

Committing to its employee value proposition (EVP) proved to be the recipe for success for Gerbang Alaf Restaurants Sdn Bhd — the local operator of McDonald's Malaysia — as this year marks the third time the company has won the Aon Best Employers Malaysia award.

Gerbang Alaf had won the award in 2013 and 2011, as well as special recognition awards — Best Employer for Women in 2015 and Best Employer for Generation Y in 2013. According to Ahmad Azhar Mohamad Darbi, Gerbang Alaf's senior director of human resource (HR), administration and halal affairs, the win is attributed to the implementation of the company's EVP, which comprises three aspects: family and friends, flexibility and future.

"We are committed to our EVP and treat each other like family and friends. We create an accommodating, flexible workspace that recognises the need of every individual, and provide equal opportunities for their career growth," says Ahmad Azhar.

At Gerbang Alaf, structured training is provided for employees at every level. The training enables staff to go from flipping burgers to higher management roles, says Zarina Osman, director of HR business partners.

She says, "The majority, or 60% to 70%, of us at the management level started off as restaurant crew. In fact, I started out as a restaurant crew and have been in the company for 27 years. Every single employee has an equal chance of moving up to become a specialist for a certain function or get exposure to become senior managers and directors. Even our managing director started his career as a trainee manager at one of our restaurants.

GERBANG ALAF KEEPS EMPLOYEES MOTIVATED AND ENERGISED

BY KHAIRANI AFIFI NOORDIN

"Career progression at McDonald's does not depend on paper qualifications, as we believe learning is lifelong. As long as you have the skills and right attitude, you can progress up the career ladder."

This win was achieved despite bad publicity in 2014 and 2015, when Mc-

Donald's became the centre of a boycott by a misinformed public. At the time, Ahmad Azhar says, employee morale hit rock bottom.

"We realised that we had to do something to support our teams at the frontline. Instead of head office, we started calling ourselves Restaurant Support Centre to allow free communication inside and outside of the management level. We got our employees and their family members involved in the countless grassroots and charity programmes we held with the public community, effectively regaining consumer trust towards the brand," says Ahmad Azhar.

Gerbang Alaf also has a platform known as the Nuts and Bolts Integration Team (NaBIT), which allows its managers nationwide to gather and communicate and plan company strategy regularly. In addition, the company holds "enthusiasm" activities such as appreciation dinners, bowling tournaments and movie screenings.

KENNY YAP/THE EDGE



Ahmad Azhar (right): We are committed to our EVP and treat each other like family and friends

Aside from practising an open-door policy, which allows whistle-blowers to report issues for improvement of the work environment, the company also conducts MySay, a yearly engagement and satisfaction survey to get feedback from employees.

Gerbang Alaf has about 12,000 employees, including its restaurants' part-time crews. Despite this, its HR team consists of only 13 members. "In large organisations, it can work only when people commit to people matters, which is why all managers are HR managers.

"In fact, in all our restaurants, the people manager will act as an HR personnel to assist the general manager. This person will take care of employee hiring, scheduling, development and payroll," explains Ahmad Azhar.

He adds that the company commits to making sure that the turnover rate for its full-time employees is low and kept below 8%. This is hard to achieve in the F&B industry. "The nature of the industry is that it is very demanding. I was at an F&B seminar last month attended by chefs, restaurant owners, franchisees and many other people involved in the industry. The topic discussed was LOVE — labour, operations, vendor and expansions — for the business. But 90% of the time, the speakers talked about labour. That's how important labour is in the industry.

"On top of that, there is also the challenge of balancing the needs of different generations in our workforce. We acknowledge that the millennials and senior staff have different needs and wants, which is why we vary our programmes for them. But it is our passion and we take pride in keeping our employees motivated and energised," says Ahmad Azhar. ■