
UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK NEWS

**Hazards
Campaign**

Winter 2003

www.workstress.net

Conference activity round-up

Members of The UK National Work Stress Network have recently been involved in three key conferences on work-related stress.

The annual Hazards Campaign Conference was held this year at the London School of Economics, hosted by London Hazards Centre. Over 450 delegates attended what was largely a successful event.

The opening session was addressed by Des Browne MP, Minister for Health & Safety the first ever such visit by a Government Minister. Delegates heard an impassioned speech from Ann Jones, the mother of the late Simon Jones who was killed in a tragic accident as a result of the employer's failure to provide training to a new agency employee in his student holiday job.

Three weeks later, a 30-strong UK contingent of the Hazards Campaign attended the highly successful 14th European Hazards Conference, at LO Skölen, in Helsingør, Denmark.

UK National Work Stress Network was represented, and we met several European delegates from amongst the 250 attending the long weekend event, who participated in a very successful workshop facilitated by Brian Robinson and Ian Draper. Hopes of a revival of the European Stress Network were raised, when indications of potential support came from friends

from Norway, Finland, Denmark, Italy and Latvia.

October saw some 500 people at **HSE** Conference "*Real Solutions – Real People*". Des Browne MP and Bill Callaghan (Chair of HSC) were among the keynote speakers, to promote the latest Stress support projects from HSE. The Network was represented through Ian Draper and Dave Jones.

In addition, we report on the terrible treatment by **Colombia** of its Trades Union activists, and as usual provide an array of 'Stress-snippets' gathered from recent news items.

This edition, the first non-paper version, highlights advance notice that our next annual Conference will be held on **Saturday 20th November 2004**, where we also hope to involve some of our new European friends.

It is with sadness that we learn of the death after illness of Alan Dalton, health and safety campaigner in a range of issues. He was at eomt time a regular speaker at safety conferences, and championed the work of the UK National Work Stress Network. Alan's fight against cancer ended recently, peacefully in his sleep. Our sympathies go out to his family.

We record the Network's best wishes to **Owen Tudor**, of TUC in his new post, hoping that he will still find the time for Health & Safety issues. We secured Owen's support and recognition at the October 2002 European Week of Health & Safety Conference in London.

As always, we regret to report that a number of distressed enquirers have either emailed or telephoned us with their problems. The Network is neither a Helpline nor a Counselling organisation. It cannot assist with individual casework – these are issues that should be referred to Trades Unions or perhaps the Citizens Advice Bureau.

We continue to be asked to provide speakers and workshop facilitators for Stress Seminars held by different trades Union groups.

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Hazards Conferences

From UMIST to Bankside

The weekend of September 6th saw 450+ residential and day delegates gather at London's LSE for the 2003 UK Hazards Conference.

As always, it is good to meet up with old friends. Those who attend these events regularly know only too well what a refreshing weekend it can be, when you can learn more of different angles on Health & Safety and just how it is 'in different workplaces'.

Plenary sessions, exhibitions, and of course workshop sessions enable a free exchange of experiences. There are chances to make new friends, to encourage novices to take up challenges. Just to listen to committed activists, or those whose lives have been touched by tragedy, and are willing to stand up and speak out against corporate killing, gives hope that in the end, workers and activists will once more keep safety in the workplace at the top of the agenda.

Des Browne MP, Minister for Health & Safety was invited to address the opening session.

Anne Jones – challenged this Government to implement fully effective and meaningful corporate killing legislation. Speaking from the heart, her personal pain and grief over the loss of son Simon was clearly obvious, and felt by everyone in the room.

Anne outlined the work of the Simon Jones Campaign, and challenged Des Browne to meet with her to discuss the issues raised from her son's tragic killing by employers and agents, who clearly had no real regrets for their actions.

Des Browne MP responded, by indicating that he would listen to what Anne had to say in a personal meeting.

Workshop Sessions – Stress Policy and Risk Assessment workshops were facilitated by Ian Draper and Brian Robinson, and Dave and Dianne Jones respectively, the latter, supported by Graham Petersen of NATFHE.

The Policy sessions, run on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, were short of adequate working time, but nevertheless, enabled productive examination of how workplace stress policy might be developed following local discussion, audits and recognition of the problem

and its causes by employers from Managing Director to the shop floor.

Closing Plenary – Colombian atrocities towards worker activists and organisers were graphically described by Jesus Naranjo from Colombian Health Workers' Union. His colleague, had been denied exit VISA from Colombia at the last minute.

In closing Mick Holder (London Hazards Centre) reminded delegates of the Campaign focus.

Diary Dates:

- **Hazards Conference 2004 UMIST, Manchester, Friday July 16th to 18th 2004**
- **Stress Network Conference, NASUWT Hillscourt Centre, nr Birmingham, Saturday 20th November 2004 10.00 till 4.00**

Danish hospitality in sight of Sweden

The 14th European Hazards Conference, at LO Skolen in Helsingor, Denmark (September 19th to 21st) was one of the better European Hazards Conferences. The wonderful venue was a magnificent residential trades union training centre, beside the sea with a stunning view of the Swedish coast no more than a mile away. Danish hospitality and friendship was excellent and one felt very welcome.

It is interesting to compare European public transport systems with those of the UK. Clean, prompt, frequent, quiet and comfortable trains transfer you from airport to destination in a short time. Then a short walk to a minibus taxi which conveys a party of eight together with luggage to the conference venue.

However stress levels were considerably increased when on the return journey, Copenhagen was subsequently blacked out by a major power cut three hours before flight departure time. The city appeared to function quite normally, despite failed traffic lights and collapsed power supplies to the mainline rail system. All was calm and people went about their business without the southern European need for honking of horns and the gesticulations of manic drivers. But the buses, although somewhat

overcrowded continued to run, and the airport quickly got back to its normal routine. The problem had arisen in Sweden, which supplies power to Denmark. Was it a case of "*La Suède – NUL points?*"

Would it have been so smooth here in the UK one asks?

Workplace visits are an enjoyable feature of European Hazards Conferences, and provide opportunities to see different working environments, but also to recognise that the same problems as UK workers experience manifest themselves in very much the same way. Our visit to the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen was a reminder that the entertainment industry has as many, if not more, safety issues and working hours problems as many other workplaces experience. A visit to the royal box, and its private rooms prompted local workers' comments about the smoking habits of the monarch, which had a kind of levelling effect.

A gentle walk through the "Walking Street" via the Royal Palace, and waterside gardens opposite the newly emerging Opera House, gave us a preview of an interesting capital. In a side street the 'courthouse' where trades union strike action is contested and fines of £4.00 day are levied against strikers to reimburse employers was pointed out. It was said that in a particular dispute some years back, the bricklayers union descended early on the place and bricked up the front of the building to prevent any fines being levied. That is industrial action with a difference! But I digress.

The weekend conference got off to a resounding start with local folk music to illustrate the problems of the poor during the early parts of the last century and its predecessor. A welcoming speech from the organisers was accompanied by the usual 6 language instantaneous translations buzzing over the headphones. A powerful speech on "The brutalisation of work under neo-liberalism" from Asbjørn Wahl (Norway), set the events of the weekend in motion.

The network was represented by Ian Draper and Brian Robinson, who jointly facilitated a three-session workshop on Stress and Policy. This was attended by UK, Danish, Finnish, Latvian, Norwegian and Italian delegates, although the latter could not be supported by translators, which was regrettable as they had prepared an excellent detailed paper with English translation.

Detailed suggestions for the revision of the European Hazards Charter emerged, which focussed specifically on a call for a European Directive to outlaw the causes of stress and to require national legislation in member states to ensure that employers comply with safety law in respect of the causes of workplace stress.

The closing session took reports from workshops on the Charter which will be examined and redrafted by the European Work Hazards Network group. The final session was a wonderful performance by a group of young thespians who took the significance of Hamlet's origins in Helsingør to some extremely amusing ends. The Danes were thanked profusely for their hospitality and especially for a very successful weekend.

Workshop 13 – Stress Charter Response

The workshop facilitated by UK National Work Stress Network, considered the causes and effects of stress in the workplace, discussed audits and risk assessment, defined terms common to the subject of stress and bullying and examined how employees and employers should seek to work together to eradicate the causes of workplace stress-factors.

The group consisted of representatives from Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Norway and the UK. Unfortunately it was not possible for translators to support Italian colleagues, but separate contact was made with them outside the workshop, and a valuable Italian paper prepared in English, was circulated to all participants, and formed the basis of a discussion period.

The group considered how they might work together to revive the European Stress Network, and it was agreed to keep in touch, and perhaps to consider meeting again at a future UK National Work Stress Network event.

CHARTER

The group examined the European Hazards Charter and in light of local experiences and workshop discussions made the following suggestions as proposed amendments:

STRESS:

- There is a need for a European Directive on workplace stress to be translated into member state law and regulation. (This was stated in the final plenary session).
- Such a directive and associated laws to reflect all aspects of the work environment,

the impact of shifting worker populations, multinational demands made on Europe and world-wide worker groups and the essential involvement of Safety Representatives in progressing improvements in individual and company-wide workstations.

GENERAL ISSUES:

- It was felt that the charter as a whole was dated, and needs a full update, perhaps with:-
 - Executive Summary or synoptic front page, with bullet points backed up by more detailed demands of a generic nature
 - Format perhaps could lead to the development of a booklet or handouts, with single pages/handouts covering specific topics, and including practical advice
 - A Web-based information platform
 - Demands within the changing political contexts and management strategies
 - Greater emphasis of the role of the worker and TU safety representative roles, and the benefits of organising
 - Requirements that all new work processes are risk assessed prior to implementation
- Clear direct references to the politico-economic context presented by the Norwegian speaker in the opening Plenum

Workshop participants agreed to take ideas back to their constituent countries and to maintain contact, with the view of reviving the European Stress Network.

HSE fails to mention Trades Unions - again

The October conference held by HSE ignored any of the real benefits of partnership, by failing to include on the platform or even to mention the role of Health and Safety Representatives and Trades Unions in its high-profile promotion of *"Real People – real solutions"*. This in the presence of over 500 representatives from a wide range of companies, Occupational Health, Human Resources, and trades unionists. It was left to Bill Callaghan, Chair of HSC, to be almost the only person to make direct reference to the role of unions in the safety partnership at work.

Presentations were made by keynote speakers on their work carried out in various companies. Information from HSE's development of workplace survey material to facilitate joint consideration of the causes of worker stress, enabled the audience to gather ideas of how employers should take the issue seriously and act to remove the causes of stress.

The *"Real People – real solutions"* packs contain examples of good practice, advice sheets and contact points, including this network's website, and are available from HSE publications.

Stressed Organisations? Stressed workers?

Travelling recently by car, I listened to a Radio-4 phone-in programme on workplace stress. Contributions included comments by factory workers and lorry drivers that, *"all this fuss about the 'blue-collar' disease is not new. People don't really know what working long hours was really like, we have been working under stressful conditions for years"*.

This chimed with personal experience and of supporting casework generated by workload, working environment, bullying management and the interaction of personal issues with employment. But you will say we cannot be responsible for what goes on outside the workplace - truth is that if things are not good at home, work suffers; if things are not good at work, family relationships suffer. Employers must be aware, and ready to respond positively.

Sadly thousands are exposed to excessive unremitting work-pressures which damage health leading to stroke and heart disease, cancer, as well as other illnesses many with permanent or fatal outcomes. Stress is an irritant to an underlying health problem. Associated psychological illness is very debilitating and stress-related suicides are not unknown.

There is a personal cost to individuals and families plus the significant cost to the economy through lost working days. In 1996 employee sickness absence cost UK business £12bn. HSE reports 20m working days lost yearly through work-related illness. 500,000 workers self reported high levels of stress illness in 1998. DfEE figures for ill-health in England & Wales reported 2.5m teaching days lost in 1999 at a cost of £3m.

So how do employers address this conundrum?

UK National Work-Stress Network

A Health and Safety Representative once asked how he might access sickness absence records without breaching confidentiality. I explained he would be looking for patterns, not for specifics. The questioner's Headteacher had already said, "*there are no patterns, it's just general debility*". Surely this was a pattern, and the school should take steps to identify the cause and exercise its duty of care?

Absence data, and sickness management procedures *handled supportively* help in isolating causes of physical or psychological illness. Medically certified and self-certificated absence may not expressly mention work-related causes or stress for fear of repercussions. And the Benefits Agency frequently rejects BI-95 industrial injury forms where stress or bullying is stated as the cause.

However sickness data provides evidence of probable underlying causes of absence, providing an opportunity to identify and eradicate the causes of a stressed organisation. It might be related to noise, heating or ventilation, regular or seasonal work pressure? Often it is a lack of control or influence over work demands.

At a Northamptonshire school, I sought to discover the most frustrating aspects of work for all staff. High on the list were poor communications, lack of information, and deadlines. The teachers' majority view was that there was insufficient opportunity to influence what was expected of them. Senior managers thought they shared information effectively. Headteacher was critical that people did not meet deadlines. Staff believed there were too many fixed deadlines. Following my seminar and a risk assessment, communications and calendar-setting programmes were modified to good effect.

An Oxfordshire Headteacher of a school in special measures, was concerned over frequent short-term absence within the entire staff. The Safety Committee carried out by agreement, an anonymous survey about health problems. The list of ailments was significant, leading to an investigation into the problems faced by the staff working in very difficult circumstances. Working practice changes were made although the fundamental cause, local social deprivation and pupils' anti-social behaviour was less easily resolved. The medium-term outcome was additional support for staff, over and above the norm, until such time as matters could be more effectively resolved.

A Health and Safety Committee, involving elected Safety Representatives and Managers should take workers' views on board. By agreement, stress audits can be undertaken. Advice in the new HSE guidance "*Real Solutions – Real People*" allows for simple surveys of problems that people see in their workplace. This is followed by more detailed investigation and dialogue throughout the organisation to address those problems. Improved conditions generate improved productivity.

Mary headed up a company accounts department where staff shortages had been experienced and at a critical time, two long-standing colleagues left. It was hard to recruit replacements. Over three months, Mary took on more and more to fill the gaps. She took work home with her. She cancelled leave, and as a single parent was under mounting pressures with her three young children. Department colleagues helped, but other senior officials disturbed her at home and work. She could not sleep, wasn't eating, and became depressed. She was signed off sick, unable to stop the tears as she talked with her GP. Recovery took six months before a phased, supported return. Additional staff were then in place and other measures identified to remove the causes of Mary's stress.

In the many cases I have handled, it has been helpful to apply a simple risk assessment to verify the causes of prolonged sickness absence and under-performance. Paperwork, red-tape, inadequate ineffective communications, poor physical working conditions, violence and abuse and lack of control over excessive workload demand are examples of problems faced by many employees, including managers.

The HSE five-step risk assessment approach with implementation of control measures and annual review, serves well for manual handling – why not for stress? Assessing the potential for injury, using local data will enable control measures to be put in place with annual reviews, eradicating the causes of illness.

Lack of sympathy for those who are likely to go under, with the advice to "*get a grip*" is not the answer. Neither are 'sticking plaster' coping strategies which lay the resolution of the problem back to the victim without addressing the underlying cause.

The 'Hatton' Appeal Court judgement (2002) makes fifteen clear recommendations for employers to seek to cover their duty of care. Employee susceptibility to pressure should be

identified, and steps taken to modify those pressures – foreseeability is bound up in positive employer actions.

Exit interviews, whilst not entirely reliable, can provide evidence about the frequency of resignations, from departments with perhaps exceptionally high workload, or bullying management styles. Such data helps to focus on identification of the problem. Is the workplace a happy one? What will those on their way out reveal? How will it help improve the workplace?

These and other questions serve as the basis upon which to carry out a successful risk assessment and put in place an agreed, active stress policy. Essential to success is full commitment throughout the organisation from Chairman and Chief Executive to the most recent recruit. Managers and Directors are required to ensure their responsibilities are fully implemented.

Top-down acknowledgement of the existence stress in the organisation is vital, and that everyone has a duty to remove or alleviate its causes. The employer must exercise his duty of care, creating a *caring, supportive culture*.

All employees must feel valued, with their worth recognised, through ownership of their contribution to the whole. They must have dignity at work.

The lorry driver on Radio-4 was talking about the and 1970s. Stress is here in the 21st century.

However these issues are not new:

“In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed:

- they must be fit for it;
- they must not do too much of it;
- and they must have a sense of success in it.”

John Ruskin, 1871

(This article by Ian Draper, was commissioned from the network by 'The HR Director', a publication directed at Human Resources Directors. Their website can be accessed at www.thehrdirector.com)

Time on the job kills passion

One in five Scottish employees is put off sex because of excessive working hours. A survey of 3,500 people by the manufacturing union AMICUS reveals that 19% of workers were too tired to indulge in passion with their partners. Community work, socialising, personal fitness

and hobbies also suffered from excessive working hours. AMICUS health and safety survey suggested that all aspects of family life were being affected.

John Quigley, AMICUS national secretary said: "Forcing people to work excessive hours is the work equivalent to a low carbohydrate diet - immediate results but with potentially damaging effects on the health of your business."

London & SE bank workers under most stress

Finance union UNIFI research reveals that workers in London and the South-East feel more stressed than their colleagues in other parts of the country.

Ed Sweeney, UNIFI General Secretary commented: "Finance staff in London and the South-East are frequently skipping their lunch breaks, coming in early and staying late. Customers often queue for up to an hour and vent their frustration on staff. The region is a stress hotspot and the pressure on staff is intense."

UNIFI believes the main reason for workers in London and the South-East in particular being more stressed is caused by problems with recruitment and retention.

Understaffing is severe in the South-East and banks are having to pay above average starting salaries to attract new staff.

Three quarters of respondents believed that their employers are losing business because of stress and understaffing.

"Staff are unhappy as they cannot deliver the service they would like. And business is being lost due to errors made by staff working under too much stress," added Ed Sweeney.

The UNIFI study also reveals that where management shows a better attitude towards the union there is less stress. "Our research has shown that unions can make a difference. Unions tend to ensure that work-life balance policies are enforced and that unfair practices are challenged," said Sweeney.

Unions pioneered drive for work-life balance

Ground-breaking research has shown that union officials were pioneers of the family-friendly

agenda before it became one of the principal planks of New Labour.

A study by Helen Bewley of the Policy Studies Institute shows that the right to parental leave, to switch to part-time employment and to job-share were all much more common in unionised workplaces than in organisations where no union was recognised. The figures suggest that union leaders are not so much "the awkward squad" as "the family-friendly squad".

Tony Woodley, general secretary of TGWU, said: "Family-friendly policies have been part of the bargaining agenda long before the law compelled employers to act." The recent unofficial strike by British Airways staff over working conditions at Heathrow was one of the first strikes in Britain where work-life balance was cited as a key union goal.

The study shows that in 1998, on the eve of a wave of family-friendly legislation over half of unionised workplaces already provided parental leave. In contrast, little more than a fifth of other employers gave them the same right. Almost six in 10 unionised workplaces offered switches to part-time working, compared with little more than a third of other employers. Help with childcare was also more likely.

Roger Lyons, TUC president, claimed for the union movement some of the credit for the new laws, saying "We were able to tell the government that from our experience it's good for staff morale, which means it's good for business efficiency."

Success for sick leave scheme

People in north-east England are being helped back to work after long-term sick leave. The government-funded *Routeback* initiative aims to find out what helps people return to work. It is targeted at those who have been off work for between six and 26 weeks and is running on Tyneside and Teesside. Chris Drinkwater, from Northumbria University, (Tyneside Routeback Manager), said: "We have very high rates of long-term sickness absence and all the evidence is the longer people are off work the less likely they are to get back.

"This is about trying to help people to get back as early as possible. We are looking at different interventions for different groups. Ways of helping people includes adaptations and aids to help them, like taxis to and from work. If it is a mental health issue, people work with a personal

adviser to find out what the issues are and are offered counselling aimed at helping them think positively.

One of those who has been helped is Gateshead voice coach and opera singer Marian Bryfdir. At the beginning of the year she developed a small viral growth close to her vocal chords which meant she had to have an operation. She said: "I was put in touch with Routeback about my problems getting back to work because obviously the voice takes quite a long time to get over this kind of operation.

"Though my singing work is not as difficult because I have a vocal technique which I am trained to use, but a lot of my work in teaching involves speaking which is much harder on the voice.

"I had a chat with the Routeback people and they suggested they might be able to help me out with mobile microphones and equipment so that I could tape some of the exercises I would normally do using my own voice and get back to work much quicker than I anticipated."

Bullied teacher awarded £86,000

A teacher who developed depression after she was bullied by her headteacher has won £86,487 in damages. Margaret Menzies said she had been left "anxious and exhausted" before retiring early from Chalgrove Primary School in Barnet, north London.

Head teacher Valerie Hughes had been "rude, aggressive and intimidatory" towards staff, Judge Brian Knight told Central London County Court, "Staff morale was low and Valerie Hughes was unapproachable, unfair in her dealings with the claimant and rude, aggressive and intimidatory in her dealings with the claimant, some children and parents."

He was critical of the local authority's senior primary schools inspector David Burns who had failed to treat the matter sufficiently seriously on becoming aware of the situation.

Ms Menzies suffered from the drip, drip effect of undermining, intimidating and unfair treatment. There wasn't a single big event but continuing dismissal of her as a professional, with constant criticism behind her back. "My every move was wrong in her [Ms Hughes'] eyes. She wanted me to leave, as 15 other people had in four years."

David Burns' notes during a review said: "Teachers threatened - not allowed to talk to any members of staff - demoralized - harassed. Aggressive and threatening management style. Teacher [Mrs Menzies] not allowed to have day off for scan. Blame culture from head teacher."

MS Menzies went on long-term sick leave in January 2001 and was granted retirement on health grounds in September of that year. Ms Hughes resigned from the school in July 2001.

Britons 'work £23bn unpaid time'

UK workers will put in more than £23 billion of unpaid overtime this year, according to a new report. The TUC said around five million people work an average of seven hours and 24 minutes without pay every week - worth £4,500 a year.

From official statistics, 1.5 million managers were working unpaid overtime. Professional staff were averaging nine hours 36 minutes a week extra, worth £9,000 a year. 150,000 craft workers were averaging an extra six hours a week, worth £3,000 and 70,000 plant and machine operatives were doing an additional five hours 36 minutes of unpaid work which should give them over £2,000 a year.

Brendan Barber (TUC) said: "Britons work the longest hours in Europe, and these figures show that much of it is unpaid overtime. Is it any wonder that top jobs are still dominated by men, when managers have to do an extra day's unpaid work each week?"

"We're not saying we should turn into a nation of clock-watchers, or that no-one should put in extra work when there's an emergency or a rush of orders, but many people are clearly putting in the equivalent of an extra day every week.

20% of workers fail to use up five or more of their days off

Research by Teletext Holidays showed that workers will forfeit at least £192 million-worth of holiday-time this year by failing to take up their full leave allowance. The survey showed that four out of five workers still have holidays to take in the current year. More than a third of those will not have used up their full entitlement when it runs out next month.

Staff 'told to sign for longer week'

Aspiring employees are being forced to sign a

clause curtailing their right to work a 48-hour weekly maximum, according to an independent report on the working time directive. The European Commission will use the news as ammunition in its battle to impose a stricter interpretation of workers' rights in Britain.

The Commission, and many EU member states, feel that UK employers are exploiting the directive's "opt-out" clause, under which workers put in more than an average working week of 48 hours if they have agreed to do so. The Cambridge University report, by Catherine Barnard, points to "evidence of the opt-out being included as a standard term of employment contracts and so, in effect, being compulsory".

This supports the trade union view that the directive has been emasculated by the opt-out clause. The unions, with some EU officials and many European politicians, want to remove the opt-out clause.

But much in the report will be useful to business groups such as the CBI and the Engineering Employers' Federation. They are determined to retain as much employer freedom as possible. The report notes that ACAS feels the opt-out "has not created significant industrial relations difficulties". It also notes the TGWU conclusion that "the freedom to work overtime rather than employer pressure was the major incentive" behind opt-out agreements.

Workers bemoan horror bosses

A third of Scottish workers believe they work with the boss from hell. A recent poll found that 61% think they could teach their boss a thing or two about management. A third criticised their boss, 39% said they admired their manager and 40% considered them a close friend. The study by LloydsTSB Scotland and campaign group Working Families found that 15% thought their boss was like embarrassing David Brent in the BBC TV comedy *The Office*.

Although 15% said they had a boss who was a good mentor and inspiration, just 3% of Scots said they could confide in their manager. Four per cent said they were happy to socialise with their manager outside work. Kim Walker, of Lloyds TSB Scotland, said: "One of the keys to being a good boss is to understand the importance of work life balance. People work hard but they get fed up if their boss doesn't recognise that they have a life outside of work."