

EPO FLIER No. 11

The EPO-FLIER wants to provide staff with uncensored, independent information at times of social conflict.

“You break every rule of good man-management ...”

In 1981, John Hoskyns, advisor to the UK Prime Minister at the time, wrote the following words to Margaret Thatcher:

You break every rule of good man-management. You bully your weaker colleagues. You criticise colleagues in front of each other and in front of their officials. They can't answer back without appearing disrespectful ... You abuse that situation. This demoralisation is hidden only from you. People are beginning to feel that everything is a waste of time. You have an absolute duty to change the way you operate.

This text will strike a chord with staff at the European Patent Office. What annoys them so much about their president is not only WHAT he is doing, but HOW he is doing it. The EPO is out there with the best when it comes to employing well-educated professionals. And yet the president¹ treats this body of decent, intelligent people like fools. He is fooling no one, except perhaps the Administrative Council, but even there it looks more like he is coercing rather than convincing.

It is sickening to observe how one dictate after another is implemented, how constructive ideas are crushed and how nothing may get in the way of the leader's will. He has not modified any proposal of any importance by as much as one word as a result of feedback from the Office's staff representatives. For all his preaching about “social democracy”, the president does not *discuss* anything; in effect, his modus operandi is to ask, “Are you in favour, or do I have to threaten you (for staff), or reward you (for Administrative Council delegations)?”

Mistakes in life usually come back to haunt you. The mistakes this president is making will be no exception. He is setting a ticking time-bomb that has the potential to destroy the European Patent Office the day it explodes. Staff at the EPO understand the complexities of European politics, they understand economical arguments and they understand that change comes to any organisation that has been in operation for as long as the EPO has.

But they do NOT understand rights being taken away from them that they had as European citizens before joining the EPO. They do not understand an arrogant prima donna style of leadership based on oppression, threats, propaganda and manipulation. They do NOT understand the piece-by-piece dismantling of their working conditions without any effort to explain to them why this should be necessary. They do NOT understand what they have done that gives the president and his cohorts the right to treat them like pariahs or parasites.

By his actions, Battistelli is demoralising a workforce that has served the European public with remarkable commitment and loyalty for nearly four decades. He is the catalyst for legal battles that will pass through national, and international courts, leaving a trail of unknown damage

¹ There is no reason in English grammar to use a capital letter at the beginning of “president”, and no moral reason either. Reverence does not come with office, but has to be deserved.

behind them. It may take ten years or more for some of the judgments in these cases to be finalised, but there will be chaos if the Office loses and is forced to wind back ten years of unacceptable behaviour and decisions. He is risking that the entire governance of the European Patent Organisation will be put into question and that the Office will be subject to political scrutiny at the highest levels. In the meantime, he, at some point, will depart, presumably to a cosy life of retirement divided between Biarritz, or some such luxury coastal town, and Paris. Behind him, he will leave an exhausted, emotionalised, demotivated staff, led by top managers who were weak under his leadership and are unlikely to find their spines back after he left.

Today, these managers – these feeble yes-men and yes-women – allow themselves to be reduced to uncritical mouthpieces, pathetically regurgitating the latest mantras coming from the tenth floor of the Isar Building and loyally toeing the party line. They repeat over and over again what they have been instructed to say, but are not able to answer any challenging questions. Can they ever regain credibility as capable managers once Battistelli is gone?

The Ivey Business Journal has a fascinating article on toxic leadership². It says:

The real tragedy of the human condition is not that we all must die, but, rather, that we choose to live by grand illusions, rather than to face our fears. Hence, we fall into the clutches of toxic leaders who promise us the moon, knowing full well they cannot deliver. In the worst of all cases, toxic leaders fall under the spell of their own grand illusions and believe that they can.

Battistelli is worse than this. He doesn't promise the moon; he can't be bothered with trying to convince us, but prefers straightforward nastiness.

Some staff say they cannot afford to go on strike.

We ask:

**Can staff afford NOT to go on strike?
Make this Thursday count!**

Please help to distribute this flyer, especially to anyone who may still be hesitating!

² <http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/topics/leadership/the-allure-of-toxic-leaders-why-followers-rarely-escape-their-clutches#.VFExr4ddC6>