

EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

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When the strain begins to show

Candidates are rejecting promotion as employees struggle with stress. Maxine Boersma reports

Economies are under stress – and so are employees. A review in November of sickness absence* revealed an estimated one in six workers in England and Wales is affected by anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress.

Similarly, in June last year, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development surveyed 592 organisations for its Absence Management Report, produced in partnership with Simplyhealth, and found stress is now the top cause of long-term absence and that for the second year running there had been an increase in reported mental health problems.

The report concluded that the high cost of such absence makes it an urgent issue for business leaders.

But some leaders are not coping too well themselves. Last October saw a high profile example of this when Antonio Horta-Osorio, chief executive of Lloyds Banking Group, shocked the City by taking leave of absence due to severe exhaustion, only returning to his desk this month.

There are expected to be changes to

the nature of his team and his responsibilities to help avoid future stresses.

Such events at this level can unsettle investors; the bank's share price was adversely affected. And the high-profile nature of the chief executive's post means that any breakdown quickly becomes very public. So what lessons are there for those at, or on their way to, the boss's chair?

Moira Benigson, managing partner of executive search company, the MBS Group, has found some executives are choosing not to apply for the top posts, preferring to serve instead on several boards as a non-executive director or diversify in other ways. Her firm has produced a report based on interviews with 40 candidates who had recently rejected top roles.

For the first time, Ms Benigson is also seeing a global trend of strong candidates rejecting opportunities in favour of a role which will make the most of their skills but will shield them from the public demands of the top job. Job satisfaction, a happy family life, less travelling and emotional well-being are increasingly being placed above financial reward.

Michael Sinclair, clinical director of London's City Psychology Group, is one of the medical experts trying to prevent employees from breaking down.

He wrote *Fear and Self Loathing in*



A doctor urges business leaders to learn to compromise more, reduce information overload, and modify their expectations

the City: a guide to keeping sane in the Square Mile and his next book, *The Little CBT Workbook: a step by step guide to gaining control of your life*, is published next month.

"I am seeing more and more chief executives come to me either while they are at work or once they have been signed off," he says. "Those that have been signed off are often in an acute state of crisis and depression

