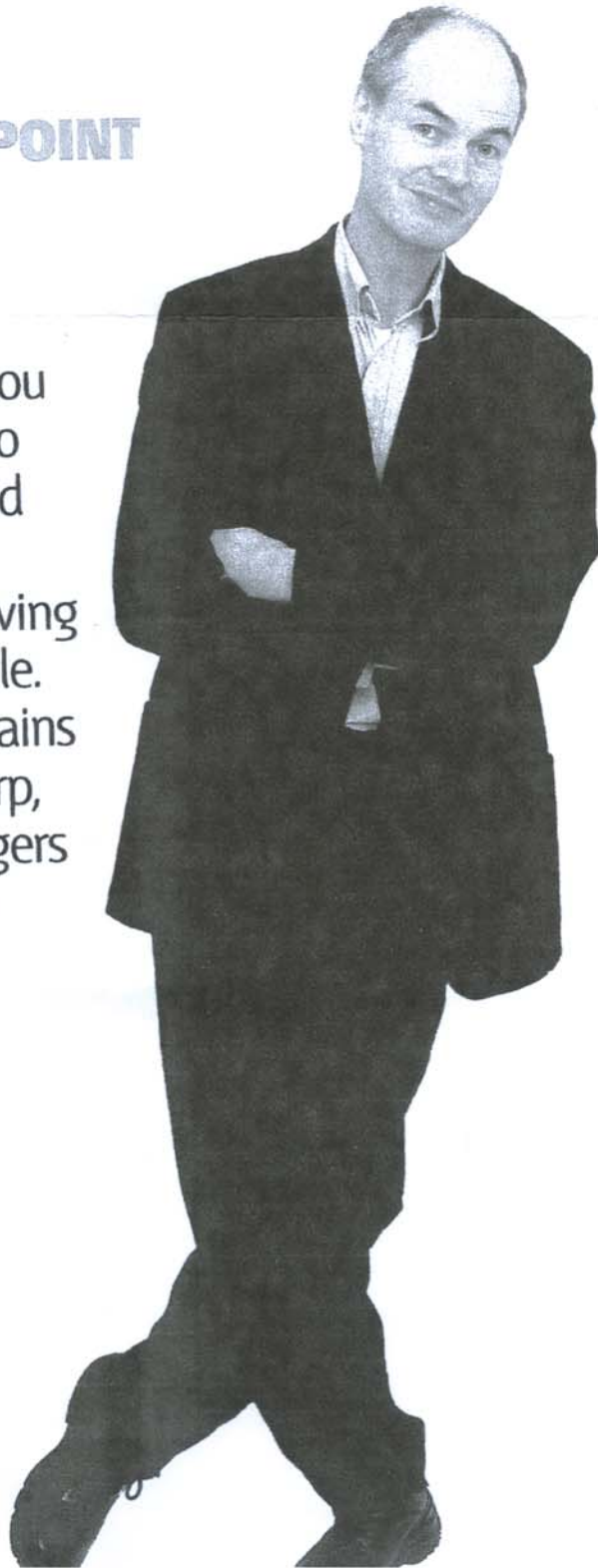


## THE HOLISTIC MANAGER | NICK POLE

### GET TO THE POINT

You can forget authoritarian management techniques. If you want to tap into staff energy and revitalise your business, try giving them the needle.

**Nick Pole** explains why more sharp, incisive managers are turning to corporate acupuncture



In a move worthy of Mr Scrooge, a call centre I know of decided to deal with high absenteeism by decreeing that new trainees who take a day off sick during the first two weeks of their training are automatically sacked. The result is that the company's two trainers often have to work with people who are not only in no state to learn anything but are also coughing and sneezing all day. Already overstretched, one of these trainers is now on her second round of antibiotics for a serious chest infection; the other has developed that not-sick-not-well state of mind and body which includes nagging fatigue, low motivation and the constant urge to look for a new job.

Contrast this with the initiative of a marketing company director I met recently who, after suffering the traumatic split-up of a business partnership and realising he needed some help to regain his focus, followed a friend's recommendation to see an acupuncturist, someone well-known for his ability to help harassed senior executives get back on track. Intrigued and sceptical in equal measure, he submitted himself to the curiously precise needling of carefully selected points on his body by which this centuries-old form of Chinese medicine aims to keep you physically, mentally and spiritually in tune. After a month or so of weekly treatment, he found himself able to let go of the acrimonious past, with renewed energy for building his business. He was so impressed that he decided to offer in-house acupuncture treatments to his staff. Four out of five of those who tried it found it made a real difference and now consider the acupuncturist's regular visits as a welcome – and fun – part of the company's way of working.

Comparing these two approaches to corporate wellbeing reminded me of a wonderful Chinese exercise in which you send a smile down into your internal organs, letting each one in turn have a few moments of individual attention and appreciation. In Chinese medicine each organ is thought of as a particular minister of state playing its

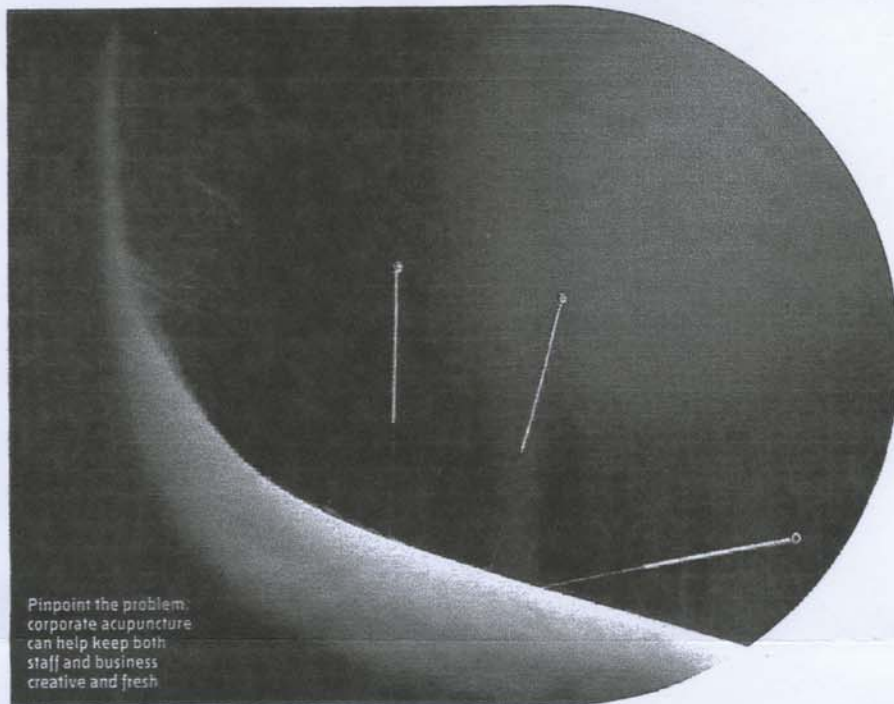


role in the efficient government of the body. The liver, for example, is the General, in charge of strategy and decisions, while the heart is the Emperor, the source of our spirit and sense of who we are. Thinking of the body as a functioning organisation made up of inter-dependent parts – each vital to the smooth running of the whole – gives you, as the chief executive of your own body, a way to let all those hard-working parts of you know how much you value them. When you do it, you start to experience a glowing sense of corporeal wellbeing. In microcosm, it gives you some idea of the effect of this intriguing experiment in corporate acupuncture – a sort of ‘smiling into your organisation’ – which five companies so far have tried.

## PLENTY OF PLUS POINTS

The director of a graphic design company I spoke to was very positive about the results and now sees it as a way to keep people creative and fresh in a business where burnout is common. Having found acupuncture very helpful in dealing with a serious health problem himself, he called his staff together one day, told them what it had done for him and asked who would be interested in signing up for the three month trial. The acupuncturist visited the company, so there was minimum disruption to work, with each volunteer having a weekly 45 minute session for four weeks, then monthly follow-ups for up to six months. About 20 of his 35 staff were up for it; though few thought there was anything wrong with them at the start, they all felt they had got something out of it by the end. Their boss noticed, ‘There’s a sort of alchemy where a 5% improvement in each individual’s happiness at work leads to a 100% improvement in creativity in the company – we definitely have a happier studio as a result of acupuncture.’

The marketing company director who tried it got so interested in the Chinese Five Elements theory that he now applies it in assessing character types of his colleagues and clients. ‘Above all, business is about



Pinpoint the problem: corporate acupuncture can help keep both staff and business creative and fresh

relationships and I do find that my relationships improve if I think about which element is most important for a particular person.’ With his staff, he has noticed that the people who have regular acupuncture are never off sick.

One area where acupuncture really seemed to help – and one which is often the biggest challenge for managers – was where problems in private life were undermining performance at work. For one woman, the initial weekly sessions were vital in getting her through the emotional upheavals of a divorce and seeing the acupuncturist once a month now helps her to balance a heavy workload with single parenthood. But more than that, she had seen a growth in herself: ‘Acupuncture helped me find the confidence to stand up for myself and the independence that I needed to get through the divorce. Thanks to that I now feel more like the real me’.

For Gerad Kite, the pioneering acupuncturist behind the trial, confidence is a key part of the process. Brimming with it himself, he is passionate about conveying it both to the acupuncturists he trains and to the patients he treats. His respect for the intricacies of Chinese medicine is balanced by a belief in the power of coaching; his aim is not just to get rid of symptoms but to release any blockages that are stopping someone from achieving their full potential.

For Gerad – who had a successful business background before becoming an acupuncturist – this is a mission as

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well as a business. He is out to prove to the next generation of corporate leaders that corporate acupuncture really works – and not just for individuals but for the company as a whole. The staff and bosses I spoke to agreed that acupuncture had helped bridge the gap between them. As one woman put it, ‘It makes me feel that the company genuinely cares about my wellbeing – and when the boss needs some needles, I can tell him’.

Which brings us back to the smile. Modern clinical research shows that smiling is biochemically good for you, so just imagine you are being smiled at by someone you’d naturally want to smile back to. Let the smile start where all genuine smiles do – in your eyes – feel it spread to your lips and then send it down to your heart. If you utter a mental ‘thanks, heart, for doing such a good job,’ it adds to the effect. Imagine actually getting some response from your heart and then move on to stomach, liver, lungs and kidneys and any other part you like, until you really start to glow inside. Practice this every day until you feel ready to approach your own corporate Scrooge to suggest that a bit of in-house acupuncture would make a lot of sense. If you are smiling your inner smile when you do, you may find that even a Scrooge can change. ■

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