

Livewire

October 2007

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Training for UNISON Stewards

Eight new Manweb stewards underwent three days union training during September. The "New stewards Training Course" is the first of several stages of training where stewards learn about their role and responsibilities as stewards, practise some basic techniques in representing members and start to get to grips with the joint agreements and procedures which operate within the company. The union takes investment and support of new steward very seriously. Stewards are the lifeblood of the union and the most important source of advice, information and support for all members. If you would be interested in finding out more about helping your union in your workplace then please contact your local steward or the UNISON Branch Office on the following number 01352 759953.

Call Centres Are you stressed?



Management unveil new model Call Centre Worker

Over 80% of long term sickness absences in ScottishPower are for staff in the Energy Retail Call Centres. Over a two year period around 50% of staff in Warrington call centre had been subjected to some form of formal procedure relating to discipline, performance or sickness absence. The call centre stewards report being involved in a continual flow of cases every week, often with little time to prepare for one case before having to pick up another one.

SO WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?

It has not always been like this. A few years ago when UNISON carried out an investigation into call centre operations throughout the UK, ScottishPower was seen as one of the leading employers lauded with a list of creditable practises. However, with increasing pressure to compete by cutting costs, widen the

customer service window to include early mornings, late evenings and weekends, many of the "good practises" have been abandoned and staff have increasingly been pressured with unachievable targets and highly regimented working arrangements and conditions. The article inside from one of our stewards on the front line gives a graphic account of a number of the problems facing members and the union.

We want to work with the company to tackle these issues with imagination and a commitment to creating a happy workforce who would repay good working practises with improved quality and loyalty. We urge all staff to join the union and help make this a reality.

Raffle: Join by 31 October!



Are you a member of UNISON?

If not then if you join up by the

end of October you will automatically be entered into the Branch Raffle with great prizes including a FLAT SCREEN TV, Free Health Spa visit, Concert tickets, Ipod shuffle & M&S Vouchers. You will of course be entitled to all the benefits of representation which

comes with being a member of a union of 1.4 million people which has real clout in the workplace and helps make sure any work problems you have can be dealt with through advise, consultation, representation and negotiation, backed up by legal experts with an enormous wealth of experience in dealing exclusively with union related disputes.

DON'T DELAY-JOIN TODAY.

Way of Life within the Call Centres

Working in a ScottishPower call centre these days is full of stress and totally demoralising. The company is full of slogans like "The Place to be", but let's be honest I don't think anyone who works in the call centre like me would agree with that statement.

Over the last few years I seen the stress levels of all my colleagues rising to boiling point due to the pressure put on them by the company. First of all they have the pressure of obtaining targets and being measured for things that are out of their control. They are marked on what information they obtain, the amount of cash they collect etc. The fact that they have done their job in asking the right questions appears to be irrelevant. For example if a customer refuses to give certain information, set up a Direct Debit or pay the balance on the account there and then with a debit card - it doesn't matter that the agent has asked they are still marked down for it.

If a customer has to call back they are again marked down for this, it doesn't matter if the agent did everything they possibly could during that call and the customer calling back was unavoidable. Things like whether you take your break at exactly the right minute are also marked. If you take it too early you are penalised but also if you take it too late you have the same problem. This again adds to the stress as working in a call centre you never know how long a call is going to last.

You have try and deal with the customer's query, obtain all the information and ask all the questions the company require and update the account, recap and try to up sell the customer to a better

package all within the company's allotted time frame known as AHT (average handling time - this includes: speaking to the customer, actioning all updates and actioning any work that can not be done whilst the customer is on the line.) Despite this, the Company then bang on about how we have to give the customer experience. How are agents supposed to sound happy, polite & do all they can for the customer when they are under all this pressure?

Along with that, they are also under the pressure of knowing all calls are recorded and will be dissected for any faults that can be found, whether it is an agent not using the exact wording wanted by the company, or not sounding how the company want them to sound. It is a continuous bombardment of unobtainable targets and scrutinisation. This leaves agents feeling deflated and also under enormous pressure.

To make things even worse under so called security procedures agents now have to work on bare desks, no personal belongings can be anywhere near them, they are

given special serialised notebooks to write in and even waste bins have been removed from under the desks. What's next is the question on everyone's lips, strip search before and after work? The company are now cracking down on sickness and dismissing people for poor attendance. Do they not realise it is them who is making us ill and dismissing people will not improve anything? They need to reconsider the way the treat their staff, start being realistic with their targets, praise staff who are doing a good job and improve moral. If they did this then I'm sure they would see an improvement in the staff's attendance, moral and customer satisfaction.

As a Union steward I have been asked How have the Union allowed the company do this? The Union is here to assist it's members but at the end of the day it is the members who run the Union and the Union is only as strong as those members. We are the one's who have allowed the company to treat us like this and if we want it to stop it is up to us to make it happen but I'm sure the Union would assist any way it can.



SAIC collective staff accept 3.5%

UNISON members covered by collective bargaining in SAIC who were transferred from ScottishPower/Manweb ISD department in May 2000 have voted in large number to accept a 3.5% pay deal with additional performance elements of up to 0.5%. The pay deal will be backdated to April 2007 and will be paid in the October payroll run.

Flexitime harmonisation discussions in Energy Networks

Energy Networks are looking to harmonise the flexitime agreements which operate across the various offices in the Manweb area into one single flexitime agreement. Flexitime was first agreed in Manweb in the early 1980's and has been one of the single most important elements of terms and conditions ever since. Not only is it seen by staff as a valuable benefit, it has also provided the company with great flexibility to help in meeting targets and deadlines and a source of unpaid labour from many staff who lose hours at the end of each month. UNISON stewards will be keen to make sure that during negotiations on harmonisation, the principles and benefits currently in place are not eroded or abandoned – especially at a time when work-life balance is seen nationally as such an important consideration.

Recruit a friend and earn some CASH!

Did you know that all members of the Manweb branch can earn money by recruiting non-members to the union. Just get some recruitment forms from one of the reps and for the first person you sign up you can claim £10 then for each further recruit you can claim £5. Simply put your name at the top of the completed form and hand the form in to your local steward

or send it off to the branch at the address shown on the form. When the member has been added to the membership books we will send you a cheque for the appropriate amount. Not only will you make some cash, but you will also be helping strengthen the union in your workplace. So, what are you waiting for.....get some forms and help build the union.

MAKE YOUR MONEY WORK HARDER

With some honest advice from the appointed provider of financial advice to UNISON members.



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For further information or to arrange a financial review call LighthouseTemple on the number below:

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UNISON Challenges Gender Discrimination



Fifty two per cent of members responding to our last UNISON survey had experienced harassment or other discrimination because of their sexual orientation. This included:-

- not being appointed to jobs
- verbal and physical abuse and threats from co-workers, managers or service users
- unfair work allocation or over-supervision
- prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes about their suitability to work with children and other vulnerable groups
- false allegations
- not being considered for training or promotion
- non-recognition of families and denial of benefits available to other workers.

Nearly one in ten of the members experiencing this discrimination decided that the only way to stop it was to leave their job. Persistent harassment commonly leads to poor work performance and attendance, which in turn may lead to dismissal, with the root cause - homophobia - never being acknowledged. Many lesbian, gay and bisexual workers seek to avoid discrimination by

concealing their sexual orientation. But such concealment comes at great personal cost.

UNISON believes that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have the right to equal treatment, protection from discrimination and full support from the union. Allegations of discrimination will be taken very seriously. UNISON is developing an inclusive Equalities Scheme to promote equality across all grounds in everything we do.

LGBT members organise in UNISON at branch, regional and national level. There is an annual lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members' conference and national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members committee.

UNISON recognises that lesbian, gay and bisexual workers are not a homogenous group. For example bisexual workers, women LGB worker, black LGB workers and disabled LGB workers all face particular issues which we need to address.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers face prejudice and discrimination when seeking work and once they are in a job. Every trade unionist has a responsibility to challenge this discrimination. It is part of our core agenda

for workers' rights. We are very keen to hear from members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) and would like to become more involved in the branch. We shall be holding a meeting to agree initial details, the purpose and aims of the group, structure of

the group and any new legislations of interest.

Details of the meeting will be sent out to all those expressing an interest.

Contact us in confidence

Ring or text Julie on 07971 996191
email: praze-an-beeble@talktalk.net

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