Good old-fashioned Common Sense

“W hat’s so funny about peace, love and understanding?” To those timeless words penned by Nick Lowe and made famous by Elvis Costello and the Attractions, I’d like to add “What’s so funny about common sense?” Or more particularly, why does it seem to be a disappearing virtue in the world around us, especially when it comes to business?

While not wanting to be negative against the motives behind, and stated objectives for, much of today’s work related legislation, it’s clear to me anyway that the more we are told how to work or how not to work, the more we lose the ability to think for ourselves. Yet clearly significant proportions of our workforce, both employees and employers, DO need such legislation as a quick review of the latest Health & Safety statistics for work related injuries show. According to one of this month’s contributors, much could be achieved in reducing dust and fume related injuries by the application of good old fashioned common sense. And believe me, much of it is genuinely just common sense.

Take another area we cover this month, that of training and apprenticeships. You could be forgiven for thinking that because industry and the country as a whole needs the right skilled people for the job, both would take a leading role in providing appropriate training for people to acquire such skills. Not as much as they could be according to Michelle Roberts, Director of the Skills Development Network for the Learning Skills Council. The reality is that while the UK’s skill levels have improved markedly over the past 10 years, we are being left behind by other countries. You can read about the challenges ahead and what Michelle and her team are doing about it in our Big Interview.

Speaking of training, wouldn’t it be common sense to recognise that because young people learn in a variety of ways, providing alternative methods of training and education might be a good idea? Dave Walsh certainly thinks so. As head of OpenReach and BT’s Apprenticeship Training which currently has almost 1000 enrolled young people achieving a highly valuable academic training combined with vital on-the-job and life skills learning, He says, “There’s a certain appeal to earning and learning which is born out by the company taking on more apprentices than graduates in 2007/8”.

Our look at emissions and energy efficiency this month rests on the premise that you can’t generate every year.

I’ve saved my favourite example of common sense in action to last because to me it’s one of those genuine ‘light bulb’ moments where you wonder why nobody thought of it sooner. I’ll not give the game away but light bulbs is a clue and I’d encourage you to read the article on Balcan Engineering’s solution to the problem of what to do with the millions of fluorescent tubes we generate every year.

I remain convinced that it is the combination of innovation and willingness to embrace new technology while respecting traditional values that will help UK industry not just survive but thrive in the coming years. That and a helpful dose of good old-fashioned common sense.