

AMERICAN EXPRESS MALAYSIA WINS ON COMPANY CULTURE

BY TAN ZHAI YUN

American Express (M) Sdn Bhd won the award for Best Employer for the eighth time at the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2018 awards. Key to its success was the presence of strong, collaborative leadership and a conducive corporate culture, says chief human resource officer Anjum Ghaffar.

“Our American Express colleagues are always willing to go above and beyond to help our customers and one another. They are very engaged, have a strong sense of values and are highly committed to the success of the company,” she adds.

The global services company was founded in 1979 and has been present in Malaysia for 39 years. Kuala Lumpur is home to the American Express Global Service Centre, which provides card and merchant services to American Express offices in 20 countries. In addition to offering the American Express charge card and merchant acquiring businesses in Malaysia under an independent operator agreement with Malayan Banking Bhd, it also operates the Travel Service Network, Travellers Cheques business, membership travel services and global network services.

The company strongly believes that, to provide the best experience to customers, it needs to support its people by providing various opportunities to help them grow in their careers. “We believe that what you choose to do for a living is one of the most meaningful decisions you can make. At American Express, our job is to help you excel at yours,” says Anjum.

“We provide experiences to help you become a great leader. We offer a world of opportunities to help you grow your career and inculcate an inclusive culture to help you thrive. We do this because the best way to back our customers is to back our people.”

The company has made a conscious decision to fundamentally shift away from an “employer-employee” relationship. Instead of using the word “employees”, it uses “colleagues” to make sure they break the barriers of organisational hierarchy and promote camaraderie across all levels in the company.

There are several core values driving how the company manages its colleagues and creates a good workplace. The first is “Doing what’s right”, which is to ensure that everything it does is reliable, consistent and based on integrity so it can earn its customers’ trust. “Respecting people” highlights how the company is diverse, inclusive and serves a varied client base.

“Making it great” means we aim to deliver unparalleled excellence in everything we do. With ‘Needing different views’, we emphasise being open to different ideas from our colleagues, customers and the world around us. ‘Delivering for our customers’ means we are driven by our commitment to deliver exceptional products, services and experiences to our customers,” says Anjum.

Its other core values are “Winning as a team”, whereby the colleagues believe they are all part of the same team and strive to deliver their brand promise to customers and each other every day. “Caring about our communities” highlights their aim to make

a difference in the communities in which they work and live.

For instance, the company often hosts volunteering events to build social networks, practise leadership and create a sense of purpose and connection among colleagues. It also partners non-profit organisations to build volunteerism into their business models, focusing on creating long-term engagement rather than one-off events through its Serve2Gether programme.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Like other companies, American Express Malaysia has a growing number of millennials on its team and in leadership positions. This has called for some modification to its training and professional development programmes to reflect the changing demographic.

“One example is training leaders who may have less experience managing teams to ensure that they can effectively engage with and retain staff. We realise that we must look at training from the perspective of having a multi-generational workforce so we can tailor solutions for different developmental needs and work styles. Ultimately, we want to help all of our people — across all ages and experience levels — be successful,” says Anjum.

The company has introduced employee networks to encourage interaction between colleagues of all levels and to help them understand each other’s needs and wants. As a millennial-centric workplace, it has also introduced an agile work culture. The goal is to create an engaging, fun and meaningful workplace so everyone can succeed regardless of their age group, says Anjum.

“We believe that our company and the quality of our workplace appeal to millennials because of our iconic brand, the opportuni-

ties we offer to grow as a leader, the ability to make a difference, our culture of learning and collaboration, our increased focus on making decisions quickly and the support we provide to help our people thrive in their career and life,” she adds.

To create an engaging culture, the company makes sure all colleagues’ views are heard and implemented. “We constantly seek feedback from our colleagues to make sure that we have the best workplace for them to succeed. For example, we host many connection sessions, where team members can ask questions and share feedback with the leadership team. We will continue to listen to our colleagues to help us shape the range of workplace benefits and career development and social responsibility offerings we provide,” says Anjum.

For instance, the colleagues reflected to the management that they would like to have a newer, improved office space and amenities. “Our teams worked together across multiple businesses to make this a reality. We recently moved into our new office with state-of-the-art amenities. This includes recreation and relaxation rooms on every floor, collaborative breakout areas, massage chairs and various games, including karaoke and musical instruments, for our colleagues,” says Anjum. **E**



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