



It pays to be inclusive at work

Increase your talent pool by hiring regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

FEATURE ARTICLE

By Reico Wong

WHEN it comes to the sexual orientation of their employees, most companies in Singapore adopt a "don't ask, don't tell" approach.

After all, such issues are deemed as private matters that should have no impact on one's performance at work.

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NEWS FLASH

The hunt is on for cyber security talent

Singapore - The Economic Development Board (EDB) has launched a new grant, with US-based firm RSA Security, to groom cyber security graduates and professionals to combat cybercrime.

It is part of EDB's Strategic Attachment and Training (Strat) programme aimed at developing Singapore's manpower capabilities in strategic areas through overseas attachments with leading companies.

The multi-year residency training programme will be held in RSA's Anti-Fraud Command Centre outside Tel Aviv, Israel. Trainees will work alongside RSA cyber security professionals and fraud analysts to detect, block and shut down trojan attacks or online banking fraud in real-time.



Hinterland cities in China draw talent

China - Many relatively smaller cities are benefiting from the Chinese government's efforts to stimulate regional economies and speed up development of China's inland areas and from multinational companies shifting their operations from first-tier cities to cheaper locations like Tianjin. Meanwhile, places further inland, like Yinchuan, Chongqing and Chengdu have been given an additional boost by the government's Go West campaign.

Young, well-qualified workers are increasingly starting to be attracted to these outposts in the hinterland, and businesses can take advantage of a motivated and eager workforce.

Thailand facing severe labour shortfall



Thailand - Thai industries are facing a severe labour shortage, with a shortfall of almost 300,000 workers this year, says the Office of Industrial Economics.

The textile/apparel, automotive, food and electronics sectors are the worst hit. There are also shortages in the plastics, wood and furniture, jewellery and steel sectors.

"Although part of the labour shortage, especially unskilled workers, are currently replaced by foreign labour and machinery, the government is also working on a workforce database to match the education system with the skills needed for each economic sector," said director-general Somchai Harnhirun.

Source : *Bangkok Post*

NAV for Malaysia's private retirement scheme at RM97.5m

Malaysia - Malaysia's private retirement scheme (PRS) has peaked since the launch of its first product October 2012, with the net asset value reaching RM97.50mil with 30,500 accounts opened since then. The PRS is a voluntary long-term investment scheme designed to help individuals accumulate savings for retirement.

The Private Pension Administrator Malaysia is the body approved by the Securities Commission Malaysia to administer, oversee and promote the PRS industry, which forms the third pillar in a multi-pillar pension framework and complements Malaysia's mandatory retirement savings schemes.

In 2002, the British bank took the initiative to roll out an employee support and networking group called Spectrum, dedicated to helping its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff connect with other colleagues.

A variety of events, such as sharing sessions and charity fund-raisers, that advocate LGBT acceptance within the bank and its partners are organised regularly by the group.

There are now more than 500 Barclays employees across Asia who are part of this group, with about 200 from Singapore.

While staff are not required to declare their sexual orientation when hired, the bank estimates that between 5 and 10 per cent of its workforce are LGBTs.

Mr Richard Seeley, the managing director of Barclays Capital in Hong Kong and chairman of the Employee Network Groups for Asia, said setting up Spectrum was the bank's way of demonstrating its firm commitment to diversity and inclusion among its employees.

"We hire the best talent, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and believe that our strong internal policies of acceptance and inclusion are capable of attracting and retaining them," he said.

"A testament to the success of Spectrum is that although many in the group are LGBTs, a majority are 'straight allies', who, while heterosexual themselves, believe in and proactively advocate inclusion and acceptance throughout the firm."

To ensure that such policies translate to actual practice, senior management at the bank undergo training sessions to educate them about the difficulties faced by LGBT staff in non-inclusive work environments.

This pushes the managers to take it upon themselves to ensure that the work culture remains fair, said Barclays.

In addition, the bank has in place a mentorship programme in which LGBT employees are paired with senior leaders, who help them to plan their careers better and provide support if they face any discrimination at work.

Human-resource experts applaud the efforts of companies like Barclays which are vocal about the importance of extending fair employment practices to minorities, including LGBTs.

Mr Josh Goh, assistant director of corporate services at The GMP Group, observed that most employers here adopt a "don't ask, don't tell" approach when it comes to recruiting and managing professionals who are LGBTs.

But companies which have a deliberate diversity programme and openly recognise talented LGBTs stand to reap multiple benefits, said Mr Goh.

"When companies have zero tolerance towards any form of discrimination, their talent pool inevitably increases," he said.

"Also, when the employees feel safe and included in the office, they can better focus on their work and are more willing to go the extra mile for the employer."

Mr Seeley agreed, pointing out that studies have shown that LGBT staff in non-inclusive workplaces are up to 30 per cent less productive and have higher rates of absenteeism and attrition.

"Making our work environment fully inclusive therefore ensures we are not negatively impacted by these unnecessary costs," he said.

"It also ensures the LGBT consumer population views Barclays as an organisation with whom they would proactively seek to do business with. The impact on our bottom line is thus unquestionably positive."

Taking a wider view on the issue, Ms Jacqueline Gwee, director of aAdvantage Consulting, recommended that companies put in place policies which embrace diversity and inclusiveness in general and to demystify a variety of stereotypes, not just LGBTs.

"Companies should emphasise a work- performance culture anchored on competence and meritocracy and not on demographics, disabilities or sexual orientation," she said.

"It would be more useful to focus on common goals and how differences in perspectives contribute to the business."



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