

Great expectations and how to manage them

The strange thing about training is that everyone talks about the necessity for it, CDM 2007 demands it and yet almost everyone is reluctant to release staff to undertake it.

We all know this year has been tough – there have been unprecedented demands on the insurance industry. Staff in a six week period managed flood claims from over 60,000 homes and businesses at a cost to the industry of over £3bn. Given the current workloads, it's understandable there's little appetite to release those on the 'front line' for training and development programmes.

However, whilst the industry, quite-rightly, continues to focus on the short-term needs of customers, we must also look to the future. I suspect subsidence is sitting quite some way down the claims-handling agenda at present, but with climatologists predicting wetter winters and hotter/drier summers – there will be more droughts and more subsidence cases.

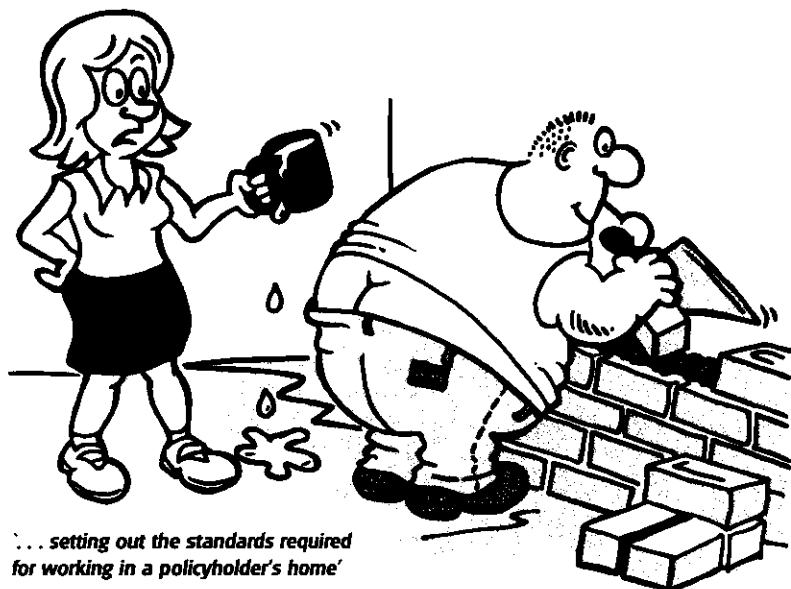
As a result, there will also be more frustrated customers who do not understand why their subsidence claims are complex and lengthy. Nor do they appreciate the level of intrusion involved with implementing some remedial measures. These are emotive issues and managing customers' expectations is crucial.

When the Forum ran its training day in October 2006, the overriding feedback was that the industry needs more training in customer care. And not just insurers, but contractors and all of those involved in the claim. Customer care training is lacking in a number of areas and contractors are a case in point.

It is entirely different carrying out construction work in a domestic, lived-in environment – operatives need to be aware of the issues and expectations of the policyholder. A different mind-set is required to that of working on a building site.

Yes, the pressure is on to ensure there's plentiful training in the skill-sets of bricklaying, carpentry and those traditional trades, but equally these trades people need to be trained to work in a domestic environment where communication is key.

As a result, the recently-launched National Insurance Repair Contractors Association will be running training courses for operatives, setting out the standards required for working in a policyholder's home. Note the use of the word home and not building site!



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In addition, the Construction Skills Council is in the process of finalising an NVQ in the multi-trade disciplines of structural repairs, a welcome addition to the NVQ portfolio. But attaining the skill set might not be such a great challenge as retaining the employees who acquire the qualifications.

The migrant nature of the construction industry means that employees move from company to company and those firms who put their operatives through training courses, may lose them at a later date to competitors who haven't opted to undertake training.

But this is a dilemma for all involved in subsidence claims - ensuring staff don't move onto another employer once they've received a certain level of training. So what's the secret of great staff retention – would greater training incentives for employers and loyalty bonuses for employees help?

I believe it's back to communication – staff do feel valued if there's regular communication and greater investment in their training. By equipping employees with the relevant skills to do their job and enhancing their understanding of the issues, they'll hopefully not only feel more loyal, but their management of customers' expectations will improve.

As Confucius said 'Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll understand'.

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New subsidence publication from the BRE

The BRE has published a new book on subsidence: **SUBSIDENCE DAMAGE TO DOMESTIC BUILDINGS - A GUIDE TO GOOD TECHNICAL PRACTICE**, which is available from www.brebookshop.com price £27.50. Key BRE publications on soils, site investigation and foundations are included in pdf format on a CD-ROM accompanying the book.

The book is being launched at a seminar on Monday 29 October at BRE Garston starting at 14.00, after registration and a hot buffet lunch commencing 13.00. Attendance is free of charge. Pre-booking is essential and can be done online at www.bre.co.uk/events