect your courage and will  
 return here each month for more.

The moral of this story? Most  
 leaders are flunking this challenge of  
 world class organisation. There is no  
 hiding place but there is a simple  
 choice. Do you want half dead, heart-  
 and-brain-in-the-locker room  
 zombies and a lifeless, fragmented,  
 unstable organisation? Or do you  
 take it to the edge. Having the guts  
 to stay connected to many disparate  
 voices; Trusting that in you will  
 emerge an authentic voice that binds  
 and leads?

Your call

Operations, your surly Brand  
 Manager.

I am the alienated, incoherent,  
 redundant and outsourced.

I am the Seattle protester, the  
 exploited far away factory worker.

I am the doctor who treats your  
 stressed out workers.

I am your partner, your children, the  
 village beside your factory.

I am your shadow, the voice of  
 humanity knocking on your door.

Through slanted eyes. I am with you  
 through thick and thin. In the  
 background sometimes a nagging  
 whisper, rising to a roaring wind  
 that blows you away.

Like your shadow, always attached.  
 Embodied in a whingeing colleague,  
 an estranged brother, a mother in

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