

Mediocre managers as damaging as the David Brents of the workplace

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Not taking responsibility, passing on stress, panicking about deadlines and telling staff what to do rather than consulting them, are some of the worst attributes of bad managers identified in new research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

These characteristics are identified alongside some of the more obvious 'David Brent' style behaviours, such as inappropriate humour or favouritism, as ways in which managers undermine employee motivation and wellbeing.

The CIPD research, *Managing for sustainable employee engagement: Developing a behavioural framework*, pinpoints how managers need to behave to get the best out of people, by both engaging employees and preventing and managing stress.

The report highlights how managers who are calm under pressure, invest time in talking to their staff, get to know them as individuals and discuss their career development are likely to benefit from higher levels of employee engagement and lower levels of stress and absence. These characteristics are among a number of positive manager behaviours identified by employees as encouraging them to go the extra mile at work, while also supporting their wellbeing.

The research found that managers are more likely to motivate and retain their employees if they: consult people rather than simply telling them what to do; take responsibility if things go wrong or mistakes are made

and; who regularly ask staff if they are OK, are more likely to motivate and retain their employees.

The research is based on analysis of responses from more than 500 employees and 120 managers, across seven organisations, to a survey which asked respondents to give their views on their immediate line manager, their level of engagement with their work/organisation and their wellbeing. It also draws on joint work the CIPD conducted with the Health and Safety Executive on the relationship between line managers and stress in the workplace.

Commenting on the findings, Ben Willmott, Head of Public Policy at the CIPD, said: "Most people will at some time in their working lives have been managed by a 'David Brent' whose use of inappropriate humour and favouritism highlights a lack of self-awareness and inability to manage people.

"However, our research shows that arguably, it is the mediocre managers, who too often 'fly under the radar' in organisations, that are even more damaging to staff engagement over time and often inadvertently cause stress. Our research shows that managers who don't find time to talk individually to their employees, who pass on stress, who panic about deadlines and fail to consult and provide advice, erode motivation and undermine employee health and wellbeing.

"In tough economic times, how people are managed on a day-to-day basis becomes even more critical for organisations that want to engage and get the most out of their workforce. Our research unpicks the behaviours that managers need to exhibit if they want to get the best out of their staff while preventing and managing stress. Organisations big and small should take note and ensure that their line managers are properly equipped to get the most out of their people."

Also commenting, Rachel Lewis and Emma Donaldson-Feilder, Directors of Affinity Health at Work, who conducted the research, said: "Employee engagement is important, but it is also fragile, so managers need to pay attention to wellbeing if they are to sustain motivation over time.

"The aim of this research is to support HR, employers and managers by providing a behavioural framework that identifies what managers need to do in order to engender employee engagement that is sustainable because wellbeing is also given consideration. The framework can be used to support managers in developing the core people management skills to enable them to both engage their team and prevent stress."

Provided by Kingston University, London

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