



“Well, then, Mr Treasurer,” said the lady with the oddly shaped, but expensive-looking, glasses. “Thank you for taking a day out of your busy schedule for this one-on-one workshop on stress in the workplace.”

Taking a day out of his busy schedule for a one-on-one workshop on stress in the workplace was exactly the sort of thing that would give Mr Treasurer workplace stress. But – needs must, diktat from above. Curses.

It was Strickard-Folley’s fault, of course – poor chap – though he had rather brought it upon himself. One Tuesday afternoon, the boys and girls in the post room came back from lunch almost 11 minutes late – and two or maybe three of the team appeared to have the smell of alcohol on their breath. Young Scuggins, the apprentice postage-stamp clerk, had been sharing a little of his joy at having put a tenner on Leicester City Football Club last autumn at 2,500/1. Young Scuggins wasn’t feeling stressed at all – and after spending 11 minutes too many at The Shiny Sixpence public house, neither were the rest of the post-room team.

When Strickard-Folley, the facilities manager, ticked them off, Scuggins got it into his lager-and-cash-fuelled head that it would be a fine idea to stuff Strickard-Folley into a cardboard box, tape it shut and have him couriered to a suburb of Samarkand, in eastern

Uzbekistan. Scuggins’ employment was swiftly curtailed. Strickard-Folley was recovered from the box long before the courier firm arrived to take it away, but his nerves had been put through the post-room shredder.

Faced with the choice of issuing a company-wide missive on stuffing other people into boxes and trying to courier them to Asia on the one hand, or organising a series of one-on-one stress in the workplace workshops on the other, the decision seemed obvious to the HR director.

“So, what causes you to experience stress in the workplace, Mr Treasurer?”

After several long minutes’ thought, he replied, “Cash-pooling arrangements in Turkey.” His one-on-one stress counsellor had no idea what that meant, but it sounded awfully technical. She was thrilled to bits.

“Ah!” she almost shrieked. “Difficult concepts, complicated financial tricks, challenging to master all the details, no support from your line manager, *stressed* –” (she stressed the word ‘stressed’) “– about losing millions of the company’s money and that a culture of blame will come raining down on you?”

“Er, no,” said Mr Treasurer. “Sorry, no. Not at all.”

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Sportingly, he felt as though he was rather letting the side down by not being stressed about such things. “We don’t have any cash-pooling arrangements in Turkey.”

To say she looked stressed would be a slur on her reputation as a professional stress counsellor, but she was definitely unrelaxed.

“It’s just that my phone rings goodness knows how many times a week with advisers and consultants of all sorts trying to persuade me to buy into suchlike arrangements,” he explained. “The point is, we don’t have any businesses in Turkey.” He leaned forward slightly. “But my busy schedule is constantly interrupted by ‘professionals’ trying to get me to do things I don’t need to do.”

There was silence. Quite a lot of silence, actually. She got the hint. “Well, thank you, Mr Treasurer. I think that was a very successful workshop. Let’s just tick this one off the list, shall we? No need to reconvene after lunch.”

Mr Treasurer cleared his throat. “Um, The Shiny Sixpence does a rather nice steak-and-ale pie...”



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