



Staff loyalty takes on new meaning

Developing staff engagement to increase productivity and better manage expectations.

FEATURE ARTICLE

By Reico Wong

THESE days, as employees become less averse to switching jobs, staff loyalty is often considered by companies as a quality of a bygone era.

Indeed, ask any employer and one would almost be certain to hear gripes about the traits peculiar to the younger generation of workers: They have a seemingly innate sense of entitlement and confidence, they often question the status quo and are very focused on their individual career needs.

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NEWS FLASH

“Low employment” university courses in China not approved

China - As graduate unemployment is high now, degree courses in China which do not directly increase the level of graduate employment will cease to be approved by The Ministry of Education.

In addition, institutions hoping to start new majors must demonstrate a market need and demand. Also, existing degree courses with fewer than 60% of graduates from two successive years failing to find work are subject to cancellation.

The Chinese authorities hope this will stem “herd mentality” among students away from “fashionable” courses toward courses that will actually “serve the needs of society”, or meet employers’ demands.



Why onboarding is essential - even for CEOs

Malaysia - According to recent research here, there is a misconception that higher management, such as CEOs, do not require onboarding.

Most organisations fail to realise these executive hires need more than just the names of key stakeholders, top-line figures and detailed project information - they also need essential information on the company, such as organisational culture and values, and working processes, which are often overlooked during the onboarding process.

The report recommended starting the process the moment the employee is shortlisted as making the difference between success or failure.

Thailand more attractive to expats



Thailand - Thailand is becoming a more attractive base for foreign investments, as found in a survey which compared Thailand with other ASEAN states in attractiveness as an investment destination.

The kingdom ranked tops in terms of convenience in accessibility to raw materials for investment, sufficient labour supply, quality of the labour force and food safety in the Abac Poll survey of about 1,000 expatriates all of whom had a certain level of understanding of the situations in at least five ASEAN member countries.

But rather than simply blaming the situation on the “more difficult to handle” nature of the new breed of workers, human-resource experts urge employers to look at loyalty as a two-way street.

Mr Josh Goh, assistant director of corporate services at HR consultancy The GMP Group, noted that in the past, employers would retain staff even when they were facing tough times.

“Retrenchment was hardly practised then, unless the company folded. But this has changed over the past few financial crises,” he said. “As redundancy becomes more common, there is scepticism on whether one’s loyalty will truly ensure one’s employment with the organisation.”

He added: “This has bred a new generation of workers who view the employer- employee relationship as nothing more than a commercial one.”

Ms Jacqueline Gwee, director of aAdvantage Consulting, said that firms today should, perhaps, rethink how they define staff loyalty. It should no longer revolve around how long employees stay with a company, but whether they become advocates who would speak positively of the firm even after they leave, she said.

“Employers need to engage their staff effectively and provide for both their professional and personal development, so that they are proud to have been part of the firm,” said Ms Gwee. “This could also motivate them to stay on with the firm for a longer period.”

It is crucial for employers to understand what spurs individual employees, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, she added.

City Gas is one company that has achieved much success in building loyalty among its employees over the years.

Its staff-attrition rate plunged to just 1.7 per cent last year, from 6.3 per cent in 2008, in line with the downward trend it has been seeing over the last five years.

Employees of the utility firm stay for 22 years, on average. Younger staff, specifically those between 21 and 40, typically serve for an average of five years.



Mr Ng Yong Hwee, chief executive and president of City Gas, attributed these successes to the company’s policy of treating staff like “one big family”.

“While attaining profit and sustaining the business are important objectives, we feel that there’s also a need to strike a balance in the benefits and welfare of the employees,” he said. “We believe a happy employee is a happy customer.”

The firm takes steps to ensure that feedback sessions are conducted with its staff quarterly, said Mr Ng. During such sessions, the management will share the firm’s targets, performance and key challenges. The sessions will also highlight how each division, branch and individual can contribute to the overall goals.

City Gas also offers financial support and examination leave to the growing number of younger employees who aspire to upgrade their qualifications.

The company takes pride in posing different challenges to employees in various age groups, said Mr Ng.

“For those near retirement age, we tell them, ‘Give your last burst of fire to City Gas!’ We urge those who are at the mid-career stage to build a strong and sustainable City Gas alongside the management. As for the younger ones, we challenge them to allow their creative juices and energy to flow, to help grow with City Gas,” he said.

Mr Goh said that even as employers accept that staff turnover will no longer be as low as that seen in the era of the “iron rice bowl”, they need to be aware that the challenge today is to minimise job hopping and reduce its impact on business.

“The focus should be on developing staff engagement. When staff are engaged at work, they are more productive,” he said. “At the same time, individuals must realise that no organisation is perfect, and they must learn to adjust their expectations accordingly.”

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