

Meet the happiness Officers

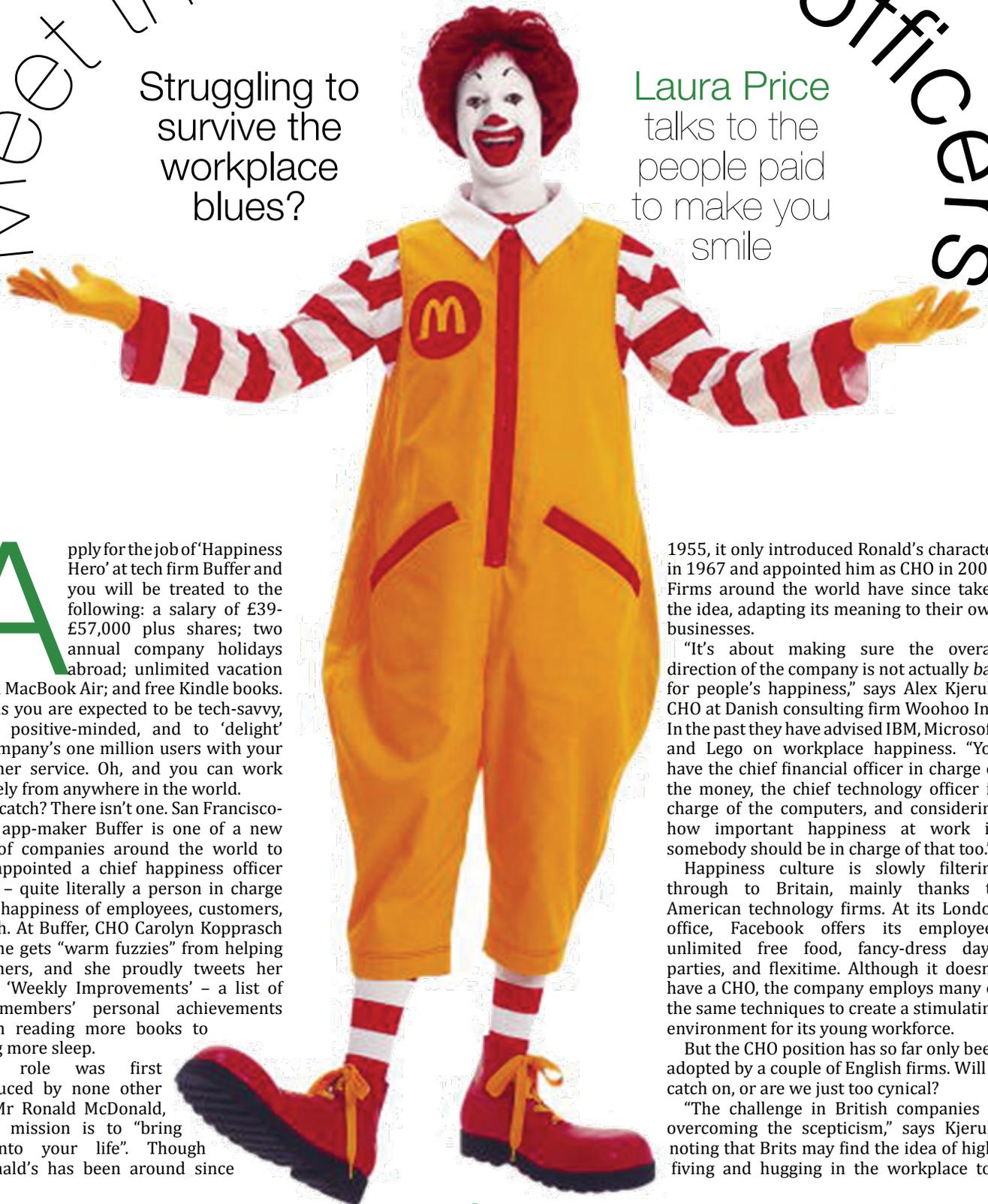
Struggling to survive the workplace blues?

Laura Price talks to the people paid to make you smile

Apply for the job of 'Happiness Hero' at tech firm Buffer and you will be treated to the following: a salary of £39-£57,000 plus shares; two annual company holidays abroad; unlimited vacation days; a MacBook Air; and free Kindle books. For this you are expected to be tech-savvy, happy, positive-minded, and to 'delight' the company's one million users with your customer service. Oh, and you can work remotely from anywhere in the world.

The catch? There isn't one. San Francisco-based app-maker Buffer is one of a new wave of companies around the world to have appointed a chief happiness officer (CHO) – quite literally a person in charge of the happiness of employees, customers, or both. At Buffer, CHO Carolyn Kopprasch says she gets "warm fuzzies" from helping customers, and she proudly tweets her team's 'Weekly Improvements' – a list of staff members' personal achievements – from reading more books to getting more sleep.

The role was first introduced by none other than Mr Ronald McDonald, whose mission is to "bring fun into your life". Though McDonald's has been around since



1955, it only introduced Ronald's character in 1967 and appointed him as CHO in 2003. Firms around the world have since taken the idea, adapting its meaning to their own businesses.

"It's about making sure the overall direction of the company is not actually *bad* for people's happiness," says Alex Kjerulf, CHO at Danish consulting firm Woohoo Inc. In the past they have advised IBM, Microsoft, and Lego on workplace happiness. "You have the chief financial officer in charge of the money, the chief technology officer in charge of the computers, and considering how important happiness at work is, somebody should be in charge of that too."

Happiness culture is slowly filtering through to Britain, mainly thanks to American technology firms. At its London office, Facebook offers its employees unlimited free food, fancy-dress days, parties, and flexitime. Although it doesn't have a CHO, the company employs many of the same techniques to create a stimulating environment for its young workforce.

But the CHO position has so far only been adopted by a couple of English firms. Will it catch on, or are we just too cynical?

"The challenge in British companies is overcoming the scepticism," says Kjerulf, noting that Brits may find the idea of high-fiving and hugging in the workplace too

cringeworthy. “Maybe there’s a British kind of happiness that’s more understated but equally happy.”

One young technology company may just have nailed that British idea of happiness. GoCardless, a London-based online Direct Debit provider, recently employed its

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first CHO – Kit Brennan. His role is largely geared towards client satisfaction, but internally he mimics some of the methods used at US tech firms and start-ups, such as taking all 25 employees on nights out and being strict about overtime. GoCardless even tried offering unlimited annual leave, but the idea failed because people ended up taking fewer holidays.

“You try and make a culture you really want to work in,” says Brennan, a 23-year-old law graduate. “Part of my job is thinking

Three UK companies embracing ‘happiness culture’

Drinking Classes, Surrey – Providing ‘informative’ drinking events across the UK, Drinking Classes takes happiness seriously, with roles on the team including ‘Director of Fun’ and ‘Operations Ninja’.

DigitasLBi, London – The words ‘office’ and ‘party’ have taken on a whole new meaning for this marketing agency, which holds legendary annual raves. Each year, about 1,800 employees and industry professionals rave with top DJs, go-go dancers and tequila boys and girls. Now that’s what we call an office party.

Bluebird Tea Co., Brighton – If all it takes to cheer us up is a nice cup of tea, then this company is off to a good start. But the co-founders of Bluebird are taking it one step further with some creative staff positions. Well, how many other businesses do you know with a puppy in the role of ‘Head of Pet Relations’?

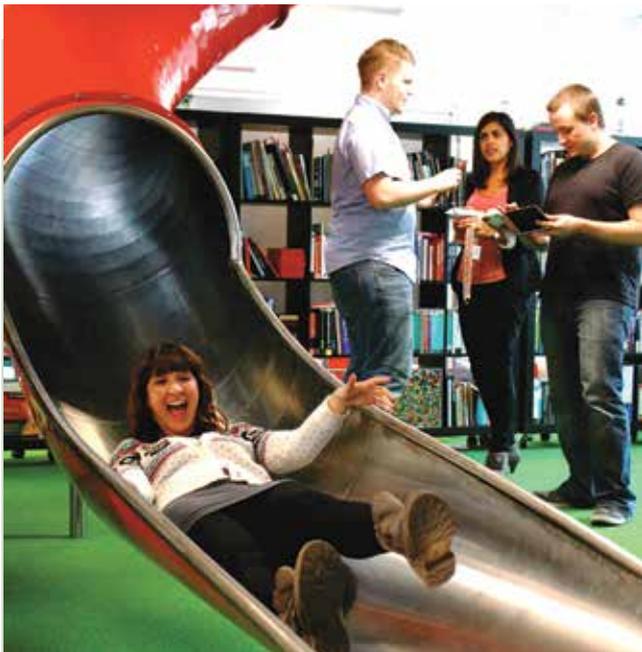
about how we do that. For example, we might all meet up for breakfast together outside the office. Often it’s just little things, but that’s the core of what I do.”

Another company planning to appoint a CHO is Bluebird Tea Co. The Brighton-based tea company already has a ‘Head of Pet Relations’ – a puppy named Arlo – who joins co-founders Krisi Smith and Mike Turner at markets and events to sell Bluebird’s range of products.

Like GoCardless, Bluebird believes customer satisfaction is as important as that of workers, so the team have tried things like leaving out packets of tea to cheer people up.

“It’s ingrained in everything we do,” says Turner. “Our aim is to spread happiness, one cup at a time, so our new chief happiness officer role will make sure there is an individual with direct responsibility for all of that.”

Although us Brits may not feel the need to show up to work in a bunny onesie or share our weekly improvements with the entire Twittersphere, it seems we do still appreciate the little gestures in the office. If having a CHO is the key to making that happen, then it might just work. **X**



More work, more play

Hiring a chief happiness officer isn’t the only way to keep workers chirpy – companies around the UK are sprucing up their offices to make sure Sunday-night blues are a thing of the past.

Clockwise from left: an indoor slide at Mind Candy (the home of Moshi Monsters) in London; Alice in Wonderland-inspired meeting rooms at 2-6 Boundary Row, Waterloo; the ‘garden’ at Melbourne Server Hosting in Manchester.