

## **DO DRESS CODES AFFECT PERFORMANCE OR ARE THEY JUST ANNOYING?**

*by Mats Rennstam*

Most companies have different atmosphere as well as different rules (or no rules) on how to dress and behave at the workplace. We set out to see if we could find any correlations and started with interviewing two ends of the scale. BPS Contact Centres with an official dress code and Unibet, the sports betting company, without one. What was their reasoning behind the different approaches and how has it worked out?

First we met up with Tina Squire, Production manager for BPS Contact centre services (part of the Teleperformance group) responsible for 250 agents.

### **Like most other UK companies you have a dress code. How come?**

Previously we had a somewhat unofficial "smart casual" rule but it got very confusing. Were black jeans ok but not blue, nice sneakers ok but not 5 year old ones, length of skirts etc. So we communicated a more official "smart business wear" rule. This e.g. means that all the guys wear a shirt with a collar but they still don't have to wear a jacket or tie.



### **What would you say were the benefits of it?**

One reason is that we have an average age of 20-30 amongst the staff and their style differs somewhat from what our customers find professional looking. But it is of course more important what the results are, how good they are at their work. But we found that when putting the dress code in place, it created a more professional atmosphere and actually improved peoples work. Some sort of psychological change takes place and theres a more distinct difference between if you are at work or not. Also we can now have a "casual Friday" which also improves performance. Not because of the actual clothes but because of the change, change is good.

Previously we had a "Dress-up day" when customers came in but it felt a bit fake and many forgot about it or over/underdid it. It's working a lot better now and the agents agree that we've found a good balance.



### **Neil Perring, MD of BPS.**

Do you agree with Tina on the advantages of a dress-code??

Yes absolutely. It both looks better when clients are visiting and it has created a better attitude and atmosphere, without It creates a psychological difference and emphasizes the change from free time to working time.

It also affects recruiting in a positive way. The candidates that are ok with our definition of dress-code are more likely to be the type of agents we want working for us. And, without it, Casual Friday wouldn't work very well, Neil says with a smile.

Unibet is one of the largest online gambling operators in the European market with over 1,8 million customers worldwide. Their UK head office has a higher average age than BPS as well as limited access for non-employees due to the sensitive information the staff handles. Elin Delvert is Unibet's HR manager for Europe with previous experience of working in offices in both the US and Scandinavia.

**You do not have any official dress-code, how come?**

It's simply not needed. There is an unspoken understanding that you dress for the occasion. If you're working in the office you dress differently to if you're having an Investor relations meeting. That it's not stated in specific rules we believe shows that the company trusts the employees with the freedom to judge what is appropriate themselves.



**Have you ever had any incidents where someone has got it very wrong?**

Actually not. If you give responsibility, people take responsibility. And of course there are very good career opportunities at Unibet and people take responsibility for their own career. We are somewhat unique though due to that we don't let non-employees into the office. Here it's more a question of showing consideration to your colleagues, what do they think is ok. And when you are a new employee, you probably adapt a bit to the rest of the staff.

**Is there any difference between your international offices**

No it is the same everywhere, helped by that every office has 30 different nationalities working there. So no local cultural specific way of dressing. If I should label it I guess most dress "Business sporty".

*In the next issue of Bright Ideas we interview a number of agents to get their view on dress-codes.*