

# Light at the end of the tunnel

A BRIGHT NEW year has started and we should all be leaping around brimming with enthusiasm for the opportunities that are unfolding. But most of us are not.

According to the NHS and other knowledgeable bodies we are in the midst of the grimmest, most depressing SAD time of the year. SAD because we are likely to have Seasonal Affective Disorder – or at least winter blues, the symptoms of which “leave you feeling tired, lethargic and unhappy”.

## Dim

The problem is caused by a lack of light – the long nights, the dark mornings, the gloomy evenings. 24 January was, according to recent press reports, the worst day of the year. Now we are into February it still does not seem any better.

There is not a lot of light anywhere these days – even inside. I confess that during last year we bought a large crate of old fashioned 100-watt bulbs. I am sorry eco people but I just do not like low-energy bulbs. They are very dim when you switch them on, and only slightly less dim after they have warmed up 20 minutes later. They – according to my wife – also emit a penetrating high-pitched buzz (which I am too deaf to hear).

At the forthcoming election I will give my vote to the party that encourages SAD people to use old-fashioned bulbs during January and February each year. It is not even ecologically unfriendly because the heat given off warms our homes. One of the few pleasures in life at this time of the year is hugging the shade of an old Anglepoise light with an incandescent bulb in it. It keeps the hands from freezing and provides inspiration when writing an article for *Solicitors Journal*.

## Dark

It is not just the lack of light that causes SAD-ness. For most of us, the whole of January was overshadowed by the dark figure waiting at the end of the month – the last day to file our tax return. If you had an accountant you would have started to receive increasingly petulant messages begging and cajoling you to give her or him enough information to make a stab at completing your return. If you did not have an accountant, you were instead staring in despair at that little message from HM

Revenue & Customs warning you that you would suffer novel and unusual forms of punishment if you did not file the form before the end of January.

And it is now February, and those of you who did not get your returns filed are presumably now languishing in a debtors' prison or at the very least scraping around for that hundred pounds the revenue want off you.

Or, worse than that, you *did* get your return in and now have to catch up with last year's arrears of tax and on top of that pay a huge sum on account (that in a moment of pure fantasy it has been deemed that you should pay). Useful tip: if you are having difficulty paying your tax, do not despair. Ring HMRC business payment support on 0845 302 1435. You may be put through a small Spanish inquisition but usually you arrange to delay payment or pay by instalments.

Or perhaps you are one of the thousands who participated in National Sickie day when workers stayed away from work due to sickness, whether real, imagined or invented. It is estimated that more people take 1 February off than any other day of the year. Paying a large dollop of tax is enough to make anyone ill.

Now that I have pushed a few unhappy *SJ* readers out onto the window ledges of high buildings, let me lure you back.

## Bright

Grim though it all seems at the moment, we are getting through it. A nearby Norfolk housing development that has been idle for months has suddenly sprung back to life because the housing market has woken from a long hibernation, and on the news it is announced that manufacturing output has reached a 15-year high. Don't please spoil the effect by suggesting it must have been pretty low before.

And we will be having an election this year. It will give us a chance not only to exercise our democratic right to get rid of – or keep – our present government; more than that, we can be candidates. I have previously suggested on this page that we need more solicitors in Parliament. The pay is not bad and expenses are generous. I am told that every new MP is entitled to one free duck house for his or her pond.

We can make a real difference, simply by having a positive attitude. At one of the many firms I have worked in, it was the custom of the



management to inspire us in the workforce by displaying bright motivational posters with beautiful photographs extolling perseverance, achievement or determination. Most of us shunned such sugary rubbish, but I did come across this stirring little speech the other day:

“I have come to find that passion is a key ingredient to the study and practice of law and of life. It is with passion, courage of conviction and strong sense of self that we take our next steps into the world remembering that first impressions are not always correct, you must always have faith in people and most importantly you must always have faith in yourself.”

I agree. Most solicitors I know are passionate about the law. We should not be ashamed to be enthusiastic. And you don't have to get a poster to view those stirring words: just watch *Legally Blonde* to the end when it is next on Sky.

## Illuminating

But I end with an illuminating piece of advice from a wonderful lady who was still ice skating at the age of 95:

“Remember to laugh. An old Japanese ‘laughing ritual’ says to laugh heartily three times: once to give thanks for yesterday, once to pray for tomorrow, and once to cleanse the mind and heart.” (Melitta Brunner.)

Or you could go out and buy a 100-watt bulb. Psst, if you cannot get hold of one I will sell you one from my crate at a mere 100 per cent profit.

Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff Harbour and Sinclair and can be contacted by email: richard.barr@paston.co.uk

SJ online



For more wise words from  
Melitta Brunner visit  
[solicitorsjournal.com/tales](http://solicitorsjournal.com/tales)