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PROGRAMME: "NICE WORK"

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LAMB: Hello. What's your New Year's resolution going to be? Give up smoking, lose that surplus half stone you've been carrying round for the last few years or maybe you've got something more radical in mind. If we are to believe a survey out this week, one in four of us would like to celebrate 2005 by handing in our resignation. Of course there are all sorts of reasons why people want to quit their jobs but one of the most common is that they don't think much of their boss. So what makes a good manager? Duncan Banantyne's business empire has spanned nursing homes, children's nurseries and health clubs and at the age of 53 he's amassed a £90-million fortune. He has strong views about what staff should be able to expect from a manager, so strong in fact that he was sacked from his first job because of them.

BANANTYNE: I left school with absolutely no qualifications and I joined the Royal Navy and I was court-martialled and dishonourably discharged. When I was 20 years old I came home with no qualifications and no references and signed on the doll.

LAMB: What were you dishonourably discharged for Duncan?

BANANTYNE: I showed violence to my superior officer, I tried to throw him off the side of an aircraft carrier. But actually he was drunk and he was poking me in the chest with his torch.

LAMB: So I take it, you didn't really think he was a particularly good manager?

BANANTYNE: No he wasn't a very good man manager, no he wasn't a very good people person, that's for sure.

LAMB: You left school with no qualifications. What qualifications would you say you have as a manager now.

BANANTYNE: I'm certainly not a good people manager. Over a period of time I've come to accept that. It's not something that I really want to do.

LAMB: So presumably you won't be good at it then, I guess you have to want to, don't you?

BANANTYNE: That's right yea. Better for me to leave other people to manage the business.

LAMB: You run a big team of people, a big stable of managers. What would you say is the most important attribute of a good manager, is there is single thing that you look for?

BANARTINE: I think it's honesty, the manager accepting his own limitations and being able to say, "look I made a mistake, this is the mistake I made." I think managers who hide their mistakes are the worst managers you can get. I think staff look for people who lead by example. You can't expect staff to work long hours if you're skiving away. I mean I've had managers in my clubs

who actually leave on the dot or leave half an hour earlier, or come in half an hour late, have turned out not to be good managers. The staff don't respect them.

LAMB: And what would you say irritates staff most about managers?

BANANTYNE: Oh buck passing. Managers who don't take responsibility. A manager who blames his staff for something that he should actually have done himself.

LAMB: So honesty is the quality that Duncan Banartine rates most highly in managers but what do ordinary employees look for? Kirsteen Knight put that question to office workers during a busy lunch hour in the City of London.

LADY: I'd appreciate if my manager sat down with me more often and gave me more indepth information.

KNIGHT: And do they give you the sort of feedback you need?

LADY: I think it's more a case of having to ask for it rather than get it.

MAN: I work for a public sector, so I've seen communication not at its best.

KNIGHT: Do staff ever feel that they could do better than the management?

MAN: Staff always feel they can do better than the management.

KNIGHT: Do you think staff trust the senior management?

MAN: No. The emphasis is more on the share price and expansion of the business rather than actually taking care of workers.

LADY: We're not really kept informed when big decisions are made. We normally don't find out till later, even if it affects our jobs.

KNIGHT: Do you trust that information always if it's coming from senior management, do you believe what they're telling you?

LADY: We don't always.

KNIGHT: Are you a manager or do you have managers above you?

MAN: I'm a boss.

KNIGHT: Are you a good manager?

MAN: I hope so. I've been staff in my time, so I know what it's like. So many people that I've worked for in the past do treat their staff badly. They've been rude to them, very dismissive of their views. When I worked for people you were never told very much. So I make a point of telling people what I have in mind.

LAMB: Well listening to that with me was Peter Meyler. He's head of Human Resources Research at MORI which manages staff questionnaires on behalf of many of the UK's leading companies. I thought that was a really fascinating response from those workers because they all said the same thing. They want to have more conversations with their boss and they want to know how they're doing, what's going on, and they want to be able to believe what they're told. Is that a common thread in the questionnaires you see?

MEYLER: Yea absolutely. We do see that a lot. I think managers are good at talking to people about sort of job information and the things that they need to do their jobs, but more the sort of the bigger picture stuff, you know, where the organisation is heading, what future strategies, they're not good at doing that and sometimes I think employees question the honesty and sometimes feel that managers are trying to hide something when it comes to those things. I think as far as upward communication is concerned as well, that people feel they're often asked what they think about things but very seldom do they actually believe that that is actually acted upon by their manager or that they get feedback specifically about it.

LAMB: Now Professor Richard Skase from the University of Kent, Canterbury, Business School's is also with us. I know you've been researching the role of middle managers and I suppose it is fair to say they are stuck between a rock and a hard place, aren't they? Can they ever please both their own bosses and their immediate staff?

SCASE: Indeed it's one of the most difficult jobs I think in an organisation being a middle manager. Because on the one hand they're seen by their employees as representing the ideas and the views of senior management. At the same time of course senior management can see them as representing the ideas and coming up with a lot of information, which is often seen not to be relevant, of people on the shop floor, on the office floor. So therefore they're having to manage this information flow top down, bottom up. They therefore have to select, they therefore have to filter and at the end of the day they can find themselves in a situation where neither top management or indeed their employees trust them.

LAMB: We do have this fundamental problem that as people become more senior, they tend to be expected to manage other people even if they don't really have an aptitude for it?

SCASE: Yes, that's right. I mean you get promoted into management as a reward for what you've done in the past rather than according to your ability to be a leader, to be a motivator, to be able to inspire people, to give and create a sense of energy in the business and that is a real problem I think, and that is a problem I think which organisations recognise and that's recognised and they're often referenced to a lack of leadership and the need for more effective leadership skills in high performing businesses.

LAMB: Many staff satisfaction surveys may make dismal reading for bosses but there are exceptions. Workers at a jewel restore chain called Beaverbrooks have helped vote the company the best retailer to work for in Britain in the annual Sunday Times Best Companies List. Beaverbrooks employs around 700 people in 55 shops and an impressive 85% of the staff said they believe their manager not only cares how satisfied they are in the job, but also regularly expresses appreciation for the good work they do. So what is Beaverbrooks doing right? Mike Johnson has been investigating and his report starts with answers to that question from staff behind the counter at the company's Blackpool store.

LADY: There's no hierarchy here at all. You can go to anybody and still feel valued and have your point listened to.

LADY: I used to work for a supermarket and there's no way that I could have gone up to the store manager of that place and given him like an idea about something or felt like I could have a conversation with him or anything.

JOHNSON: Why was that, were they too intimidating?

LADY: Yea they used to put the fear of God into you for some reason. They'd walk past and you'd feel like you were being watched by some evil bloke. But Mark has been here a few times.

JOHNSON: That's the managing director?

LADY: Yea. He puts you at ease.

JOHNSON: Do they pay shed-loads of money?

LADY: No not at all. It's the atmosphere that's definitely kept me here anyway. I wouldn't have any problems with phoning up anybody that I needed to speak to regarding any issues that I had or any suggestions that I had. I would feel happy that it wouldn't be just something that was pushed aside.

JOHNSON: Would you really feel okay about sending an email say, or a letter to the managing director of the company?

LADY: I wouldn't think twice about it.

JOHNSON: You wouldn't think twice about it?

LADY: No. No not at all, I'd feel very comfortable.

ADDLESTONE: This letter just came to me today, funnily enough. This is from Karen and she's a sales assistant in our store in Bluewater.

JOHNSON: Rear indeed is the company where the managing director starts his day by opening fan mail from the staff. Welcome to the weird and wonderful world of Beaverbrooks boss, Mark Addleston.

ADDLESTONE: Dear Mark. "Just wanted to say a huge huge thank you to you and the company for giving me the most amazing feeling this morning. I shall explain", and she goes on to talk about how over the year she's actually accumulated £900 in bonuses and she's going to take her children and her husband

to Florida for a holiday. But then she just finishes off by saying, "how lucky am I? A job I enjoy, colleagues throughout the company who have the utmost respect for each other and a recognition of my abilities which gives me the chance to feel this good. Thank you." It's just lovely.

JOHNSON: In many an organisation Karen from Bluewater might also be seen as lobbying for an award of her own. Company creep of the year. Here though her letter does seem to be a genuine expression of gratitude, not just for the bonuses she's earned, also for the spirit in which her company is run. But it wasn't always like this. Though Beaverbrooks was established back in 1920 it wasn't until the mid-1990s that it seriously began to seek the opinion of its staff.

ADDLESTONE: I started a series of focus groups when I went round the branches round the country asking the question, what's good, what's not good? And some of the staff, I have to say when I got back, made me very very uncomfortable.

JOHNSON: Like what?

ADDLESTONE: Well like the lack of development that they were receiving, like the fact that they felt not valued properly, all sorts of stuff. But all came back down to one thing, it came back down to the fact that they didn't feel involved in the business and that was a real wake-up call and it did hurt at the time.

JOHNSON: Stung into action, he launched a flurry of new initiatives. Everyone was encouraged to contact him direct with views and ideas. One recent example from the shop floor was an improved package of maternity benefits, important for a company where almost 85% of staff are women. These days Mark Addleston visits every store personally at least twice a year trying to foster an atmosphere where people feel comfortable talking to him. One visit revealed a serious case of bullying by the shop manager.

ADDLESTONE: Fortunately, I had a sufficiently good relationship with the team where one or two of them felt comfortable enough with me to be able to tell me what was actually happening. You know when you ask somebody a question and you say, "how are things" and they say, "fine" and you look into their face and you know that there's something not right, there's something missing. It's at that point that you have to delve more deeply. I believe our people trust us, I believe our people trust me.

JOHNSON: Another reform was the introduction of a new layer of middle managers. Their task to take charge of a small number of stores boost morale and improve communication between the Board of Directors and the shop floor. Jed Gilfoyle has 9 stores under his wing including Blackpool. Now aged 40, he joined the company as a junior sales assistant at 17. He benefited from another Mark Addlestone innovation that senior managers must first have worked in a Beaverbrooks shop to help them gain the respect of their charges.

JOHNSON: How much confidence do these people have in you?

GILFOYLE: I'd be absolutely sure that they absolutely trust me. They know I have the best interests of the business and them at heart, so every decision I would make I would consult with the team, I would consult with the manager and there would be a sort of come on together.

JOHNSON: And what about Jed, your area manager. He likes to think that you all trust him. Is that right?

LADY: Yes it is, 100%.

JOHNSON: So you feel free to say to him, look I don't think the manager's any good, you've got to get rid of him, something like that?

LADY: If there was any reason to I think I could approach Jed quite easily.

JOHNSON: People can only get on the management ladder if they've worked in the store. Does that mean you're more likely to respect the people in charge, do you think?

LADY: I would say so yes. You're valued for the experience that you've had in the branches. That carries more merit than someone that's just come out of university.

JOHNSON: What's happened at Beaverbrooks over the past few years is perhaps deceptively simple. People now feel they have a voice and they trust their managers to listen. But for their boss, Mark Addlestone, any organisation can get to that point. All it takes he believes is commitment from the top.

ADDLESTONE: My belief is that it's a choice. Even in the biggest companies in the country, or indeed in the world, if people truly are considered to be important, and I underline the word truly, then it will happen. If the guy at the top or the woman at the top truly believes that people are important, they will find a way to make it happen.

LAMB: Mark Addlestone of Beaverbrooks ending that report by Mike Johnson. Now Jonathan Austin is with me now. His consultancy Best Companies carried out the staff survey at Beaverbrooks and joining us from Ireland is Sir Gerry Robinson. Now non-executive chairman of the drinks company, Allied Domecq, Jerry is perhaps best known for his time at the helm of Granada. More recently you may have seen his TV series "I'll Show them Who's Boss" in which he brought his business acumen to bear on struggling family run businesses. Jonathan Austin, let me start with you. Your business is all about researching

what makes companies great places to work and I was struck by how in some ways how old fashioned Beaverbrooks sounds, you know one big personality at the top, all the managers promoted from the shop floor rather than brought in from other companies. I guess the difference is that they've got open communication, that's the new thing.

AUSTIN: I think so, and I think what's significant is that as you heard from Mark that it wasn't until 1990 that they realised that they needed to start to listen to their employees and find out good and bad what they felt. Our research is based on a confidential employee survey of 66 questions that the employees send back to us and the most highly correlated question to the output of the list is actually, "senior managers do a lot of telling but not enough listening." And interesting enough Beaverbrooks actually scored the highest that you can get in that. They scored number one in that question. So they're clearly walking the talk in terms of listening rather than telling people what to do.

LAMB: Sir Jerry Robinson, would you say part of Beaverbrooks secret is that the company has a face, you know, Mark Addleston's face, and when he champions an idea, people believe it in perhaps in a way that they wouldn't if it was just another faceless company policy?

ROBINSON: Oh I'm absolutely certain that he is absolutely the key to the exercise. Mark is the reason for the success. There is no doubt that someone leading something, it's like parenting. You have to genuinely care about the people that work for you in a way which is practical and real and not some kind of highfalutin nonsense about "people are our most important asset" and all the nonsense that one hears in that way. When I listen to Mark I come away thinking yea, Mark does probably care about them and he handles it in a way which doesn't surprise me succeeds.

LAMB: Now Jonathan Austin, also we could endlessly discuss the pros and cons of different management structures. But does it matter how you structure your company, as long as you get this issue of communication right?

AUSTIN: I don't think many organisations can afford masses and masses of middle management. So I think a lean company is obviously better than having a bureaucratic organisation. But I think the most important thing is that everybody at all levels get to see where the business is going. They feel like they have access to the leader or the leadership team to be able to ask questions and talk openly about their concerns and any challenges they may have.

LAMB: This is an interesting point Sir Gerry, isn't it? Because obviously good communication is great and it's the ideal but there must always be a tension between management and staff about exactly how much the staff should be told.

AUSTIN: Yea. I think something Mark said earlier on about being trusted I think is the key to the exercise. People know that when you tell them something it's very likely to be the truth. Now obviously there are times when you can't tell everybody everything, and I think the key thing is never to lie and if there are times when there are things you can't say, it's best to say, look I'm sorry, I can't touch that at the moment but I will come back to you and tell you about it when I can. That kind of honesty and straightforwardness I think is the key to good communication and good communication, without a doubt, is the key to a good solid workforce.

LAMB: Richard Scase, the other point that struck me about Beaverbrooks is that the staff know it's a family company, they know that Mark Addleston is not going to leave. The other managers tend to stay long-term as well and they have to live with the consequences of their actions.

SCASE: Yes I think that's absolutely right and it's important I think with family firms as with entrepreneurial businesses, you often have a very kind of outstanding character at the top who's going to stay in the business for a longer term than, for example, perhaps in a multi-national corporation where the managers may only be there for three or four years and if you are at the top for a long period of time, as in Beaverbrooks of course, you can generate that trust, you can generate that integrity which is absolutely vital of course for getting the commitment of employees. And of course none of this is rocket science, I mean people have been writing about the need for open communication and transparency and the need to treat your staff as your most valued resource since what, the 1930s, 70 years ago.

LAMB: And yet there is still widespread cynicism I think particularly about senior management. You know Jerry Robinson talked about this, the phrase we've all heard it, "people are our most important asset." But generally I think most people's experience doesn't reflect that, does it?

SCASE: Absolutely. In fact if we look at surveys that are being conducted over the last few years, we find that senior managers are trusted less now than they were a few years ago and this is because I think of the high turnover of managers. They are therefore often seen to be faceless, they are often seen to have a short-term stakeholder interest in the business and therefore that creates suspicion, often misunderstandings, misinterpretation of open communication, and Beaverbrooks of course demonstrates quite the reverse of this and of course demonstrates why entrepreneurial firms and family owned firms are often very high performing, not always, but are very high performing when they get the ingredients in place correctly, as does Beaverbrooks.

LAMB: You're listening to Nice Work on Radio 4. I mentioned earlier that one in four people are apparently thinking of quitting their jobs in the New Year and if anecdotal evidence is anything to go by, a lot more of us would

change job if we could. Of course that doesn't necessarily involve leaving your current employer. It might be promotion you're after and if it is, there's a battery of self-help books out there for you to read. We're going to be reviewing some of the best sellers, but let's start with what most people think of as the one that launched the entire genre. I took a trip into Central London to find out more. "How to Win Friends and Influence People" was published more than 65 years ago. Since then it's been translated into almost every written language and it's sold an astonishing 16 million copies. It was a publishing sensation when it came out and it's still a best seller today. So I've come along to ask the current publisher, Fiona McIntyre, why she thinks it's still so popular.

MCINTYRE: I think the actual title of the book has become part of the lexicon. Certain books can get a momentum and once you've got that momentum then it is just going to go on and on. The messages that are within the book are as pertinent now as they were then. Basically do unto others as you would like done unto yourself which is a very human message.

LAMB: And obviously the market has grown enormously in books offering advice and guidance of all sorts but specifically in the area of business and careers. It's a colossal market, isn't it?

MCINTYRE: It is a significant market and I think one of the reasons it's such a big market is that people spend an awful lot of their time at work and they're wanting as much out of work as they are out of their personal lives. So there's a real crossover. So what works for you in business, can frequently also work for you in your personal life. Which again is why I think this Carnegie book was so huge and is still so huge because it's a genuine personal development book.

LAMB: Is there anything do you think in the idea that people read these books now because of the feeling of uncertainty at work, there's no job for

life, so it is down to you, you have to organise your career, you have to manage your opportunities because no one else is going to do it for you?

MCINTYRE: I think there is a possibility that that is actually the case. None of us is guaranteed a job for life any more, so you have to cope with change in every aspect of your life and certainly in your business life.

LAMB: Obviously, the market for self-help books has grown and grown and grown. Can it continue to do so or has it really reached a plateau, do you think?

MCINTYRE: I don't think it has reached a plateau. I think people want to make the most of their lives, they want to be better people. So as long as there are straightforward well written books that will help them with that, then that market's going to grow.

LAMB: I was talking there to Fiona McIntyre of Ebury Publishing. Sir Gerry Robinson and Professor Richard Scase are still with me and joining us is Averill Leeman, a clinical psychologist and career coach. Now I want to hear all your thoughts about "How to Win Friends and Influence People". We're also going to be discussing two other self-help books which take a very different approach. There's "Who Moved My Cheese" by Dr. Spencer Johnson which has sold 2 million copies since it was published about six years ago and "The Rules of Work" which has been a best seller since it was published anonymously last year. Sir Gerry, "How to Win Friends" isn't strictly about advancing your career, it's really about how to deal with people, but I think Fiona McIntyre summed up the message rather neatly when she said it's about do as you would be done by. Is that ethos still relevant today, can you climb the career ladder by being considerate to others, do you think?

ROBINSON: No, no absolutely. I think the Dale Carnegie book is the one book frankly in all of this genre that is worth reading. It's interesting what Fiona said, it's just as valuable now as it was when it was published, I think you said 60 years ago. The issues are always the same. I think if you do want to get on with people, you have to listen to them, you have to take seriously what they say. You have to talk about them, not about you. All of those things are absolutely as relevant now as they ever were.

LAMB: Averill Leeman, Dale Carnegie does have a very colourful style, lots of entertaining anecdotes and analogies, he talks about gangsters, politicians, he has great chapter headings, things like, "How to make People like you Instantly" and "The Big Secret of Dealing with People." He knew how to sell his ideas, didn't he?

LEIMON: Yes. I mean I think his stories are fantastic. They're quite hilarious now in a sense because you can have Al Capone on the same page as...

LAMB Yes they're archaic, aren't they?

LEIMON: Yes. And also I mean I was struck with my background, the sort of academic relevance, because on another page I found B.F. Skinner, Hans Seeley and William James which probably won't mean anything to anybody nowadays, but to psychologists these were tremendous minds working in that field. So you really had drawn from all of that all the best aspects of human behaviour in this particular role.

LAMB: And do you like it?

LEIMON: I was delighted to go back and read it again having read it not 65 years ago, about 30 years ago, I have to admit, and I was really very taken. I was also quite depressed because I thought, and people still haven't got it. You

know these things are so simple. They're, as Richard said, they're not rocket science, very simple, and people are still getting it wrong and it's so easy and in a sense so cheap to do some of these things.

LAMB: Richard Skase, let's move on to "Who Moved My Cheese". Now this for people who haven't read it, it's a parable essentially about two mice called Sniff and Scurry and two tiny people called Hem and Hore and it's about learning to deal with change and enjoy change. Now a lot of prominent people have found it a life changing experience reading this, a lot of other people loathe it. What did you think of it?

SCASE: I rather liked it because, again rather like this genre, it's written in a very human style. It's written in a way in which people can relate with, can identify to. It's a very simple story of two mice and two mice-sized men who have to look for cheese in order to survive and the mice are much more agile, they're much more flexible, they're much more adaptive in this maze and the whole thing is about how we get out of being fixed in our old beliefs and ideas and how we continually can be agile and able to cope with change. And the lesson therefore is about how organisations indeed have to be continually changing, continually adaptive and we within organisations have to be continually changing and adaptive. But it's written in a much more exciting and interesting way than some boring turgid MBA book on organisational behaviour or human resource management and I think that's the attraction of these books. You can read them on aeroplanes, you can read them in trains.

LAMB: Well indeed you can in about an hour. Sir Gerry Robinson, what did you make of that book?

ROBINSON: I loathed it with passion. I'm very definitely in the hated category. I thought it was the most banal piece of reading I've ever had to do in my life. I mean it takes a few blindingly obvious things and makes a whole story

around it about two boring little mice. I mean the basic message is be adaptable to change and don't over-intellectualise things. I agree, but frankly that could have been written on a postage stamp. It was terrible, absolutely dire.

LAMB: Averil Leimon, let's move on to "The Rules of Work". I mean this is a very different sort of book. It's a plain black cover, no author's name. A bit of a flavour of James Bond about it for me. We're told to learn the rules, keep them secret, never tell anyone that we know about them. What did you make of it?

LEIMON: Well I was quite put off by that initially and it felt sort of psychopathic almost. It was at the expense of other people. But the more I read it, I realise he was obviously needing to adopt this. I think he, there is a name on it and I assume...

LAMB: It's a nom de plume, so we don't know who the real author is.

LEIMON: Right. I assumed he was adopting this because that would appeal more to current readers, this feeling of getting one over, but when you actually look at the tenets, they're very very sound, very ethical beliefs he has deep down about having personal standards, about none of it working if you don't actually know your job and do it very well. So it's a bit intriguing that he had to package it this way to make it bearable to people.

LAMB: Sir Gerry, obviously you worked your way up from scratch to become extremely successful. Did you ever read any of these self-help books along the way?

ROBINSON: No, no and I'm absolutely certain there's a direct correlation between those who read these books and who don't. I'm pretty certain about that.

I just thought that the Richard Temple or whoever it is, I thought "The Rules of Work" was actually really quite cynical and any book that tells me that by practising to walk like the general manager got you promotion, I have to struggle with that. I really think by comparison to Dale Carnegie, it's very cynical and I think a bit sad.

LAMB: Richard Scase, it does strike me, the latest crop of these books, they take a very simplistic approach. "How to Win Friends", it's quite a solid read. It's an enjoyable read but it's a pretty chunky book. The ones that are coming out now, it's a handful of messages. I mean is this cynicism on the part of the authors in the sense they want to spread their ideas over three books or do they feel that's all we can cope with?

SCASE: I think that's very much so. Yes indeed. My view is that they are airport books, they are books you can read between London and Paris or Athens and what have you and what you normally find in these self-help books is that the end, is there's the flogging of consultancy, there's the flogging of management development programmes. The whole thing is a cynical PR selling activity I think for the authors and their associates. I think there's now a trend against, as Sir Jerry says, I think there's a trend against these books. I think perhaps we're now coming to the end of their half life in many ways that people do regard these things as simple and at best often trite and really it is a cynical attempt to generate revenue which then locks into the video which locks into the corporate presentation etc. etc.

LAMB: Well we should probably point at this point, Sir Gerry's actually written one about leadership, so, ha ha ha.

ROBINSON: Yes it's a wonderful book.

LAMB: I think perhaps we'd better leave it today, I think we'd better rap this up at this stage. Many thanks indeed to all of you. That is all we have time for today and indeed for this series. If you'd like to hear all or part of the programme again, visit the Radio 4 website. That's [bbc.co.uk/radio 4](http://bbc.co.uk/radio4). Just go to the Listen Again menu. If you'd like to comment on anything you've heard, why not drop us an email, nicework@bbc.co.uk. Nice Work will be back with a new series in the spring, but until then thanks for listening.