

# American Express wins Aon Best Employer award for the seventh time!

**A**merican Express (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd (AEM) has bagged the prestigious Aon Best Employers Award for the seventh consecutive time, no mean feat when a sizeable portion of its employees are made up of millennials.

The 167-year-old company, which has been a byword for premium payment services in Malaysia for the last 38 years, is one of few companies known for its diverse workforce, world-class service culture and dedication to staff career development.

Amid the challenges of operating in a highly competitive industry and considering the fact that the millennial generation will make up more than half the global workforce just three years from now, AEM has time and again shone as the employer of choice in Malaysia. This has to do with the company's leadership-centric model, where employees are given encouragement and trained for leadership roles.

AEM prides itself on its commitment to leadership development as a means of building up a new generation of leaders in the junior and middle management segments of the business.

This is ideal, given that more than 85% of the company's employee population is made up of millennials, who often demand change in their quest for personal achievement. The company has put in place strong professional development programmes. This, in addition to its competitive and structured engagement strategies, has kept its talent pipeline growing.

"At American Express, we firmly believe in the power of people. Driving the ethos as an employer of choice for seven consecutive times is testament to our employee engagement policies," says Ryan Lai, vice president of CEN Greater China, South East Asia (GCSEA) and general manager of American Express (M) Sdn Bhd.

"Positive customer and shareholder outcomes will fall into place naturally when employees feel valued, respected and engaged, and are given the opportunities to develop," he says.

It must be working. Wency Chua, Manager, Customer Fulfillment Network, is enthusiastic about working in the company. "I work with great people and customers at Amex who value morals and integrity, and care about people. The culture is great, creativity is encouraged, passion is commonplace and collegiality is unifying. The core values align with mine. I love Amex!"

The engagement work streams are a fundamental part of its people strategy, helping employees learn, engage and develop new skills. AEM believes that as part of the strategy, individual potential to learn and engage is cultivated beyond the daily grind of day-to-day work.

There are eight engagement work streams focusing on development; rewards and recognition; collaboration; diversity and inclusion; healthy living and safety; digital innovation; synthesizer; and special projects (see infographics).

Every employee is given the opportunity to partake in the various work streams annually. They are encouraged to nominate themselves for the work stream of their choice and each nominee will go through a stringent selection process to ensure each work stream has employee representation from each of the company's business units, and that it reflects a balanced distribution in terms of gender and age.

One of the most popular sessions in the EDGE work stream is the "Coffee Connect with Leadership" gathering. The segment provides employees with an opportunity to share their feedback and learn from the leaders.

Another interesting activity organised in-house is #OwnYourCareer, where employees get to ex-



plore the workings of other business units within the company and apply for jobs available internally in the country and globally. While this empowers them to explore other business areas, it also gives employees opportunities to try out different career paths and to learn a new set of skills.

This kind of career proposition is the reason AEM is the employer of choice when it comes to millennials. In fact, 71% of its junior management positions were filled by internally discovered talent.

Recognising that millennials are a purpose-driven generation, AEM gets it young employees to be a part of its corporate social responsibility activities underscored in its Healthy Living and IRECOGNIZE work stream.

To further boost participation, AEM has developed another work stream called the Blue Camera Lens (BCL), where young employees are encouraged to bring their technical and creative skills to the fore and offer in-house capacity to create marketing and media campaigns using photography, videography or animation.

BCL projects include undertaking the Country Executive Team photo shoot, creating videos for AEM's quarterly town halls, video interviews with the company's Long Service Award recipients and newly promoted employees, as well as videos and content for senior leader visits to Malaysia.



## DEVELOPMENT – EDGE

- Creating a Forward Thinking Centre with you
- A pivotal strategy behind the creation of the Forward Thinking Centre, where employees are given the opportunity to hone their professional interpersonal skills and confidence in the workplace.

## REWARDS AND RECOGNITION – IRECOGNIZE

- Rewarding passion
- An inclusive effort to recognise and reward employees for driving outstanding results or demonstrating superior leadership behaviours and values.
- Programmes include Employee Appreciation Month, recognition during town halls, Presidents' Award, Customer Service Award and the Pinnacle Award

## ENGAGEMENT – XCITE

- X-centuating you
- Employee engagement, branded as XCITE, creates a lively environment that underscores Malaysia's diverse cultures
- Employees come together to celebrate the main cultural festivals in the country such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali and Christmas
- Events are held to celebrate the diverse workforce and showcase their talents in acting, dancing and singing

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION – WOMEN'S INTEREST NETWORK (WIN)

- #BeBoldForChange
- Provides a forum for female employees to seek career development, support and mentoring related to the unique diversity women bring to the workplace while encouraging parity



tion Study twice in Hong Kong (2016 & 2017) and Singapore (2015 & 2016).

Other accolades include the Hong Kong Call Center Association Award, where AEM won in five categories — Gold for Best Contact Center; Gold for Best Workforce Planner; and Bronze for Best CCP (Customer Care Professional), Team Leader and Trainer.

The employer branding enables the multinational company to innovate by engaging a multidimensional approach to enhance its value proposition in the Malaysia market.

The multiple recognitions have also helped the company attract millennial talent, who in return provide extraordinary service to customers.

Given that American Express Malaysia does not operate proprietary business in Malaysia and card issuance is done through a preferred banking partner, it becomes even more imperative for AEM to grow its presence in the country.

This is why it has also harnessed social media platforms and online tools such as Facebook Advertising and Google Search Engine Optimisation to promote its brand as a part of its recruitment strategy.

Another core strategy is the enhancement of diversity within the organisation. AEM's Women's Interest Network (WIN) focuses on making diversity a mainstay in the establishment and generating programmes to assist and empower female employees and leaders.

Today, nearly 60% of the company's junior management roles as well as some senior positions are filled by women, as a result of constant attention in driving the agenda of diversity forward.

The focus on the right diverse talent is to ensure equal representation of female and male employees as well as to stay ahead of the curve where business is concerned and prioritise customer needs.

As Malaysia is a servicing hub, AEM's caters for three continents, 20 global markets and five languages. As such, multi-language capabilities are key when it comes to customer service.

With such assorted markets to service, language fluency is a top priority for AEM customer care professionals (CCPs). In Singapore, for instance, CCPs are fluent not only in English, Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin but also Cantonese.

Work-life balance is a key reason that employees in the service sector tend to job-hop. AEM understands that its employees are juggling various responsibilities at work and at home. Therefore, it emphasises a culture of health and wellness aside from career development.

The company's global signature brand for well-being, Healthy Living, has been running for the past seven years across 22 markets, along with 17 wellness centres. The Healthy Living wellness centres are aimed at promoting good health, providing preventive care and providing employees with health resources.

In addition, the company constantly analyses the correlation between health, productivity and business outcomes.

On the whole, employees are encouraged to create a work-life balance and take a personal interest in adopting healthy habits through special programmes. For its part, AEM runs a range of exercise programmes in partnership with fitness companies that offer its staff special discounts.

In-house healthy cooking demonstrations are periodically organised to promote healthy eating. The company also hosts talks on stress management and improving sleep habits.

AEM's success with its large millennial workforce is enviable. It can be mainly attributed to the fact that the company understands its younger staff and their aspirations and goals.

The introduction of BCL has not only allowed AEM to groom in-house talent, but also to cut costs and reinvest the budget into other work streams.

In 2016, about 150 of its employees joined forces to do their part in preserving the environment by cleaning up a beach in Port Dickson. The company also raised funds to buy musical instruments for a Kuala Lumpur-based welfare organisation. The sum raised was matched by management.

To mark AEM's 38 years in Malaysia, company-wide Founder's Day celebrations were held on April 18. The event also commemorated the recruitment of the company's 1,000th employee.

Apart from the seven consecutive AON wins in Best Employer segment, AEM's other badges of honor includes Best Employer for Gen Y (2015), Best Employer for Women (2016), and the highest ranking in the JD Power Credit Card Satisfac-



**HEALTHY LIVING AND SAFETY — HEALTHSQUAD**

– Promoting healthy lifestyle and safety governance  
– Health squad is uniquely designed to combine both healthy living, health and safety to bring Wellness and Safety programmes to employees. The team's aim is to create awareness, allowing employees to take charge of their well-being and safety, MOVE MORE, EAT WELL STRESS LESS and SAFETY FIRST through innovative, fresh and engaged activities.

**DIGITAL INNOVATION — BLUE CAMERA LENS**

– The peak of innovative multimedia  
– Pioneering innovative digital engagement and communications. Employees in the team are acquainted with unique ways in delivering messages and presentations through multimedia using photography, videography, graphic editing and animations.

**SYNTHESIZER**

– Transformation through collaboration  
– A transformational collaboration between two or more lines of businesses to work towards improvement

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

– Optimising resources and talent  
– Managing and driving AEM centre-level projects to success