

Editor's comment

LONG-TERM DISASTER AHEAD?

SHOULD we be working more than 48 hours a week? For many flooring contractors, especially those who have had to lay off staff, the belief is that remaining employees must be obliged to work beyond their normal hours simply to keep the business afloat.

Buried in the news recently was the announcement that the UK is being allowed to keep its opt out of the European Working Time Directive setting a maximum 48 hour working week. This decision contradicts the Euro-sceptic claim that every aspect of British business is dictated by bureaucrats in Brussels. On this occasion, at least, they clearly failed to force the UK to adopt a directive that is adhered to across the rest of Europe.

People who still have jobs are actually reluctant to argue against working more and more overtime, often without extra pay. Health and safety concerns about long hours are just brushed aside by managers, deeming that drastic measures are needed for businesses 'to ride out the recession'.

The real tragedy is that many thousands of construction workers, including apprentices, have been made redundant during the last six months. This has robbed the industry of skills which could leave many contractors seriously uncompetitive when the recovery eventually kicks in.

With fewer staff, surely those still employed today should undergo training to become more skilled and more efficient? The reality is that many firms have short-sightedly slashed investment in training. The result is that staff are required to work longer, but without the necessary training to enable them to contribute more to the job.

Most flooring companies are not starting to prepare for the recovery. It's wise to remember that extra overtime on its own does not boost productivity. Indeed, poorly training floorlayers are more likely to make mistakes which could ultimately cost their employers dear.

Despite the abundance of excellent courses for floorlayers (at reasonable prices) offered by organisations like FITA, the call for training has declined alarmingly this year.

Some flooring contractors may not yet see signs of their fortunes improving, but if 2010 does herald an economic revival – as many are forecasting – those companies who have neglected training will be hopelessly unable to cope.

The devastating loss of construction skills in the recession of the early 1990s took years to replace. An appeal to the industry not to let history repeat itself was given recently by Nick Raynsford, deputy chairman of the Construction Industry Council and a former construction minister.

He cautions that cutting training will not hasten the upturn. On the contrary, he adds an ominous warning that unless contractors invest in training and recruit apprentices now 'this short-term crisis could turn into a long-term disaster.'



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For starters:

Flush trade

TV celebrity Jonathan Ross reportedly earns millions. So does his plumber, apparently.

This Pimlico plumber — whose client list is said to include personalities such as Mr Ross as well as film star Hugh Grant and the celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey — recently revealed a

whopping £4.6m turnover in the first quarter of 2009, despite the recession.

Assuming that a celebrity may want his toilet unblocked, this plumber could become known as 'sewerage specialist to the stars' — even Gordon Ramsey couldn't call that a crap job!



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