

Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2024

Mental health podcast series

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP



DGCOS
Ombudsman
Scheme



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Our podcast series

FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH IN THE INDUSTRY

Welcome to our 2024 DGCOS newsletter. Throughout the past year, our team has worked to continuously enhance the value we offer to our members.

We are committed to providing a truly holistic support programme for our members, ensuring that the value of their membership resonates at every stage of their individual journeys. We aim to create an environment where every member can thrive and access the business support they need.

Our mission is simple: to communicate to the industry at large that targeted, industry-specific support is available with a DGCOS membership.

I hope you find our newsletter valuable for gaining insights into our current initiatives. Should you have any feedback or thoughts, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via email at f.hussain@schemes.org.uk.

Best wishes,
Faisal Hussain



Faisal Hussain
CEO

DGCOS

Ombudsman
Scheme



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DGCOS MEMBERS CAN REGISTER WITH FENSA

The Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) insurance broker is back on the approved insurance providers list for FENSA, which brings with it a host of benefits for installers.

BiBAs

Finalist

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VALUE WITH MEANING

Respect, integrity, teamwork and communication: These are the core values that we live every day across the business, and they are embraced wholeheartedly from the top down. I am delighted that this has been recognised through Lancashire's business awards, the BiBAs.

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Voice of the Industry

OPTIMISTIC FOR 2024

It's fair to say that some of our installers had a tough year in 2023 as consumer spending on home improvements slowed down. Installers have been reporting to us that the impact of the cost of living has filtered down the supply chain and consumers have been holding onto their money. However, with early signs of things turning a corner, we are optimistic that 2024 will be a better year for installers.

In light of the current economic situation, we have worked hard at

DGCOS in supporting our installers to maximise their efficiencies, which helps them add to their bottom line. This is something we are planning to build on next year. I am still personally committed to the ongoing conversation around mental health in our industry, and following the success of the first series of mental health and wellbeing podcasts, we are producing a new podcast series that will equally benefit installers which will be available in 2024. A healthy workforce means a healthy industry, and this is something I will continue to talk about.



The time for just talking is over; time to take action

BUILDING ON THE 2022 MENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN

In the latest in a series of columns, Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) talks about the organisation's plans to build on the Mental Health campaign it started a year ago with industry-specific resources.

It was this time last year that I first wrote about the subject of mental health in our industry, hoping to raise awareness of what was then, a topic most likely not to be discussed openly. Whilst I am delighted to see that the conversation has opened up and there's lots of evidence of the industry now talking about the issue with growing support from specialist organisations and charities, there is still more we can do.

My quest to bring the mental health conversation out in the open was sparked from my experience of a DGCOS member who was struggling, which I shared in this column. That conversation sparked the Fenestration Industry Mental Health Survey. The results were disturbing and emotional, casting light on an issue that has been proven to be starker than anyone could have anticipated: 89.5% of respondents had seen an increase in their workload since the pandemic; 76.3% were experiencing burnout from their workload; 86.8% believed there isn't enough awareness about mental health and sadly, 60.5% believed there is a mental health crisis in the glazing industry. The results put simply showed we are an industry on the edge, feeling under pressure

and at cracking point because of the relentless work. Whilst we are past the pressures of the pandemic, we now have huge fears in the face of the cost-of-living crisis and recession.

Bleak picture for mental health in construction

The latest ONS statistics are bleak too, showing a rise in the devastating loss through suicide in the construction sector from 483 deaths in 2021 to 507 people in 2022, 503 of whom were male. Men aged 40-49 have the highest suicide rates in the UK driven by society's expectations and the traditional gender roles where men are less likely to discuss or seek help for their mental health problems. This may sound stereotypical but it's a fact. It used to be said that suicides within construction are three times that of the national industry average. In fact, the latest data indicate that workers in construction are now nearly four times more likely to take their own lives compared to other sectors. But the issue is about so much more than column inches and statistics. It's about real people's lives.

Campaigning for better mental health

Blue Monday which is on the 16th January this year, is the day claimed to be the time when people feel most down every year. Whether you think it's a marketing gimmick or not, these awareness days/ social media campaigns are about raising awareness about an issue that has such damaging potential for individuals, their families, livelihoods.

Last year, Blue Monday very recently followed the alarming conversation I had with an installer and we kick-started our better mental health campaign with a donation to MIND of £1 for every installation that was registered on our online portal that day.

Resources for better mental health

This year, our better mental health mission continues. We want to continue to raise awareness of the struggles everyday people are facing and remove the stigma from having a conversation about them. DGCOS plans to take action to develop some real tools that will help people and businesses in this sector. We are looking to partner with different mental health charities that specialise in construction: Band of Builders, Lighthouse & Mates in Mind. Each charity offers specialist support, and our aim is to work with each one to develop a bespoke offering of resources to people and businesses in our sector to have better tools in place to support better mental health. We accept this won't happen overnight but a collective and collaborative strategy, sometimes requiring courage and a willingness to confront uncomfortable issues is definitely a step in the right direction.

The three charities each have their own specialism and value that we think can best help us continue to encourage and build conversations with practical support. If we help just one person in our industry? Then, it's worth it.

If you are reading this and struggling now, regardless of whether you're a DGCOS member or not, we urge you to reach out to one of the three charities we have mentioned. Lighthouse, for example, offer free 24/7 confidential support. Text **HARDHAT** to 85258 to access.

Left high and dry by dissolution

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN INSTALLATION COMPANY CEASES TO TRADE?

Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) talks about the problems that can occur when installation companies are dissolved rather than put into liquidation.

In the course of our work at DGCOS, we deal with a lot of positives every day when we're talking to and meeting with our members. We offer a range of services to installers, from marketing and sales, financial, contractual, recruitment and retention advice, to name but a few of our Installer Journey Benefits. However, as in all markets, there can be a darker side which is sometimes swept under the carpet.

An end to over-promising

In my last column, I wrote about manufacturers' warranties and the fact that they are often trade-only warranties. Retail door and window companies shout loudly about the warranties on their products, usually promoted as 10-year warranties, which give the homeowner

reassurance that they are protected. Quite often, these warranties stem from what the manufacturer provides to the installer, and unless specifically stated in the warranty wording, don't actually apply to the end user. This is because the warranties provided by a manufacturer are provided to their customer, the installer and not the end user, the homeowner, something that isn't always clear.

The end of a business

Another consumer protection concern that raises its head and one that DGCOS has to tackle, is what happens when an installation company ceases to trade, and what are the implications for the homeowner? There are any number of reasons why a company may stop trading: retirement, death of the owner, a decision to move into a different sector, and of course when a company runs out of money, which as we all know sadly happens.

If a company is solvent, it can choose to be dissolved, perfectly legally, if it has stopped trading for a period of time and doesn't have any outstanding obligations. This is a quick process, which only involves filling in a form issued by Companies House, and, unless anyone objects, the company can be removed from the register within a couple of months, as long as they have given notice to all shareholders and creditors. While the process is quick and cost-effective, an installation business cannot forget it has guarantee liabilities which must be honoured. Dissolving a business to avoid liabilities is morally dubious and can have implications for those with 10 year warranties.

Stand by your promises

The other option is to go into liquidation. Any company which

cannot afford to pay its debts must go down this road, but, crucially, solvent companies can take this option as well. The process is more expensive because a Licensed Insolvency Practitioner has to manage the process and it can take up to a year.. Under section 1003 of the Companies Act, two circumstances need to be met for a company to be dissolved, and if they aren't, they have to ethically go into liquidation.

Firstly, if the company closing down has business guarantees to customers in place, they have an obligation to honour them. On that basis it has to continue to trade for the duration of the guarantees that are in place. Secondly, all creditors have to be notified that a company is being dissolved and homeowners in this situation are creditors for as long as they have access to guarantees. Extending 10 year warranties has long term implications on a number of levels, particularly when a company goes out of business. All we are asking is that installers in this situation consider their customers if this situation arises.

As an organisation that's all about consumer protection, this issue of how a company closes down needs to be discussed on a wider platform. The fact that a solvent company can effectively just disappear without recourse to consumers, or creditors as they are in legal terms, leaves them exposed and unprotected. It's not a pleasant or particularly attractive topic for the industry to discuss, but as we've said many times before, DGCOS is not afraid to tackle these darker issues which are often swept under the carpet. I'd be interested to hear the views of door and window retailers about the subject.

“Dissolving a business to avoid liabilities is morally dubious and can have implications for those with 10 year warranties.”

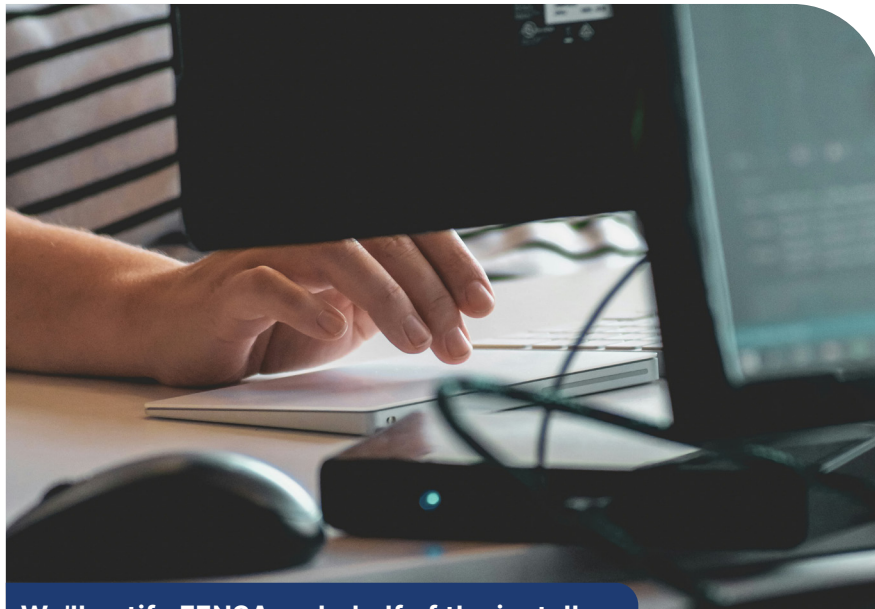
DGCOS members can register with FENSA

ALL ROUND BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) insurance broker is back on the approved insurance providers list for FENSA, which brings with it a host of benefits for installers.

Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of DGCOS comments: "The insurance broker for DGCOS, UWC, who brokers our Insurance Back Guarantee (IBG) offering to our members to support their customers should they cease trading, has been reappointed as an approved provider by FENSA. This in turn means that DGCOS members can now nominate FENSA as their Competent Person's Scheme through us, to support compliance with building regulations for the work they carry out. Each time a job is registered and completed with DGCOS, an IBG is issued and now we can notify FENSA on the member's behalf so there is no need for duplication, saving administration time and around £1.80 per registration.

"The aim of both organisations is to ensure quality in windows and doors. FENSA is a government-authorised



We'll notify FENSA on behalf of the installer

scheme that monitors building regulation compliance for replacement windows and doors. DGCOS supports a network of installers, working in the retail sector, who have been accredited by our strict accreditation process for the product (or products) they sell. The collaboration is a positive for both organisations."

Tom Butler, Head of Sales & Marketing at the GGF comments: "As

the largest community in the glazing industry, it's important that FENSA Approved Installers have a wide range of IBG providers available to them. We look forward to working with them".

Faisal concludes: "DGCOS offers more than just IBGs and the now streamlined benefits of registering work under a CPS on your behalf. We support installers at every stage of the journey, from set up and business management assistance, to alternative dispute resolution and ombudsman services, as well as a range of other insurances that protect both our members and their consumer customers. DGCOS is about all round business support, supporting the work that FENSA does in the industry and this collaboration provides a huge bonus for installer business to tie the two services together."

"We support installers at every stage of the journey, from set up and business management assistance, to alternative dispute resolution and ombudsman services, as well as a range of other insurances that protect both our members and their consumer customers."

Find out more about DGCOS installer benefits here: installers.dgcoss.org.uk

Measuring Competence

ENSURING QUALITY INSTALLATIONS

Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) looks at how we measure and police competence in the fenestration industry, and the implications for installers.

As the Ombudsman scheme, we have access to lots of data relating to consumer complaints, not only how many there are, but also what type of complaint they are. As you'd expect, problems are wide-ranging and in the main relate to installation issues, including dropping doors, condensation and failed units, discolouration, and issues with trims and seals. Again, probably not surprisingly as they can be a complex structure, a significant number of complaints relate to conservatories in particular. So what is going on and what problems are installation companies having that causes these complaints?

Skills, Training and Education

No one designs or installs a conservatory to fail, but common issues that homeowners are having relate to leaking roofs, guttering issues and water ingress. It is almost certainly not down to the design of the product, but most likely the installation. Building a conservatory - and it is a building - takes an expert team, and the current combination of a lack of skilled labour and a training gap is clearly having an impact. To compound this, smaller conservatories under 30m² are exempt from building regulations so sub-standard installations could go unchecked. Therefore, as there is no realistic measurement of installation competence, conservatories often suffer from what would seem to be a disproportionately high number of complaints. Only vigorous measurement and policing will see those complaints fall.

Training the labour force remains an issue with companies reporting difficulty in managing succession planning and bringing new, skilled labour into businesses to replace older team members who take years of experience out the business when they leave. This is a subject that keeps recurring and being spoken about, but nothing seems to change as years go by.

Low inspection rates, high call-backs

In addition, Competent Persons' Schemes cannot possibly inspect every window and door installation across the country. It's so labour-intensive it's just not feasible to have that manpower available which results in circa 1% of installations being checked. The way we measure competence is not robust enough to negate the levels of consumer complaints and until this changes, we will see the same issues coming across our desks. This has a direct impact on installers because for every box gutter or muntin bar that hasn't been sealed properly, for every leaking roof where the beading has failed, it's a call-back that the installer has to rectify, and there's a time and financial cost for doing that. In the longer term insurance premiums could go up, so it's a much wider issue.

Exclusions apply in guarantees

But what happens when it isn't down to lack of training? What happens when it's just because of older product and the laws of physics? During the hot summer of 2022, we saw many instances of glass shattering - spontaneous glass breakage. Consumers, who rightly refer to their 10-year warranties, reasonably contact their installation company to ask them to fix it, but this kind of breakage is not due to a failure in the installation or a faulty product. It's down to extreme weather, usually on south facing aspects, causing older

glass to spontaneously break: it's outside anyone's control and can't be mitigated against. Yet, because of the long guarantees, installers are frequently going back to the home and fixing the glass at their cost because it's quicker and easier to do so. To protect installers against this type of expensive call-back, installers should look at the wording in the guarantees they offer homeowners, to ensure exclusions like this are included. Acts of God (or physics) should not be rectified at the installer's own cost and it again raises the question: Should these guarantees really be in force for such a long time?

Taking proactive steps

The issues, behind the complaints we see therefore, are two-sided. On the one hand, we have a need for more robust and comprehensive inspection schemes, combined with a need for more skilled labour and higher training standards. This is the only way installer errors, and therefore customer complaints, will reduce. Installation companies become more competent, householders are happy, call-backs are reduced. On the other hand, we must look at the installers' guarantees and give them more support in ensuring they do not become responsible for failures that cannot be predicted within such a long period. This is where DGCOS can help. We have a broad range of materials and practical advice that supports installers within their businesses, including for example, template homeowner guarantees. Actively approaching the issue from both sides, will help significantly in preventing installers wasting their time and eating into their bottom line rectifying issues that can, in the vast number of cases, be avoided. In partnership with our installer members, DGCOS is committed to help do just this and tirelessly continue to raise industry standards.

DGCOS continues to campaign for Better Mental Health by supporting 3 charities

DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE ISSUES

The Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) launched a campaign last year to promote better mental health in the window and door industry, starting with a donation to MIND following a Blue Monday campaign and the industry's first mental health survey. A year on, campaigning continues with the announcement that the organisation intends to work with different wellbeing charities this year: Band of Builders, the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity, (Lighthouse Club) and Mates in Mind.

Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of DGCOS comments: "DGCOS is never afraid to address issues that others may prefer to sweep under the carpet, and unfortunately, this time last year, mental health was one such topic. Over the past 12 months, we've dug deeper into the issue with the Glass and Glazing Mental Health Survey and delivered proactive solutions such as the Self Care toolkit, which is designed to support installers to adopt a self care routine that can reduce or eliminate anxiety and depression, reduce stress, increase

happiness, and more.

"As part of our journey, we engaged with charities that are trying to make a difference in the wider construction industry and started a conversation with Band of Builders, the Lighthouse Club and Mates in Mind to see how we can deliver support services that are tailored to our industry.

"Each charity offers different support. For example, Band of Builders runs the Big Brew, which we are hoping to roll out to trade counters and fabricators; the Lighthouse Club offers a huge variety of emotional, financial and physical wellbeing issues to the construction community, including a free and confidential 24/7 helpline, text support service (text **HARDHAT** on **85258** to access) and Self Support App. Mates in Mind raises awareness, understanding

and supports organisations take a proactive approach through learning and education, which we're hoping to develop into bespoke learning on the pressures of working in fenestration. DGCOS is now a Lighthouse Club Company Supporter and has already made a further donation of £250 to each charity, following our second Blue Monday campaign in January.

"It is fantastic to see that today, mental health and wellbeing are not so taboo and are on the agenda for many industry events. But more needs to be done and by partnering with these three charities, DGCOS will be delivering a range of tools to help businesses, employers and individuals to combat any mental health issues they may be facing."

Find out more about DGCOS: installers.dgc.org.uk



The Power of Data

DIGITAL SERVICES IN EVERY DAY LIFE

In this column, Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) discusses the importance of data and analysis for raising standards within the industry.

We have all witnessed a digital revolution within our lifetimes, and it has affected the way each and every one of us lives and works. As consumers, we see this across the way we bank, order goods and services, book holidays – almost everything we do now is down to a huge explosion in digital services that are designed to streamline our lives. The simple fact is that we are all reliant on digital services, and organisations providing those services therefore are reliant on data. Collecting and analysing data enables a greater understanding of customer behaviour which in turn enables more efficient operations. Managed correctly and responsibly, data is one of the most powerful tools we have.

The vetting process

Data is key to our operation at DGCOS. If we are to fulfil our role as a consumer protection organisation, and if we are to offer the best possible service to homeowners, we have to exploit the available data as much as possible. It starts with vetting potential new members. The process is rigorous and we investigate all aspects of the installer company and its owners to ensure they are operating to a

professional level. This vetting service gives us a holistic view of the business, their longevity and highlights any potential risk. After all, we want to work with installers that should be in the industry, who will not disappear overnight leaving consumers high and dry and who will stand the test of time.

Compliance

This process is not just done before installers become a member; it is an ongoing process managed by our Compliance team. They monitor, for example, alerts from Companies House if there are any changes in ownership of a member. We also monitor credit scores. This is important to maintain the quality of our membership and ensure that our members aren't struggling, in case we can be supporting them better. Part of this process is to conduct an Annual Health Check with each member, with varying degrees of depth, depending on how much support the member would like.

This is offered as a benefit to members to help them keep their businesses on track, but another distinct advantage is to reduce any insurance risk. The rising cost of insurance claims affects all of us eventually, and compliance is able to minimise that risk. This is a fair approach to both members and homeowners, and it means that any householder can initiate an installation project with confidence. It is part of our role as a consumer protection organisation, and can help installers

nip any issues in the bud to ensure they remain on track. Ultimately, it's a win-win for both parties.

Membership support

Another area we monitor is the registration of jobs for any unusual behaviour. Anything out of the ordinary may indicate that a member is struggling, and we would then be in a position to have a conversation with them to find out what support they need. Alongside the Compliance team, our membership team works closely with our members to support them to be successful, in any way we can. Not only do we want to mitigate against potential insurance claims, we also want to raise standards in the industry. DGCOS lives and dies by the quality of our membership and it's something we take extremely seriously.

Customer Services

Last but by no means least are our Customer Services team – the gatekeepers of DGCOS. They manage a broad spectrum of calls from, for example, members looking to register jobs or needing advice, consumer queries and claims advice across all schemes. They also issue membership certificates and make outgoing calls. The team can take over 100 calls per day and the only way we can make sure the service is operating as efficiently as possible is by data analytics. We look at call waiting times, average call times and drop out rates to ensure maximum efficiency of our team.

Only by collecting and analysing all this data can we fulfil our role as an Ombudsman Scheme effectively. It is all about ensuring consumers are protected and members are supported in their journey as DGCOS installers. It's vital that homeowners can rely on our scheme, and our data analytics play a fundamental role in making sure that happens. Data is intelligence and intelligence is king.

“We are all reliant on digital services, and organisations providing those services therefore are reliant on data.”

Success relies on teamwork

COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

In this column, Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) discusses the power of teamwork and how having a strong team reaps benefits for everyone.

Author John Donne said, no man is an island. At its deepest level, he was talking about the feeling of being part of the human race, but the theory is something we apply to our every day lives. None of us, professionally or personally, can function successfully without the support of other people. In business, we can see clearly how teams are the key to an effective, efficient operation. We are no different at DGCOS and we rely on the contribution of all our team members to ensure the organisation is the success that it is today.

While we hear much these days about WFH, and while we are in favour of supporting employees' working practices in achieving a healthier work/life balance, I would go one step further and say that having an in-house team is key to the on-going work that we do at DGCOS.

The cornerstone of success

Our Membership team is a perfect example of this. It has a wide range of responsibilities and the calls they receive and the enquiries that come across their desks are varied and sometimes unpredictable. The strengths of the team are wide-ranging, to the benefit of the overall operation, and the value of teamwork in our experience is the ability to collaborate, share experience, support each other and to respond to issues or questions in an agile way.

Their role is to support members on every part of the installer journey from setting up and registering a

business, through to marketing and sales support, advice on building regulations and other installation issues, customer satisfaction via surveys and complaints handling, to doing an annual business health check. They are often the first port of call and liaise with the wider DGCOS team to ensure the right support is delivered, so it's important that we operate in the most effective way for the benefit, not just of us as an organisation, but our members as well. Our teams are the cornerstone of the DGCOS operation.

The benefits of teamwork

To my mind, the benefits of working in and with a team cannot be overstated. For us as an employer, we see the benefits of having that collective experience and expertise in one place. The quick and natural flow of information enables us to react quickly to any issues without any ambiguity; we can overcome obstacles; we can talk about different ideas and projects easily, and we can innovate faster. In short, our service levels stay consistently high, our knowledge is always developing, and our team members are engaged and motivated. In my view, this is only achievable with the team mainly on-site and sharing the same space.

For the employee, their performance can be monitored far more effectively, which isn't a stick to beat them with, but an opportunity to iron out any areas of weakness where there might be a training need, and equally to reward excellence. Working in a team environment provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and everyone wins as a result – the employee and the employer.

Skills-based teamwork

The range of job functions within DGCOS is varied. Our team members are trained to be able to do everything

"We are no different at DGCOS we and rely on the contribution of all our team members to ensure the organisation is the success that it is today."

to support an installer's journey from the very beginning. On that basis, we may have a team member who is a marketing specialist, and another who is more comfortable with process and complaint handling. While we play to each person's strengths, training and induction programmes are in place to ensure every person understands the aspects of different roles. This helps us if we have staff shortages due to illness or holiday, and it helps members because they know they are dealing with a team of experts, regardless of who is on the end of the phone. Having a knowledgeable and confident team means we are delivering every element of service expected of us, every time. An understanding of all areas of the business, open communication internally and with our members, the contribution of every team member to achieve our objectives, and the ability to deal with concerns in an effective and efficient manner is what good teamwork does, and this is what we do at DGCOS.

REVEALING THE ISSUES IN THE INDUSTRY

port in the workplace: including
the understanding from customers,
the staff, more focus on wellbeing

Breaking the silence around mental health



Tune in at nhic.org.uk for our special podcast series on mental health

EPIISODE

1

Improving well-being and mental health

EPIISODE

2

Taking a holistic approach to supporting your team

EPIISODE

3

Managing loneliness and working away from home

EPIISODE

4

How to achieve work-life balance and manage demands

EPIISODE

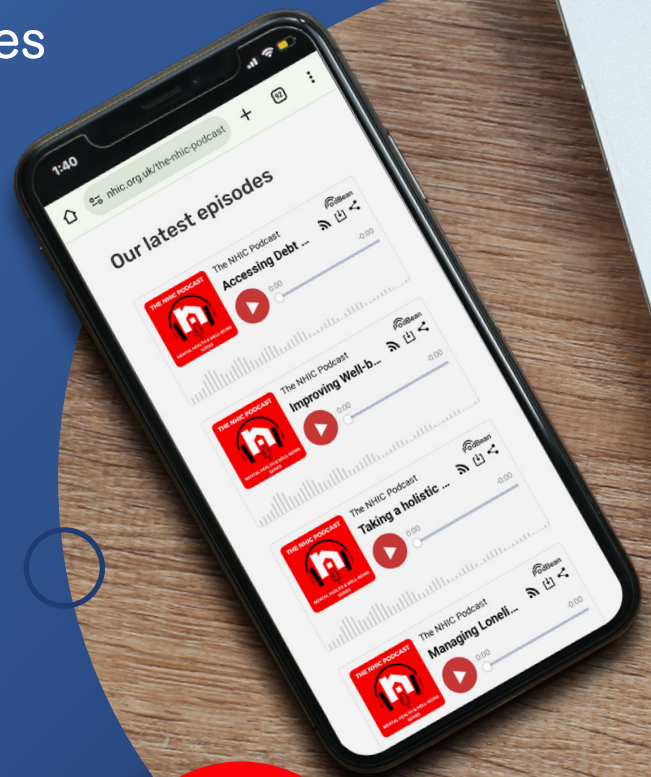
5

Support in the home improvement, renewables sectors and for tradespeople

EPIISODE

6

Accessing debt support and achieving financial health



DGCOS

Ombudsman Scheme

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installers.dgcoss.org.uk

Passing the installer test

SETTING HIGH STANDARDS

In this column, Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) discusses the vigorous membership accreditation process of installer companies to maximise protection for consumers.

At DGCOS, our core principles evolve around how we can best safeguard consumers when they are choosing and using a door or window installer in their home. They need to be sure that they can make informed choices and that they are protected if anything goes wrong. Our installer accreditation process is, therefore, the cornerstone of what we do, and our accreditation process is robust and detailed. Not all companies are successful in their application to become part of our approved installer scheme because our standards are high. We will not accept anyone who falls short and to do so would be negligent in our duty to consumers who place their trust – not to mention their money – in DGCOS approved Members.

A lot of work goes on behind the scenes before a company makes it as an approved installer and we dig deep. There are no short cuts and part of my job is to ensure the processes across my teams is as rigorous as it could be to ensure we only accept good companies. Complacency has no place in our industry and that applies to DGCOS as well. To that end, our processes have recently been strength-tested and adapted to be even more comprehensive.

Building an information bank

Essentially, what we are doing through the vetting process is a thorough health check of the business which covers everything from the company background,

financial history, compliance, director history, insurances and reputation. Not only does the company need to demonstrate it has historically been run properly, but we need to ensure it is able to continue trading in the long term.

For every question we ask, the answer falls into a traffic light system as a way of easily highlighting any potential risks or red flags that would either need further investigation or which would prevent a company being accepted as a DGCOS member. For example, alarm bells are raised if the company operates a PO Box number rather than a physical address; if the company is signing up more customers than it can reasonably handle based on the size of its fitting team, or if they have previously been rejected or expelled from the scheme. And that's before we move on to the detailed information!

Fact-based decision making

For a company to get the green light according to our system, it must have been trading for more than 4 years, have a healthy credit score and be able to demonstrate a history of profit. Directors should ideally be registered at Companies House and have no spent or outstanding CCJs against them. We investigate the trading history of the company and whether it or any director has ever had a winding up or strike off notice issued against them – anything that might call into question the operating ethos and integrity of the people running it.

Another tick in the box for a professionally-run company is that they can demonstrate they have the right competency certification and guarantees and whether they use their own installers rather than outsourcing, which is a good indicator

of a higher quality installation. Having the right kind of insurances and not being under-insured is another sign of an ethically-run business.

Customer experience matters

Not only do applicants to the DGCOS scheme have to submit their company accounts, proof of insurance and compliance, we also look at online reviews from paying customers. Google reviews, Yell, Facebook, Trustpilot – all these provide vital information about the customer experience. When we combine this with hard facts, our traffic light system tells us whether a company is of the right standard, with the right ethics and trading practices, and with the longevity we are looking for to be accepted as a DGCOS accredited installer.

However, not all companies who apply and get 'amber' ratings are rejected. There are several factors which can influence why an installer may not get a fully green score. For example, a company may only have been in business for less than 4 years but taking all other factors into account will tell us if they are operating professionally, ethically and if they have the potential for sustainable growth. In fact, by going through the accreditation process, we can often advise businesses on where their weaknesses lie and that in itself gives them guidance for how to improve their systems and processes.

Our processes are strict and regularly reviewed, but setting high standards and telling companies what is expected of them contributes, not just to consumer confidence and protection, but to raising standards in the industry. It is the cornerstone of what we do, and our industry relies on it.

Working together for the greater good

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING AND WORKING TOGETHER

In this column, Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS), talks about the power of coming together for the greater good and why DGCOS are heading up a Fenestration Working Group.

We've talked before about the transformative power of collaboration and how teamwork, sharing information, experience and expertise to achieve a shared goal is so important. As an industry we've had a lot to deal with over the past two years: keeping the wheels moving during Covid and the aftermath of the home improvement boom, coupled with a struggling supply chain. We've read reports of the importance of communication and working together to make the situation more fluid.

Supplier Campaign

A great example of this is the "United Front" campaign last year, that was fronted by Ryan Green of Clayton Glass and supported by nineteen independent suppliers to the home improvement market. The group issued an open letter to the industry, calling for a show of solidarity in the message to consumers, saying

that "every supplier is weathering the same storm and that, by giving customers an understanding, they can quickly work together to provide solutions and get back to delivering continuity of supply".

The key message is that by working together and asking consumers for "continued patience and understanding whilst we continue to work round the clock to deliver a product and service that you are happy with", we will all get a better outcome. I believe the letter even made its way to the national press – a powerful thing that although didn't solve the issues as many are still current, it allowed some breathing space to work them through and improve the situation.

Continuing the good work

This is exactly the type of work I would like to continue. As a group, we work across multiple home improvement sectors and we are part of a number of working groups that focus on current affairs, driving forward quality and maintaining reputation in those relative industries. We have a voice with government and the working groups are having a positive impact on the sectors in which we operate.

Creating a Fenestration Working Group

As an organisation we believe strongly in collaboration and always have our members' best interests at heart. We engage with and listen to our members so they can contribute and collaborate in industry topics and feel heard. This feedback is turned into actions which serve purely to raise standards, protect consumers, and help our members' businesses stand out and thrive. We want to expand this out to the wider industry

and as an independent body, we are in a good position to lead this forward and remain impartial. I strongly believe that by working together, we can shape the future of our industry.

I have seen first-hand all the best practice that take places within our sector and want the objective of this working group to be about promoting the good things that we do to external stakeholders, like the government.

This isn't a sociable thing. The meetings will be online and structured to discuss what's happening and where we are going. It won't mean lots of time out of the business, or a load of extra work. All you need to do is be part of the conversation so that together, we can tackle issues and make important changes that benefit everyone in the industry and make a real difference. The working group is open to anyone operating within the glass and glazing sector.

I'm calling for you to get involved, and ask you to contact me directly to show your interest:

f.hussain@schemes.org.uk

"I strongly believe that by working together, we can shape the future of our industry."

Values with meaning

OFFICIAL BIBAS FINALISTS

Respect, integrity, teamwork and communication: These are the core values that we live every day across the business, and they are embraced wholeheartedly from the top down. Without them, we wouldn't be the organisation that we are today, and I am delighted that this has been recognised through Lancashire's business awards, the BIBAs.

To be nominated as a Finalist in the Employer of the Year category means a lot, not just to me, but to the entire team. It is validation that we are doing things right, and nurturing and supporting our teams plays a huge role in this.

I can confidently say that we have created a positive working culture across the Schemes – including DGCOS - which has a direct impact on almost every aspect of the operation. It's just simple logic that a happy workforce will show commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the job. If you have that then you are in a good position to guarantee the best service levels, greater productivity and to a high standard, which ultimately benefits our members. If they are supported by a fulfilled workforce, then we can be sure they are receiving the care and attention they would expect.

Building a culture through our values

What do we do to build an engaged workforce? It starts with the values I mentioned earlier. The ones we have in place were chosen by our team and therefore reflect what they feel is important, and they are at the heart of all our interactions with colleagues, members, and consumers. They enable us to speak freely, listen properly, embrace

differences, trust each other, work collaboratively and to know our contribution will be acknowledged and supported.

Secondly, we only employ people that fit into the organisation's culture. Skills and experience are important, but it's not just about that. We look for the 'soft' skills that you can't teach someone: Openness, empathy, a willingness to work with a team and good communication. We also have an open door policy. Our Senior Leaders and Senior Managers are not hidden away behind closed doors in big offices: We are on the office floor with the rest of the team. It means everyone is part of the conversation, that management is available and approachable, and it removes any potential for a 'them and us' feeling. Every member of our team has a voice, and everyone is empowered to drive forward change and contribute to business decisions.

Invest in training and development

Of course, having values and the right people in the right jobs is only one part of our responsibility as an employer. We also have a policy of taking each team member as an individual, identifying training gaps and making sure they have the skills they need for their own professional development. In the spirit of openness, we not only inform staff how the business is performing on a regular basis, but we also believe that having a fully rounded knowledge of the whole business operation benefits us all in the longer term. It is very easy for us to all just focus on our own jobs, but we want the team to understand other parts of the business too. We recently employed an external accountant to train non-finance staff on reading and understanding company accounts so that they understood this part of

BIBAs Finalist

the business too. As a result, those who previously might not have fully understood the financial side of the business are now confident in communicating with members about their own accounts and are able to make more informed decisions. The positive impact has been noticeable amongst many of our staff.

We have recently undertaken a 'Day in the Life' exercise, where more of our team found out exactly what being an installer entails. Only by putting yourself in your customers' shoes can you fully understand their challenges and issues. By gaining this first-hand experience, we will be able to deliver a high quality service with empathy and understanding.

Impressive results

To my mind, this holistic approach to the organisations' culture and team members is just logic but we see tangible results in hard facts. Our staff turnover in 2022 was 0.02% - the UK average is 16.4%*. Our absence rate in the same year was 0.5% against a UK reported average of 2.6%**.

This means not only do we grow our business by creating new positions rather than having to fill existing ones, but there is also far more continuity within the business, which enables our workflow to, well, flow. Yes, there is a time investment needed, and a financial one too for training and development but the cost of not making these investments would be immeasurable.

*Reference: Cendex

**Reference: Office for National Statistics

The importance of the supply chain

WHAT LIES BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Faisal Hussain, Chief Executive of the Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) wants to keep the momentum going with tackling the industry's mental health crisis. In this month's column, he explores some of the feedback derived from the Glass and Glazing Mental Health Survey 2022 and discusses one big problem to come out of the survey - the failing supply chain.

When we released the Glass and Glazing Mental Health Survey 2022 last month, we could not have predicted the outpouring of support and interest, and in some cases, installers sharing their own personal battles with us. With over two thirds of respondents experiencing burn-out, and circa 90% saying they've seen an increase in workload since the Pandemic, the survey shows the price we're paying in terms of mental health as a sector. But what lies behind the statistics?

A broken supply chain

We're all aware of the battering the global supply chain has taken in recent years, and the fact is, it's not growing fast or sustainably enough. The

challenges of Brexit, new immigration bills, tariffs, containers stuck in the Suez Canal, unpredictable weather, erratic buying patterns, are all still out of control and having significant impact on our sector in terms of supply. Combine this with the home improvement boom at the start of the Pandemic, when the UK used a whole year's supply of fencing and paint in just one month, and we have a perfect storm.

COVID is no longer an excuse

But based on many of the verbatim comments given in the survey, it's clear there's something else going on. The majority of people, when asked to say in their own words what the main causes of stress were, named supplier issues. One comment in particular stuck out for me: "Why are materials arriving in the wrong colour and wrong size? Is it because nobody cares anymore?" What a startling message.

COVID can no longer be seen as an excuse for poor customer service. Sadly, the fact is that supply chain, safety, and staffing challenges are well-established market conditions now and can no longer be blamed on the Pandemic. It's just part of the everyday problems that occur when running a business or dealing with customers, and no matter what happens, customer and supplier trust must be maintained. The situation is also surprising when you consider that according to the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) there has been huge growth in the number of customers prepared to pay more for better service since the beginning of the Pandemic.

Good communication is the solution. Poor communication when things go wrong has also been mentioned in

the survey, with some respondents saying they just can't get hold of their supplier on the phone or that emails aren't being answered. The stress that this adds to retail businesses, already working at capacity to meet demand, is immense. Therefore, one of the simplest solutions is to talk to each other. Installers will accept longer lead time on certain products, as long as the supplier communicates the facts. This is something Thom Emerson brought up in our mental health podcast conversation too and an issue regularly discussed when DGCOS supports customers in mediation and disputes. The fact is, when we have all the information – good and bad – we can plan, and installers can keep their customers updated.

What is difficult for installers to accept, is incorrect or part-filled orders for no reason other than a mishandled order. This is unacceptable with any buying experience, so why should our industry think otherwise.

Some readers may disagree with some of the conclusions drawn from the survey, and I'd love to hear from anyone who does, just to find out if there is something else we need to consider. The survey indicates the failing supply chain remains a big problem and one that needs tackling head on. DGOCS is never afraid to talk about the issues that others steer clear of, in the hope that collectively we can resolve these challenges in a positive and constructive way, and in so doing, give voice to the hundreds of installers out there who are struggling, and the industry as a whole.

Download the full report [here](#).

"COVID can no longer be seen as an excuse for poor customer service."

DGCOS investment in people is rewarded with ISO 9001

A FOUNDATION OF QUALITY

The Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) has been awarded ISO 9001, validating their investment in both their team and customer care processes.

ISO 9001 is the internationally recognised standard for Quality Management, focussing on a key set of Quality Principles, including leadership, engagement, continual improvement and evidence-based decision making.

Faisal Hussain, DGCOS Chief Executive, comments on the achievement: "To be awarded ISO 9001 - with no non-conformities, I'd like to add - gives members and homeowners confidence that, when they contact DGCOS for any reason, they can be sure that they will receive the best level of service. Having ISO 9001 confirms that the foundations we have put in place in recent years have given us a solid basis for growth.



"As an organisation, our ethos is to protect consumers and raise standards within the fenestration industry, with support for both members and consumers being at our heart. Quality is a word we use a lot internally, whether it's the quality of the team, our processes, our communication, or our service. It's the starting point for all we do, and we are continuously looking for ways to improve on it.

"To this end, we have recently further strengthened our leadership team and have recruited a new Head of Quality and a new Head of Operations.

"Our Head of Quality will be looking at the members' side of the business, and how we can improve the experience for them. This includes spending more time on-site at our members' premises to ensure standards and compliance, but also to offer advice. Our Head of Operations will concentrate on our internal processes and ways in which we can be more efficient and offer an even better service by ensuring we hit key milestones, like phone calls answered within 30 seconds and emails replied to within 48 hours.

"Growing the team and investing at senior level builds on the strong

"Having ISO 9001 confirms that the foundations we have put in place in recent years have given us a solid basis for growth."

foundations that were already in place, with future growth and improvement being a constant theme. We never allow ourselves to get complacent, or to think the job is done. All processes, policies and procedures are continuously reviewed and tested. For example, we are currently reviewing our equality policy because we must also ensure we provide a fair working environment for our people. They are the foundation for the quality we strive for every day."

"Our Head of Quality will be looking at the members' side of the business, and how we can improve the experience for them."

Collaboration for the benefit of installers

RAISING STANDARDS ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

DGCOS Chief Executive, Faisal Hussain, raises the idea of forming an installer Think Tank with a view to identifying issues installers face and opening a debate to find common solutions that help installers in their businesses. In this column, he discusses his thoughts and invites responses to the idea of industry co-operation.

The work that we do with our installer members means that the team at DGCOS is aware of the issues and challenges they face in the industry. We have regular conversations with installation companies through our role in providing them with support, assets and advice which result in an understanding of the challenges our members are facing. Often, though, it may well be that the wider industry is also well placed to advise or input on these issues and challenges because they have experienced the same problems.

Proactive action for a positive future

Over the last few months, I have increasingly been thinking of ways in which we can address these challenges in our position as an independent industry body. It has become apparent to me that there is potential for the creation of a Think Tank, to bring the industry together and open a debate.

As I've discussed before, there is a clear link between the pressures that installers encounter and their mental health, the extent of which is well recognised now as a serious issue. Often, installers can feel isolated when issues or circumstances, many of which are outside their control,

conspire against them – they do not always know where to turn. Not only does this have a negative effect on their business operations, but on them as individuals. Both have damaging consequences. The key is that no one is alone and if you are experiencing challenges in your business, someone else is probably going through the same thing. Or they may have already dealt with the issue and could help advise on a potential solution. My belief is that if we can find a way of coming together and asking for help and collectively find ways to overcome them, the benefits could be huge.

Collaboration, debate and action

A Think Tank is the ideal place for this type of interaction, but how could it work? My vision is to create a forum for any installers across the country to access (regardless of whether they are a DGCOS member), which acts as a platform to discuss issues that affect the smooth-running of their businesses. This would be a confidential space where companies can be open about the challenges they face on a regular basis which interrupt their time, their service levels and the ability to grow or develop their businesses.

Through discussion and collaboration, we would then be able to identify actions that collectively we could take forward to help mitigate against these challenges over the short, medium, and long term. It may be that DGCOS would be able to build on resources already available, or that we need to work to develop strategies and initiatives that would offer support to the installer community.

“We already have a stable of resources that installer members can access.”

This approach is already built into the culture at DGCOS. We already have a stable of resources that installer members can access to help them run their business with confidence. The Think Tank would go further, though, and I envisage it to be a wider installer community, helping each other, sharing best practice, and identifying areas where we can help raise the standards across the industry by all pulling together.

What happens next?

I believe that there is an appetite within the industry for a forum of this nature, but I would be interested to hear what the fenestration community thinks. To develop the conversation further, I am inviting individuals or companies to contact me with their thoughts and opinions, the concerns that they feel need to be addressed and ideas about how best to achieve a more collaborative, joined-up thinking approach to our industry that will ultimately benefit everyone. Let's face our challenges head on and work together to make our businesses better, our lives less stressful, and raise standards across the industry.

Get in touch:
f.hussain@schemes.org.uk

Podcast: Mental Health Support for Tradespeople

WHAT SUPPORT IS OUT THERE?

Mental health support in the industry for tradespeople: why are mental health issues prevalent in our sector; what are the effects on productivity and business; what support is out there?

This is the title for Episode One of the new six-part special mental health and well-being podcast series brought to you by The Double Glazing and Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) and the National Home Improvement Council (NHIC). This is the first podcast series to delve deeper into our specific industry's pressing mental health and wellbeing challenges, and with the help of experts, offer insight and support.

In this first episode, Hannah Vickers, Chief of Staff at MACE Group and Head of Productivity at the Construction Leadership Council, talks with Faisal Hussain, DGCOS, Chief Executive and about how mental health and well-being impact productivity in the sector.

Rethinking the definition of productivity

For a podcast on productivity, it made sense that the starting point for Faisal and Hannah was to explore exactly what productivity is and the results were thought-provoking. Hannah makes the point that we should not always just view productivity through a financial lens. There is a far bigger definition which involves thinking beyond turnover or profit only, to really understand the mental, physical and financial costs of delivering works, materials, skills, accreditation, training and adding value. Faisal agreed that the first step for anyone struggling with a poor work-life balance is to take a step back, and really look at what their objective is. Not all new business

is the right business; not all customers are the right customers and often, going for growth only is a big driver for mental stress. Hannah also made the interesting point that from the get-go, our sector is such a visible one – it doesn't get more under the spotlight than working in people's homes which can often mean we're the first to get hit by bad press and negative views. This close and constant scrutiny provides a perfect storm for mental health struggles and added pressure which other sectors don't have.

Strategies around enhancing productivity

Hannah and Faisal then discuss helpful strategies for enhancing productivity from a position of strong self-awareness about what you want to achieve. It's often a case of prioritisation and good organisation, taking the time to plan projects properly rather than chasing your tail constantly to deliver, forcing multiple unnecessary visits to site; double working; errors creeping in and the stress of complaints. There is also so much help available that we can get from technology and adopting the principles of lean construction, but you need to give yourself the headspace to research and take on new information. Hannah also commented that we shouldn't underestimate the value of young people or apprentices and we shouldn't be scared or threatened by them. They are digital natives. Faisal made the great point that people working in construction and home improvements tend to naturally be problem solvers by nature. Plan and prepare and you will perform.

Thoughts for the future

As if we don't have enough on our plates as a sector, the challenges facing us, especially when it comes to decarbonisation works and retrofit are

massive. If many businesses are already at capacity now, asking for a further 60,000 heat pumps to be installed is simply not realistic. This is where we need to take a stand, go back to the beginning about what we're trying to achieve for our businesses, and let ourselves know it's ok sometimes not to be ok.

DGCOS Chief Executive, Faisal Hussain, concludes. "Rewind even five years, it was not ok to say you weren't ok, so I've personally been encouraged to see how much mental health and wellbeing have become more comfortable topics of conversation in our sector. We may not have totally broken down the taboo, but we've certainly started to chip away at it, something that DGCOS is determined to continue to do. I've always said if these podcasts help just one person, then our job is done. And I'd like to leave the last words to an installer who contacted us recently to say that after 40 plus years in the industry, he finally understands that he is struggling with burnout. He called to thank us for bringing light to this topic. He had been ignoring the way he was feeling and now he has the knowledge and confidence to understand it and do something about it."

Future episodes being released weekly feature more esteemed including Martin Lockham from Mates in Mind; George Jones from Cahill Renewables; Tony Steel from Band of Builders; GP Dr Rachel Cooper MBBS MRCGP; and Greg Jenkinson, from Step Change.

Listen to
Episode 1 of the
series here:

SCAN ME



Podcast: How To Achieve Work-Life Balance and Manage Demands

IS SELFISH BETTER THAN SELFLESS?

In this episode, guests Michael McGougan, Head of Membership at DGCOS and George Jones from Cahill Renewables discuss the issues surrounding work life balance.

Michael and George kick off the podcast by acknowledging that most organisations and individuals, especially those who are sole traders, have so much to deal with, including marketing, sales, purchasing, installing, invoicing and often, chasing payments. With days filled with delivering jobs and evenings full of admin, it's no surprise that achieving a work life balance is a big ask.

What does work life balance mean?

The podcast delves into what the phrase work-life balance means and highlights that it signifies something different to each of us. Michael makes the point that time is so precious to us all, but to deliver quality at work, we need to try to find quality downtime for ourselves, whether that be with friends, family, hobbies, etc. Michael says that from experience, the best way to start to achieve that balance between making money while removing stress, is to introduce structure into our lives.

Digital noise versus personal discipline

Agreeing with this, George comments how technology has made switching off so much harder. We can become real slaves to our inboxes. We've all done that 'I'll just quickly check my emails' at the weekend or in

the evenings. But it can become relentless, so taking a step back and introducing practical measures can be helpful. It could be as simple as having a work phone and a private phone or actually finishing at 5pm. Ironically, technology has introduced so much flexibility that it is a massive cause of stress. Another suggestion is to understand yourself and your strengths and weaknesses. Are you an early bird or a night owl? We can't be both, so maybe structure your work around times when you know you're most productive. If you're a list person, maybe try prioritising by using a short 'to do' immediately list, and then a midterm to longer list which isn't constantly in your line of view.

Delegation is not failing

The whole area of delegation is then put under the spotlight in the episode. Michael comments that sometimes he feels that he has failed when he delegates. He is now trying to spin this on its head and see that through delegation, you are giving someone else an opportunity – and often, they will succeed at the task at hand. We need to try to lose the fear of letting go and see how we're actually empowering others to support us in our businesses and alleviate stress.

Time Management

Our sector is an ever-changing environment, and we may think we've got our days planned out, but then something comes up that takes priority. Being reactive is far more stressful than being proactive. George comments how introducing clear methods of communication

with your clients can often mean they mirror you, so they are more understanding if things go wrong. It can also mean they respect your time more too.

It might sound straight forward – but take a break! Sometimes the smallest changes in our habits make the biggest difference. Try not to 'work' through lunch. Somehow, we seem to think that by working through lunch, we get more done. We're all human and have our limits, with 20 minutes often cited as the optimum time for us to be able to focus properly before needing a break. Hydration, nutritional foods, and at least 30 minutes of sunlight every day is critical. We all know how physical health and wellbeing are the foundations to our mental health. Giving ourselves the opportunity to decompress is so important.

Michael concludes by discussing how DGCOS' focus is to be every members' added resource to help them get time back in their day, give practical support and above all, be there to give reassurance as the critical friend to rely on. And that's probably what we should all take away – being open, empathic and sensitive to our own needs will in the long run, promote better mental health and reduce stress. Sometimes, being selfish is better than being selfless.

Listen to
Episode 2 of the
series here:

SCAN ME



Podcast: Managing Loneliness and Working Away From Home

CHECKING IN WITH EACH OTHER

In this third episode, we welcome Tony Steel, Operations Director at Band of Builders and Jonathon Moorhouse, Head of Business from DGCOS. The podcast explores loneliness, how much of a problem it is; strategies to manage loneliness and working away from home; the downside of using drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms, and signposting to hubs that are there to help.

What is loneliness?

Jonathon kicks off the podcast by posing the question: what is loneliness? He comments that it's a misconception that loneliness is only something that you feel when you are on your own. You can be with people or a group and still feel lonely. Sometimes work contracts can last weeks away at a time and of course, we all miss our families when we're away from them.

Tony adds that no matter how well you off you are in terms of friends and family, there are always going to be situations where you are actually going to go through loneliness and really feel it.

Tony adds that there are always going to be situations where you feel lonely, regardless of how much you are surrounded by friends and family. When you recognise this, it can become clearer to accept that there are strategies that you can put in place, even when you're working away from home. Sometimes just even having the awareness that you're getting sucked into unhealthy lifestyles – a couple of drinks at the

bar every evening – can help prevent really bad habits developing that are detrimental to mental health. The topic of drugs and alcohol is probably one of the most difficult to get people to admit to. Avoidance and shying away usually means the loneliness, often mixed with feelings of guilt, builds to become overwhelming.

This is backed up by stark statistics: in 2021, 507 construction workers took their own lives, the equivalent to two workers every day*.

Help is at hand

The podcast also explores good ways of coping with loneliness. If you are working away for particularly longer periods of time there are options out there like local clubs, or some sort of sport. In many instances, physical exercise has an immediate and really positive effect on your mental health. Thirty minutes of sport a week is the same dopamine release as small levels of anti-depressants. Pack your trainers, have a walk, run, play golf, explore new surroundings, run or use a hotel gym where possible. Fresh air is magical.

Seek support from dedicated groups like Band of Builders and others listed in the show notes. Jonathon shared that he personally reached out to Andy's Man Club when his brother took his own life and commented: One of Andy Man's Club advisors got me through one of the toughest times of my life.

Whether it's through organisations, charities, friends or colleagues, the first step is be open and share your feelings of loneliness. We can all step

"There are always going to be situations where you feel lonely, regardless of how much you are surrounded by friends and family."

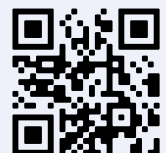
in too and play our role by getting in touch with people to see how they're doing. Checking in with your colleagues who are working remotely can really change the course of their day.

Maybe ask yourself, who should you be checking in with? Equally, if you are reading this and struggling now, regardless of whether you're a DGCOS member or not, we urge you to reach out for confidential 24/7 support by texting **HARDHAT** on **85258**."

*Reference: [Britsafe](#)

Listen to Episode 3 of the series here:

SCAN ME



New DGCOS Conservatory Best Practice Survey

WHAT CHALLENGES DO INSTALLERS FACE?

Understanding customers is key to being able to provide first class customer service. At DGCOS, we continuously strive to find out what challenges our members face in their daily working lives, so that as an organisation we can provide the optimum level of support. We recently put the focus on conservatories.

Our motivation at DGCOS is to provide consumers with the best possible protection and advice for their door, windows and conservatory installations. We can only do this if we have a thorough understanding of our members, how they operate, the challenges they face and what they need in terms of support. Our focus recently has been on giving our membership team the time and space to delve into the working lives of our installer members, to gain a greater understanding of how the DGCOS team can further support them. Knowing their business is our business, and this is particularly important in the conservatory sector which is subject to complex builds.

Specialist skills required

Part of this project was to conduct a survey of our members who install conservatories to dig deeper into the factors they have to consider, where they might have difficulties, and how they approach a conservatory installation from the beginning.

Installing a conservatory is a specialist skill and the current trend has long since moved away from a basic frame with windows and a glass roof. Consumer demand now is for more sophisticated structures that add value to a home, and which have a certain, more modern aesthetic.

There are also other important factors to consider that apply to any conservatory structure, outside of design: Location, proximity to trees, rooflines, manholes, guttering, soakaways, piling, base work – all these things need to be assessed and the client advised accordingly, to prevent any future costly call-backs. During this research the main reasons for call-backs included leaking, door adjustments, gutters, condensation and even subsidence.

In order of priority, when first meeting a consumer who wants a conservatory quote, the following were the main considerations:

- 1) Customer needs and the purpose they want the conservatory to serve
- 2) Survey and design
- 3) Planning permission and building regulations
- 4) Ground conditions

To help address the above parameters, just under half of those surveyed carried out test digs or inspections and most involved someone from building regulations before the build, when filling in and throughout the whole build. Interestingly, it was a 50/50 split between installers who carry out base work themselves and those who outsource. All included the base work costs in their quotations.

Collaboration gets the best results

Another interesting outcome of the survey was the importance of working closely with fabricators, seeking advice on the specification of the design, using results of site visit and plans to help finalise important features such as roof pitch, rooflights and box gutters. One of the recurring

comments about box gutters was the requirement for installers to stress to homeowners even at design stage, box gutters only work properly and remain protected under guarantee if they are regularly maintained.

On the subject of guarantees, most manufacturers offered their installers guarantees between 1 and 10 years, although one installer said 40 years. We also asked members about how they deal with spontaneous glass breakage – a subject we'll be focusing on soon for the industry – and 70% said they'd replace it immediately while the rest said it wasn't covered.

The information gained from this survey is important to everyone involved in the conservatory sector. From installers looking for best practice, to fabricators looking for product innovation inspiration, to our membership team who support our members with all aspects of their business. We can all benefit from gaining a full understanding of this specific area of expertise, procured from the experts on the ground.

Derived from best practice observed over the last decade or so, DGCOS has also produced a Guide to Conservatories, which offers advice on how to approach a conservatory installation or for anyone who is looking to diversify into this area. The rewards can be great, but knowledge is power, and they should only be undertaken by an expert team.

Both reports will be available to download from the DGCOS website in the coming weeks: installers.dgcoss.org.uk

Podcast: Taking a holistic approach to supporting your team

DESTIGMATISING THE ISSUES

In the latest instalment of our mental health podcast series, we talk to Martin Lockham, Head of Fundraising and Growth at Mates in Mind, one of the UK's leading charities supporting mental health awareness within the workplace, and Louise Auld, DGCOS Executive Assistant. This podcast discusses ways in which companies can support their staff who may be suffering with mental health issues, and how important it is that there are cultural changes which enable us to destigmatise the issue to support open communication.

Including soft skills in management training

The key to being able to recognise when a team member is struggling and being able to act on it is something we can all take responsibility for but the communication about mental health within organisations starts from the top. Culturally, we need to break down the stigma of mental health and accept it as an issue that can and should be openly discussed without embarrassment or fear.

Often it is the case that managers are in post because they are good at their jobs, and they may have received some training to make them more effective in that role. More often, this training will not include how to spot the signs of mental health issues, or how to start conversations, how to listen and what employee assistance programmes can be put in place.

Martin and Louise both advocate taking a holistic approach to the

“Culturally, we need to break down the stigma of mental health and accept it as an issue that can and should be openly discussed without embarrassment or fear.”

wellbeing of employees, treating them as individuals and being able to create an environment where mental health does not just fall under the HR remit.

Look after each other

Key to having a healthy approach to mental health lies within all of us. Martin suggests that all of us should be able to recognise the signs of stress and anxiety in ourselves to be able to act, but also to be able to look after each other. Team members often know their colleagues well and are able to know if someone is not quite themselves. Having implicit permission to ask simply, 'Are you OK?' of each other and having the space to have that conversation is as important as having access to support systems and more formal help. Looking after each other and being aware when someone is potentially struggling can often be the start of a conversation which leads to a turning point in accessing help and being understood.

Employee support systems

Both Martin and Louise have experience of what support systems employers can put in place that staff can access. After all, a healthy

workforce equals less absenteeism, fewer mistakes and greater productivity, so both employee and employer benefit. As well as being able to listen and encouraging peer to peer support, companies should be looking at employee assistance programmes, access to 24 hour helplines, putting contact information in buildings and even pay slips, text services and medical schemes.

Mates in Mind has a free, confidential 24/7 hotline called Be A Mate, which is available to anyone in our industry.

Just text **HARDHAT** free on **85258** and a trained volunteer will be available to help, whatever the issue. This is not just open to DGCOS members, but to anyone in the industry who feels they would benefit from expert, confidential support.

Listen to
Episode 4 of the
series here:

SCAN ME



Calling all double glazing installers...

WHAT CAN DGCOS DO FOR YOU?



We are passionate about improving the industry, protecting consumers and supporting our members with a wide range of benefits, giving them all round business support.



Faisal Hussain

Chief Executive Officer

Get in touch to discover the incredible installer benefits from DGCOS.

DGCOS is a consumer protection scheme for the installation of double glazing products. Being a member of DGCOS shows that as an installer you are committed to complying with high standards of consumer protection.



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Podcast: Improving Wellbeing and Mental Health

THE CHALLENGES FACING EVERYONE

This episode of our mental health podcast series is one that is particularly relevant to all of us, regardless of where we work or what we do. Dr Rachael Cooper and Cathy O'Hara have many years of experience in working with people with mental health issues, and they bring their vast knowledge to this broadcast.

Dr Cooper has been a GP in Newcastle for 22 years and a significant amount of her work involves dealing with patients with mental health challenges. Cathy started her career in HR for a construction firm and has worked for DGCOS for the last 16 years.

Identifying mental health problems

When patients approach Dr Cooper with mental health issues, they often use the word 'stress', where in reality what people are suffering from is anxiety or depression. Symptoms may include mild worrying to full-blown panic attacks, catastrophising that something bad will happen, an inability to get out of bed, lack of motivation, drinking too much and/or taking drugs, feeling restless and unsatisfied, and not sleeping properly. Dr Cooper also speaks about a little-

known condition called anhedonia, which is the inability to enjoy yourself or find pleasure in anything. This is a recognised symptom of mental health conditions like depression and can manifest in feeling numb, flat, and not being interested in anything. All these symptoms indicate that help is needed, and it is important to acknowledge that suffering is not a weakness, but a form of illness that needs to be treated.

Building resilience and self-care

Resilience is the ability to cope with situations and challenges, and the better our physical and mental fitness, the better our resilience and the more we get out of life.

Looking after physical health is as important as taking care of our mental health and the connection between mind and body should not be underestimated. Exercise and being outdoors are both shown to have a positive impact on mood. Eating the right food, having hobbies, surrounding ourselves with positive people and finding support systems all go hand in hand in helping to boost our mental health. Developing a growth mindset and continuing to learn and develop are all positive habits to embrace.

To help with self-care, social media breaks, practising gratitude, listening to inspirational podcasts, and using Apps are all tools that provide support. We are more likely now to be working in isolation so finding time to socialise with positive friends is important. Equally, bad habits need to be broken: drinking, drugs and bad eating habits and behaviours all contribute to a negative state of mind.

Organisations that can help

Cathy and Dr Cooper highlight three organisations which have expertise in the area of mental health treatment, whether that is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and talking therapies for anxiety or counselling. A GP can also provide access to services and may prescribe medication in more serious cases.

Lighthouse provides support exclusively for workers in the construction industry. Mates in Mind is a charity which raises awareness and aims to destigmatise the conversation around mental health, and Band of Builders specifically helps tradespeople in need. Often it is men who find it most difficult to talk if they are struggling with their mental health. As the construction industry is a predominantly male industry, this is a vital organisation.

Mates in Mind has a free, confidential 24/7 hotline called Be A Mate, which is available to anyone in our industry. Just text **HARDHAT** free on **85258** and a trained volunteer will be available to help, whatever the issue. This is not just open to DGCOS members, but to anyone in the industry who feels they would benefit from expert, confidential support.

This podcast emphasises the fact that there is no reason to suffer in silence and that help is available. If you need support, it is not a sign of weakness and you are not alone.

“Looking after physical health is as important as taking care of our mental health.”

Listen to
Episode 5 of the
series here:

SCAN ME



Podcast: Accessing debt support and achieving financial health

TAKING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION

In the final instalment of our mental health podcast series, we talk to Greg Jenkinson, Debt Advisor from StepChange, one of the best UK impartial and free Debt advisory services and Michael McGougan, DGCOS Head of Membership. This podcast discusses ways in which to take control of your financial position, minimise your financial stress and understand what support is available. We also discuss the options around debt solutions and how DGCOS support their members' financial health.

What is financial health?

We all need to be able to maintain our day-to-day budgets. Good financial health is being able to pay bills on time and have some left for personal use. Poor financial health is where you become reliant upon credit, not able to pay those important bills and find that you are juggling too much. Contributing factors will have a knock on effect with your financial health. You could unexpectedly be out of

work for reasons outside your control or have a physical injury and those days/weeks off could have a huge effect on cash flow.

Recognising your situation and taking control

There is a misconception about debt that if you have it, you have failed. This is simply not true. It is so easy to take the approach of "I will deal with that another day". The further down the line we push it, the further the worry increases. A poor financial situation is not a reflection on the person themselves. Two thirds of people who find themselves in a poor situation have actually not been foolish with money. There is no shame in asking for help and once you start to address the issue, of which is daunting to many, the easier the steps become moving forward. One step could be as small as checking your bank statement each week and seeing where you could be more comfortable in making some little changes.

What support is out there?

StepChange offers free impartial debt advice on a personal and business level. They will listen and understand and will be able to advise on the best course of action dependant on your financial health. They are experts with many years of experience and will assist with arranging payment plans for loans and credit cards, or breathing space with organisations. If you are a member of DGCOS, you have many avenues to take to get the help and support you need. They have dedicated account managers who will be able to offer you advice and guidance on which ever avenue that best suits your situation: help with policies and procedures, getting a good accountant, or exploring avenues like income protection. They can even offer you guidance on how to do a simple excel spreadsheet to help you take control.

Take the free help. You will wish you had done it sooner!

StepChange has a free, confidential online helpline that is available 24hours a day 365 days a year: www.stepchange.org

You can also speak to one of their advisors on **02800 138 1111** Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 2pm.

"There is a misconception about debt that if you have it, you have failed. This is simply not true. It is so easy to take the approach of "I will deal with that another day". The further down the line we push it, the further the worry increases."

Listen to
Episode 6 of the
series here:

SCAN ME



Poor Service Levels and the Impact on Business

COMMITTING TO BASIC SERVICE LEVELS

Outside of work, DGCOS Chief Executive, Faisal Hussain, is undergoing significant home renovations, and his experiences with different types of tradespeople have proven how important good service levels are in terms of winning and retaining customers. Here he outlines important factors installers may like to consider in their own businesses.

It has been an interesting exercise trying to renovate my home. When trying to engage with various types of installers, I have experienced a surprising amount of miscommunication, lack of responses to requests for quotes, wildly differing costs between suppliers, and evasiveness when it comes to deposit and payment protection. Not for the first time, it occurred to me that running a business that involves dealing with the consumer, installing products and supplying service is so much more than just the product and the installation. One of the worst things about my experience is the frustration, not to mention the waste of time and the resulting delays to the project, which could almost always have been avoided. So what are the pitfalls of providing poor service, and what should we be mindful of in our industry?

Making business harder

The Financial Times reported in August that construction companies in the UK are going out of business at the highest rate in a decade. Unforeseen challenges such as Covid and Brexit have meant disruptions to the supply chain and labour shortages, so surely it is just logical that installers should be doing all they can to future-proof their businesses. By providing poor service levels, organisations are sabotaging their own performance.

There are always going to be issues that cannot be predicted in an installation project: bad weather, structural issues, and delays in product supply for example. Most consumers understand this and generally accept it. It is the avoidable issues that cause problems. For example, I have approached a number of companies for quotes, and some do not even reply. I understand they may be too busy to take on the work – but tell me and I can move on. Some companies who have quoted and have asked for a deposit have no idea what I mean when I ask them about payment protection, particularly where they ask for a deposit. Either the company has no policy in place, or the contractor who I am speaking to is unaware of it. In terms of making a buying decision, I have already discounted them – therefore what could have been a perfectly decent installer has lost business because of a lack basic service levels.

Small changes lead to more business

At DGCOS we understand that our installers are experts in what they do: they know their products, building regulations, and how to do a quality installation. However, what is not always the case is how to manage the softer skills that all business owners need, which can often come down to better communication.

In the days of social media and platforms such as Trustpilot, Google reviews, and Facebook, bad news travels fast. Consumers are far more likely to post negative rather than positive reviews. Like it or not, consumers trust online reviews and focussing on service levels is one way to help build your reputation. If your service levels are not up to scratch, a consumer will choose another supplier.

Basic service levels

- Communicate. If you are too busy to take on the work when you receive a request for a quote, tell the customer. It just takes a few minutes and is basic politeness.
- Do what you say you are going to do. If you have committed to a site visit, for example, turn up when you say you are going to or let them know if you can't. Your customer's time is just as valuable as yours.
- Put service level agreements in place, not just for the customer, but for any employees. Make sure they understand the importance of getting back to customers, taking pride in how they work, their appearance and their attitude. First impressions count and an employee that has not read the memo can do damage.
- Educate the customer. Make them aware at an early stage about what they can expect, what happens next, timeframes and possible delays. Don't leave them guessing.

DGCOS members have access to support

DGCOS installers benefit from a range of support measures to help guide them through their journey with a consumer. End users benefit from payment protection as standard, and I know from my recent experience how valuable that is, so use it as a selling point. We also advise on all the softer skills that installation companies may need help with: generating leads, marketing planning, managing an online presence – all these things that are vital to building and keeping a reputation and being seen as a trustworthy company. Companies that embrace a full service approach will be winning and keeping more business – and adding to their bottom line.

DGCOS Announces New 6 and 2 year Registration Options

OFFERING THE MOST RELEVANT PROTECTION

To support the changing market, The Double Glazing & Conservatory Ombudsman Scheme (DGCOS) is introducing shorter 6 and 2 year registration options for members, in addition to its current standard of 10 years, allowing members to offer more relevant protection on installations and replacements.

Faisal Hussain, DGCOS Chief Executive, explains the thought-process behind the decision: "Did you know that under Competent Person Scheme requirements installers must provide 6 years' financial protection for consumers when replacing windows and doors? And, that some Competent Person Schemes also only require 6 years' consumer protection too. As an industry, we have always offered 10 years as standard, and this could be an unnecessary expense. We want to give our members the option to provide either a new standard 6-year registration or a 10-year 'added value' registration. Consumers would still have free access to all our services, under the 6 and 2 year options, which includes our advice line, mediation and access



Registration options that make sense

to the Ombudsman.

"The new 2-year registration level is specifically designed for smaller jobs such as replacement handles, locks or individual units, where a 10-year guarantee is neither needed nor required.

"By offering different registration levels, we are reducing the financial burden on installers at a time when

companies have to compete for every penny earned, and when costs are increasing. Installers can still meet their legal requirements towards their customers but can do it at a more accessible price point, something that we believe will appeal to medium sized businesses, in particular. As it stands, the 10-year package is still vital for companies who are FENSA members to match their requirements on guarantees.

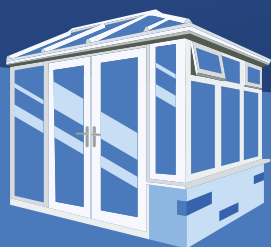
"As I have spoken about before, overdelivering on consumer rights by having 10 year guarantees in place adds to the wider cost for all of us across the industry. More information will be provided when the new registration options go live, which is expected to be in 2024."

For more information about DGCOS and membership benefits, visit installers.dgc.org.uk

"Did you know that under Competent Person Scheme requirements installers must provide 6 years' financial protection for consumers when replacing windows and doors?"

Are you a double glazing installer?

DGCOS can help you at every stage of your installer journey, including...



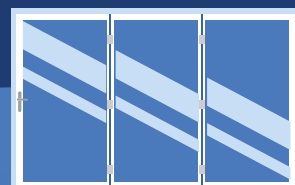
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Support setting up and registering your business



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Helping you close your leads



Installing

Making it easier for you to install



Customer Service

Making sure you and your customers are satisfied



Annual Review

Looking at the previous year, preparing for the year ahead

Get in touch today to discover our incredible installer benefits, designed to help you succeed.
info@dgcoss.org.uk

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Arrange a call with our Chief Executive, Faisal Hussain, by emailing him at f.hussain@schemes.org.uk