



Olympic athletes not immune to disengagement

Engagement specialists RedBalloon For Corporate take a look at some of Australia's most notoriously disengaged and misbehaving Olympic athletes.

19 July 2012, Sydney: Just over a week out from the 2012 London Olympics, engagement specialists RedBalloon For Corporate share some insights around some of Australia's most well-known disengaged and misbehaving Olympians, and where they and their employers went wrong.

Pippa Savage
Details: Australian rower Pippa Savage was dumped from the women's quad sculls boat in June – two months out from the London Olympics – after continued personality clashes with her crewmates. In her campaign to be chosen in the single scull rather than a crew for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Savage provided a psychiatric assessment, which claimed her personality was far more suited to rowing alone than with teammates, yet she was still selected in a team event.
Employer: Rowing Australia
Status: Has been left out of Australia's 46-strong Olympic rowing team but will remain a non-travelling reserve in case of injury
Employer's failure: Ignoring expert advice that deemed Savage unsuitable for team events, and better suited to individual pursuits
Lesson: Play to people's strengths – there's no point forcing a round peg into a square hole

Nick D'arcy
Details: Nick Darcy is a promising 24-year-old butterfly swimmer, whose career has been plagued by controversy. D'arcy has been in the headlines a number of times for all the wrong reasons – most notably after an alcohol-fuelled incident where he king hit team mate and fellow swimmer Simon Cowley in a bar in 2008. Most recently he gained more negative media attention after a photo of him and swimming teammate Kenrick Monk brandishing guns while on a trip to the US was posted to Facebook.
Employer: The Australian Olympic Swim Team
Status: Swimming for gold in the 200m butterfly in London
Employer's failure: Employers must provide guidance – particularly for young employees – around reputation management and how to properly represent your organisation, particularly in circumstances that involve alcohol consumption and the proper use of social media. D'arcy has announced a self-imposed social-media ban in the lead-up to the Games, on top of an Australian Olympic Committee-imposed ban for the entire Games period.
Lesson: Social media is a powerful tool in making and breaking reputations – both for individuals and brands. Employers need to ensure they have policies in place around alcohol consumption at organised events, and how employees present themselves and represent the organisation through social media channels

Sally Robbins (aka Lay-Down Sally)
Details: Sally Robbins represented Australia in the women's four event at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the women's eight event at the 2004 Athens Olympics. She was involved in an incident in Athens when she stopped rowing during the final part of the race, appearing to have succumbed to exhaustion. She was heavily criticised and publicly ridiculed for this incident, being dubbed "Lay-Down Sally". Robbins was accused of mental weakness and The Daily Telegraph reported: "In a team sport such as rowing what she did was unforgivable. It appears Robbins committed the greatest crime there is in honest sport: she quit."
Former Employer: Rowing Australia
Status: Seeking a career as a cyclist
Employer's failure: Not being aware of the mental and physical strain that was placed upon the employee, and the effect this was having on her performance.
Lesson: Employers need to be aware of the mental and physical state of their employees, and take steps to remedy any problems before they become a performance issue. If someone is showing signs of exhaustion or fatigue, it needs to be dealt with, particularly in an industry where their physical health and fitness is so fundamental to their performance.

John Steffensen
Details: John was left out of the individual 400m Olympic team in place of 19-year-old runner Steve Solomon, despite beating the young up and comer at a the Olympic trials in Melbourne earlier this year. He was notified of the decision via an email. South African-born Steffensen still secured a place in the 4x400m relay, but spoke out about his disappointment in being overlooked for the individual race, labelling the decision as racially motivated.
Employer: Australian Track and Field Olympic Team
Status: Steffensen is still undecided about whether he will attend the games as a 4x400m relay, or boycott as a protest to the decision.
Employer's failure: Not communicating the grounds of their decision effectively or in a personal manner. A phone call and a conversation around how the decision was reached could have avoided this outcome.
Lesson: "The problem with communication is the illusion that it has occurred." George Bernard Shaw.
Employers have a responsibility to keep channels of communication open and effective. This is an example of poor communication and an "employee" feeling disengaged and frustrated with an outcome due to proper process being overlooked.

Russell and Lauryn Mark
Details: Husband and wife Australian Olympic Shooters Russell and Lauryn Mark have attracted criticism for complaining about not sharing a room at the athlete's village in London – male and female athlete sleeping quarters are separated at the village. Russell labelled the decision unfair and claimed that "hundreds of gay couples" would be able to share a room, and that they were being discriminated against for being heterosexual. The couple have been criticised for trying to get publicity ahead of the games, and to promote Lauryn's recent Zoo Weekly magazine cover shoot.
Employer: Australian Olympic Shooting Team
Status: Rooming separately, but not happy about it
Employer's failure: No failure here. It's a mountain out of a mole-hill
Lesson: You can't please everyone all of the time, but employers must always keep the majority interest as a priority, and offer alternative options to maintain harmony in the workplace. The couple has been given the option of paying for accommodation outside the village which they have declined.

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Note to the editor: All comments can be attributed to RedBalloon For Corporate General Manager Matt Geraghty

About RedBalloon
RedBalloon For Corporate provides exciting reward and recognition solutions, corporate gifts and sales incentives to ensure businesses keep their employees and customers motivated, rewarded and engaged. With a unique resource of over 2,500 amazing experiences in Australia and

New Zealand RedBalloon specialises in creating attachments between employees and their employer. RedBalloon has also been awarded for its innovative employee engagement practices, named in the Best Places to Work by BRW Magazine three times, including a top ten ranking in 2009. Hewitt Associates have also awarded RedBalloon with an engagement score of over 90 per cent four years in a row. The average engagement score in Australian businesses is 55 per cent.

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