

## Lessons from the Winter Games for employers

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Major sporting events, particularly multisport events, are often inspirational. However, there is something particularly inspiring about the Winter Olympics and Paralympics. Maybe it is because it shines the spotlights on a lot of events that are not commonplace in most parts of the UK, or maybe because it brightens up an otherwise cold and miserable time of year. Notwithstanding the inconvenience of watching events live, I have been trying to catch as much of the coverage as possible and in doing so a number of themes and thoughts revealed themselves that have wider application.

In this first part of a two part blog I look at some lessons for employers. Later in part two, it is the turn of employees.

**Communication** – The level of communication and discussion within a curling rink is almost unbelievable. Firstly discussing the strategy of the shot and where to place the stone, then the actual delivery, every person has their role. Similarly, the level of inch perfect constant communication needed to guide a visually impaired skier down the mountain at speed is something to behold. This kind of team work and transparent communication – leading to a high level of trust and engagement – is definitely something to aspire to and to encourage in the workplace.

**Inspiring confidence** – One of the most positive things I have seen is that almost all of the freestyle skiing and snowboard events (slopestyle, big air and halfpipe) start with each competitor getting a great big hug and/or a fist bump or similar from their coach just before they drop on. Often accompanied by confidence boosting exaltations of 'you're an absolute boss, you're skiing amazing' or similar. This of course does not stop these intrepid freestylers from smashing face first into hard packed snow off the top of a massive kicker – but it gives the riders the belief that they can land it and to go for it – and go for it again if they don't at first succeed. Putting your faith in your employees may not be rewarded every single time but creating an environment where they can really show what they can do should pay dividends in the long run.

**Backing the underdog** – Each workplace is full of the superstar performers who always (or almost always) deliver: Henrieta Farkasova, Felix Loch etc. But inspirational performance from the likes of Red Gerard and Ester Ledecka show that, however unfancied and however long the odds surprise results do happen. No workforce is made up entirely of superstars and encouraging all employees to excel and step out of the shadows of their more high profile colleagues will benefit everyone.

**It's sometimes about the equipment** – Our GB men's luge athletes put down great runs with good lines down the track, but were just not competitive. This was explained by greater investment in the sled's runners and other equipment by nations with a longer history of luge success. Those nations were better able to adapt the equipment to the track and to the weather conditions. Sometimes being talented is just not enough and employers should not overlook the importance of providing employees with tools and infrastructure to support their performance and success. This includes things such as great IT, timesaving software, clear policies and procedures and a happy and healthy working environment. Similarly, keeping hold of your equipment is essential as the Jamaican female bobsledders found out when their coach left taking their only sled with them!

**Someone always has to hold the clipboard of power** – Apparently something of a longstanding in-joke amongst snowboarders, the clipboard of power certainly made its presence known in Pyeongchang ([www.bbc.co.uk/sport/winter-olympics/43139335](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/winter-olympics/43139335)). The clipboard is used of course to ensure that the boarders head down the icy slope in the correct order and is on the face of it purely functional. Although, snowboarders may tell you that the clipboard has an apparent ability to pass 'power' on to the competitor and its name is not simply a reference to the status of the person holding it at the time. Of course, in the workplace managers need to keep control of the situation and direct their employees in their activities. But the snowboarders and their clipboard of power remind us that light touch, humane management with, dare I say it, an element of fun at appropriate moments, can take a manager further than a micromanaging, overly hierarchical approach.

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