



Dr Doreen Miller's
Audio Stories

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health experience



Hello, I'm Doctor Doreen Miller, the founder of Miller Health Management and The Miller Health Experience.

This is the first in a series of stories to demonstrate how we work with our clients to solve their employees' health problems and bring added value to the business.

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Dr Doreen Miller's Audio Stories

STORY 1:
**Key software specialist overwhelmed
and goes A.W.O.L.**

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In this story, the key point is how the company doctor can bring health professionals together and, using private health benefits insurance to speed up the treatment, reach a successful solution that gets the sick employee back to work quickly AND enhances productivity and company value.

SO, WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

Mary, the company's HR manager, called me: "Doctor, can you help me with our top software engineer, John? He's young, single and quite a character as well as being our software wizard".

"John's been out of sorts recently and said to me following his holiday: ""I can't sleep at night and I can't concentrate at work"". So I sent him off to see his GP. He didn't come in the next day and he hasn't phoned us. What do I do?"

A friend found him wandering in the street at 3 o'clock in the morning in a dazed state a few days later. He had gone to stay with relatives and saw their GP. Two months later he's still off work".

Mary continued: "We're really worried and don't know what to do. He's not sent in a FIT note and we don't know when he's coming back. You see, the business is being prepared for sale and he's our software wizard. Please can you see him and help us, doctor?"

RIGHT, I SAID, LET'S FIND THE SOLUTION

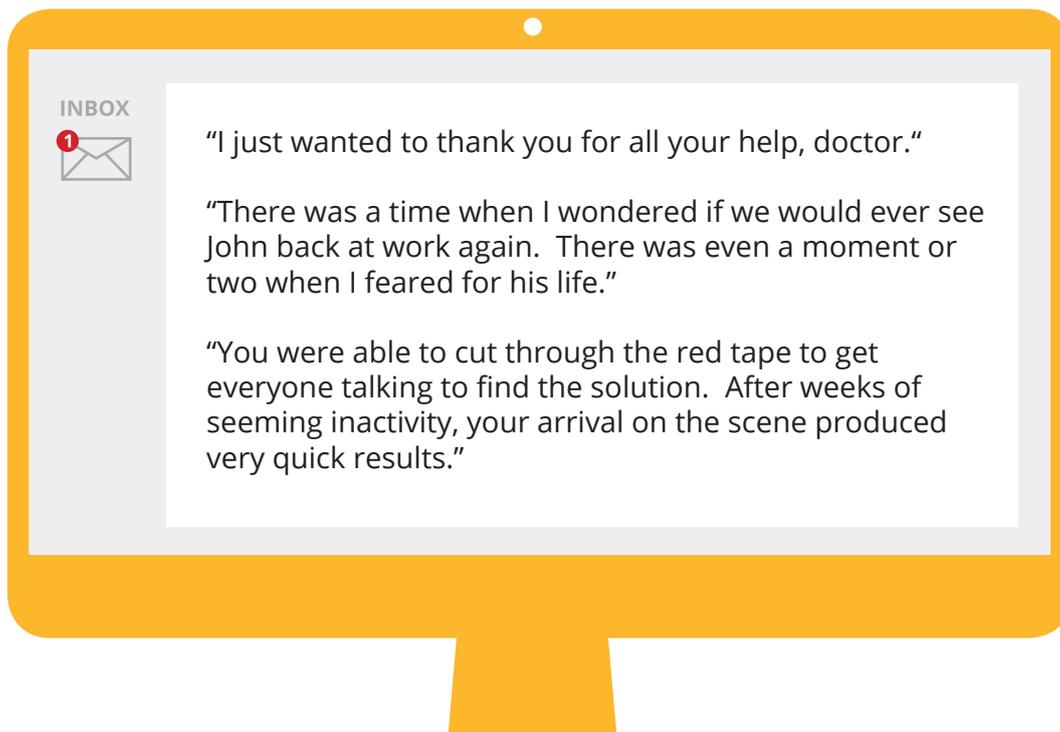
When I saw John, a handsome bearded young man, he couldn't sit down to talk to me. He paced the room and told me: "I love my job. I have so much to do with the sale of the business coming up but, since my holiday, I can't settle. But I need to get back to work; I've been off for 2 months. Can you help me?"

"John, you need some help to get you better".

With his consent, I phoned the GP to discuss his current state and he was referred urgently to see a psychiatrist privately. As his condition improved with the new treatment, I spoke to his consultant to discuss how best to get him back to work. Knowing his job, I suggested that he started by working three short days with five minute breaks hourly.

I visited him two weeks after he returned to work. His manager, a caring man, was surprised how well he was doing. "He's working as well as before and the five minute breaks are so effective in helping him that I have offered them to all my team. They love it and I've noticed how their performance has improved too with the five minute chat time."

Soon after, I received an e-mail from the MD saying:



WELL, WHAT ARE THE KEY BUSINESS LEARNINGS FROM THIS CASE?

- ✓ Establishing the correct **DIAGNOSIS**. In this case, the cause of John's problem was agitated depression with the root cause being within the business with the pressure building on his key role in preparing the company for sale.
- ✓ Determining the **APPROPRIATE REFERRAL** to a psychiatrist and using Private Medical Insurance to achieve a speedier resolution.
- ✓ Introducing a plan to **REHABILITATE** him back to work **EFFECTIVELY**.
- ✓ **MODIFYING DUTIES TO SUIT THE NEED**, in this case introducing hourly breaks.
- ✓ Introducing the **BENEFIT OF THE HOURLY BREAK** for John influenced the manager to use hourly chat breaks for all of his team, resulting in increased productivity throughout the department.
- ✓ Finally, the benefits that John's return to work brought to the company were reflected in the MD's testimonial acknowledging his appreciation of **THE VALUE OF THE ACTION TAKEN**.
- ✓ Oh, and I nearly forgot. The sale of the business was successful!

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STORY 2:

Business reorganisation leads to stressed shipping staff, sickness absence and lost business.

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The second of my stories in this series demonstrates how we work with our clients to solve their employees' health problems.

This time, the essential point is how the business doctor identified the employee's ill-health as a symptom of a business problem which was the root cause of her stress.

SO, WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

Mary and Jane, members of a shipping team of three in a high-tech manufacturing company, became stressed. One went off sick leaving the unit undermanned.

I asked the HR director, with whom I work closely, to introduce me to Frank the Finance Director when I asked: **"Can you help me to understand what is going on in the business?"**

Frank replied: **"The business has been restructured into six divisions. Each division sends products for shipping worldwide using the same shipping team."**

I then explained the stress being experienced by two of the employees.

Following further investigation, Frank told me:

"There have been problems with poor quality work being delivered late to the shipping team.

"The team members have had to return these products to the divisions, causing them extra work and delaying the despatch of the orders."

"Angry customers keep phoning up to check where their orders are".

"Some customers have gone elsewhere."

So we now find there are additional risks and pressures facing an already busy department.

WHAT WAS THE SOLUTION?

There were three key actions:

- I supported the two stressed employees in the shipping department and liaised with the sick employee and her GP to help get her back to work quickly.
- The business divisions were trained to improve the quality of their work and avoid delivery being late for shipping to customers.
- An additional shipping department team member was recruited.

... AND THE OUTCOME?

- The root cause of the stress was found within the business.
- The quality and the timeliness of the six divisions' work improved after training.
- The shipping team members became productive again....
- and felt in control of their workload.
- Customers were again pleased with the service.
- As a result, a serious growing cost to the business was halted.

THE KEY BUSINESS LEARNINGS?

- ✓ **HEALTH SYMPTOMS** of employees can often be the **SIGN OF A BUSINESS PROBLEM**.
- ✓ **FINDING THE ROOT CAUSE** can have a major impact in preventing a recurrence of health symptoms and - importantly - in saving money.
- ✓ In this case, and others like it, let's remember **THE CUSTOMER IMPACT**: dissatisfaction with the service, potential transfer of business to another supplier, and resultant brand damage. **THE DIRECT AND HIDDEN INDIRECT COSTS CAN DESTROY YOUR PROFITS**.

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STORY 3:

Senior sales manager suddenly loses sight in left eye, can't drive and fears for his job.

And now here's the third in this series of my stories.

It demonstrates how the sudden onset of an employee's disability doesn't prevent their return to work.

SO, WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

Kevin, a senior sales manager in his 40's, was on a business trip to India. Whilst texting a message, he suddenly lost his vision when looking to the left.

He flew back to the UK, still unable to see to the left, and immediately visited his GP. He was referred urgently to an eye consultant.

When I saw Kevin, he told me that he had been diagnosed with a stroke which had caused his partial loss of vision when looking to the left. The visual impairment would be permanent.

Kevin could still see ahead and to the right but not to the left. Now realising that he couldn't drive and also having difficulty avoiding bumping into things, how could he get back to work?

The good news was that he was still able to use his PC at home where I visited him. I kept in touch with him regularly by 'phone and, in discussion with his supportive manager, he was given some non-urgent work activity to perform for short spells at home in the mornings to help boost his morale whilst not being at work.

Kevin's colleagues offered to drive him to and from the office. This gave him hope. We discussed his use of a white stick which he was reluctant to use.

WE NEED TO FIND A SOLUTION

So, in discussion with his employer, a trial return-to-work programme was considered, agreed and started, albeit with some ups and downs along the way. Colleagues were happy to drive him to and from work, 3 days a week initially. But one day when he was walking along a corridor in the office, a colleague bumped into him and told him to look where he was going. At the time, the colleague knew nothing of Kevin's health problem because he looked "normal", so didn't appreciate the reason. After being told of Kevin's eyesight problem, his colleague came back later to apologise.

Kevin now realised how a white stick would help him!

But Kevin's difficulties weren't only at work. A domestic issue arose when he was out for a meal with friends. He suddenly realised after he'd finished his main course that he'd only eaten the food on the right hand side of the plate! So here was another learning point for him: to remember to turn the plate 180 degrees to ensure that he ate all the food.

And here was another learning point for Kevin:

Whilst he was developing his expertise in managing his partial sight, he needed to give permission for colleagues and friends to understand his problem.

SO WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

- Kevin is now working five days a week and colleagues drive him to and from the office.
- He has been transferred to European client work to avoid long-haul flights.
- He has travelled on business alone.
- He is gaining skills and experience on how to manage himself using his white stick to warn other people of his visual limitations.
- Colleagues have learned to understand and accept the adjustments needed for him to manage his sight problem.
- He is valued for his 27 years of experience with his employer and is making a great contribution at work.

... AND THE KEY BUSINESS LEARNINGS?

- ✓ When the initial diagnosis of an employee's medical condition – in this case a stroke – has a downbeat emotive connotation, **DON'T ASSUME AN INEVITABLE NEGATIVE OUTCOME.**
- ✓ Respond positively to the employee's core desire to **GET BACK TO WORK** and do what they can do – not what they *can't* do!
- ✓ **LOOK AT THE OPTIONS** available for a phased return to work.
- ✓ Identify the potential **SUPPORT OF COLLEAGUES.**
- ✓ **MODIFY THE EMPLOYEE'S ROLE TO PLAY TO THEIR STRENGTHS** and optimise their engagement and contribution. Don't concentrate on what they can't do!

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STORY 4:

Long service manager facing business culture changes goes off sick – amazing recovery!

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Here's the fourth and final story in this series.

This case study highlights the effects of change management on the mental health of an able and long serving manager and how, through medical treatment and a programme of training and rehabilitation, he was able to return to working full-time in the company.

LET'S START WITH THE PROBLEM

Tom was a good manager – he was good with people and had given long and valued service to his employer. But he started to feel anxious with many changes taking place in the business. A new style of management had been introduced with which he was unaccustomed.

He'd previously worked successfully with a senior manager who was people focussed. As a new target-focussed management style was introduced, he felt increasingly anxious and uncomfortable with the changes. With the departure of his boss, Tom now reported to a new senior manager who was target driven and overloaded him.

Tom became depressed with associated panic attacks and went off sick.

SO WHAT WERE THE IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS?

Tom was seen by an occupational health physician and referred to a consultant psychiatrist for treatment with medication and cognitive behavioural therapy. Surprisingly, the company's private medical insurance policy didn't cover mental health issues but they agreed to meet the cost of private treatment to speed up the process.

WHAT WAS THE WAY FORWARD FOR TOM?

Alternative project work was then proposed temporarily for him by the business doctor so he could be rehabilitated in a more supportive part of the business when he returned to work. He was given shorter working hours initially.

AND THE OUTCOME?

Tom coped with a more supportive management style in another part of the business. He was given further training in change management and resilience. Later, he was able to resume full-time work and is now valued in his role.

AND THE KEY BUSINESS LEARNINGS?

- ✓ **The company changed its private medical insurance policy to include the cover of mental health – now the commonest cause of sickness absence.**
- ✓ **Change management training was introduced for all employees.**
- ✓ **The company recognised the effect of the new management style on employees. Senior management were encouraged to develop a culture of good health in the business as well as employee health.**



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