



# It pays to engage silver workforce

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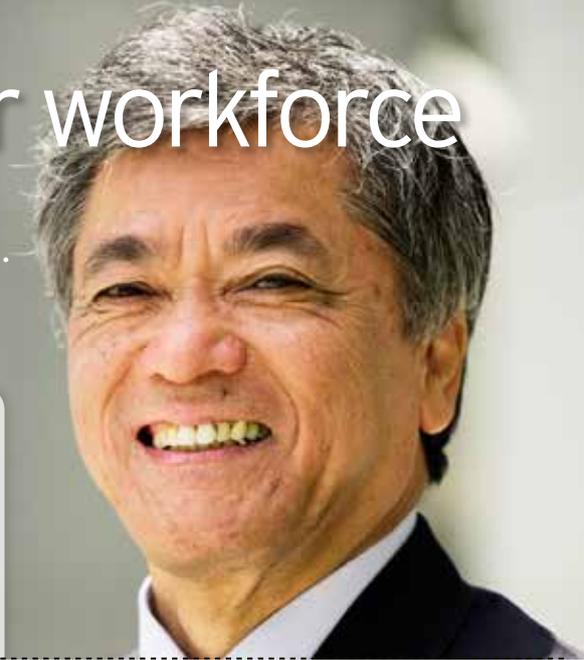
FEATURE ARTICLE

By Adrian Lim

BANK customers who have engaged the services of a relationship manager (RM) might have noticed a curious phenomenon: Most of the RMs are young and good-looking.

That might lead one to conclude that the position of RM can be filled only by youthful executives of eye-candy calibre.

**Continued overleaf** ▶



## NEWS FLASH

### Skilled construction workers given more pay

*Singapore* - Construction firms in Singapore are offering pay rises of up to 20% to retain and attract skilled workers, whose \$500-monthly earnings have remained stagnant since 2011.

Workers from China, India and Bangladesh make up for most of the 300,000 construction workers in Singapore, but workers now prefer to stay home due to the economic boom.

Seasoned workers also mean lower levies for firms as they pay less to the government when they hire workers who have been in Singapore for at least four years and have attended skills upgrading courses by the Building & Construction Authority.



### Scheme helps jobless grads gain soft skills

*Malaysia* - Jobless graduates, especially those from rural areas, are encouraged to participate in the 1Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M) to acquire technical skills required for employment.

The scheme, which targets those who have yet to get jobs six months after graduation, focuses on undergraduates from rural areas and low-income families to provide them with confidence and exposure to the working environment.

The aim of SL1M is to increase graduates' employability, and many participants have indeed secured permanent jobs.

### Emails in Germany banned to cut stress after work



*Germany* - Germany's job chiefs have banned its managers from contacting staff outside working hours, except in emergencies and called for "minimum intervention" into workers' personal time.

Aimed at preventing employees from burning out and protecting mental health, the new guidelines state that ministry staff should not be faulted for switching off their mobile phones or failing to reply to messages after work.

The move follows similar regulations on after-work emails imposed by German companies such as BMW, Volkswagen and Puma.

However, human-resource (HR) experts pointed out that older professionals in their 50s and 60s can, in fact, be just as adept in doing the job.

This is because older workers not only have invaluable work experiences but they also have good people and problem-solving skills, said HR experts.

Such effectiveness is something that companies tend to overlook, said Ms Helen Ko, executive director of BeyondAge, a consultancy that helps businesses engage mature workers.

Ms Ko's firm trains managers and HR professionals from about 200 companies every year, and she said misconceptions about the older workforce are still pervasive.

"Many employers still harbour myths about older workers: that they are inflexible and unwilling to learn, that they do not want to pick up new skills and are slow," she said.

Ms Helen Lim, managing director of Silver Spring, a firm that engages the mature workforce, said eight in 10 workers over the age of 50 she meets do not pass the first interview with prospective employers.

"They are often told they are either over-qualified for the job...or under-qualified when they hail from a different industry, although their transferable skills are more than relevant and applicable," she said.

Ms Ko said that among all the misconceptions employers have about older workers, there is one which stands out that she hopes to dispel.

"They tend to associate a person's negative attributes with age. (For example), they put the blame for a person's inflexibility on age."

While it is true that old age brings about an "accentuation of personality traits", it is not necessarily the cause of such characteristics, she said. Applying a broad brush to lay the blame on old age is something which needs to change.

In the light of Singapore's recently-released population road map - which postulates that there will be just two working adults supporting one elderly person in 2030 - the impetus to tap on the silver workforce is ever more relevant.

"While the Government is doing an excellent job caring for the old who are frail and unable to work, the more sustainable solution is to keep mature professionals, managers and executives aged 45 and above economically active as long as they can work," Ms Lim said.

Ms Ko said that with the Government's drive for productivity and a reduction in foreign manpower, coupled with fewer younger workers coming onstream because of a greying population, companies will have no choice but to tap on the mature workforce.

She reckoned that with better health and higher education, many people in their 50s and 60s today are just as effective as those in their 40s.

"Organisations with foresight will put in place various systems and structures to utilise the silver workforce. The earlier companies (do it), the better. It will give them an edge," said Ms Ko.

To create an elderly-friendly workplace, firms should promote a culture in which everyone is aware that people are hired based on competency, and not age, said Mr Josh Goh, assistant director of corporate services at HR consultancy The GMP Group.

Simple gestures such as increasing the font size of words or simplifying technological gadgets can make the workplace more conducive to older employees, he said.

Mature workers should "project an active persona in their resumes" and highlight how their past experiences are relevant today, if they want to better their chances of being hired, said Mr Goh. Displaying a willingness to learn and being adaptable to technological advances are also advantageous.

Still, there will be hiring managers who have no qualms about showing their biases during the job interview. In such cases, older jobseekers should not be disheartened but, instead, show their maturity in dealing with "tricky situations", said Mr Goh.



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