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03 Aug 2012

## Cutting employee costs may be no benefit to business

By Donna Obstfeld

When economic times get tough, businesses can go one of two ways – they are either small enough that they are able to morph and redesign themselves to cater for survival, or they don't have the resources, knowledge and experience to weather the storm and lose out to stronger and fitter competitors. And either outcome can have an impact on employees.

Very often, the costs associated with employment are the most flexible. Employers may look at reducing staffing costs, which they can do as long as proper respect is given to three aspects – the long-term needs of the business, employment legislation and communication – that means open, honest, two-way communication.

But employers must make sure that any changes comply with employment legislation:

- While economic circumstances are sufficient reason to make staff redundant, the laws around the selection process must be carefully adhered to. As well as being the employer's responsibility to make sure employees are treated fairly, staff in turn need to be assured they are not being unfairly dismissed.
- If an employer is cutting back on staff, are there still enough employees to cover all the required opening hours, while not breaking the working time directive legislation around weekly working hours and breaks? Remember, the government states that no one can be forced to work longer than a 48-hour week and [working time regulations](#) say employees must take sufficient breaks.
- Changes to benefits are one way of reducing costs without shedding staff, but changes can only be made with consultation, especially if they are contractual. Without a contract in place, if the benefits have become custom and practice, negotiation and consultation are still required. Changes to holidays, sick pay, pensions, health insurance and life assurance are all possible. But many small businesses do not offer anything more than statutory benefits, and these cannot be reduced.

Employers must also consider the long-term needs of the business. Removing staff could result in losing valuable skills, so staff with multiple skills may be deemed more valuable. Once the economic climate improves the business will need to make sure it still has the skills and expertise required to grow.

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**Benjamin D'Montigny, Pharmacy technician**

Posted on 17 August 2012.

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- Sometimes, although there is always a worry that they won't invite me back