

YOUR WEEKLY BULLETIN OF WIT AND WONDER



THE CHANEL CHANNEL

The comfy-versus smart Zoom solution. You'll thank me one day...



NO WAY TO TREAT A MOTHER

Tribunal takes aim at appalling maternity management.



GEORDIE SURE

I'm A Celeb is back - and I have advice!

VIRTUALLY STYLISH

Shock news heard on BBC Radio 4 this week - the suit is going out of fashion!

Marks and Spencer reports that its suit sales are down by 80% compared to pre-pandemic years, and now only half of M&S stores are bothering to stock them.

Meanwhile sales of joggers have shot up by more than 60%. An M&S spokeswoman robustly asserted that men are choosing to mix up blazers and chinos and merino wool jumpers instead.

Yeah. Sure. Or they're just wearing joggers.

But I think Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms are missing a trick here. We already have the option of choosing a funky backdrop and ironing out a few face lines - but how about virtual workwear?

Imagine the ease of being able to slob out in front of your laptop in a onesie for a workplace gathering while the image you're transmitting shows you in a Saville Row suit or a Chanel jacket? Of course there'd be licensing issues but imagine, also, the boon to fashion when it starts to get a massive percentage of its income from virtual garments which only exist in the meetings media ether.



And then there's the carbon footprint saving. Literally NO cotton, wool, silk, dye or man-made fibres required.

Naturally, your outfit will always fit and look fabulous on you, irrespective of that Nandos blow-out last night.

The next step will be hair and beard grooming. In fact - soon, we'll all basically be exquisitely curated avatars. Picture it! Never another bad hair at work day ever again! No stress about that spot on your nose! No fears about catching that awkward angle where your neck suddenly looks like a slowly deflating balloon and the haunted look on your gravity-stricken face screams 'BUT THAT'S MY GRAN!!!'*

Of course, the downside of all of this will be when we're eventually forced to meet in person at seminars and networking events, at which we'll all be in a state of shock about how everyone's let themselves go.

Worth it, though, eh..?

*this applies to any gender. Mark my words.

Would you prefer to wear virtual haute couture? Or should the working world just embrace joggers and jumpers? Tell us your fashion choices over on our Facebook page.

And speaking of questionable choices brings me to the case of *Mrs A Rodin v Dhillons Management Services Limited* 2021 and an employer's insensitive - and expensive - treatment of an employee on maternity leave.

Mrs Rodin worked for her employer as a trainer until her dismissal in September 2017. In October 2016, she informed her office manager, Ms Sandu that she was pregnant. She went on maternity leave and was expected to return to work in March 2018. While on maternity leave, she was contacted and informed that her employer company, Dhillons Management Services Limited, was shutting down but that on her return from maternity leave she would be employed by a new company, DMS1, which was owned and operated by the same individuals, including Ms Sandu.

In September 2017, her maternity pay was late and she contacted Dhillons Management Services Limited. The managing director, Mr Dhillon, told her that her last two months' statutory maternity pay would be sent to her bank account, but that she should "go to the job centre for any 'future money' as the company was now closed". The job centre told Mrs Rodin that they could not assist as she was on maternity leave and that it was the company that should pay her. Mrs Rodin again contacted Mr Dhillon who, after promising he would investigate, failed to reply to any more of Mrs Rodin's communications.

On 30 September, Mrs Rodin was dismissed and served with her P45. She was not given a reason for her dismissal and soon became stressed and depressed. This impacted her milk flow which affected her ability to breastfeed her daughter. She saw her GP and a psychiatrist and was prescribed sleeping tablets and anti-depressants. She told the tribunal that "this was the worst time in her life as she was not able to enjoy her baby daughter".

Mrs Rodin subsequently filed a claim for unfair dismissal and discrimination based on pregnancy and maternity.

During the hearing, Ms Sandhu told the Employment Tribunal (ET), "Her solicitor gave her false hope. All the medications started after she sought legal advice. It is unfair, why should I pick up the bill? Imagine it was the other way around? I hope you can see."

The ET upheld Mrs Rodin's claims, with Judge Sage stating that "the reason for dismissal was due to [Mrs Rodin] taking maternity leave and being absent on that ground". In reaching this conclusion the ET took into account that Mrs Rodin was told to go to the job centre to receive the rest of her maternity pay, and she was told she would be offered a role in the new company after her maternity leave ended. The ET reasoned that this was to avoid transferring Mrs Rodin's maternity rights to the new company. The company also failed to provide any evidence of another reason for Mrs Rodin's dismissal.

Mrs Rodin's dismissal also amounted to unfavourable treatment which, in the absence of an explanation from the employer, the ET concluded was because of pregnancy and maternity. Her discrimination claim therefore also succeeded.

The ET awarded Mrs Rodin over £40,000 in compensation. Of this amount, £12,500 was for injury to feelings. The ET stated that this award reflected the additional distress caused by Ms Sandhu's suggestion that Mrs Rodin "had been 'sold a dream' by her solicitor and she had attended therapy in order to have back up for a 'big payday'".

This case is a clear example of pregnancy and maternity discrimination. Employers are reminded that they cannot dismiss an employee or treat them unfavourably because they are pregnant or take maternity leave, and that these employees are entitled to some enhanced protections from dismissal. Employers unsure of their legal obligations towards employees who are pregnant or have recently given birth should seek advice before risking a costly tribunal claim.

EVENTS SEASON

2021

NOV 24
Employment Law
Masterclass -
Practice Makes
Perfect

DEC 15
HR Hangout -
Understanding
the Menopause



GET ME IN THERE!



Yes - I'm a Celebrity - Get Me Out of Here is back and once again camped out in a draughty Welsh Castle instead of a balmy Aussie jungle.

Last year's lockdown show was a big success considering the restrictions, but at least part of its usual appeal for us mid-wintering Brits is lapping up all that sunshine. Shivering in a stone cold building, if reports of the soaring price of gas and electricity are to be believed, will not be a stretch for many of us. Escapism it ain't. But the line-up looks good, with ITV's Richard Madeley and ex-BBC Breakfast presenter Louise Minchin bound to draw the viewers.

The one thing that strikes me as nuts every year, though, is why the celebs always tell the producers and the viewing public exactly what it is they're afraid of. And how they don't seem to think it through.

'I'm terrified of heights!' whimpers a soap star...CUT TO: Terrified soap star on a plank, 60 metres up.

'I will DIE if they put me in a coffin or something,' gasps an ex-politician...CUT TO: Coffin dwelling ex-politician in underground meltdown.

'I can't stand spiders,' shudders a former god of football...CUT TO: Screaming footie legend in a space helmet full of tarantulas.

A little bit of reverse psychology would help. HINT: Whatever you're scared of, *don't mention it*. Or even pretend you quite like it. 'You know... the feel of spiders' feet on your face, it's actually quite

calming, like a little massage... And rats? So cute. So cuddly! Can I jump out of a plane? Can I? Can I?'

That said, I so adore Ant and Dec, I would want to keep getting voted onto trials, just to be near the Geordie Boys of Joy. Although it might be hard to fully appreciate them with a snake wrapped around my face in an underground vault...

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