

Inhuman Resources

Most of us who are lucky to be in employment have experience of human resources. This profession can be much-maligned – the only other section possibly less popular is the audit team –so The Edinburgh Reporter sought the views of a HR professional, an expert in their field. Sadly, we couldn't find one so we asked our resident Hearts supporter Mike Smith, who works in HR, for his views. Perhaps we shouldn't have bothered...

Working in the field of Human Resources as I do – okay, some people may challenge the term 'work' but I do at least turn up at the office on a daily basis – I was interested in an article in an edition of *Personnel Today*, the weekly publication for HR professionals (enter your own punchline here)

The article was about the Employment Statutory Code of Practice which has been published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Part of the aim of the Code is to protect people's beliefs. I can see, dear reader, you are already ahead of me on this one. For it is envisaged that some of these beliefs may include:

Feng Shui believers who shun the number four in meeting rooms, desk numbers etc. This stems from the fact the number four is considered inauspicious as it sounds like 'death' in Cantonese. I look forward to the next disciplinary hearing I am asked to attend. There will be the manager, the employee, their trade union representative – and me. Hang on, that makes four in the room. 'That's discrimination on grounds of my beliefs' says 'the accused'. 'And you've deliberately arranged the hearing for four o'clock on the fourth day of the week on the fourth month of the year. Okay, then – you may have been suspected of emptying the safe in the office and burning the building down with ten people still inside but rather than risk being taken to an Employment Tribunal, we'll let you off

– this time...

Vegans demanding a separate fridge and non-leather chairs. Now, I don't really have a problem with this. In fact, I wouldn't stop at separate fridges. How about separate kitchens; separate floors; nay, separate buildings. And non-leather chairs? Only one person in our company can even consider a leather chair (and it certainly ain't me, eh boss?)

An environmentalist demanding time off to attend a protest march, under a company policy that allows absence for important events. Many years ago in the early 1980s BC (before children) I used to attend CND marches in Aberdeen and Edinburgh – at weekends. In those less enlightened days, if I took time off work during the week to do so I would have been involved in another kind of march – the sort that would have taken me to the nearest Job Centre.

Reading this article had my manager and I shaking our heads. I did, however, agree with one part of the article – a quote from Richard Crouch, Head of HR at Somerset County Council who said of the Code of Practice *'the world has gone barking mad'*

Well said, Mr Crouch – although I suspect he may receive a letter from some tree-hugging, Feng Shui practising vegan who says their dog has found his comments offensive...

I also read an article on the internet the other day about 'office-speak phrases you love to hate' and, unsurprisingly, I found myself nodding and smiling at many of them.

36 years after I first began working – jings, that makes me feel old as I still recall my first day as a working man, 1st June 1978 in a ramshackle furniture store – the world is a much different place. In the late 1970s, you were bawled out if you made a mistake, the ever-present threat of an on the spot sacking loomed large, sexism was commonplace and the words 'grievance' and 'procedures' were about as common as hairdressers refusing to do perms because they looked

ludicrous.

Nearly four decades on and much has changed for the better in today's working environment. But the downside of better working conditions is the jargon which has not so much crept into today's working vocabulary as swept in.

In the list I read on t'internet was the use of *idea showering* instead of *brainstorming*— less this offended people who have epilepsy. That's one used in the company I presently work for, the head office of which is in England and whose regular guidelines on what to say and how to behave cause much amusement to us Scots north of the border. *Thinking outside the box* and *blue sky thinking* are others. I recall doing some blue sky thinking while at school in the 1970s — only for my teacher to believe I was merely gazing out the window and throw a chalk duster which struck me on the back of the head. She wouldn't get away with that today (principally because I'm now 52 and the fact she's probably scrawling away at a blackboard beyond the Pearly Gates. Can I say 'blackboard'? Is that politically correct?)

I particularly like *my door is always open* which emanates from our office — particularly as we're in an open plan office and the only door is the one heading for the way out. Of course, senior managers may be trying to tell me something — and my appraisal is next week...

Anyway, I suspect I don't *have enough bandwidth* to carry on with this nonsense and the end of this rant is now *in my radar*. I've just received an e-mail from someone who wants to *touch base about something off-line*.

So I'm turning the computer off...