

S P SETIA CHANGES WITH THE TIMES



BY TAN ZHAI YUN

Team Setia” is more than just a motto and catchphrase at S P Setia Bhd. It encapsulates the value of teamwork, which is actively nurtured at every level, be it the physical environment of their offices to the daily staff activities.

For example, its network hub on the ground floor of its headquarters — which was completed last year — is a specially designed open space to facilitate discussions. Employees have meetings every morning or every week to catch up on company news and encourage each other.

It is this team spirit that has helped the property developer win the Aon Best Employers award for the ninth time since 2003, observes chief human resources officer Nadiah Tan Abdullah.

“I think the cornerstone of our success is teamwork. We have this thing called ‘Team Setia’. Before we start a meeting in the morning, we say ‘Morning Setia’ and everyone responds with ‘Setia!’ I realise that it is something that pulls people together. Most people are very proud to be a part of Team Setia and that pride translates into passion and how we execute everything that we do,” she says.

Nurturing the feeling of togetherness is not an easy feat for a company that has employees from multiple generations and skill levels. The challenge can be at granular levels such as the method of communication. For example, how should company news be shared with employees, as some may prefer social media while others rely on email?

According to Nadiah, 56% of the workforce comprises Generation Y (those born between 1979 and 1991), 29% Generation X (1964 to 1978), 7% baby boomers (1948 to 1963) and 8% millennials (those born after 1992).

“Personally, I think there is no difference between the generations. Everyone wants to have flexibility and freedom. I think the difference is just in the stimulation,” she says.

“For example, when I was growing up and when I started working, there was no internet. The stimulus that people grow up with now is different, so expectations are different. We are consciously making an effort to make this place more exciting for the younger ones. We are looking at future workplaces or work styles as something we can adopt.”

The launch of the network hub is one example of the company’s efforts to bring people together in a modern workplace. Employees

are free to use the space for meetings or work away from their desks, bringing an element of flexibility to the workplace.

“The space used to be a sales gallery, but we have designed it to be bright and colourful. The seating arrangement is modular, so you can change it as you go along. It is designed to be a space for collaboration and where employees can have an informal setting,” says Nadiah.

“In one place, we have a TED talk-style stage, where we conduct training for staff to do presentations. It is also about creating an environment where people can express themselves more because Gen Ys like to express themselves.”

The design is also in line with the company’s values, she adds. “We want to have a Google-like environment, but we are not Google. I think it is important to say that while we want to provide an environment that looks like Google, it has to connect with our core values. If it is about teamwork and humility, then whatever we do in terms of infrastructure and human resource processes have to reflect that.”

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES

Another area that S P Setia pays close attention to is training its employees. At every level, employees are given opportunities to undergo training or coaching so they feel empowered.

“We have this acronym, QSERI, which stands for quality, speed, efficiency, reliability and integrity. It guides everything we do. For instance, we even train our tea ladies and send our drivers for defensive driving courses. We don’t just do training for core and key individuals. We make sure that every segment of our population is covered because everyone plays an important role,” says Nadiah.

The company has a goal called 18-by-21, where it aims to double its market capitalisation from RM9 billion to RM18 billion by 2021. Talent development is crucial to achieve this goal.

Earlier this year, the employees indicated through surveys that they wanted a more structured career development path. In response, S P Setia launched a company-wide coaching programme.

“We have three programmes. The first is called transformational coaching. Even the CEO attended the two-day session, which speaks volumes on how important he thinks it is. This was for the 40-plus senior managers,” says Nadiah.

“The second is the ‘Coaching for growth’ sessions for managers, which will see about 400 people attend. It is ongoing until the end of the year. Executives will attend the ‘Building resilience’ programme, which is aimed at driving their personal development.”

A goal of the programmes is to drive a coach-

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> Nadiah

ing culture within the company so that career conversations are less transactional and do not only revolve around key performance indicators. Instead, the coaching culture will encourage conversations around career aspirations and personal development.

S P Setia also has training programmes that bring together the sales and marketing teams from business units (BUs) around the country so they can network and understand the company’s vision. “We also award the BU that achieved the highest sales with a big trophy. This year, it was in Johor. It was quite moving when the winning sales team shared their emotions because they felt appreciated,” says Nadiah.

“In October, we will have two more groups: one for the technical teams and the other for the customer service and credit administration teams. Next year, we will do it for the support function and other job families.”

DEVELOPING DIVERSITY

Earlier this year, S P Setia launched Women of Inspiration (WIN) circles at its headquarters and BUs to create a support network for women. Every location has a diversity advocate (called Diva) to coordinate the meetings.

“Last July, we did a focus group to find out the top five things that are going through the minds of women at this company. We found out that they wanted to increase their confidence levels and they needed work flexibility. We did this as we wanted to hear from them and create the changes accordingly,” says Nadiah.

At these meetings, the participants talk about their experiences. For instance, an employee who had just returned from maternity leave broke down when she was sharing her struggles as a working mother.

“It is amazing how powerful the discussions are because we don’t come to work just to do a job. It gets boring if you spend 10 hours a day on it. We want people to feel that it is not just a job but something we do because we believe in it and we have friends who will support us,” says Nadiah.

The company has also set up a mentoring programme called Women4women, where senior and junior-level female employees are paired for mentoring sessions. The purpose of setting up such programmes is to figure out how the company can help employees realise their potential, retain their services and empower them in their roles.

Reserving parking spots for pregnant ladies and building nursing rooms are basic amenities that are already available, says Nadiah. Instead, the discussions will help the company craft more specific solutions based on the employees’ feedback.

“We are looking not just at women but also parents. Men play a role as well. How can we help them play their role in looking after their children and feeling empowered too? Some of them may have wives who do better than them and they need to take paternity leave. I am always thinking about how we can get on with the waves of change and then balancing it with our culture, but also making sure we don’t rock the boat too much,” she says.

In terms of potential employees, the company wants people who are qualified and passionate about what they do. “We want to hire based on attitude. You can be the best person, but if you are not a team player, you will either not fit in, not perform or damage the whole team dynamic. We want someone who wants to learn and scale up because Setia is always about learning, growing and getting your hands dirty. You must have passion because it drives pride, execution and excellence,” says Nadiah. **E**