

theLOOP

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South Staffordshire Plc

Welcome...

I am delighted to share with you the news that Echo has been successful in the re-tender of the contract to deliver both RapidXtra and contact management services to NI Water. The contract should see Echo delivering these services to NI Water for the next 10 years (initially a seven year contract with the option of a three year extension). The contract will initially be worth in the region of £27 million.

Under the contract Echo will provide NI Water customers with improved access choices by expanding and enhancing the range of contact channels, making it easier for customers to get in touch when they need to discuss their accounts. Echo's 150 strong, Belfast based, team will use Echo's market leading RapidXtra billing system, as well as a suite of state of the art innovative contact management technology, to provide a full range of multi-channel customer services.

Winning this contract was a great team effort. The bid process itself lasted over 18 months and required a contribution from a huge team of people. Not only did it involve the submission of more than 1,000 pages of documentation, it

also involved site visits in Belfast and at Welsh Water offices in Cardiff where NI Water were able to witness RapidXtra being implemented and talk to the Welsh Water team about their experience of working with Echo.

I'm so proud of our partnership with NI Water. Over the past seven years we have supported the delivery of a number of innovative customer service enhancements and we look forward to building our partnership further over the next seven years as we deliver further service improvements for their customers. We have now begun implementing all of the plans that we proposed during the bid process. This includes the introduction of new customer contact channels, new ways



Photo above: Nigel Baker, Managing Director, Echo

for customers to pay and enhancements to RapidXtra which will ensure that NI Water is able to deliver its strategic objective of putting the customer first and continually improving the customer experience.

Nigel Baker
Managing Director, Echo

STOP PRESS: MD Keith Marshall retires after 41 years' service



Here are just a few photos from his retirement presentation on 1st August 2014. The next edition of the Loop magazine will contain an indepth feature of his 41 years' service.

DRAGONS' DEN

meets Sandwell Students



"I'll give you all the money for 40% of your business"

On 17 July students from a range of schools across the South Staffs Water region took part in the National Citizen Service's (NCS) Dragons' Den Challenge.

The panel of Dragons included our own Head of Communications Caroline Maddox who was joined by a number of other local business professionals including Jacqueline Thompson, HR Manager for the RAC.

Students were tasked to deliver a pitch to the Dragons for funding to support activities within their local communities.

In total, five teams presented their concepts, which ranged from drug awareness campaigns to an innovative way of raising awareness of bullying and how best to tackle this widening issue through poetry and music.

Each team pitched for a total of £80 and were challenged by the team of Dragons on their business plans, budgets and marketing.

Commenting on the event, Caroline said; "I have been amazed by the talent that these young people have demonstrated. Their team work and overall confidence is refreshing to see. It's been a pleasure taking part in the initiative and I hope the advice and guidance that we gave the students will serve them well as they move ahead with their careers."

As part of the NCS Challenge, a number of students visited Green Lane and experienced first-hand the workings of a busy open plan office. They asked questions and were able to practise their pitch on John Morrall (CSR Manager) and our current graduate Emma Redfern.

Emma said: "Having been through a similar exercise as part of South Staffordshire Plc's Graduate programme, I really felt for them, but they all did a fantastic job in securing funding from the panel of Dragons."

As part of our commitment to working with schools and young people, there are plans to continue with similar projects across both South Staffs and Cambridge regions.

Pictured above: some of the students taking part in the Dragons' Den Challenge with the panel of Dragons including Caroline Maddox, SSW (far right).

Echo NI receives its Zero Hero Award

Congratulations go to the Echo Northern Ireland team which recently attended a prestigious luncheon for winners of a Zero Waste Award run by letsrecycle.com.

Letsrecycle.com is the recycling and waste management news and information site for businesses, local authorities and third sector organisations. The Zero Waste Awards were launched in May 2012, to recognise the work that organisations are doing to drive down waste to landfill in the UK.

In September 2013 it was announced that Echo Northern Ireland had won a silver award for the hard work and innovation demonstrated by all staff in lowering the company's impact on the environment.

The luncheon, which took place in the picturesque location of Coombe Abbey Hotel in Warwickshire, was attended by

Donna Morgan, Head of Quality and Compliance, Antóin Millen, Quality Manager and Donal Kane, Facilities Manager.

Antóin said: "This award recognises the tremendous work done by our Management Review team, The Green Team and all staff.

"However, our work is not complete as we must continue to do our part to help the environment by reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill, cutting back on energy used to treat the waste we recycle, and increasing the amount of material we are able to reuse or repair. Thank you to everyone for their support and hard work."



(l-r) Antóin, Donna and Donal show off Echo NI's Zero Hero Award.



Echo wins contract to deliver RapidXtra to Anglian Water Business

Echo is delighted that its market leading billing and customer information system, RapidXtra, has been selected by Anglian Water Business to serve its commercial customers.

Anglian Water Business chose RapidXtra as part of its strategy to actively compete for customers and give its retail business a competitive advantage when the water retail market opens up further in 2017.

Anglian Water Business is the first major UK water company to have announced a system procurement of this kind.

Jonathan Clarke, Head of Systems and Service at Anglian Water Business, said the company wanted a system that was flexible and easy to configure.

He added: "We've chosen RapidXtra as our billing system primarily because it is ready for competition and the essential functionality required by customers is already in place.

"At Anglian Water Business we understand that every business is different, we pull out all the stops to provide a quality service, tailored to their exact needs and we know that Echo share this approach in the development of RapidXtra. This makes them the perfect partner as we continue our preparations for market opening."

Being built specifically for UK water, RapidXtra is ready for commercial customer competition. Features include consolidated billing, management of both wholesale and retail charges, highly developed web self-service and sophisticated CRM integration. It is highly customisable and flexible meaning it is ideally placed to cater for the ever-changing needs of customers as the competitive market for commercial customers evolves. In addition it is also

available on a Software as a Service (SaaS) basis ensuring the system is affordable regardless of customer base.

Monica Mackintosh, Business and Product Development Director of Echo Managed Services said "We are delighted that Anglian Water Business has chosen RapidXtra.

"Our wealth of experience of UK water billing system solution implementations, demonstrable track record of deployments to major water clients in the UK and strong partnership ethos means that Anglian Water Business can be confident that Echo is the right partner to deliver a cost-effective, low risk delivery implementation that is capable of meeting its future growth requirements."

Hydrosave acquires GWC

On 2 July 2014 Hydrosave was delighted to announce its acquisition of the trade and assets of Global Water Conservation Ltd (GWC), a national leak detection and water management business.

The acquisition provides the company with an opportunity to expand operations in Scotland and with new customers in the UK, including Northumbrian Water, Essex and Suffolk Water and Sutton and East Surrey Water.

Hydrosave and GWC were both framework suppliers to Scottish Water following a contract award in 2013. Following the deal, Hydrosave is now sole supplier for Scottish Water's leak detection activities throughout Scotland, on a long term framework, employing more than 130 field based staff and up to 20 technical office secondments.

All GWC business operations are now being managed by Hydrosave and all GWC employees have been transferred.

Following the deal all new employees received a call from the HR team to welcome them to the business and a series of meet and greet employee presentations commenced on 7 July with HR and senior management.

Payroll, HR, accounts, fleet, equipment, fuel and telecoms provisions have been the focus during the initial few weeks. It is the intention to fully rebrand all GWC operations to Hydrosave within the next month.

Client meetings have also been carried out in the past few weeks in all new regions of Scotland, Northumbrian Water, Essex and in Sutton and East Surrey.



Comments from clients to date have included: 'We are delighted to continue working with Hydrosave' and 'We are very happy and impressed with the transition process to date'.

Hydrosave would like to take this opportunity to welcome all new colleagues into the Group and thank them for their continued support.

Hydrosave introduce Loggers Online

Hydrosave has successfully replaced almost 9,000 data loggers across the Severn Trent Water network.

Pre-existing logging equipment has been upgraded to real-time monitoring systems with alarm functionality, to provide Severn Trent with a better understanding of what is happening on their water network.

As part of the project, Hydrosave developed the bespoke web-based viewing platform Loggers Online.

Loggers Online records the exact location of each logger, including geospatial coordinates, health and safety details and on-site installation photos.

As part of this field collection software, records are continuously kept up to date so if a logger is ever relocated, Loggers Online will record its new location. The software also gives users the ability to raise maintenance requests, and track their progress.

Along with built in fault reporting, Loggers Online can also track visits to sites and provide recommendations on how to improve performance. Historic details are kept online for viewers to access at any time.



Hydrosave develops project specific work management systems to provide clients with efficient and effective web-based solutions, to aid contract delivery. Loggers Online is the latest suite of Hydrosave software that also includes OPS leak detection management software, and Asset Database recording systems.



Echo NI team put their best foot forward for Diabetes UK

A team of Echo Northern Ireland employees have completed the Belfast City Marathon to raise more than £550 for Diabetes UK.

The team completed the marathon in a relay, each taking on a stretch of the 26 mile circuit around Belfast.

Christine Heggan said: “We all enjoyed the day, despite being soaked to the skin. There was no feeling like it to know that you have achieved 26.2 miles as a team for an excellent charity.

“We set a target on our Just Giving page of £300 but the support and sponsorship that people have very kindly given was outstanding and in the end we raised over £550, which

is a fantastic achievement. The race is something that we all enjoyed and we will look to take part again next year.”

Diabetes UK is a charity that offers care and support for people diagnosed with the condition. There are now 80,000 people living with diabetes in Northern Ireland and a further 12,000 have it but are undiagnosed.

Find out more at www.diabetes.org.uk

Photo above: Team members Liam Montgomery, payment processing, Ciaran Forrester, CRC, Barbara McCrea, C&R, Gareth McMenamin, CRC TM and Christine Heggan, CRC TM are pictured with Emma from Diabetes UK.





Martin goes sky high for cancer charity

South Staffs Water employee, Martin Vickers, became a world record breaker when he took to the sky to raise funds for Beating Bowel Cancer on 14 June.

Martin, who is Head of Capital Investment Delivery, took part in a tandem parachute jump at Brackley airfield in Northamptonshire to raise funds for the charity Beating Bowel Cancer. His jump was part of an

attempt for the Skyline World Record for the number of tandem jumps in England in one day. Last year's record was 187 people, and this year it was smashed with 323 parachutists taking part across the country, including 106 taking part at Brackley.

Martin, who has himself beaten the disease and is now in remission, has raised nearly £2,100 to date.

He said: "People asked me why I wanted to jump out of a perfectly serviceable aircraft! I got the five



year 'all clear' from the oncologist in February this year. When I got home I looked at my emails and the first one I saw was from Beating Bowel Cancer about the skydive event. It was three days before my 50th birthday, so I decided I'd do it.

"Initially I wasn't too nervous about the jump, but as it got closer I got more and more nervous, but it was for a fantastic cause. I knew nothing about bowel cancer when I was diagnosed five years ago and it came as a massive shock. The information and support provided by the charity was really invaluable.

"When the day of the jump came, the worst thing was sitting around waiting. We had to wait four hours for our turn.

"We undertook the training session, where we were tested on the taking off, exit from the aircraft (don't look down!!), freefall, parachute opening and landing techniques, and then it was wait, wait, wait.

"At the time I was also participating in South Staff's Water's 'Walk Competition' but didn't take my pedometer with me as I didn't think it would work from 15,000ft! If I had

I might have added another 20 miles onto my total with all the pacing up and down I did.

"During the wait, looking up into the sky and only just being able to make out the plane two and a half miles up made me suddenly realise how high I was going to be actually jumping from.

"Our turn eventually arrived and we were paired up with our instructors. By this time my nerves had subsided and I really couldn't wait to get up there. I was also introduced to my personal cameraman who was going to follow my every move on the way down. I'd decided I needed this monumental event recording so I could relive the experience over and over again.

"The plane took 10 minutes to climb to just over 13,000ft – nice and cosy in a small aircraft. It was then time to 'exit.' I was third out and it was a nervous moment seeing the first two go before me. I shuffled down to the door and hung my legs out of the plane. 'Don't look down' I'd been told, and keep your head back, but I couldn't resist the temptation to look down and wow what a view and sudden realisation just how high we were - well above the clouds with a beautiful blue sky.

"Within moments we were out and freefalling. It took a couple of seconds to re-orientate myself and watching back on the video I hadn't realised we had done a full 360 degree somersault!

"We were now freefalling at a speed of 120mph, which was quite surreal with a cameraman flying backwards about 3ft away from me, but the view to the ground was amazing. This seemed to last forever, but in reality was only about 50 seconds before the instructor deployed the parachute and the adrenaline rush of the first part of the skydive subsided to be replaced with a peaceful canopy ride through breaking clouds as we slowly glided back down to earth.

"There was time for a practice landing technique as we weaved in and out of clouds before our landing area came clearly into view from what was just a mass of green and brown fields from higher up. Our supporters on the ground were now becoming clearer and I could make out all my family as we came in for a perfect landing with a massive smile on my face.



“As soon as I’d landed I wanted to do it all over again. Wow, what an amazing experience and one I would thoroughly recommend everyone tries!

“I’d like to pass on a massive thank you to everyone who so kindly donated and supported me; your support has, and continues to be, amazing and fantastic.

“Also a big thanks to Leanne Allen and Kerry Beddard for organising the cake sale in Green Lane and at Hampton Loade, which raised a further £107.50 for both Beating Bowel Cancer and WaterAid.”

Danielle Chamberlain, Events Fundraising Manager for Beating Bowel Cancer, said: “Martin has been a fantastic support to the charity and we’re thrilled that he took on this challenge. Only through the generous support of fundraisers like Martin can we continue to help more patients and families.”

Beating Bowel Cancer is a registered charity working to support all those affected by bowel cancer, plus improving awareness of the condition and promoting early diagnosis in addition to providing emotional and practical support.

When Martin was diagnosed with bowel cancer, he found the information and support offered by the charity invaluable, and now helps spread the message on symptoms to look out for.

For the last two years Martin has taken part in the charity’s ‘Decembeard’ campaign, where he has grown a beard for the month of December and persuaded lots of colleagues to take part too.

Almost 41,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year in the UK and it is the second biggest cancer killer. Yet over 90% of cases can be treated successfully if caught in the early stages.

There is a tendency for people with the disease to think they are suffering with irritable bowel syndrome or haemorrhoids, but with early diagnosis some 93% of patients live for five years or more.

Martin added: “The other message we need to educate on is that this is not just a disease that affects the elderly. An increasing number of younger people are getting bowel cancer – Stephen Sutton, for example, who raised so much for the

Teenage Cancer Trust, was just 15 when he was diagnosed with it. The message we need to get out there is think bowel cancer and get it checked out”

To support Martin and Beating Bowel Cancer in this fundraising activity, you can still make a donation at: www.justgiving.com/Martin-Vickers3.

Beating Bowel Cancer advises people to go to their GP if they have any of the following symptoms for three weeks or more:

These are:

- Bleeding from the bottom
- A change to bowel habits lasting longer than three weeks
- Abdominal pain
- A lump in the tummy
- Unexplained tiredness, weight loss, dizziness or breathlessness

For more details visit beatingbowelcancer.org

Martin Vickers, SSW



South Staffs Strugglers Bike Ride

Big hearted staff from South Staffs Water and South Staffordshire plc tackled a gruelling 67 mile cycle ride on Friday 6 June to help raise funds for various charities, primarily WaterAid.

The team of 14 cyclists, known as the South Staffs Strugglers, cycled from Blythe Bridge in Stoke-on-Trent - close to the source of the River Blythe which feeds into the company's Blithfield Reservoir at Abbots Bromley - to Chelmarsh, the company's other reservoir near Bridgnorth. The aim was to go from the northernmost point of the company's water source to the reservoir that is at the southernmost end.

After months of planning, organising and training the big day was finally upon us. Malcolm (Malc) Podmore's driving license had been converted from slate to a snazzy new card thingy and was delivered just in time for him to pick up the mini bus.

The weather could not have been better. The sun came out the day before to dry out the towpaths and another glorious

day stretched ahead leaving us all with tanned forearms and white hands!

We arrived - full of beans and cereal bars - in an empty train station car park. After a couple of group photos and Julian (Jules) Winders' first Sudocrem application of the day, we set off at a steady pace up the hill towards Barlaston.

The hill went on and on until eventually it got much steeper and Lee Webster - who had not ridden a bike for more than eight years - had his first little rest of the day.

From here it was all down hill to the canal which we all foolishly assumed would be easy going: we were wrong!! The towpath was non-existent, making the next 11 miles slow going. In fact it was so slow there was a narrow boat going faster than some of us.

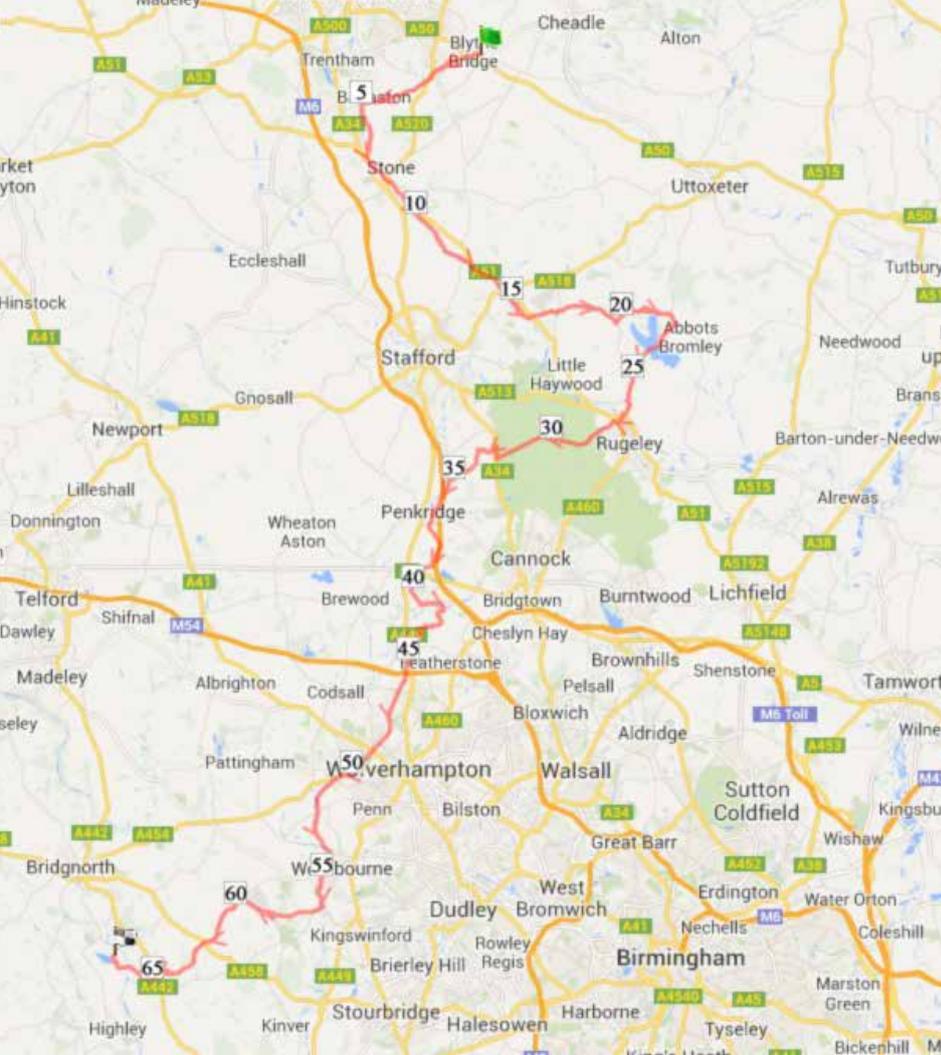
When we eventually reached the next undulating road we were all so relieved to be on firmer ground even if it was uphill.

A few 'little rests' and Sudocrem stops later we made it to Blithfield for our first official stop of the day, where we met up with Gary (Gaz) Pearson, Malc and the ice cream man. Everyone took the opportunity to fuel up and Jules applied yet more Sudocrem.

Feeling refreshed, we all set off over the bridge towards Rugeley. We made it another 300 yards before Lee needed another 'little rest' (and Jules another layer of Sudocrem.) At this point, Lee had to admit defeat and went home to bed - something a lot of us were jealous about if we were honest!

The next climb was up Bower Lane and over the Chase, where Zac Downen reached his top speed of the day,

Photo above (l to r): Michael Redman, Trevor Boughton, Julian Winders, Peter Roberts, Martyn Frost, Nathan Dolphin, Dave Garrard, Dan Haire, Adam Welsh, Zac Downen and Lee Webster.



although this may have had something to do with him holding onto the minibus.

After a very entertaining river crossing we headed out of the Chase towards Penkridge where we fought our way through some overgrown paths which left us with tingly shins for the next few miles.

We met up with Malc and Gaz one last time before attempting the long section of canal to Swindon. The tow path varied from non-existent to barely existent but we let Dave 'The Pace' Garrard lead the way and tried our best to stay with him until an actual towpath appeared.

When we got to Tettenhall we were surprised to see Gaz directing everyone off the towpath towards a table full of Jelly Babies and Jaffa Cakes, which Martyn Frost and Gary Forrest had arranged for us. This was extremely well received and was a well positioned stop for Jules to apply, yes you guessed it, MORE Sudocrem.

The remaining miles on the canal were plain sailing with nice towpaths and a few locks to go down.

We left the canal at Swindon where the smell of chips had everyone eager to finish. With some grueling hills towards Bobbington and Six Ashes we all plodded on with the thought of beer and burgers in our minds.

We eventually made it to the final decent into the Severn Valley and along a very wet and muddy byway to Hampton Loade.

At this point we let out a sigh of relief, not realising we still had two steep hills to get over to get to Chelmarsh reservoir.

Luckily for us Kevin Watkins and Tony Cartwright had been busy cooking up enough burgers and sausages for a small army and there was still some Sudocrem residue left in Jules' pot.

It took over 11 hours to get from Blythe Bridge to Chelmarsh. We only had three punctures and one mechanical issue when Adam's brakes seized on. The "Award For The Most Spectacular Crash" goes to Nath Dolphin, who managed to fall off when he tried to cross a ditch through the Chase, much to everyone else's amusement.

Thank you to everyone who was kind enough to sponsor us and helped us raise nearly £2000. Just over £500 will go to a charity providing dogs for autistic children, £95 to Birmingham Children's Hospice and £80 to Beating Bowel Cancer, with the remainder to WaterAid. A special thanks also goes to Gaz and Malc for all their support!!

Peter Roberts, SSW



The Diary of an IWS APPRENTICE

Carla Spate has been working as an administration apprentice for IWS since September. Here she details her first 10 months on the job.

Monday, 30 September 2013

Today is the day I started at IWS. To be honest I did not really know what to expect. I had a few cups of badly made tea in a meeting room while going through my induction programme with a nice HR lady. I keep thinking to myself it can't be that bad - it's only a NVQ Level 2 and anything's got to be better than being stuck in sixth form all day!

Tuesday, 1 October 2013

Today is my first proper day in the office and its introductions time. I have honestly never been so anxious - this was definitely different to scraping plates and serving meals for my part time waitressing job. I've got my best ex-sixth form clothes on with the addition of a bit of McDonald's hot chocolate down the front from the exhausting walk up Green Lane. I eventually get into the office and my first task is to meet the managers. Although I was a bit worried it actually went well. They were really nice and down to earth and I had nothing to be anxious about. Then I had a brief walk around the office saying hello to everyone else and trying to memorise everyone's name and what their roles were in the company! I can't claim to be brilliant at remembering names, with so many people I saw a future of

calling everyone by "Excuse me but..." "Sorry to bother you..." or worse still staring vacantly at them hoping they could read my mind. Finally, I got to my desk, settled in, and personalised my desktop. My first task was assigned to me - laminating. I reminded myself that nothing could be too hard and it was a relief when I found myself making acquaintance with the laminator that was going to be my best friend for the rest of the week. Yes, I am now an expert in laminating. I could hold my own with the best, and surely I should have a laminated certificate of achievement for my efforts?

Week 2 and beyond! Oh I didn't know weekends went quite so fast!

After my week of laminating I was hoping for something a little more interesting, not overly challenging, but something to get my grey matter working. I'd decided to go the apprenticeship route because I'd found sixth form just too restrictive. I felt I'd outgrown it and was considering going to college as I knew I didn't want to just coast along without having a proper career. I wanted to meet new people and have more challenges, but at sixth form I felt stagnant and stuck in the same routine day in day out. Admittedly,

earning my own money was another plus point for being an apprentice. I like money. I had some from working part time but I had needs.... like clothes, nails and that nice handbag I'd seen while out window shopping.

Over the next few weeks the tasks I was given changed from mundane to more interesting things. I learnt who everyone was and more importantly how they liked their tea or coffee. I get on really well with my boss and the administration team that I work with. My workload has changed so much that I am now doing cost breakdowns for jobs, sorting job folders, working on brain frazzling software called IFS and really starting to pick up working with the Electrical Department. It is so much better than laminating but we've all got to start somewhere eh!

Tuesday, 26 November 2013

Today is my second meeting with my mentor from Walsall College; she is really nice and straight to the point. I meet with her once a month to assess how my apprenticeship is going and how I am doing with my NVQ. If it goes as smoothly as today the NVQ should be a breeze. Today also gave me hope and ambition as I found out there have been many apprentices at IWS, some of whom have climbed the career ladder to management.

£500
HOLIDAY
WINNER



Thursday, 19 December 2013

Everyone's in the Christmas spirit and after being responsible for organising the Secret Santa over the last couple of weeks today is the day that my hard work has paid off. It's not often the whole office is in high spirits - unless it's 3.59pm on a Friday - so it made a change for us all to be chuckling and having a really good time. Each employee who wanted to take part put their name in hat to be drawn by another colleague. To make it interesting you couldn't spend more than a fiver and it had to be something funny. I wasn't sure if everyone would join in with the spirit of it but they did and there were some really funny gifts given like a Borat bathing suit and my own personal favourite - animal socks!

Monday, 21 December 2013

Spirits are high today as the Christmas party was on Saturday and it went well. I didn't really know what to expect. I've been to parties and a Prom but never a posh work's do at a racecourse! It didn't take me long to catch on the spirit of the party was to get into the "spirits" at the party and to have a great time throwing your moves on the dance floor, before spending Sunday nursing a hangover while groaning at the pictures on Facebook.

Friday, 28 March 2014

They say time flies when you're having fun and time has definitely flown for me because today was my six month review. I knew I had come on leaps and bounds since I started the company as well as having my ups and downs but I wasn't quite expecting the great review I got.

After my review I just couldn't wait to get the next six months over and if I'm lucky, secure a permanent job with a better wage.

For the next three months I continue to work hard, improve my tea making skills, stalk the Retro Sweetie counter in the canteen and rather than walk up that never ending road, I now ride my perfectly perfect pink pushbike.

Looking back to the start my apprenticeship I can honestly say it has been one of the best decisions of my life. It's kept me in education but also given me real work experience. It wasn't what I was expecting and after the first week I was concerned I had made a huge mistake and should have stayed in my comfort zone at sixth form. Now, I know I did the right thing. I am so glad I have stayed at IWS and hope to complete my NVQ Level 2 the end of September then continue to do my NVQ Level 3 - hopefully with IWS.

If asked I would definitely advise anyone thinking doing an apprenticeship to go for it! The opportunities it gives you are incredible. As well as getting you a way in with a good company like IWS, you also learn real life skills and gain confidence that can be transferred to other areas of your life.

I also highly recommend Walsall College as a provider. The mentor has given me so much support and I will be forever grateful to her.

So my heartfelt thanks go to IWS M&E staff for welcoming me into the fold 10 months ago and especially to my boss for advising and listening, but most of all for believing in my abilities and giving me the confidence to tackle anything I'm given.

Carla Spate, IWS (pictured above)





Helen advises us all to get moving to manage stress

Exercise and stress

Most of us know that that exercise does our body good, but often we're too busy and stressed to fit it into our routine. The good news is that being active can boost your feel-good endorphins and distract you from daily worries.

Virtually any form of exercise, from walking and swimming through to aerobics and yoga, can act as a stress reliever. If you're not an athlete or even if you're downright out of shape, you can still make a little exercise go a long way towards stress management.

Exercise and stress relief

Exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being, which puts more pep in your step every day.

It pumps up your endorphins:

Physical activity helps to bump up the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins.

Although this function is often referred to as a runner's high, a rousing game of tennis or a nature walk can also contribute to this same feeling.

It's meditation in motion: After a fast-paced game of squash or several laps in the pool, you'll often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. As you begin to regularly shed your daily tensions through movement and physical activity, you may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help you remain calm and clear in everything that you do.

It improves your mood: Regular exercise can increase self-confidence and lower the symptoms associated with mild depression and anxiety. Exercise also can improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety. All this can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life.

Put exercise and stress relief to work for you

A successful exercise program begins with a few simple steps:

Consult with your doctor: If you haven't exercised for some time and you have health concerns, you may want to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

Walk before you run: Build up your fitness level gradually. Excitement about a new program can lead to overdoing it and possibly even injury. For most healthy adults, the Department of Health recommends getting at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity (think brisk walking or swimming) or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity (such as running). If you're new to exercise, start at the moderate level and then add vigorous activity as your fitness improves.

When Helen Noble Wilson is not working as a project controller for IWS Mechanical & Electrical, based in Fleet Hampshire, she is a keen fitness enthusiast. As well as being a Level 3 personal trainer she is also an indoor cycling instructor, gym based boxing instructor, circuit training instructor and sports nutrition consultant. Since working at IWS she has seen first-hand how keeping fit can help her and her colleagues to manage stress, and this is one of the reasons she decided to qualify as a personal trainer. Here she gives us all great advice on ways we can get moving to help manage stress.



Do what you love: Virtually any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing your stress. The most important thing is to pick an activity that you enjoy. Examples include walking, jogging, cycling, yoga, tai chi, gardening, golf, weightlifting and swimming.

Pencil it in: Although your schedule may necessitate a morning workout one day and an evening activity the next, carving out some time to move every day helps you make your exercise program an ongoing priority.

Stick with it

Starting an exercise program is just the first step. Here are some tips for sticking with a new routine or reinvigorating a tired workout:

Set SMART goals: Write down specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and time-limited goals. If your primary

goal is to reduce stress in your life and recharge your batteries, your specific goals might include committing to walking during your lunch hour three times a week or, if needed, finding a baby sitter to watch your children so that you can slip away to attend an exercise class.

Find a friend: Knowing that someone is waiting for you to show up at the gym or the park can be a powerful incentive. Working out with a friend, colleague or family member often brings a new level of motivation and commitment to your workouts.

Change your routine: If you've always been a runner, take a look at other options that may help with stress reduction, such as Pilates or yoga classes. As an added bonus, these kinder, gentler workouts may enhance your running while also decreasing your stress.

Exercise in increments. Even brief bouts of activity offer benefits. For instance, if you can't fit in one 30-minute walk, try three 10-minute walks instead. What's most important is making regular physical activity part of your lifestyle. Whatever you do, don't think of exercise as just one more thing on your to-do list. Find an activity you enjoy — whether it's an active tennis match or a meditative meander down to a local park and back — and make it part of your regular routine.

Remember - any form of physical activity can help you unwind and become an important part of your approach to easing stress.

Helen Noble Wilson, IWS
(pictured above)

1:1min interview

Ceri Rowland, Receptionist, South Staffordshire Plc



Ceri on the Harry Potter Tour in London.

- 1) What's the best part of your job and why?
The People
- 2) What's the worst part of the job and why?
Having a time limit to answer the phone within 3 seconds when we have 100's of calls and many visitors.
- 3) Describe your journey to work.
Way too fast, never any traffic like on the way home after!
- 4) What was your first ever job?
River Island, I loved that job and I felt so rich with my first wage packet!
- 5) What's your dream job?
Formula 1 Girlfriend (yes it can be a job!!)
- 6) What personal items decorate your desk/place of work?
Photo of my children and a packet of chewing gum.
- 7) What's the proudest achievement in your current job?
Being here for 10 years is definitely an achievement for me.
- 8) Where did you go on your last holiday?
Abroad was Italy and here is Llandudno.
- 9) What was the last album you bought?
Ed Sheeran.
- 10) What's your favourite film and TV programme?
Prisoner of Azkaban and Emmerdale.
- 11) What's your favourite quote?
"Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times when one only remembers to turn on the light." - Dumbledore, Harry Potter.
- 12) Who do you most admire and why?
I admire my mom and dad and also J.K Rowling for obvious reasons.

We want to hear your views...

To help us improve the Loop magazine please send us your thoughts to:

theloop@south-staffordshire.com