

IS MR MARK MOODY-STUART A "GREEDY BASTARD"?

In September I compared Mr Moody-Stuart with the Captain of the ill-fated Titanic. The recent devastating cuts and closures at Shell prove just how prophetic that comparison turned out to be.

It is all so far removed from the rosy press articles about Mr Moody-Stuart that coincided with his elevation to the top managerial post in the Royal Dutch/Shell Group. Shell's PR people did a great job. It was almost as if the Pope had taken over from Mr Herkstroter.

Readers were informed in an FT article that "a strong religious ethic pervades his large family"... "Two sisters and his wife Judy are Quakers"... "His brother runs Transparency International, a pressure group dedicated to more openness in public life and is the author of the book 'Grand Corruption'..."

The imagery of a Shell Chairman with a high moral background was reinforced by the emphatic pronouncements made by Mr Moody-Stuart about his absolute commitment to Shell's Statement of General Business Principles. He said that the principles, which include fairness and respect for people, were "non-contestable and non-negotiable". Impressive stuff. He appeared to be seeking Sainthood, rather than the mere Knighthood achieved by his predecessor. Is Mr Moody-Stuart genuinely someone of exceptional moral fibre, or just another selfish, ruthless, corporate "Fat Cat"?

An emphatic answer was provided by an executive pay survey published in the Sunday Times on 25th October 1998. It stated that Mr Moody-Stuart is overpaid by a massive £568,887 per annum. The latest bout of "downsizing" will have the happy effect of generating even more share incentive, bonus etc. for him and his colleagues. How on earth can this be morally justified? His hypocrisy is absolutely breathtaking. No wonder that John Edmonds, the President of the TUC Congress, recently described executive pay as the "politics of the pig trough". Mr Moody-Stuart falls within Mr Edmonds description of "a greedy bastard", as defined in the article.

Mr Moody-Stuart could recover some vestige of moral authority by ploughing back the £568,887 overpayment so that less Shell staff would need to be thrown onto the scrap heap. He could surely scrape by on the remaining £1.7 million per annum from his £2.2 million plus package.

According to the latest press statement, he now wants to move further and faster with the pace of "restructuring". Comments that many Shell staff must have read with great trepidation. It seems to me that the balance between the interests of shareholders and employees has swung too far in one direction. Shell cannot legitimately claim to have respect for people as a core principle when its own employees have to live in a climate of fear and uncertainty.

Unfortunately, from what I have seen, despite all of the PR inspired guff about Mr Moody-Stuart's lofty ideals, he only pays lip service to the principles set out in the STATEMENT. This is in stark contrast to his predecessor, who displayed a genuine desire to uphold them, even under difficult circumstances.

I note that Shell Transport conveniently offers a "hyperlink" connection between its own Internet website and that of Transparency International. Perhaps the courtesy afforded to the organisation run by his brother could be extended to the Don Marketing website, which contains a wealth of information about Shell? This would avoid any whiff of impropriety.

My interest in the integrity of Mr Moody-Stuart is simple. If he had been prepared to uphold Shell's Statement of General Business Principles, then the problems my family has had with Shell UK would have been resolved long ago. In view of his ludicrously over-optimistic forecasts at the May AGM (when the financial icebergs were already on the horizon) and his abject failure to uphold Shell's code of business principles, he should resign. This action would make way for someone willing and able to restore Shell's standing at a time when it is being completely eclipsed by a more talented management at BP that is hiring staff, not firing them. BP's success in growing its business has been better for its employees and its shareholders.

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