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## TAKING STOCK

# Rammya Mathew: Building compassionate and joyful workplaces

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Whether we like it or not, work is what we spend most of our waking hours doing. So, finding joy in work isn't a nice to have: it's a necessity. An organisation such as the NHS—the world's largest employer of highly skilled professionals—should conceivably have a highly developed approach to ensuring that people have fulfilling and rewarding jobs that they want to keep coming back to.

This is key in terms of reducing staff turnover, increasing employee productivity, and improving overall organisational performance. Yet the NHS stands out for having a rudimentary organisational development strategy, and if you speak to staff the stories that you hear don't chime with an organisation that's actively investing in its people and, more specifically, their joy.

There are numerous bugbears in the NHS that we mostly just learn to accept, particularly during our training years—for example, not receiving a contract until several months into a job, being perpetually paid and taxed incorrectly, and, worse still, having to jump through hoops such as appraisal and revalidation, which often feel far from being opportunities for development. All of these things grate, but I don't believe that they are what drive people out of the NHS.

The most unforgivable acts can almost always be traced back to a basic lack of kindness. Such as when senior staff don't bother to learn the names of the more junior staff working for them. Or when we forget to thank or show any appreciation for team members who go above and beyond. Or when acts of bullying or discrimination get swept under the carpet or are diminished because it's easier than dealing with them head on.

If I asked you who in your workplace was enabling you to work to your values, who was nurturing your team and giving you a sense of belonging in that team, or who was looking out for your contribution and actively looking to recognise it, I think most doctors would draw a blank. A failure to cultivate compassionate leadership is what has predominantly zapped the joy from our workplaces.

In his new book, *Compassionate Leadership*, Michael West invites us to re-evaluate how we get the most from our workforce in a way that genuinely translates to better, more cost effective care. Our obsession with target driven care has meant that compassionate and joyful working environments have all but been sacrificed on the altars of “value,” “efficiency,” and “outcomes.” Yet if we look at the evidence, cultivating joy at work is exactly what the NHS needs to do to achieve its desired ambitions. It's high time we moved on from myopic short term strategies and made compassion and joy the central tenets of our long term vision for the NHS.

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