

people

► Freeth Cartwright has appointed Ann Critchell-Ward as an associate in its IP and IT team. Critchell-Ward joins from Martineau Johnson, where she worked for eight years.

► Chelmsford-based firm Wollastons has hired former Olswang lawyer Grace Kerr as a partner in its commercial property department. Kerr has more than 10 years' experience of mainstream property work.

► Forsters has boosted its family team with the hire of Ann Northover, who joins as a partner from Gordon Dadds. Northover is a specialist in advising high net-worth clients on the financial aspects of divorce, prenuptial agreements and disputes involving children.

► Shoosmiths has strengthened its Midlands commercial team with the appointment of Lucy Lazzeri to its Nottingham office. Lazzeri specialises in commercial contracts, IT and IP.

► The Birmingham office of Cobbetts has appointed five new solicitors. Jane Raca, a former commercial litigation partner at Shoosmiths, and newly-qualified solicitors Richard Coates and David Purvis join the commercial dispute resolution team, while Pia Brosinovich and Victoria Stowell join the property dispute resolution team.

in brief

► The Newton Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year Awards were held last Wednesday (20 October) at Rudding House in Harrogate, with DLA's Robin Smith picking up both the top prize of Lawyer of the Year and a Lifetime Achievement Award. Smith was described as "one of the people who put Leeds on the legal map". He was the chief architect of the development of Dibb Lupton & Co from a five-partner provincial firm into the international outfit that is now DLA.

Stress under pressure

Stress management needs the support of the whole firm – starting from the top. By Carole Spiers



MANY employers do not realise that since the introduction of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, all organisations with five or more employees have had a legal duty to conduct regular risk assessments of workplace hazards, including psychosocial hazards such as stress.

The Health and Safety Executive has published new management standards for work-related stress, due to be launched on 3 November, designed to ensure that organisations address key aspects of workplace stress, such as demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. As well as following this new guidance, there are a variety of other measures employers should also introduce.

A stress policy should be implemented in conjunction with staff liaison groups, and commitment should begin at the most senior level. There is little point in introducing stress-management training for managers, for example, if the partners have little commitment to minimising or eliminating excessive pressure.

When recruiting, it is important that both the organisation and applicant understand the requirements of the post and the potential pressures involved. One conclusion of the Court of Appeal case *Hatton v Sutherland* [2002] was that "there are no occupations that should be regarded as intrinsically dangerous to mental health". It is essential to combine an appropriate selection policy with sufficient job-specific, practical training, to enable individuals to work within their capabilities.

Teams known as first-contact counselling teams, made up of volunteers from the organisation who are trained in basic counselling skills, are often used to provide employees with an 'active listening' service. Effective communication is often neglected in management training, yet it is essential to good management. This includes 'active listening', where the listener engages with the person they are listening to and responds appropriately. Good communication at all levels will help ensure everyone can work with confidence, reducing the opportunities for stress to develop.

For stress management to become integral to corporate culture, initiatives must be introduced that will raise awareness of work-related stress. In particular, recognising the early warning signs and symptoms should become integral to management strategy. This can be achieved by monitoring sickness absence, carrying out confidential staff surveys, observing working relationships, questioning changes in attitude and behaviour and so on.

In *Hatton*, the Court of Appeal ruled that "any employer who offered a confidential counselling service was unlikely to be found in breach of duty of care by the courts". Counselling should therefore be regarded as an intervention to be included alongside other supportive services available to employees.

Employee assistance programmes (EAPs) help employees to access confidential counselling and information services, but they should not detract from the importance of line managers. Nor must an application to an EAP be interpreted by managers as suggesting a lack of confidence in their own ability to deal with stress-related issues.

Depending on the nature of your organisation, concierge services or complementary therapies, such as reflexology, yoga, massage etc, may also be of benefit. Typically, however, they should be incorporated within a holistic approach to work-related stress, rather than being expected to resolve underlying problems on their own. If an organisation introduces these types of 'stress-busting' initiatives without a solid foundation of stress management training and employee counselling support, they risk adding to problems of work-related stress through frustration, disillusion, and a belief among employees that the true causes of stress are not being taken seriously.

Carole Spiers is an occupational business stress consultant at the Carole Spiers Group

There is little point in introducing stress management training for managers if the partners have little commitment to eliminating excessive pressure

The work-life quiz

Michael Laver, managing partner, Stevens & Bolton

What was your first ever job?

When I was 16 I sold fruit and veg from a market stall in Guildford.

What was your worst experience as a trainee?

Taking a statement from an 18-year-old who had just lost both legs in a motorbike accident



Where's the best place to go if you want to find out what's really going on in the office?

I like to walk around the office. I think people are used to my wanderings and I find it a good way of keeping up to date.

What time do you usually leave the office?

About 7pm.

What do you do at weekends?

Sailing, woodworking, but mainly acting as a taxi service for the children.

What's your favourite restaurant?

Cambio's in Guildford – a very popular Italian restaurant.

If you weren't a lawyer, what would you have been?

An opera singer. Unfortunately I have to make do as a second tenor in various local choirs.

Who was your mentor or role model?

My former senior partner David Wilson. Among many other things, he taught me the benefit of a clear desk policy – a practice I seem to have singularly failed to pass on to a good number of my colleagues in the office.

What's the best thing about your job?

The people (well, most of them), both in the office and the clients. The journey to work isn't bad. Twenty minutes to Guildford station and 20 seconds from there to my desk.

What's the toughest thing about your job?

Trying to provide the work-life balance that we promise.

What's your biggest work/career mistake and what did you learn from it?

Being absent from the partners meeting that voted me in as managing partner.

What car(s) do you drive?

BMW 530 and a Land Rover Defender.

What book are you currently reading?

Robbert Goddard's *Play to The End*.

What's on your CD player at the moment?

No idea – whatever my daughter left in there last.

What's your favourite children's book?

Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome.

events

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