

When Albert Chai, Cisco country manager in Malaysia, heard that his company had won the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2017 award, he was overjoyed.

“It was the proudest moment of my 10 years at Cisco. I’ve always been a firm believer in creating an amazing workplace for our employees to want to come in to work every single day. This is not an easy journey, but it’s been very rewarding.”

Chai, who is also managing director of Cisco Systems (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, says the company has one of the lowest attrition rates among its local peers. He believes Cisco won because of the unique employee experience it provides.

For instance, Cisco fully recognises the contributions of its employees. When a team member plays a part in the success of a project or makes a big impact on the company, it is not unusual for the whole company to come together to celebrate the event.

“At our ‘hands’ meetings, people from all levels of the company will clap for the success of an employee. We recognise the contribution of the individual,” says Chai.

A hands meeting is attended by all employees and held on a regular basis to keep them up-to-date on important events and milestones. More importantly, this means team spirit is nurtured and employees do not compete to outdo each other. Instead, Cisco inculcates the culture of supporting one another and winning together.

“Each member of the team tends to help out the others. And they organise events such as providing food parcels to the homeless and picking up litter while

UNIQUE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AT CISCO

BY KUEK SER KWANG ZHE

hiking up Broga Hill to build trust among themselves,” says Chai.

The culture of support is also embedded in management. Chai says Cisco stands behind its employees when they are going through difficult times. One of the best examples is when Cisco’s former chairman John Thomas Chamber personally telephoned a Malaysian employee when he heard that the latter’s child had been diagnosed with leukaemia.

“John called him to assure him that the company would take care of all the medical expenses and to just concentrate on his child,” says Chai.

He says it is this supportive culture that made Cisco’s employees stay with the company longer than their peers in similar organisations. The culture also promotes camaraderie, which enables staff to work together efficiently to reach a common goal.

“Building trust among employees is very important. People who trust each other will be committed to working towards a common goal. With commitment, there is accountability. You can have a very robust strategy, but without having a high level of trust [between employees],

it cannot be executed,” says Chai.

As Cisco is a technology company, millennials make up a large percentage of its workforce. Chai says the company is able to attract young talent because of its culture, which emphasises candour and empowerment.

At Cisco, employees are allowed to voice their opinions at every meeting, regardless of their standing in the company. If they disagree with the leader, they are free to speak their minds. “At our management meetings, leaders openly



voice their disagreement. At our hands meeting, you will see other members of our team, such as the account manager or engineer, raising objections to something I said and offering an alternative viewpoint. It is an open environment for discussion and this is one of the things our employees like,” says Chai.

Meanwhile, Cisco’s employees are also empowered to make decisions, including high-value commercial ones on deals that involve hundreds of millions of dollars. “Our team is empowered because of the trust and support we have built up over the years. This makes us a highly productive organisation,” Chai says.

For millennials, one of the best things about working for Cisco is the flexibility. They can work outside the office because Cisco champions the idea of connecting people through technology. Its employees are highly connected through their mobile phones and laptops, so they are able to operate from different locations.

“When we are out there, the phone is our office. Our employees could be in their client’s office, partner’s office or a café doing their work. But they are still highly connected and very productive. We usually negotiate and make commercial decisions online via the phone,” says Chai.

He attributes this work process to the trust between employees and the empowerment they receive from the company.

Chai is very proud of the Cisco employee experience and says that is the reason the company has been able to attract and retain talent over the years. “Our compensation package is one of the most competitive in the market. But the experience is still our value proposition.”