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HR & WELLBEING

NEXT EVENT

Thursday 20th June 2019

5:00PM

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Notes from our chairman

As we all know it can be difficult to juggle work and family commitments. Changes strengthening an employee's ability to request flexible or compressed working hours and changes to maternity and paternity leave can leave employers struggling to find a fair balance between retaining happy and productive staff by granting requests and retaining happy clients and customers by having staff available to help them.

If these two concepts feel like they are mutually exclusive, then our next business focus topic could help give you the answers! We are focussing our next meeting on Human Resources, in particular wellbeing in the workplace, so if you are looking for answers on the above then Greenmeadow Golf Club on the 20th June is the place to find them.

Our next event

Our June meeting is on **Thursday 20th June, 5pm Greenmeadow Golf Club**, and we are very pleased to announce that Natwest Cymru are sponsors and host for this event.

As the UK's biggest lender to small business NatWest Cymru supports more than 20,000 businesses throughout Wales with lending totaling more than £1.5bn. The bank supports businesses by doing more than just lending money however and provides frontline support to new start-ups and scale-up companies through its Business Growth Enabler team, led in Gwent by Lee Morgan. The event at Greenmeadow Golf Club will be run in collaboration with one of the UK's biggest outsourced communication providers – Wrexham headquartered Money Penny – and will focus on practical ways to develop a happy workforce and a productive team of employees.

Following this presentation will be a few rounds of facilitated networking.

Book Your Place:

[http:// bit.ly/tbv-june-2019](http://bit.ly/tbv-june-2019)

I'd also like to take the opportunity to welcome our new members and gently remind existing members to encourage contacts and business friends to come along as the more of us there the more we all get out of the evening. I'd also like to thank Natwest Bank for their kind sponsorship of the event which is very much appreciated.



Ashley Harkus
Chairman, Torfaen
Business Voice

Dates for your diary

20/06/19 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm

9/07/19 - Meet your Business Neighbour - 5:00pm

19/09/19 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm

23/10/19 - Women in Business Event - 4:30pm

05/12/19 - Torfaen Business Voice - 5:00pm



All of our quarterly Torfaen Business voice events are held at Greenmeadow Golf and Country Club, Cwmbran

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Staff retention: six ways to make people want to stay

Employees are an SME's most valuable asset – and happy staff are more productive and stay with companies for longer. We explore the tried-and-tested ways to build a business people love to work for.

When it comes to factors that affect the day-to-day running of a business, one in four senior decision makers are most concerned about staff loyalty, according to a survey of over 500 chief executives, managing directors and senior managers by AXA PPP. The survey also revealed that staff retention was the biggest worry for 29% of decision makers – nearly double the proportion that was most concerned about long-term sickness.

Finding ways to make employees want to stay in your company is good business sense, not least because it costs on average £28,436 to replace an employee. So here are six practical steps SME owners can take to improve staff retention.

Have an onboarding strategy

It's estimated that one third of new hires leave their role within six months of joining, usually because they feel unsupported and unwelcome. Alison King, founder and director of Bespoke HR, often hears this complaint when conducting exit interviews on behalf of clients.

"Having an onboarding strategy is essential if you want your staff to feel motivated from their very first day," says King.

"Little gestures, like treating them to lunch, are a nice way to welcome a new starter and can give them a chance to get to know their colleagues in an informal setting."

Communicate your vision from the outset

Working at an early-stage start-up or SME can be exciting but intense. Employees may find themselves putting in long hours for no extra pay and limited benefits. Staff turnover can be high as a result.

"Start-ups are usually led by visionary entrepreneurs who have a clear mission and a relentless drive to achieve their goals. This creates a culture that's unlike most companies. It can end up being a challenging environment for even the most talented and experienced people," says Nicholas Sherratt, co-founder and MD of fintech start-up Mojo Mortgages.

Sherratt says it's crucial business owners communicate their vision from the outset, so employees know whether they're a good cultural fit.

"Also, trust your employees to deliver. If allowed to work with autonomy, they will feel empowered," he adds. "This allows

the business to be agile and you to make quick decisions – two fundamental aspects for start-up growth."

Show respect

Beanbags, breakout areas and free snacks can be par for the course at new and young companies. However, while they're nice perks to have, they don't guarantee that employees are going to stick around.

Trust your employees to deliver. If allowed to work with autonomy, they will feel empowered" Nicholas Sherratt, co-founder and MD, Mojo Mortgages.

"Employees want to be respected as much as they are rewarded," says King. "Sit down with them, find out what drives them, what type of work they want to do in the future, and be sure to demonstrate how they can advance in your company. Defined career paths are a great retention tool."

Invest in personal development

Employees want to feel significant, according to Mark Loftus, founder and CEO of management consultancy CharacterScope. They also want to feel like their contribution is making a difference and that they are competent.

In order for employees to feel this, Loftus says, their personal development needs to be actively invested in. This could be through upskilling or sending them on training courses – so, for example, they become certified in using certain software and are given more responsibilities.

"If they don't feel valued or are treated only as a means to an end, they're going to vote with their feet and search for a new place to work – somewhere with a higher chance of them feeling significant," he adds.

Use your gut instinct to make HR decisions

Thanks to technology, businesses can now make better-educated and informed HR decisions. They're able to give feedback to employees based on a whole range of metrics and mathematical analyses.

Despite this, it's important that businesses don't become too reliant on data, says Colin Dulson, MD of Berrison, a business development company, which helps SMEs with their employee engagement.

"Effective employee feedback is crucial in fast-changing workplace cultures. Businesses need to ensure their appraisal systems are up to date," he adds. "But employees, especially the young generation, don't always want to be dictated by number-crunching."

They want trust, training and autonomy, he says, and this comes from having conversations and using gut instincts.

Offer flexible benefits

You may assume that employees are more inclined to stick around if they're paid more, but this is not always the case. Dulson says younger workers, in particular, are known to be less concerned with financial gain and instead seek rewards that complement new styles of working that their generation is used to.

King says that if businesses are going to offer a benefits package, flexible benefits are an attractive proposition.

"Offering flexible working hours and the chance to work from home appeals to a lot of employees, as they are perks that fit their lifestyle," says King. "Allowing flexibility creates happier employees, who will be more dedicated and will want to stay in their job."



What can employers do about this? Key elements for employers are to be aware, approachable and supportive.

Signs that may be seen within the workplace that could indicate a mental health issue include irritability, lateness, performance issues and changes in usual behaviours.

Identifying early warning signs and acting on them can be key in establishing a positive way forward. Questions as simple as "how are you?", "how are things at the moment?" can open up a communication channel for employees who may be struggling. Getting to know your staff can be invaluable when dealing with mental health issues. As a manager or colleague you may notice small signs that someone may be struggling. A consistent means of communicating such as one to ones at regular intervals will help to spot and draw out any issues that individuals may have. Issues may not always be work related but you may be able to offer a solution in work that helps them for example a temporary change in hours or work pattern.

More employers are demonstrating their commitment to workplace wellbeing by offering Employee Assistance Programs which give access to counselling, advice and support on a confidential basis. Many organisations are building working relationships with Occupational Health Practices in order to gain timely help and guidance with both the mental and physical health of employees.

Findings from a workplace mental health and wellbeing survey carried out by the Mental Health Foundation revealed that 86% of respondents believe their job and being at work are important to protecting and maintaining their mental health. In addition to this recent studies have found that addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by as much as 12%. These figures alone indicate that organisations should be looking at mental health in the workplace and by doing so are likely to see positive effects both for individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Below are links to a number of resources and organisations that businesses may find useful on this topic:

ACAS

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1900>

CIPD factsheets

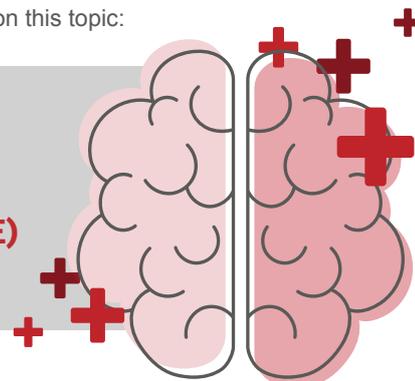
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/mental-health-factsheet>

Mental Health Foundation

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

Health & Safety Executive (HSE)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mental-health.htm>



An interview with Lisa Hand, senior HR Manager, Sigma Systems

Lisa Hand is one of 3 senior HR Managers at Sigma Systems the global leader in catalog-driven software. The company has headquarters in Toronto, Canada, London, UK, USA, India, Europe and Asia Pacific. One of the UK operations is based at Springboard, Cwmbran from where Lisa is responsible for HR operations across Europe and Asia Pacific and where 60 of the 95 UK staff work. Lisa reports into a VP, HR, and has been with the company for five years.

Sigma has been recognised among the 30 Best Companies to Work for in Wales. It's recently received the prestigious one star accreditation for 2019 from UK Best Companies. Lisa was a finalist in the 2019 Wales HR Awards (Best HR Professional Digital/IT category).

Your own journey in HR

We only touched on HR within my undergraduate degree but after graduating I secured my first HR job at the Welsh Ambulance Service which lasted a year. A good mentor advised me to undertake a Master's Degree in HR and pursue the full CIPD track.

I've had experience across public, private and not for profit sectors which included the NHS, hospitality sector and Housing Associations.

What does being a finalist in the Wales HR Awards mean to you?

Firstly, I have a fantastic, supportive team behind me which has enabled me to be successful. I was delighted to be shortlisted. These awards demonstrate growing respect for HR (traditionally regarded as a less visible support service) and the impact HR professionals can have on the success of a business. I love the tech industry. It means even more to be shortlisted in this sector.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

Variety and responsibility along with opportunities to make an impact within an innovative business is truly rewarding. Sigma also ensures staff engagement is high on our agenda.

In the last eighteen months the geographical remit of my role has doubled and it's much wider than a traditional HR function. I operate as a true HR Business partner and look after Europe and Asia Pacific. Our commercial expansion plans into new markets enabled me to establish new HR systems and look after issues such as immigration which is vital to our success. Sigma places high importance on recruiting the right person with the qualities and attitudes we value. I'm involved at the very start of their Sigma journey with initial screening processes and first interviews. I really enjoy seeing the successes our employees go on to achieve.

What are the challenges?

Recruitment and attracting the right person for the job. The tech sector is such a competitive industry. Retaining staff and maintaining excellent engagement are also important to get right.

What's at the heart of The Sigma Way concept?

Our unique culture places genuine trust, flexibility and great values at its' heart. Our goal has always been to create a fantastic environment where people want to work and stay for the long term; it's also about evolving with the changing needs of our people and the business to continue our success story.

Our global recognition programme features performance embedded awards linked to our company values and salutes the success of both individuals and teams. Our Career Adventure Programme enables employees to think creatively about how they can develop, travel and maximise their career opportunities.

Our social events also help create a stronger team and improve collaboration and innovation

What are the HR 'hot topics' for 2019?

The potential impact of Brexit and changing immigration rules. Sigma depends on employing staff from Europe and further afield and our employees also travel regularly across the continent and the world.

Attracting the best people, getting the best out of them and making sure they feel they want to stay. Employee experience and engagement is becoming more important.

Health and wellbeing of employees and ensuring a true 'flexible working' culture can operate.

In Wales the well-publicised tech skills shortages present a real issue, so businesses like us are working with universities, colleges and other partners to help ensure a dynamic and exciting industry for the future.

A final word

‘HR is all about common sense, doing what's reasonable and fair and what works for people in practice.’



Are your interviewing techniques a help or a hindrance?

Interviews. You either look forward to doing them, dread them or get someone else to do them for you. Perhaps you feel you have nailed your interviewing technique by now and typically follow the same process every time. This is great... if your technique is a success and legally compliant.

It might surprise some employers to learn that employment law applies even before hiring an employee. From the moment you begin recruiting, you are bound by laws on discrimination and data protection.

Choosing the right questions can also be a challenge. In a limited length of time you'll want to find out if they are the right person for the job, the right fit for your culture and to tell them more about your company. Believe it or not, some employers stumble here and get this part horribly wrong.

What not to ask in a job interview

Earlier this year a candidate tweeted about her brutal and humiliating interview during which she was quizzed about her childhood, her parents' relationship and criticised for her posture.

Unsurprisingly the tweet went viral attracting attention and a BBC radio interview. Not to mention some bad PR for the company in question.

Inappropriate or invasive questions can make a candidate feel uncomfortable and some, such as "Are you married?" or "Do you have children?" can be blatantly discriminatory and illegal. It's best to avoid getting too familiar.

In another example, a well-known Caribbean food chain is reported to have asked candidates to show off their limbo skills.

Whilst it's in the spirit of the company culture, this is a risky route for an interview. We would advise that interviewers avoid asking candidates to dance – unless it's crucial to the job!

What can I ask a candidate?

There are plenty of acceptable questions that you can and should ask an interviewee, that won't be harmful or embarrassing. We suggest having some prepared ahead of time.

You'll want to prioritise questions that explore their skills and experience to find out if they are the best person for the job. Questions like "Can you elaborate on your relevant experience for this role?" or "What skills can you bring to this position?" will help you to make your decision.

Questions that instigate critical or creative thinking can also be useful, if they are necessary for the role requirements.

Naturally you'll also want to know if the candidate will fit in well with your company culture. Open ended questions like "What are your hobbies?" can be a good ice breaker and are a safe way to find out more without being invasive. Also, a revelation such as regular participation in dangerous sports might tell you a lot more about a person.

Are my interview questions legal?

If you are unsure, it is always best to seek professional advice. If you are about to start a round of interviews and would like to check your technique first, why not run your questions past us or come on one of our training courses? Or if you would like a higher level of support, let us do the questioning for you.

Lee Monroe, Director of the HR Dept.
lee.monroe@hrdept.co.uk

Not a member? Make 2019 the year to join!

Membership is affordable with just a one off payment. There are no hidden charges and membership gives you two free places per meeting.

Call 01633 648644

Email: info@southwalesbusiness.co.uk

Click on the following link:

<http://bit.ly/TBV-business-club>

£48 for companies trading less than 1 year or first time member.

£60 inclusive of VAT for companies with 1 – 10 employees

£80 inclusive of VAT for companies with 10+ employees

Meet your business neighbour

Tuesday 9th July at 5pm

Blaenau Gwent, General Offices, Ebbw Vale

This is an opportunity for businesses in Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent to network and gain valuable contacts. There will be three rounds of facilitated networking followed by a buffet with more of a chance to engage with other businesses.

Free of charge

Booking essential:

<http://bit.ly/meet-your-business-neighbour>



Save the date

Torfaen Women in Business 2019

Wednesday 23rd October 2019

4:30pm - 8:00pm

Parkway Hotel & Spa, Cwmbran Drive, Cwmbran NP44 3UW



Meet the Member

When I started Awaken in 2010 it started out as Awaken Life Coaching. Having crashed out of a thirty year corporate burnout in 2009 I had to take a year out through which started my recovery following which I started the business.

It has and always will be my intention to help others in whatever way I can.

The business has now grown and is based these days more around business consultancy, mentoring and coaching, with this in mind the company name has now changed to Awaken Group Ltd.

In 2012 I realised one of my childhood dreams when I became the proud author of my first published book 'Made it Thru the Rain' which chronicles my journey through burnout and how I worked to turn it around. The book is available on Amazon and now seven years on I am in the process of writing the next stage of the journey.

I am based at our office in Cwmbrian where you will find me working on the many avenues through which we provide help.

In 2015 I developed the Corporate Angel programme which is designed to help those in the medium to large businesses with the well-being of their staff / teams. It is through this programme that I visit organisations as a well-being consultant to assist them with their well-being strategies. It is my intention to link small businesses with those larger ones so that together they can move forward in new ways to develop programmes etc. to then help those that work for them.

The Awaken Business Club started in 2017 which through a monthly meeting I provide mentoring and coaching to small business who are looking for guidance across the minefields of setting up and growing. This is an affordable group and by its members it has been likened to having your own senior management team on board to help you with those ever necessary business decisions.

Alongside the above I work as a speaker and with a little help from my team an event organiser, our next event is the South East Wales Business Show on the 12th June at Chesptow Racecourse.

If you are interested in any of the above please get in touch so we can touch base for a chat.

07502375714

bev@awakencoaching.co.uk

www.awakencoaching.co.uk



Beverley Jones

New Members

Ask Alice

xalice.manshipx@hotmail.com

Business Doctors

www.businessdoctors.co.uk/newport

CKL Build Group

karen@cklbuildgroup.co.uk

Dragons Rugby

tom.watkins@dragonsrugby.wales

House of Colour- Monmouthshire and Torfaen

www.houseofcolour.co.uk/
sianfisher

Launchstorm

www.launchstorm.com

Mosswood Industrial Supplies

www.mosswoodtools.com

RDP Law

www.rdplaw.co.uk

Sian Fisher HR

www.sianfisherhr.co.uk

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robert.stephens@stephenswilmot.co.uk

Thomas Carroll Insurance Brokers

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South East Wales Business

Showcase Networking

Breakfast at Chepstow

Racecourse on June 12th

7:45am Networking breakfast 10am Exhibition



We would like to thank our contributors:



SIGMA

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