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SHOULD YOU BADGER OR BUST YOUR SALES TEAM?

If you saw the Badger tearing a big strip off a bunch of hapless sales jockeys on Sky One's Badger or Bust this week, and were impressed by the 40% increase in sales that they delivered as a result of her ... well ... 'badgering' them, you may want to think twice before donning your Gladiator kit and storming the sales floor.

I would like to draw your attention to four key points all of which are central to your decision as to which course of action to take:

First, this was a TV programme and what actually was real and what was staged we may never know.

Second, those involved may have been satisfied that the employees in question had worked for the company for less than one year and therefore 99% of unfair dismissal claims would have been doomed to failure.

Third, there were no signs of a likely discrimination claim mainly because she was equally intimidating to each of the employees.

Four, the Managing Director may have been prepared to take the risk of tribunal litigation because if he had continued to tolerate the appalling sales results, he wouldn't have had a business for very much longer anyway.

Experienced HR and Employment Law advisors are used to this cold but logical approach being taken by Directors, especially when they are located across the Atlantic where group headquarters may not entertain poor performance for long and where poor sales results are greeted with a zero tolerance response. Most efforts to persuade a Sales Director based in the US to suffer the expense of further employee training is usually met with a stern negative. They are fully aware that the clock is ticking and it's a case of put up or get out and if it costs £50,000. So be it. They are painfully concerned with what the real cost will be if their competitor steals a march on them.

If you don't have the stomach for the full on approach (or the budget) then you should have continued watching Ruth Badger at work and you would have noticed that she did in fact train the sales force in the fine art of 'selling' which is helpful if you are a sales person and something which their managing director and sales manager hadn't thought of for themselves, which is quite extraordinary. She also insisted the team improve their product knowledge dramatically having been miffed to learn that one of the sales team thought Marbella airport was called Heathrow!

However by far the most amusing gaff was the sales advisor who suggested a prospect call the competition for a quote before buying, but to her credit and after receiving the Badger treatment she came out as top sales person for the week having sold over £22,000 worth of business and winning the £500 cash prize offered

by Ruth at the beginning of the exercise. Cash works well as a motivator because that's what sales people like most of all (and if they don't then they shouldn't be in the sales room).

So there is hope for all of us even if we don't want to sack people at random. Just remember to:

1. motivate your team by drawing their shortcomings to their attention first, then show them how they can improve and use powerful incentives to demonstrate why it is worth their while improving.

This is 'sales team management' and is a full time job and not for the faint hearted or those who count themselves as nurturing individuals, because inevitably if the enterprise is to succeed sales targets must be met and equally as certain is the fact that there will be those who don't make the grade and then the cold logical decisions will have to be made whether you are American or not. Nevertheless, at least those decisions will only be made after the employee has had a chance to improve, and that is known as 'firm but fair' management and therefore much less likely to result in an expensive unfair dismissal case.

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Notes for Employers and Managers:

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