



# Doing a “David Brent”... And surviving it!

By Jane Arthur-McGuire

Some of you may have seen Chief Executive of Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust Phil Morley’s superman video this week

(<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2343765/Superwit-Online-backlash-175-000-year-NHS-chief-dons-Superman-outfit-bizarre-video-urging-staff-fit.html>).

Possibly viewed through the gaps between your fingers as you cringed with embarrassment on his behalf. Phil Morley has committed something commonly known in organisations as “doing a David Brent”. He is not alone. Countless executives over the years have made similar gaffs in misguided attempts to appear ‘in-touch’ with their employees and show their approachable, human side. You may even be cringing now at the thought of *that* joke you told at the last team meeting that was a shade too crude, the speech you made at the employee conference that was met with nothing but tumble-weed, or even the after-dinner presentation that was given after one too many glasses of red wine.

The fact is, if you’re not nodding your head in acknowledgement of committing a similar kind of office faux-pas, hold on to your smug smile for as long as possible as its probably still ahead of you in your career. The question is, what should Phil do now? How do you survive such a cringe worthy experience without damaging your professional reputation?

Clearly, avoiding the office and all of your colleagues, and in Phil’s case the media, is not an option. The trick to coming out of a situation like this fighting-fit is just as your Mother told you- hold your head high and get out there to face the music. Do this quickly, as soon as you become aware of your gaff. Emphasise the core positive message that you were trying to make, it’s amazing what kind of embarrassing behaviour people can gloss over in the name of a good cause. Most importantly though, laugh at yourself- everyone else is, so join in. The more serious you try to appear now, the more starkly your gaff is likely to stand out and the jokes will run and run... Whatever you do, do not threaten those who are poking fun, this will only make you their adversary and add fuel to their fire, if you laugh at yourself you will be collaborating with them. They will still laugh, but why shouldn’t they... dressing up as superman and dancing down the corridor to “show me the way to Amarillo” when you’re a middle-aged bald man in a position of authority is funny! You’d laugh too ☺