“Brew Monday” – how to reclaim “Blue Monday”

The concept of “Blue Monday” will be familiar to a lot of people. Falling on the 3rd Monday in January, folklore has developed around this being the most depressing day of the year. But is it really?

The phrase “Blue Monday” was first coined in 2005 by a UK travel company, presumably as part of a marketing campaign to encourage sales of holidays. It was said to be based on a formula, where seven variables affected a person’s mood – weather, debt, monthly salary, time since Christmas, time since failure of New Year’s resolutions, low motivational levels and the need to take action.

Since the original press release, there has been much debate about the concept of “Blue Monday” and the formula used to devise it has been largely debunked by scientists. Mental health charities have also emphasised that low mood is not the same as a medical diagnosis of depression (or any other mental illness), which can occur at any time of year and does not have an exhaustive list of causes. Despite this, #bluemonday continues to trend on twitter year after year.

In 2018, the charity Samaritans launched a campaign called **“Brew Monday”**, which aims to turn the concept of “Blue Monday” on its head. An extension of its **“Small Talk Saves Lives”** suicide prevention scheme, “Brew Monday” encourages people to connect with friends, family and colleagues over a hot beverage.

The central aspect of the “Brew Monday” campaign is to encourage people to check in with others and not only ask how they are, but to listen to the answer. The hope is that by doing this, people who are struggling will be able to access support. Importantly, the campaign makes clear that this is not something that should be done only on so-called “Blue Monday”, but throughout the year, recognising that people can struggle with their mental health at any time.

Although positive strides have been made to reduce stigma around mental illness, it still exists, especially in the workplace. It is widely acknowledged that the best way to reduce this stigma is to talk about mental illness. This is to enable employees who are struggling to talk to their managers about mental health and access appropriate support. Therefore, initiatives such as “Brew Monday” can only be positive.

Mental illness is just one factor that can cause employees to struggle at work. The BDBF team frequently advises clients who are experiencing issues in the workplace. Many of our clients feel that they are being **discriminated** against. While discriminatory treatment can take many forms, a pattern we see time and again is employees being excluded from accessing the full benefits of the workplace enjoyed by their colleagues because of their protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation). It is this feeling of exclusion that the “Brew Monday” campaign is aiming to prevent. While it is primarily a mental health campaign, its message can be read across into other aspects of working life and benefit employees dealing with other life events, such as returning to work from parental leave, experiencing the **menopause** or undergoing gender reassignment.

Although conversations over a cup of tea will not solve all workplace issues, encouraging employees at all levels to communicate openly with each other and raise any issues or concerns they have at an early stage will go a long way towards creating and maintaining a healthy and productive workforce. “Blue Monday” takes up just one day of the year, but the concept of “Brew Monday” is relevant on every day of the year and is to be encouraged.

Brahams Dutt Badrick French LLP are a leading specialist employment law firm based at Bank in the City. If you would like to discuss any issues relating to the content of this article, please contact Clare Brereton (ClareBrereton@bdbf.co.uk) or your usual BDBF contact.

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