

NEWS

M&S hires US 'guru' to train its staff

STRUGGLING HIGH STREET chain Marks & Spencer has hired a US 'motivational guru' in an attempt to revive morale among its demotivated staff.

The retailer is spending what it calls 'a significant amount' on sending all its store staff – which number 60,000 – on one-day training sessions with New York-based motivational speaker Mary Gober. This is the first time that the company has used an external trainer to work with all its store staff on one programme.

According to several reports, M&S is spending in the region of £10m on the customer service training initiative. However, the company's corporate press manager, Sue Sadler, dismissed this figure as 'ludicrously too high'.

'We're not giving a figure on what we're spending, but obviously we think this is important so we are committing a significant amount. That figure is something like ten times higher than it should be,' she said.

Gober, whom M&S describe as being 'an international expert on customer service', will spend several months with M&S employees, running one-day workshops,

which have already begun. Staff will be taught her three-step 'Gober Method', designed to improve an individual's customer service abilities. Gober also teaches customer service staff to deal effectively with face-to-face and telephone enquiries.

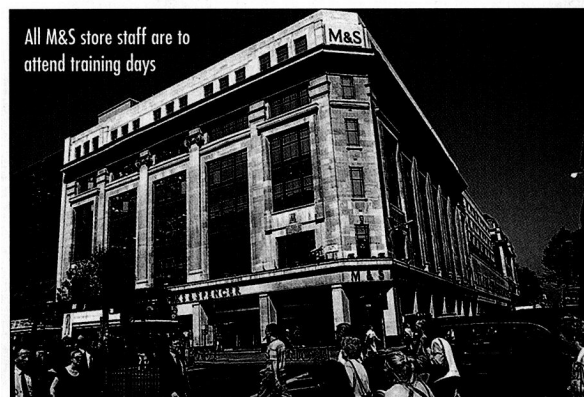
M&S's Sadler refuted suggestions that the appointment of Gober, whose other clients have included Royal Bank of Scotland, Nestlé and Coca-Cola, was indicative of an increasing panic among the company's management.

'There is absolutely nothing panicked about this at all. We want to provide the kind of customer service that we were renowned for in the past, and when we asked our staff what they wanted they said that they would like to have more customer service training. Customer service is a key priority.'

Despite major changes and staff reshuffles at head office, M&S has so far been unable to reverse the slide in its

fortunes in what are increasingly difficult conditions for the retailing industry. Its latest sales figures show a fall in sales of 5.4 per cent in the three months to July this year, with clothing sales having fallen by 9.2 per cent.

M&S was the subject of a hostile takeover bid by retail billionaire Philip Green last year. The bid was successfully rejected by the board, which then appointed Green's rival and former friend Stuart Rose as chief executive.



EMCC to launch Europe's first coaching kitemark scheme

A NEW KITEMARKING SCHEME for appraising coaching and mentoring training is being proposed by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), which will be the first of its kind in Europe.

The scheme, which the EMCC intends to implement later this year, is being considered and refined by coaching professionals across the UK and Europe. The EMCC then aims to launch the scheme in December at its annual conference in Zurich.

Thus far there has been little monitoring of the quality of coaching taking place across Europe, and it is hoped that the EMCC's scheme will provide a valuable benchmark for the profession. The kitemarks will enable training professionals to measure the different courses available against four clear and well-defined practice levels.

Having conducted extensive research

among the coaching community, the EMCC proposes that these levels should be defined as Fundamental, Practitioner, Intermediate and Master.

'At the moment it's very difficult to tell how well qualified a coach or mentor is unless you are an expert on many different training courses. This scheme aims to create a common currency amongst the myriad courses and qualifications on offer,' said the EMCC Standards Committee chair, Gil Schwenk in a statement.

The scheme has already been successfully piloted earlier this year, and was a feature of the EMCC's recent Standards Workshop. The feedback from both trials will be used to develop and 'fine-tune' the scheme ahead of the December launch.

'We were tremendously encouraged by the positive feedback we received at the

workshop. There was a real feeling of anticipation and urgency at the event,' said EMCC's Schwenk. 'Practitioners, training organisations and buyers of coaching and mentoring services felt there was a real need for kitemarks and the quality assurance that comes through using them, and they wanted us to implement them as quickly as possible,' she added.

The organisation is now looking for further contributions from coaching professionals for a second pilot stage this autumn. 'We're asking organisations to work with us to refine the assessment process, and organisations and qualifications that pass assessment will be eligible to be awarded the EMCC kitemark', said Schwenk.

Anyone interested in taking part should get in touch with the EMCC by emailing info@emccouncil.org.