

## Reality check: what can employers learn from recent news stories?

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Alastair Vettese  
TRAINEE SOLICITOR | UK

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TV bosses have had tough decisions to make in recent weeks as successful reality shows such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, *Ex On The Beach* and *Love Island* have come under scrutiny for the standard of care provided to participants both during and after filming. In their pursuit of ever higher ratings, producers have been forced to confront a reality of their own: that commercial success sometimes comes at an ethical price.

Many employers have to grapple with a similar dilemma when determining how best to incentivise profitability without rewarding bad behaviour. At a time when businesses are subject to increasing public scrutiny, and when a company's environmental and social impact often plays an important role in employee and customer recruitment and retention, the importance of workplace culture cannot be underestimated.

So how can you promote positive behaviour within your workforce without curbing the ambition and creativity of your employees? Here are three ideas:

#### **Embed cultural expectations within your recruitment practices**

Communicating your expectations as an employer starts well before your employees arrive for their first day. Publishing a job specification which sets out required behaviours, and adopting a recruitment process which actively tests for them, will ensure that applicants understand the balance of your priorities even before they are appointed. Keep in mind also how important the induction period can be: new starters may not remember every detail of your sickness policy, or the names and faces of those responsible for handling grievances, but the first impressions they form of how seriously you value positive behaviour will endure – and might even have been one of the reasons they applied for the job in the first place.

#### **Adopt a more nuanced bonus structure**

Offering bonuses can be an effective way to incentivise employees and to reward the delivery of key targets. Often bonuses are linked to financial success, both because it is more straightforwardly quantifiable, and because the employer only pays when it has the money to do so. Consider whether you can take a more nuanced approach: for example, by linking a company-wide bonus to sustainability measures, or by using a wider range of factors to determine whether an employee has been successful in their role.

Redefining success is particularly likely to resonate with millennials. A recent Deloitte Global Millennial Survey found that the proportion of that group who believe that business 'has a positive impact on wider society' has fallen dramatically in the past two years. If you are seeking inspiration for a bonus system which matches modern expectations, you might find it in the growing use of peer-to-peer micro-bonuses, whereby staff are given a budget to reward the good practices of their colleagues. While any such system needs to be deployed with care to avoid creating a popularity contest among employees, the increasing use of the concept shows that there is at least an appetite for a different approach to employee recognition.

#### **Have a clear whistleblowing policy**

English law protects workers from being dismissed or suffering detriment if they make a 'protected disclosure'. This means a disclosure of information, made in the public interest, showing that one of a number of specific forms of wrongdoing is being, has been or is likely to be committed. Whilst the legislation is designed to protect your staff, you also stand to benefit: the legislation promotes the swift and effective

identification of serious workplace issues.

Despite this, it was reported in The Times last week that one in three companies does not have a proper whistleblowing policy in place. Many employees are reluctant to report their concerns about negative workplace behaviours unless they can be sure of a fair, sensitive and confidential hearing, and they may also be unaware of the extent of their legal protection or confident that they can rely on it.

Having a clear policy in place to deal with whistleblowing situations will not only make your staff more likely to come forward and help your company to monitor the health of its workplace culture; it will also send a strong message that you are serious about your responsibilities to your employees and to society more widely.

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# Authors

Alastair Vettese

TRAINEE SOLICITOR | LONDON

Commercial Real Estate

 +44 20 7597 6275

 [alastair.vettese@withersworldwide.com](mailto:alastair.vettese@withersworldwide.com)