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### Managing stress at work: Warm hearts shine through

At one small firm, the company's three-tonne truck was used to transport stranded workers to the office and back, as well as taking care of the school run

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I wonder how people in the Emirates reacted to the reports of our sudden snow blizzards in the UK at New Year. Perhaps it is hard for you to imagine a densely populated country where the weather is totally unpredictable, and can sometimes bring work to a sudden halt without notice.

Since this was the first prolonged cold snap for at least ten years, it awakened some of us to a whole new set of workplace stressors for the first time.

You may have thought from our employment laws about absenteeism, that the cold weather could have brought out the worst in some people, using it as an excuse to stay at home, but claiming full pay, or that some unscrupulous employers may have welcomed the chance to send everyone home when orders were slow, and deduct those days from their holiday allowances. But among my wide-ranging clients and colleagues, I have not heard of a single case of deliberate abuse of the situation only a number of heart-warming reports of co-operative effort and improved teamwork in the office, quite apart from countless examples of neighbourly goodwill at home.

At one small firm, the company's three-tonne truck was used to transport stranded workers to the office and back, as well as taking care of the school run.

#### Bonding

At another, a union shop-steward, usually noted for his strict application of the Health & Safety regulations, agreed not to close down the factory when the temperature slipped just below the statutory 16C minimum.

But the story I like best came from a long-established building firm. They were working on a new hospital in a remote part of the country, where they were due to deliver a number of massive steel joists. There, a large gang of steel erectors were waiting for these girders, in order that construction work could proceed when suddenly, it started to snow, until after about an hour, the entire site was covered 200 millimetres deep.

With only about half the staff able to get to work that morning, everyone was having to do two jobs.

#### Initiative

The driver knocked on the transport manager's door to tell him he needed a second man in the cab. There was no one else. And the cost of keeping the whole construction team

waiting another day or possibly more was unthinkable. The manager would have to go himself.

Now these two had always disliked one another. The manager was the son of a senior judge, and the driver came from a dirt-poor livestock farm. Like oil and vinegar, they refused to mix.

A gruelling ten-hour journey changed all that. By the time they'd negotiated half-a-dozen steep hills the two of them were casually joking together, even singing on the way home. An enmity of opposites had become a friendship of opposites.

#### **Focus on flexibility**

The UK's first big freeze for years has brought out the best in many. Companies have been prepared to be flexible to meet the challenge. Forced teamwork has sometimes improved relations between colleagues.

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