

Risky Business? The Value of Employing Offenders and Ex-offenders: An Interview with James Timpson, Chief Executive of Timpson.

Abstract:

This interview with James Timpson, Chief Executive of Timpson retailers, explores his innovative approach to recruitment and empowerment in the workplace. James Timpson is passionate about the employment of ex-offenders, working closely with the prison service in the UK and creating a workplace that invests in its employees. This interview offers some interesting insights into how organisations can contribute positively to society and engage seriously with improving our communities. Drawing on James's insights, we provide a commentary on the impact that James's work can have on ex-offenders in terms of reducing reoffending and improving the lives of a vulnerable group of people, through creating a workplace culture that emphasises empowerment. James shows how organisations can support ex-offenders and simultaneously ensure the success of the company. In fact, he shows how these two things can go hand-in-hand.

Keywords: Employment, Empowerment, Ex-offenders, Organisational Culture, Prison Work, Rehabilitation

Introduction

James Timpson is the Chief Executive of Timpson, a family retail business that trades from over 1,500 shops across the UK and offers services such as shoe repairs, key cutting, dry cleaning and photo processing. James describes himself as a cobbler by trade and refers to his management style as 'upside down management' in which he encourages individuals at all levels of the organisation to take the lead. James is keen to empower employees (or colleagues as James refers to them) with autonomy, creativity and entrepreneurialism. There is much in this interview that merits further consideration but we have found the milieu in which James Timpson's approach to recruitment takes place to be of particular interest. Timpson are pioneers in the recruitment of ex-offenders. In our commentary we will focus on demonstrating the significance that these ideas have on theories of rehabilitation and the employment of offenders. James proposes a strategy that, whilst we acknowledge does come with a certain amount of risk, can have an immense benefit to a wide variety of groups, individuals and organisations.

Timpson currently has a turnover in excess of £250 million and whilst the company implements many innovative strategies to achieve this their inclusive recruitment strategy has generated considerable excitement and interest in the organisation. Timpson (and James personally) work with the prison service to identify potential candidates within prison who have ‘the right kind of personality’ to work at Timpson upon their release. James and his team implement a closely managed process of selection, training and mentoring whilst offenders are still in prison, these individuals are then provided with the opportunity to secure employment with Timpson upon walking out the prison gates. This process has led to ten per cent of Timpson colleagues being recruited directly from prison. This is particularly important to note when we consider that many employers are reluctant to hire individuals with criminal records. Holzer (1996) conducted research in the US which examined attitudes toward hiring a person with a criminal record and found that, without regard to the offence, nearly two-thirds of all employers reported that they would not knowingly hire a person with a criminal record. Employers indicated that they would be more likely to hire welfare recipients or individuals with minimal work experience than someone with a criminal record, whether real or suspected. More recent studies have shown that these adverse attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders are still prevalent (Fletcher, 2001; Varghese et al, 2010; Batastini et al 2017).

So, how does James turn what could be considered a risky strategy into a success? This interview emphasises the rewards in hiring ex-offenders, demonstrating the value that they can add to a business and the important role that it can play in society. To ensure this recruitment strategy is effective, Timpson explains the importance of developing an organisational culture that values and empowers its employees. After presenting the interview with James Timpson, we will then provide a commentary, drawing on the literature related to

rehabilitation, self-efficacy and work place empowerment, to demonstrate the important implications that Timpson's work with offenders can have.

Interview with James Timpson

What is Timpson?

Timpson comprises two businesses – a chain of nine hundred Timpson shops where shoe repairs, key cutting and watch repairs are the norm. Dry cleaning services are also available in some of our shops. Timpson also operate three photo businesses: Max Spelman (located in Northern England), Snappy Snaps (mainly located in the South of England), and the Tesco photo business (in stores throughout the UK). Timpson's business is based on small premises that employ (on average) 2.2 colleagues per shop. Timpson serve four hundred thousand customers a week and employ three thousand, six hundred people.

What makes Timpson different from others?

The organisational culture of Timpson is the defining issue. Our culture is upside down management. I am a great believer that great businesses do good things and the more good things you do, the better your business becomes. For example, in conventional organisations, the Board and Top Management Team decide what the strategy is after 'consulting' with senior management and others. They end up asking the people that actually do the work to implement The Board of Directors' view of the strategy. Some companies operate a sort of aggressive, hard sell, with a high turnover of colleagues. Many would view that approach as a success. Our business is very different. The most important people in our business are those branch colleagues who serve customers. Everybody else's job is to help, support, and guide them. We can't tell them what to do. It is no one's job description in our business to tell anybody what to do. Anybody caught doing so face the consequences.

What part do you play as Chief Executive?

I visit our shops all the time looking for examples of where our teams excel. There is something about being in the middle part of the business that makes you want to start telling people what to do. Especially when things start to go wrong. But you are not allowed to in our business, you have to let it go. And the reason why that works is because we only have two rules. Rule one is: you put the money in the till. Simple. We still catch two colleagues a week who fail to do that. Rule two is: you look the part and behave as if you are in front of your granny.

Do staff have discretion in what they do?

Apart from a few common-sense things staff can do whatever they like. Some of our common-sense rules include: opening and closing the shop on time; no noise [radios]; no friends in the shop; no eating in front of customers; no stubble. They can charge whatever they like, order whatever stock they want, do whatever promotions they want. They can give stuff away for nothing, put posters up and even paint the shop whatever colour they like if it makes them happy. While strategy is set by the Board, the business is run by those colleagues who serve customers and put money in the till. They are the innovators who sort out the problems and make four hundred thousand decisions a week, ensuring that the business works.

How do you recruit the right people?

One of our strengths is that we promote only from within. Our culture is clear, and we are completely open about it and if anybody goes against our culture, they find their happiness elsewhere. Of course, a culture only works if you can recruit the people that you want. We

don't bother with CVs. The only point of a CV is for a name and a phone number, - the rest is normally pure fantasy. We don't bother with psychometric testing, we don't put everyone in a room with one-way mirrors etc. We interview anybody who applies to us for a job and during a brief chat we try to work out what sort of personality they have. I can't train someone to have a great personality, but I can train them to be a great key cutter. So, all I am interested in is finding the right personalities.

I want people who are happy, up for it, keen, a bit sparky, slightly eccentric in some ways. If they have a great personality they will be with the company for life. I don't want new staff that our colleagues don't want to work with. As a leader, this is my primary concern. Every week I have a list that is put on my desk of all the colleagues whose best isn't good enough and we have got to exit them out of the business. So, we are absolutely brutal on this. And to me it's important.

Do you have any problems recruiting staff?

No, we maintain a waiting list of people who want to work for us that we recruit from when a vacancy arises. If you have a vacancy and you are desperate you will recruit someone who isn't really quite good enough. We have a waiting list of over two hundred and eighty potential colleagues who we have already interviewed and liked for our business. This approach has been the key to solving recruitment problems over the years. I think that can be the same for any business. You have got to have people lined up ready to take the vacancies that aren't yet there.

How do you make the business special for employees?

The way to make a business special is to do things that reward your colleagues for being amazing. Pay and bonus is not enough to say well done and thank you. Each year we probably spend £600,000 – £700,000 saying thank you to our colleagues. And if we ever had a bad run and we didn't make any money the last thing I would stop spending my money on is the way we amaze our colleagues.

If you want to say thank you to everybody in your business the first thing to do is give everybody their birthday off as an extra day off. It's a great way of recognising someone's birthday and they also get a card and a present. We have several holiday homes so everyone can go on a free holiday in one of them. If anybody gets married, they get an extra week off and our driver takes the bride to the church in a Bentley and so on. It is not just about giving someone a great pay packet, I need to be able to say thank you in other ways and the best way is to involve their family. It is great if we can support them when times are tough by lending them money, that is great. If we can, we help them go on a holiday of their dreams or sort a medical problem out or buy a stair lift to help their mum come and live with them instead of going into a home.

You mentioned promoting from within, does this always work?

I have learnt over the years that no matter how hard you try, if you don't surround yourself with really good people, it just doesn't work. You have got to be brutal in making sure that those people who aren't good enough (and they could be at any level of the business) don't stay in that job. If we promote someone and it doesn't work out, we demote them back to what they were doing before. It's amazing how happy they then become. We have more ex-area managers working for us than area managers.

Why do you recruit from prisons?

Twenty-five per cent of men over the age of eighteen in this country have a criminal conviction that is more than a driving offence. It could be for a serious crime or throwing a trolley in a canal or fighting when they were seventeen years old. But it means that so many people are excluded from the job of their dreams and many people end up living (sort of) a lie, not just to their employers but often to their partners and everyone else because they are embarrassed about what's happened or they have seen it as a restriction to their future.

I am interested in personalities rather than what they have done. So that is why ten per cent of our colleagues are recruited from prison. And I am sure we have more than ten per cent who work for us who have been to prison and have got criminal convictions, some just haven't told us, and that's fine.

How did Timpson's start recruiting from prisons?

Twelve years ago, I went to several prisons in the UK. In one prison I was shown around by a young man with a great personality. So, I slipped him my business card and said 'listen when you are out, give me a ring and I will give you a job'. A few months later his mum phoned me to say he was being released and that I had promised him a job. I said 'fine, he can start on Saturday'. He is now a manager and is very successful in the business.

I thought perhaps I should get more recruits like him. I found that those we recruited from prison were better than those recruited in the conventional manner. But there is one proviso, when it goes wrong, it goes really wrong. But when it goes right, I am recruiting much better people than I would normally be able to recruit. So I thought I would go and get some more. In addition, several of my colleagues who had been with the company for a long time (many in very senior positions) expressed relief as they had kept their convictions secret. This

meant that we have an open culture where everyone is accepted. We began working with five prisons, now we work with seventy.

What training do prisoners get to enable them to take a job on release?

I remember visiting a training academy in one prison where people were doing mundane tasks such as making leather belts to put the prison officers' keys in. There was no inspiration at all. So, I decided to create my own training academies. I thought that I might as well recruit them while they were in prison, train them up so that when they were released they were already up and running; they had more confidence, they had the necessary skills and we also knew what they were like.

We opened the first academy in Liverpool where we taught them how to repair shoes, provide excellent customer service and process work orders. We found it was a great way of training up colleagues and getting the whole business involved because we sent many of our existing colleagues to the academy to take part in the training.

Today we have nine shops run by colleagues who go back to prison at night. They wake up in the morning, they travel to the shop, they have our keys and unlock the door and work in the shop all day. During the day they do the paperwork, the banking, order the stock, serve customers, then lock the door at night and go back to prison. And our customers don't know or care, they just want great service and they are served by people who are really good at what they do.

Are there any drawbacks in recruiting ex-offenders?

Over the years I have learnt quite a lot of lessons. We don't recruit sex offenders. We take photos of children in all our shops so recruiting sex offenders is out of the question for us. We don't recruit offenders under the age of twenty-three because I just don't find that they are mature enough. Everyone we have tried to recruit in their late teens have been fantastic for the first four weeks then they get paid and it has started going wrong again. We like to concentrate on the more mature members of the prison population. We like to recruit men and women over the age of twenty-four who have got a 'hook' For example: they may have a child, or they might be in a stable relationship and have someone who is going to look out for them. They may have a dream or simply want to do a normal day's work for a normal day's pay in a great company and go home and not have the chaos of a criminal life.

I can't do all this on my own. I have a colleague who is an ex-offender who ended up going to prison for eight years. When he was in prison he decided that he wanted to help his fellow prisoners as he saw the potential in them. He is now one of my foundation ambassadors and visits prisons every day. His role is recruiting, sorting out problems, taking lots of employers into prisons and so on. He is a key member of my team.

Are other employers involved in recruiting ex-offenders?

Yes, there is an employers' forum for reducing reoffending which is essentially a group of employers who see the potential in ex-offenders. Retailing is a good avenue for people coming from prison because there are shops everywhere. Gregg's are a significant employer of ex-offenders, as are most charity shops such as Sue Ryder. Other excellent employers of ex-offenders include Marks and Spencer, Iceland and Halfords. Some of the biggest employers of ex-offenders in the private sector are Tesco and Asda but they just don't know which of their employees are ex-offenders. We know who ours are. And what we have learnt

is that if you go into prison you can find much better people than you can find on the street if you look really hard. And when they end up working for you they will become more dedicated, more loyal, they will work harder, they will be far more reliable and if you get all that right, you will actually make more money. So there has got to be a commercial vein running through this in my experience to make it work.

How does the Employers Forum work?

The Forum is a Government sponsored initiative. Essentially, it's a group of employers who direct each other to where the right prisons are and how to influence government policy to make it easier for us to work with prisons and employ offenders. It's very much a peer group where we all look out for each other.

Have any of your ideas failed?

Yes, some of the ideas that I have had haven't been successful. I have always liked the Jamie Oliver fifteen concept, where young people are trained to have a career in catering whether it is front of house, back of house etc., So I decided to do my own in North Wales. So I bought a hotel and recruited our first cadets, built an amazing cook house building. We started with sixteen cadets and, after two years, seven of those got excellent jobs. But we found it increasingly difficult to work with young people. We found that to make our culture work really well we needed people who have a level of maturity, that can be independent, that we can trust them to make more mature decisions. But we are still working with this project.

What is the Timpson Foundation?

One of the things that we learnt in our shops is that customers really like it when we do things for free so there are loads of little tasks like putting holes in belts, gluing things and so on that

we do free of charge. My view is that if you are going to charge less than £5 then don't charge anything. Customers love it. Instead we say, 'put a pound in the charity box'. We raise £14,000 a week for our charities as a result of doing tasks for free. For us, this is a win-win situation. Others may call this CSR but we call it the Timpson Foundation - where money plays a part in doing good. We train our staff to do this as it's a good part of our customer service as well as a way of raising money.

Does the culture instil entrepreneurialism in staff?

Next time you go into any of our shops, please talk to our colleagues and ask them what they think of the culture. If they are not excellent let me know. Because we don't have any fixed prices you are allowed to haggle. Let's say you walk into the shop and ask for a key to be cut. They may say that's £6 for one, £9 for two. If you say that you only want one and that you only have £5 I will bet that they will take the £5 every time and, in the process, help to meet their sales targets. So please ask them about our culture, ask them about the foundation and the work we do, but most importantly just understand the way our business works which is we employ wonderful people, who have great personalities and we trust them to get on with their work.

Commentary

Employment alone cannot solve all the ills of criminal behaviour and imprisonment.

Rehabilitation is a complex process that involves more than simply 'getting a job'¹.

Nevertheless, it is still central to the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration back into society (Johnson, 2013). There is a large body of literature that outlines how having a

¹ Other factors that can impact rehabilitation include substance misuse, family backgrounds, housing, mental health problems as well as others, and most often, these are interlinked (Ministry of Justice, 2013).

legitimate job lessens the chances of reoffending following release from prison and that recidivism is less likely among those with higher wages and higher quality jobs (Sampson and Laub 1997; Harer 1994; Visher et al, 2005; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Johnson, 2013). Obviously along with many other factors, if after prison offenders are unable to find work or obtain a job, it is much more likely that they will then return to crime and to prison. Policy makers and researchers alike have acknowledged that ‘employment is a key factor in reducing re-offending’ (HM Government, 2005: 39; see also, Dhami et al, 2006; Gallagher and Edwards, 1997; Shea, 2007). Obtaining work is just one way to help break the cycle, and whilst it is unlikely that this alone is the answer, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

With this back drop, it is especially disappointing that offenders are substantially more likely to be unemployed than the population as a whole (Fletcher, 2001; Fletcher, 2010). Sixty-seven per cent of prisoners are found to be unemployed in the four weeks before imprisonment (The Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) and one in seven prisoners have never had a job (Fletcher, 2010). Fletcher (2008) argues that many prisoners appear to be caught in a revolving door of criminality and imprisonment as evidence suggests that sixty-seven per cent of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of their release (Home Office, 2005; Fletcher 2008). This tempestuous relationship between offenders and employment underscores the need to develop strategies to encourage and improve offenders’ chances of employment post release in an attempt to help them desist from returning to crime.

Government policy has responded to this evidence by proposing a ‘rehabilitation revolution’ that emphasises education, training, skills development and an overall focus on work during incarceration (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Whilst in practice this has not always proved to be successful (Author removed for review process), it is argued that prison work that closely

resembles real employment outside the prison walls, has greater rehabilitative potential (Guilbaud, 2010; Silva and Saraiva, 2016; Visher and Travis, 2003; Wakefield and Uggen, 2010). If prison work can help prisoners to imagine a passage between prison and the economic world (Guibald, 2010) it has the potential to act as a mechanism for recovery and rehabilitation (Silva and Saraiva, 2016). Timpson's work inside prison has certainly contributed to this vision. Nevertheless, even if prison work is designed in a way to encourage rehabilitation and build self-efficacy amongst prisoners (Maruna, 2001; Crook, 2007), we must ask: what is waiting for them upon release from prison in terms of employment? This Government strategy attempts to tackle the 'supply side', but what about the 'demand side'? (Fletcher et al, 1998; Haslewood-Po'csik, et al 2008).

Ex-offenders carry with them an enormous amount of stigma when attempting to re-enter the labour market as they are considered to carry a certain amount of risk (Haslewood-Po'csik, et al 2008). Fletcher (2001) argues that ex-offenders face multiple barriers into employment which can include: employer discrimination; poor basic skills and a lack of qualifications; a lack of recent work experience; low self-esteem; behavioural and health problems; problems of poverty and debt and insecure housing. If we draw specifically on the issue of employers hiring ex-offenders, Varghese et al (2010) demonstrate that a significant bias in hiring exists against those with a criminal charge compared to those with no criminal charges. It has been found that employers have high levels of anxiety about recruiting ex-offenders with much of the concern relating to the possibility of the individual reoffending against the company, negative publicity for the organisation and the perceptions of other employees (Batastini et al 2017; Fletcher, 2001; Conalty and Cox, 1999; Pauly and Kay; 1996; Holzer, 1996).

Whilst James Timpson does explain that there is a philanthropic underpinning to his approach -“I am a great believer that great businesses do good things and the more good things you do, the better your business becomes”- he still argues that these individuals can be an incredible source of talent and in fact, employing ex-offenders has the potential to be a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved. Timpson receive enthusiastic, motivated and loyal employees. The ex-offenders are given a real chance at turning their lives around by progressing positively in an organisation that values and trusts them. Government and society get to slow down the rate of the revolving door of prison, rehabilitating offenders, reducing prisoner numbers, improving safety and as a result, reducing costs. Timpson’s approach therefore deals with both the supply and demand side of the employment crises for offenders: Timpson offer work and training during incarceration, with the potential to continue working for the company upon release.

However, it is one thing to recruit offenders, but once recruited, how does Timpson’s ensure this approach works in the long term? It is evident in the interview with James that the organisational values and culture of empowering ‘colleagues’ is likely to have something to do with this. Timpson’s organisational culture of embracing empowerment, autonomy, trust and entrepreneurialism enables staff to regain power over their everyday lives. Within the management literature empowerment is the ‘dynamic process of a redistribution of power between management and employee’ and mainly involves increasing employee authority and responsibility (Greasley, et al. 2005, p. 355). Empowerment can ‘provoke a strong emotional response, which may affect [employees] attitudes to their work and to themselves personally. If they feel that they are empowered and are able to take pride in their work, they can feel a high level of self-esteem, which goes well beyond the boundaries of their working world...There is a clear link between empowerment and self-esteem indicating that this

perceived 'softer' emotional response can have practical consequences' (Greasley et al. 2005, p. 364). Thus, this approach can have immense benefits for employees. But the benefits of empowerment initiatives within the organisation are not limited to those being empowered; research has found that they can also enhance employee performance as well as employee well-being and employee's attitudes to work which will inevitably have a positive impact on the organisation (e.g., Hempel et al, 2012; Spreitzer, 2008; Wagner, 1994).

Traditionally, the concept of empowerment, grounded in religious studies and sociology in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on sharing real power and fostering human welfare (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006). This understanding of empowerment is certainly evident in Timpson's approach; In terms of sharing real power, employees are involved in decision making, and have power and control over many aspects of their job and their stores such as pricing, purchasing and promotions. And with regard to human welfare, James demonstrates how Timpson are focused on increasing employee self-worth, dignity, respect and pride (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006). This is achieved in various ways, such as their open culture where 'everyone is accepted' and the personalised support colleagues receive. In the management literature this understanding of empowerment has been extended to include the idea of 'fostering productivity' (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006) which is more focused on building a sense of ownership and responsibility in the workplace. As Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006, p. 265) argue, 'the more or less explicit expectation in these domains is that empowerment will increase the productivity of workers and reduce the cost of supervision'. Whilst this understanding of empowerment is certainly open to critique as a result of its exploitative potential (Kizilos; 1990; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1997), when working alongside the former concepts of 'sharing real power' and 'fostering human welfare', Timpson's approach

to empowerment has the potential to benefit employees, the organisation as well as society more broadly.

Empowerment initiatives have the potential to have a positive impact on *all* employees, but this impact is likely to be intensified when we consider ex-offenders, for whom empowerment and self-efficacy are considered key influencers for rehabilitation. A good job is a key element in rebuilding self-esteem and a sense of belonging in the community (Visher et al, 2005). According to Johnson (2013), ex-offenders must be in an environment where they are given the opportunity to feel competent with decisions, which then leads to greater self-efficacy. Self-efficacy and belief in one's own abilities is vital for offenders to reintegrate back into society (Maruna, 2001; Author removed for review process). Timpson's approach to empowerment is a clear example of how offenders and ex-offenders can build their self-efficacy and reintegrate into society through work. James Timpson advocates for the empowerment of all colleagues, weakening an individual's belief in their personal powerlessness (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Thus, the values championed by Timpson are the very values that can build esteem in ex-offenders and can lead to them embracing legitimate work and a new life void of criminality and imprisonment.

Unfortunately, engaging in corporate citizenship or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is often seen to be exploited as a PR exercise to improve organisational image and reputation (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006). As such, in an attempt to profit from CSR, this can often lead to organisation choosing to support what would be considered 'worthy' societal causes. If this is the motivation for engaging in CSR, then it is less likely that organisations will engage with 'less popular or the so-called "underserving"' causes, namely, working with prisoners, criminals and ex-offenders' (Parkes, et al, 2010). It is then vitally important that organisations

embrace the argument that business enterprise is anchored not simply in a desire to make profit, but in a broader aim to build a positive and progressive society, by attending to the welfare of employees and participating actively in public life (Hall, 1997; Parkes et al, 2010).

Whilst Timpson's is a UK based company, the relationship between employment and rehabilitation is recognised globally and the research discussed in this commentary is drawn from the US, Australia and much of Europe, meaning that Timpson's approach is not only relevant to the UK. The interview with James draws attention to the ways that organisations can benefit from working with offenders, but there is still much work to be done. Publicising the conditions of disadvantage that are associated with a criminal record, and the social and economic costs to ignoring this problem (Graffam et al, 2004) could help to manage the stigma associated with employing offenders. Government and prison reformers can play a key role in reducing stigma in this way. Timpson's publicising the work they do with offenders is a positive step in encouraging other employers to adopt such strategies. They are demonstrating to all that ex-offenders are capable of rehabilitation and reintegration, and that this can have positive economic benefits for the organisation as well as improve the quality of life within our communities. James shows how organisations can support ex-offenders and simultaneously ensure the success of the company. In fact, he shows how these two things can go hand-in-hand. Based on the literature and the experiences of Timpson, reintegration is most successful when organisations adopt a culture of empowerment and build self-efficacy. Whilst we do not necessarily advocate for the hiring of employees based on 'personalities' we would suggest that the sentiment underlying James's methods is about approaching recruitment in a more holistic way; seeing each potential employee as a whole person where their strengths, weaknesses and future potential are all considered. Ideally, more organisations would adopt Timpson's recruitment techniques and embrace what ex-offenders

might have to offer. There are short term risks to this strategy but as James Timpson demonstrates, there are certainly long-term gains for both society and the organisations growth and profitability. This organisational investment could transform the lives of ex-offenders who most often face significant stigmatisation by society at large.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an interview with James Timpson, the Chief Executive of Timpson retailers. We have presented a commentary on this interview drawing specifically on its relevance to the employment and rehabilitation of ex-offenders. This conversation is particularly pertinent when we note that offenders are most likely to be unemployed before and after incarceration. Government have attempted to manage this situation by encouraging work in prison, dealing with the ‘supply side’ of offender unemployment, but drawing on the work of Timpson, we emphasise the need for organisations to participate in supporting the ‘demand side’ of offender employment. We argue that, based on the rehabilitation literature and the employee empowerment literature, adopting a similar ethos to Timpson’s workplace culture, one that emphasises self-efficacy and autonomy, is significant in cementing the rehabilitative potential of employment. Organisations could learn from Timpson’s approach in terms of both the ethos and culture they adopt and take heed of Timpson’s broader, more nuanced understanding of what makes an ‘ideal’ employee. It is the combination of both approaches that enables Timpson to have a real impact on reducing reoffending and we would encourage organisations from various sectors to follow suit.

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