

- 1 -

PRODUCTIVITY AND PERSONAL RELATIONS

I'm a Department Head in a software writing house. I have two Programmer/Managers, Jenny and Neil, who supervise day-to-day work. They're each in charge of about 15 programmers.

Jenny and Neil are very different from each other. Neil knows it all: he's been in programming since the late seventies. He used to get good results because he knows his job and he's good at dealing with people. Lately his productivity has dropped. I've heard that he's having problems at home: he's just broken up with his wife. He's never spoken to me about it.

Jenny's starting to complain about this. After all, why should she knock herself out to improve productivity when Neil makes hardly any effort at all? Her figures are good and they're improving. She's much younger than Neil; hard-working and ambitious with a PhD in computer science, though she doesn't have his industry knowledge and people skills. What can I do to keep these two people happy and productive?' ■

- 2 -

LOYALTY AND COMPETITION

I own and run Selling Solutions, a firm which sets up and runs training courses for sales staff in various companies. I have ten trainers who work for me full-time, plus freelancers, and I run courses myself from time to time.

My problem is that I suspect that one of my trainers is going into business for himself – and that he's stealing my clients. This is what happened.

Recently I went out to see a regular client. The last course they had from us was run by Frank; he's a full-timer who's been working for me for five years. One of the trainees asked me if I worked for the same company as Frank. As I talked to her I realised that she thought the company was called Sales One and that Frank was the director. Apparently he'd given her a business card, but she'd lost it. I've spoken to some of the other trainers, but I didn't find out anything from them. What's my next step?' ■

- 3 -

DISCOUNTS AND AUTHORITY

I'm a salesman: I work for a processed food company. My customers are supermarkets and shops – local businesses not the national chains. I get on with my boss though we're not especially close. We don't play golf together or anything like that. Lately he's started to do something which drives me crazy.

The company sets strict limitations on the discounts I can offer. What happens is this. I go out to see a customer and offer a price. The customer decides to think about it for a day or two, so I tell them I'll call back and I leave. The customer then rings the company and my boss offers a bigger discount than I'm authorised for. I've now got one customer who rings my boss every single time. What should I do?' ■

- 4 -

CASH FLOW AND OPPORTUNITIES

I sell office goods: furniture, equipment and consumables like paper and fax rolls. My biggest customer is an American company, NEX Holdings. They represent about 60% of all the business I do.

As you can imagine, their custom is very important to me, but they pay very slowly, sometimes I have to wait six months. I once had to wait almost a year, and that was for a fairly large amount of money. They're always telling me that they've lost invoices or that payments haven't been approved... They always pay in the end, but it's expensive having all that money out of the business. Not only that, it makes it difficult to plan my cash flow, which upsets my bank manager.

They now want to refit their building and they've offered me an exclusive contract for furnishings, fittings and equipment. Obviously they're looking for a very good price, but this contract is still worth as much as I normally make in a whole year. On the other hand, if they make me wait six months for the money I really don't know if I can survive.' ■



Problems

Worksheet Progress check

9-12b

ACTIVITY

Groupwork: reading, speaking

AIM

To discuss a set of business-world problems and suggest solutions to them.

GRAMMAR AND FUNCTIONS

Talking about actions and their results

Zero, first and second conditionals

Making suggestions

VOCABULARY

department head, software writing house, productivity, to knock yourself out, hard-working, ambitious, people skills, industry knowledge, trainer, to run a course, a regular client, trainee, freelancer, business card, processed food, to get on with your boss, discounts, to be authorised for, office goods, consumables, invoice, cash flow, to upset your bank manager, refit, an exclusive contract, to survive

PREPARATION

Make one copy of the worksheet for each student. If possible, make sure you have dictionaries for the class.

TIME

30-45 minutes (depending on size of class)

PROCEDURE

- 1 Tell the students that they are going to discuss a set of business-world problems and suggest solutions to them.
- 2 Divide the class into groups of four.
- 3 Give out the worksheets.
- 4 Ask each person in the group to read one of the four problems. Allow time for reading, checking vocabulary and absorbing meaning.
- 5 Once the students are ready, ask them to explain the problems in turn to each other and to discuss what advice they would give.
- 6 When most groups have finished, run a brief class discussion to compare solutions in different groups.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE

These texts are difficult. An alternative approach is to divide the class into four groups and give each group one problem to deal with. They can then present the problem and their solution to the class.

FOLLOW-UP

Ask students to write a 100-150 word reply to one of the anxious managers.