

A revolution in management



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Employees constantly bemoan the people management side of UK workplaces, yet they still fail to do anything about it.

When you write about the world of work, it quickly becomes apparent that it's something of a miracle there was never a revolution in the UK. The French got themselves organised, but the closest we ever got to revolt was a few loom burnings and a nudge and a wink towards the French when we adopted the phrase 'giving someone the chop'.

What baffles me is that British workers complain so much but still never get round to 'vive-ing la difference'.

This being the case, it was unsurprising to find that an analysis of 360-degree feedback, carried out by customer survey specialist Shine, found that it is the people management side of things that most aggravates employees.

In 83% of cases, the thousands of respondents said this was a problem. On the other hand, they praised their managers' technical excellence, which is no consolation because it shows that managers are ignoring their *raison d'être*: to manage. If you are technically excellent then good for you, but don't claim to be a manager.

Good for nothing

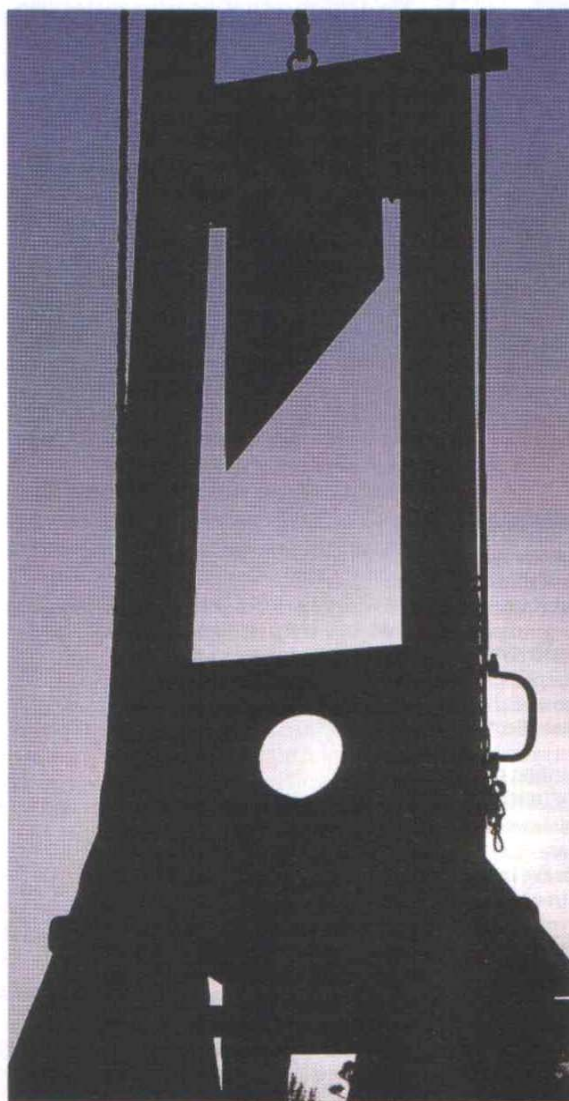
In fact, I challenge you to find a single study that says workers think UK managers are a force for good and not just a group of inadequate ne'er-do-wells. Like it or not, Mr and Mrs Manager, the likelihood is your staff think you're crap and have done for years.

So just in case the workers do decide they've had enough and it's time to introduce Madame Guillotine, let's quickly try to get to the bottom of this.

The first big problem with management is the Powers That Be promote people into management positions because it is either their turn or they've rendered good service. They studiously ignore the fact that technical excellence does not mean you can manage people. In fact, the exact opposite tends to be true, as dedication can easily come at the expense of social adequacy. Are these whizz-kids able to have the tough conversations with staff that performance management requires? No. Are they able to be strong and understanding when things are going wrong? Of course not.

Lesson one then: if you want to manage, get some training.

The second potential problem comes at the other end of the scale. These days, being a 'manager' is something of a dirty word. If you're up with business intelligentsia, you'll know you have to be a 'leader' not a manager. The idea is you are a strategic, visionary *tour-de-force*, not some petty dictator keeping a paranoid eye on your employees' every move.



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A delightful sentiment, you'll agree, but the result is essentially the same as before. These newly empowered 'leaders' now that they are on some new ethereal plane and can be regularly found staring into the middle distance, thinking thoughts that are beyond the realms of us mere mortals. The upshot is they are now far too visionary to be dealing with those beneath them.

Lesson two: don't buy into the trendy claptrap about becoming a leader at the expense of being a manager.

The third thing is the demands made of managers by the very people who are complaining – managers are expected to be superheroes, devoid of standard human responses such as frustration, impatience, boredom, etc. They're also supposed to be able to squeeze at least 28 hours of good solid work out of every day without breaking sweat because staff are getting more needy by the minute.

Distant memories

We have long lost the notion that employees work for the good of an organisation – ask almost anyone and you'll find they expect the company to be run for the good of them. We don't just want the ear of the boss; we want a hug as well.

Those questioned for the 360-degree research, repeatedly said managers were becoming more and more distant. But my question is: exactly when was this halcyon time when managers and staff frolicked together through carefree, lavender-scented offices? This notion is as absurd as the piece I read recently by an old-Etonian lamenting how the rise in the public school fees meant Eton was losing its innate diversity. When exactly was Eton a paragon of social inclusion?

Blurred vision

The only conclusion must be that in the current, tough, retail environment there must be a sale on rose-tinted spectacles. This close rapport has never really existed in the workplace.

You would have to go back to before Victorian times to shake off the traditional British reserve that keeps us from having these cuddly professional relationships. But once you'd got there you would realise that management as we know it was only a twinkle in the eye of the Industrial Revolution, so it would have been a wasted journey.

Since we are hundreds of years overdue for our revolution, I reckon it's high time we take all this on board.

It's just a starting point of course, but if it staves off insurrection and bloodshed, then my work here is done.

debate

Do you agree with Michael? Or is he wide of the mark? E-mail your response to personneltoday@rbl.co.uk