

HUMAN RESOURCES

Feeling blue? Audrey Macnaughton, director of HR at Training and Development Consultancy Macnaughton McGregor Ltd, has some ideas to cheer you up...



Audrey Macnaughton.

RATHER THAN an exciting beginning, often the start of a new year can be a depressing time. The low mood after the extended Christmas bank holidays has even been given its own name by Professor Cary Copper and it's "acute post-bank holiday depression syndrome"!

It doesn't stop there. Last year psychologists declared January 24 to be the most depressing day of the year.

The one thing that can keep you going through January is the energy and motivation to stick to your new year's resolutions. Whether it's getting fit or even leaving the office at a reasonable time at night, there is something energising about the focus of a fresh start.

Moving in to February we still have most of the reasons that January is depressing: tight waistbands, big credit card bills, miserable weather, coughs and colds and to top it all there are likely to be the failed resolutions as well.

So how can we buck the trend and have a fabulous February? How can we make February great for us and our teams? Here are some things you could try:

Get a purpose

You may not have kept up your resolutions, but does it matter? Try not to be too hard on yourself and pick up where you left off. You might want to review your resolutions and make any positive changes to get a better chance of success.

Lacking focus? Try doing a quick health check on yourself. In his bestselling book *Authentic Happiness*, the psychologist Martin Seligman suggests carrying out an annual self appraisal which measures satisfaction in areas of your life such as profession, finance, love, friends, play and health. Seligman also suggests logging a 'trajectory' rating to the appraisal rating ie is your satisfaction in each area going up or down? This appraisal and 'trend' should give you some focus to make positive improvements in the quality of your life.

Give a purpose

If you are the leader of people you will likely be used to setting objectives and distributing work but I don't mean that in this case. In a recent survey by the Oxford Psychology Press, around half the respondents stated that they would make 'a major work change in 2008' and will look to their managers to keep them happy and motivated in their current roles.

The start of the year is an ideal time to have career discussions with your people. Finding out what they have enjoyed about work in 2007; what's made work difficult and what they want to do in the

How to... make February fabulous



future. The response to these questions is the essence of finding out what you can do to help motivate your people more effectively. Remember this type of conversation only becomes urgent when a key person hands in their notice so don't wait until then to start finding out more.

Stop complaining

If you know someone who whinges most of the time you'll know that they drag down the mood. Maybe not to that extreme, but we can all fall into the trap of moaning. The thing to think about is that by complaining and using negative words you actually have a detrimental affect on your own emotional state. You quite literally talk yourself into a bad day. The first step to making a change is to start noticing your own habits and a technique to try is to put something on your wrist, an elastic band will do fine, and each time you complain swap it over onto the other wrist. Try to get through a day without moving it and you will have cracked your negative

habit, about 21 days should do it and you will notice changes.

Use the extra day

It's a leap year so how about planning to do something great on the bonus day of the 29th. Maybe something you've never tried before, something you've been meaning to get round to or something with your team such as a team lunch or something doubly valuable such as volunteer work.

There's so much hype around fresh starts in January but with the January blues it can, in reality, be the wrong time to set plans in motion. Why not try one or two of the things I've mentioned and promote February from the forgotten month to the fabulous one.

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