Cleaner working 'relentless hours' hits back at Gove's 'empty words'

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‘We need more than your gratitude’ Birmingham cleaning boss responds to Michael Gove’s thanks

A Birmingham cleaning company boss working ‘relentless’ hours supporting staff on the frontline says Michael Gove’s thanks are empty words.

Bev Redguard, director at a branch of ChemDry Excel has been regularly donning protective clothing to join her 40-strong workforce to fight against the spread of Coronavirus in schools where key workers’ children are still being taught.

She has also been available to clean commercial premises as employees are sent home to work or furloughed before they are shut down. But mother of three Bev, 50, had to turn down a job to clean an NHS hospital as she didn’t have the staff available.

Last night (TUES) when cabinet minister Michael Gove expressed his thanks to cleaners and others in public services, Bev said that it was a welcome gesture but without further measures to back it up, empty words.

Bev, who has five staff away from work because of self-isolating, said:”This is a terrifying time for us not only as we continue to work while others stay home but also in terms of how we are coping as a small business.

“It’s relentless. I thought I already worked long hours but this has been on another level, all day, every day.

“We’re constantly hearing a message that the one way to stop the virus spreading is by staying at home, yet every day I am asking my staff to go to work.

“My anxiety levels go through the roof every time I have a member of staff who has displayed symptoms and has to go into isolation.

“These last few days I’ve been taken away from cleaning by urgent business admin from home but I’m still involved on the phone, supporting teams on-site and as the days go on, I’m ready to get back out there.

“Yesterday, I woke up at about 3:30am because I couldn’t sleep and did a few notes on my phone for in the morning. I went online for a catch-up at 7:30am and didn’t switch off until after 10pm.

“My team are incredible. My cleaners at one school have not had a break since Christmas because they worked through February half-term doing the deep clean and now they have agreed to work through the Easter holidays as well.

“Other staff have been working six days a week to cover for colleagues that are self-isolating. I am incredibly proud of them,” said Bev who runs her business with husband Keith from a unit in Cato Street, Nechells.

“I’m still juggling urgent flood repair work in Staffordshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. This has also been very challenging due to team members now self isolation, or where we are available to go into people’s homes where work remains an emergency, making sure our technicians can work two metres apart.

“So while I am very grateful to hear the government say thank you, I need to see this backed up by actions. The support publicised for small businesses is not enough. I am eligible for help and you might think that because we are so busy with public sector work that we will be okay, but our domestic work has been decimated and balancing the books is going to take a lot of work.

“Also I am hearing a lot from friends working in vital trades such as electricians who are now held back by social distancing. I’d call on the government to make it a priority to help these thousands of small

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businesses like us, who are the backbone of our society, alongside showing NHS, care staff and supermarket staff how much they are valued and keeping the country running.

Looking forward, past the threat of Covid-19, Bev says: “My working life now is nowhere near what you would call balanced but it’s not forever. We all have to do what we can do, to ensure the sections of society that need to keep operating can do it safely in a clean healthy environment. Everyone’s health comes first.

“I have seen a change in people's attitudes towards cleaners as we are recognised as key workers. I hope it lasts. We are hardworking individuals who provide others with healthy clean spaces to live, work and play in.

“This is an unsettling period for everyone. For people at home worried they may not be cleaning enough, they should follow the advice and don’t have any visitors so at least the germs and bacteria are their own. Then do what they can each day.”

Issued by Linda Aitchison (07867 420803) on behalf of Bev at ChemDry Excel, please call Bev if needed on 07540 497958

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