

Background

Managing personal relationships is one of the biggest challenges company executives face. Everyone knows that for a company to operate at its full potential individuals need to work together. Apollo Printers has a reputation as a quality printer of top-of-the-range company brochures and annual reports for public companies. The company prospered in a very competitive segment of the printing world.

Yet when Daisy O'Leary was appointed as Managing Director, what struck her most was the poisonous atmosphere that existed at the printing works. Daisy often found herself in the middle of bitter arguments between the sales force and the printers. The printers looked down on the salespeople as golden-boys who were ready to promise a client anything in order to get a contract. Printers were often required to work late or at weekends to keep the promises that had been made. For their part, the salespeople regarded the printers as over-sensitive and uncooperative. They believed that the other members of staff should be grateful for all the business they won.

Staff turnover was high in some of the less crucial roles, but the sales and printing teams stayed on because they could earn very good money. The sales people made a good commission and the printers a fortune in overtime. The bonus scheme meant that even staff in back-up roles did better than their peers in other kinds of businesses. All the same, this did not stop support staff from feeling miserable and undervalued when they saw how well the others were doing.

Daisy decided to do something about breaking down the barriers of distrust and suspicion. On such occasions companies sometimes turn to events organizers to help them improve inter-personal relationships. In a previous job, Daisy had been on a survival weekend that was

meant to make everybody 'bond' and had hated every minute of it. As far as she was concerned it had been a complete failure and she had ended up having a worse working relationship with her boss than ever!

This experience made Daisy determined to face up to the problem herself. She believed that if everyone had a better appreciation of what their colleagues did, they would treat each other with a little more consideration. She introduced a shadowing programme where a member of staff from one department followed another during their working day. The printers understood better the pressures that the sales team was under to meet the demands of their clients. For their part, the sales team got a better idea of how long it took to set up a machine and how demanding the work was. The support staff understood just how tough other roles were and the sacrifices their colleagues had to make. After a few weeks had gone by she detected that there was a better understanding and respect between the camps and a softening of attitudes, even if people weren't the best of friends.

She also offered a number of different activities where the emphasis was on having fun. She believed that if you provided a relaxed environment, personal relationships would eventually sort themselves out. A paint-balling afternoon, and a murder mystery day were both a great success and appealed to people across the spectrum of the company. She arranged a theatre trip to *Mamma Mia* that nearly everyone enjoyed. It was a long, slow process and there was no magic solution, but over the following months there were fewer arguments and everybody worked together more harmoniously. Amazingly, the firm was able to take on more business and even if they didn't all live happily ever after they at least got a bigger bonus!

Reading file 8

1 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.

- 1 How important is it for you to have a good personal relationship with your colleagues?
- 2 Are there inter-departmental rivalries that cause problems where you work?
- 3 How would you judge the general atmosphere at your place of work?
excellent very good OK poor terrible

2 Read the text quickly and chose the most appropriate title. Can you think of a better one?

Oiling the wheels Bring in the experts A miracle at work

3 Read the first four paragraphs again and answer the questions.

- 1 What areas does Apollo printers specialize in?
- 2 The article mentions three groups: the salespeople, the printers and the support staff. How did they feel about each other?
- 3 Despite the poor atmosphere, why did people stay at the company?
- 4 How did Daisy feel about events that were designed to make staff 'bond'?

4 Read the final two paragraphs and complete the table.

Action	Purpose	Result
shadowing		
'fun' events		

5 Match 1–7 to a–g to form collocations from the text.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1 competitive | a turnover |
| 2 annual | b segment |
| 3 public | c company |
| 4 full | d failure |
| 5 staff | e relationship |
| 6 complete | f report |
| 7 personal | g potential |

6 Using the text to help you, decide what the collocations in 5 mean.

7 Match these definitions to phrasal verbs from the text.

- 1 think you are better than someone else: _____
- 2 remain in a job: _____
- 3 destroy or make disappear: _____
- 4 find yourself in a situation you didn't expect to be in: _____
- 5 accept and deal with a difficult situation: _____

8 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

9 Work in groups. Discuss these questions.

- 1 How well do you think Daisy managed the problem?
- 2 Are there occasions when you think that events like survival weekends bring better results?
- 3 Think of difficult relationships at your place of work. How do you think they could be resolved?