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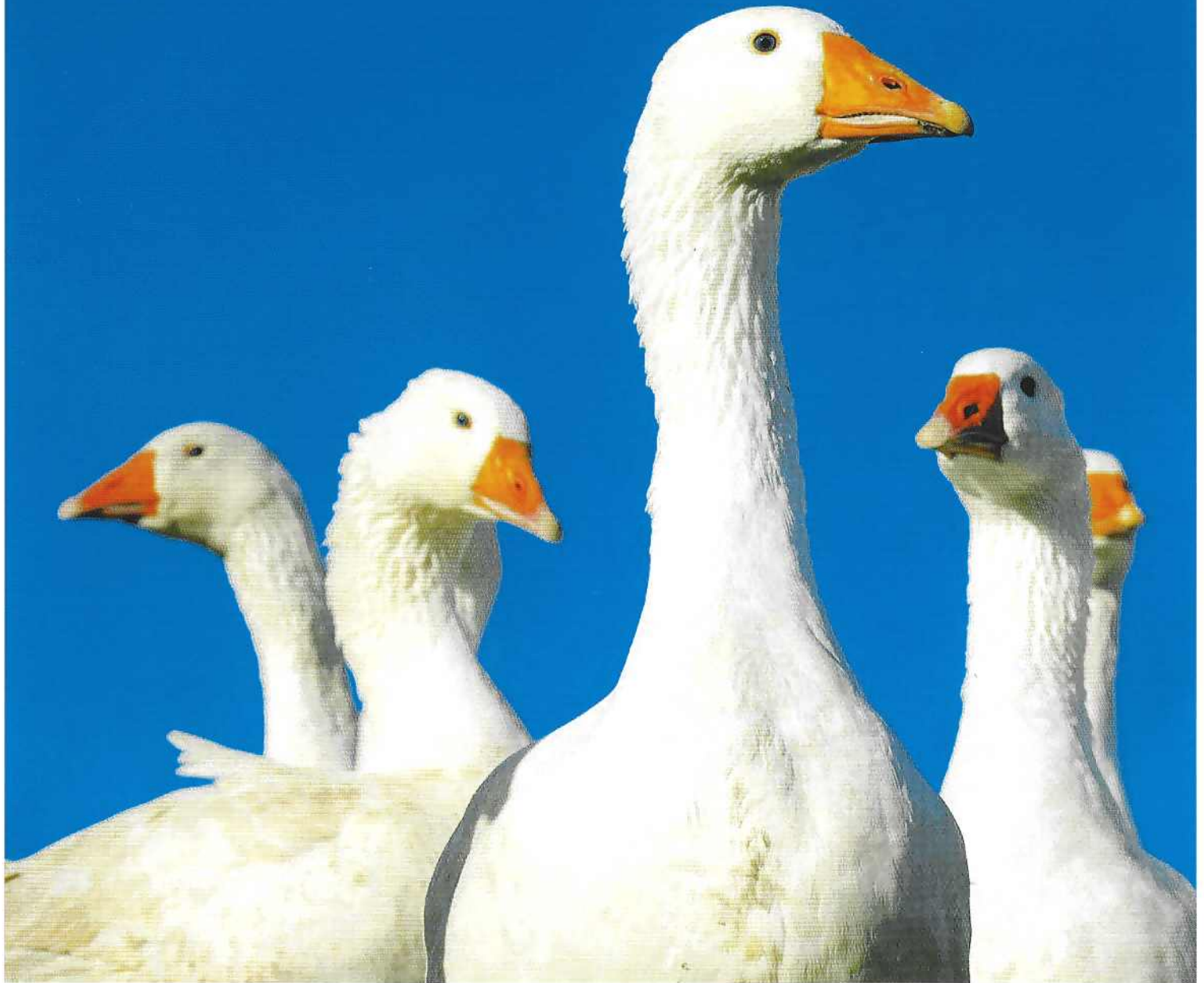


THE TIMES

MONDAY

GOOSE IS GOOD

Why every office should be a farmyard



Sorry, darling... I had to play late at the office

'Enjoy-Work' is the branding for a business park that entertains and indulges its employees. But does it make you more productive? **Steve Boggan** reports

IT IS DIFFICULT to imagine anything more ridiculous in the name of productivity and job satisfaction: herding geese around an obstacle course while a band plays chirpy music in the background.

If that isn't enough to make you hungry for work, how about jumping 150ft into a net — without a harness — while your colleagues cheer you on? Or taking part in a giant game of table football, with you as one of the players? Or skydiving, or remote-controlled speedboat racing?

Well, if you happen to work at Britain's most unusual business development, a possible model for the workplace of the future, these are just a few of the things you are invited to do in the name of morale. Welcome to Chiswick Park in West London, where gleaming structures of glass and steel blind you as you arrive on a sunny day and where, at first sight, the wives of Stepford have taken up residence and the language of north-American corporate-speak is king.

Here, according to company literature, is a "culture and ethos hinged on the notion of providing an environment which actively encourages employees to enjoy work. This ethos is represented by the brand: Enjoy-Work — that manifests itself in the everyday lifestyle..."

It is also a place where workers are called "guests". Got it?

If not, have a look at the website, www.enjoy-work.com, where quotes from people such as Douglas Adams ("I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by") are juxtaposed with images of paper planes emblazoned with the words: "I fancy you." From here, you are led to another site, www.enjoychiswickpark.com, where a teddy bear says:

*I enjoy work. I have great sex.
I don't enjoy work. We just seem to argue a lot.*

There are other slogans too:
*I enjoy work. I take responsibility.
I don't enjoy work. It wasn't my fault.*

Surely all that is missing is another: Arbeit Macht Frei? That may seem a little harsh — it was, after all, the message that greeted Jews as they arrived at Auschwitz: Work Brings Freedom. Nevertheless, it is with that sense of uneasiness that I visit Chiswick Park. It all seems a little creepy. Enjoy-Work. A brand or a subliminal instruction?

Last month Lawrence Kersten, an academic-turned-entrepreneur, launched a blistering attack on America's \$5 billion-a-year motivational industry. There was a large dollop of parody in his book — *The Art of Demotivation: A Visionary Guide For Transforming Your Company's Least Valuable Asset, Your Employees* — but some

of his points were heartfelt. If you tell your workers how wonderful they are, they might begin to believe it. And that's the last thing you want; a narcissistic workforce.

His tongue-in-cheek argument, reported in T2, was that fear, low self-esteem, moderate expectations and despondency get equally good results and cost nothing. (Some of Kersten's suggestions in fostering fear — and, thus, a desire to impress — include: when e-mailing colleagues: "Create anxiety in an employee simply by mak-

Employees (referred to as 'guests') are 'empowered to reclaim their weekends'

ing his name the last one to appear in the 'cc' list")

So here I am, herding geese at Kersten's idea of hell, Chiswick Park. Designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership, it was opened in 2001. Six buildings have been completed, with a further six to come. Among the 40-plus tenants are the Walt Disney Company, Kraft Foods, Vue Cinemas, France Telecom, Discovery (Channel) Networks Europe, CBS Europe and Teletext. Each office is designed along sleek, simple lines. There are floor-to-ceiling windows and bright open spaces. Koi carp swim in lakes and creeks surrounding the office blocks. There is tasteful landscaping, a gym

Chiswick Park organises a wide range of social events and wacky activities for the people who work there — such as geese herding (facing page)

and small kiosks dispensing coffee. There is an impression of calm and quiet, with the soothing sound of a man-made waterfall in the distance. Hang on, perhaps this isn't so bad after all...

My geese-herding partner is Kay Chaston, chief executive of Chiswick Park Enjoy-Work, the service company that manages the estate. The exercise doesn't turn us into a team — in fact, we are useless at it — but it does, indeed, raise a smile and, for a brief few minutes, enables us to forget that we are both at work. We each have a staff and the services of a sheepdog called Jill who is supposed to accept some simple instructions: "Come by", which means circle in a clockwise direction (didn't you always want to know what that meant?); "away", anticlockwise; "move on", which speaks for itself; and lie down. Jill ignores us completely, and so do the geese. But all those watching enjoy the spectacle. And it has to be better than sitting at a computer terminal during your lunch break.

Chaston, a Canadian with a background in the hospitality industry, has a tendency to slip into corporate management-speak but what she has to say behind the jargon begins to make an enormous amount of sense.

For example, I cringe when I hear that the 3,000 guests (remember, they are not called employees) on site — the figure will rise to 12,000 — are being "empowered to reclaim their weekends". But then Chaston explains what that means, and it is nothing



COMPANY JOLLIES

■ Ben & Jerry's has had a full-time "Joy Gang" since 1987. Events include Manufacturing Appreciation Day, where employees dress up as their favourite production worker, and Play Day, where lunch tables are covered with paper and staff given crayons and Play-Doh.

■ Businessmen can pay £450 for an urban survival course designed to teach them to be creative. They spend two nights sleeping in a cardboard box, eat a breakfast of cold tea and stale bread and support themselves with the money they make from street performances.

■ Workers at a B&Q in East Kilbride were encouraged to greet each other by singing the *Mahna Mahna* song from *The Muppets* instead of saying "good morning".

■ Companies including Royal & Sun Alliance, Shell and Mitsubishi have sent employees to work on environmental projects for the charity Earthwatch. Two weeks in, for example, the Arctic Circle or the Sahara for 20 employees costs around £20,000.

■ Asda sent 800 managers to a marquee in Lancashire to learn about "the spirit of the squirrel, the way of the beaver and the gift of the goose" — part of Gung Ho, a management theory based on native American customs.

■ Britain's Ambassador to the EU, Sir John Grant, recently flew a drumming team to Brussels so that 150 diplomats could beat on bongos and play with Frisbees.

THE Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development has conducted research into what satisfies and motivates employees.

Their factors, not necessarily in everybody's scale of importance, that make a workforce happy are:

- Fair pay
- Family-friendly policies
- Effective management
- Having a say in the workplace
- Good training and development
- Good prospects for career progression
- The opportunity to carry out varied work

short of revolutionary. "A lot of companies have an intranet messaging network," she says. "Well, we have taken that a step further and have an 'extranet' system which links all the companies on-site and also provides access to services available in the community. People can arrange to have all the things done that normally take up their weekends, all from the comfort of their desk. And, because we provide a large market, there are discounts on everything."

That means you can arrange for your groceries to be delivered, your shoes to be collected from your desk, repaired and brought back. Local dry-cleaners offer a similar service. You can have your car cleaned and valeted, your films developed and returned or your troublesome back massaged in the office. As a result, your weekend is, indeed, free for you to enjoy.

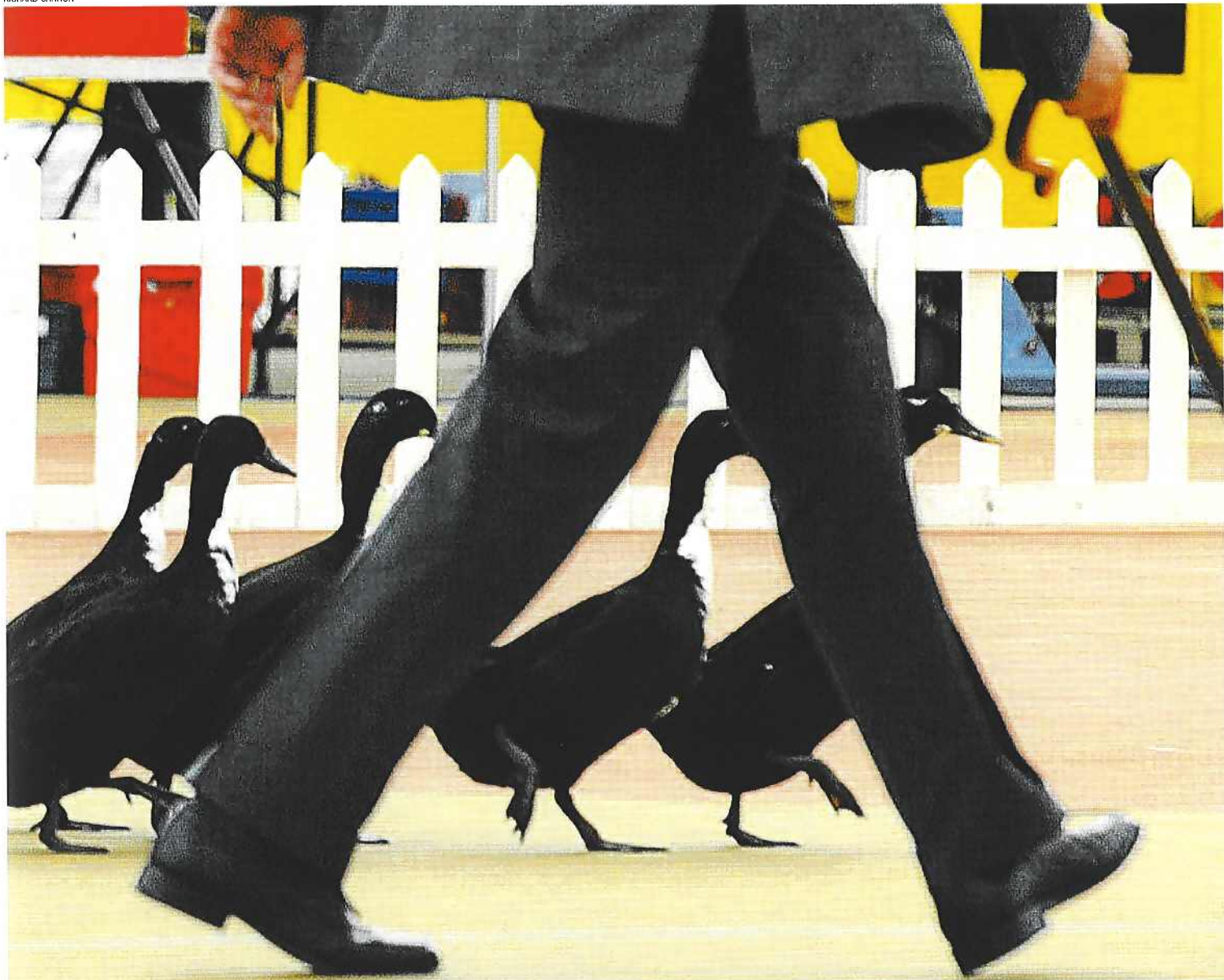
Every Friday lunchtime at an open space filled with tables, a small stage for a band and a large barbecue, the Enjoy-Work team lines-up a little entertainment. The geese-herding, it turns out, isn't some wacky team-building exercise; it's just a bit of fun. Similarly with the 150ft free-fall known as scud diving. And the remote-controlled boat racing. And the archery.

These are organised by Emma Jones, events manager, on budgets of between £1,000 and £8,000 a week. "It's an opportunity for people from different companies to meet each other, perhaps compete against each other and generally have a good time away from their computer screens," she says. "The events go down very well and simply let people know that they are appreciated. It isn't forced down people's throats. If they'd rather get away for a while, we have bikes they can borrow and picnic blankets so they can find somewhere else to relax. We also have sports during the week and free night classes in languages, photography or even learning to play the guitar."

Letting people know they are appreciated costs money, of course: service charges at Chiswick Park are £1.75 per sq ft, 20 per cent of which goes towards the Enjoy-Work events and services. So for an average-sized office of 50,000 square feet, the annual service charge would be £87,500, £17,500 of which would go to Enjoy-Work.

Barum Jeffries is a 23-year-old staff trainer from the estate and property management agents Foxtons, a company not known for suffering slackers gladly. "I used to pass the place on my way from home to my previous employer," he says. "It looked like a great place to work so when I was offered a job here, I jumped at the chance. The people who run it make a real effort to welcome you and to ensure that it isn't

RICHARD CANNON



simply a place to endure the daily grind.

"The extranet makes life simple and there is a constant emphasis on helping you to realise that you are part of a larger community. The events help you mix and make new friends — even some of the light hearted competitive events. We've got a bit of rivalry going with the staff from One.Tel at the human table football and they've become friends. We've even got business from each other. That means you get back to your desk happy and ready for work. I find that my stress levels have gone right down."

Numerous others I spoke to felt the same way. There were even staff from International Data Corporation who don't work on the park but would like to. Colin Almeida and Giovanna Saba work over the road but use the facilities here. "We've all been asking if there is any chance of relocating here, and I believe the hierarchy are looking into it," says Almeida.

But, in terms of attracting the best staff, keeping them and increasing productivity, does it work? Chaston says she doesn't know because companies guard such information jealously, yet the Enjoy-Work team conducted a

"guest survey" last year that found that 91 per cent of respondents claimed that the environment and events "made a positive difference" to their lifestyle and 74 per cent valued the on-site services. Tim Richards, chief executive officer of Vue Entertainment, the former Warner Village cinema chain, says it is too early to say whether staff turnover or productivity are showing signs of improvement. His staff of around 100 used to work in the West End of London as part of a larger group so comparisons are difficult.

But he says: "I can't speak too highly of the place and the people who manage it. We are just 15 or 20 minutes away from Central London, but instead of being in a crowded environment, I look out of my window every day and see teak walkboards over a lake and a waterfall. There is grass and open space and peace and quiet. My staff all seem more relaxed. They en-

'My staff are all more relaxed. They enjoy the events and the way they're looked after'

joy the events, the way they're looked after, all the help they're given to run their lives more easily, and they seem to have fun every day. Nothing could ever persuade me to go back."

Architects and developers, too, seem to admire the park. It has won awards from the Royal Institute of British Architects, the British Council, the British Construction Industry, the British Association of Landscape Industries, and the Civic Trust. So that must mean other companies and planners are rushing to use it as their future model? Well, not yet.

Kate Groucutt is a policy adviser for the Confederation of British Industry. She says: "It looks like a very pleasant working environment and no doubt employees really welcome the perks and facilities on offer. But whether someone will really enjoy their job depends on other factors — the nature of their job, whether it is challenging and whether they are well managed. So enjoying your job is much more complex than simply location and facilities. For us, the jury is still out on whether productivity and staff retention will improve because of the ethos at Chiswick Park.

"There are no figures yet, but other

companies are looking forward to seeing them. If they're positive, I have no doubt they'll be published."

The CBI is not the only body with a close eye on the experiment. There is a whole army of management consultants and business psychologists expressing an interest. And, at this stage, not all are convinced.

Dr Paul Brewerton is an occupational psychologist whose company, Blue Edge, has given advice on working environments to companies such as Orange, Standard Life, and the RAF. He points to seminal work on motivation by another psychologist, Frederick Herzberg in the 1950s and 1960s. "Herzberg called it his Hygiene Theory," says Brewerton. "He argued that the 'hygiene' factors — including security, salary, status, supervision, administration and working conditions — will cause dissatisfaction if they are not addressed by a company. Fulfilling these will not in themselves increase

The CBI keeps a close eye on Chiswick Park. At the moment, not everyone is convinced

motivation but if addressed they will prevent dissatisfaction. To promote satisfaction and productivity, other factors — the 'motivation' factors — must be addressed before workers will be truly happy. They relate to the actual job and whether a person feels a sense of achievement, advancement, recognition and whether they are well managed.

"What the Chiswick Park people are addressing is the first group — it is up to the individual companies on site to address the second group, and without those there cannot be a true enjoyment of work. What we don't know is how people are feeling who don't join in all the events, lifestyle options and so on, the people who may be staying away from it all and are generally unhappy with their jobs."

So the jury is out. If you don't like your job, corporate fun days aren't going to make you any happier. That is out of the hands of the Enjoy-Work pioneers and that should not reflect badly on them.

Across the country, there are people who dread working for employers who don't give a fig about their welfare. At least here they care. Now, where are those geese?