

DHL TAKES HOME THE TOP PRIZE

BY OLIVER CHRISTOPHER GOMEZ

Fourth time's the charm for DHL Express (M) Sdn Bhd. The logistics company won its maiden "Best of the Best" award at the recently held Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2018 awards.

Managing director Christopher Ong is pleased that the company finally made it to the top after winning three consecutive Best Employer awards previously. "We are extremely excited, just exhilarated really, because everyone worked really hard for this. I am not talking about just the managers or supervisors, but everyone in the organisation," he tells *The Edge*.

"I am very proud of the fact that we have been one of the best places to work. But now, we are considered the best place to work."

But becoming a top employer does not happen overnight. For DHL, it comes down to the company's strong execution of its overarching strategy.

"The first pillar of this strategy is 'motivated people'. Once you have cultivated really engaged and motivated employees, they will want to deliver 'great service' quality to our customers. This gives rise to our third pillar, 'loyal customers'. And all this results in our fourth pillar, a 'profitable network,'" says Ong.

This creates a "virtuous cycle", as he puts it, with each pillar feeding into the other. "And once we have that profitable network, we then want to invest the profit in our people," he adds.

These pillars were put to the test during the 14th general election in May. "If businesses aren't open, we won't have any shipments to move and this impacts our revenue. In May, we had three unexpected vacation days due to the general election. Businesses were closed during that period and in the months since, they have adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach. As a result, our performance went a little astray. We communicated these issues frankly with our employees and they rallied to increase our overall service quality to make sure the customer felt even closer to DHL during this period," says Ong.

When employees are taken care of, they take care of the company. Recognising this dynamic, the company has made significant investments in its people over the last 12 to 18 months. "We were already doing well, but we have really accelerated the investment in our people over the past year," says Ong.

"To us, the most important people are our supervisors. So, we have rolled out a lot of training programmes to help them become active leaders. We want our supervisors to have the passion and engagement to help their teams grow."

According to him, supervisors tend to be the first point of contact for all the company's new hires. "They are the first managers the new hires report to. And often, it is the supervisor who dictates the course of their careers. If a new hire has a particularly engaged supervisor — someone who coaches and guides them — then chances are that the new hire will go on to achieve bigger things," he says.

The company runs a global programme known as the Certified International Manager Supervisory Excellence. It is run in all the countries in which DHL has a presence. "In Malaysia, we have been aggressively pushing



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the certification for the last 12 to 18 months and we have been able to upskill our supervisors. They don't just learn technical skills but also soft skills and how to engage with the staff," says Ong.

"By the way, these training sessions are not facilitated by some HR training manager — they are facilitated by the supervisors' own managers. In fact, I facilitate these sessions about three or four times a year."

This alone isn't enough, however. As DHL is a global company, the bulk of its business comes from overseas shipping. DHL's Certified International Specialist is another certification programme to create specialists within its ranks.

"Because most of our focus is on international shipments — 90% of our business in Malaysia is in cross-border trade — our people must be trained and equipped to become specialists on issues like customs regulations, for example. They must be able to advise customers on the kinds of things that can and cannot be shipped," says Ong.

The company also runs a Certified International Manager Programme. "Here, we set the tone for new managers or young managers so they know what is expected of them, particularly when they engage with their supervisors," he says.

Ong also spends a lot of time engaging with the staff directly. "Every six months or so, we go on a town-hall meeting circuit. DHL has 16 facilities in Malaysia. Over a four-week period (in July and August), I must have conducted about 25 town hall sessions," he says.

During these site visits, Ong makes an extra effort to conduct smaller and more localised meetings with small groups of employees. "I sit down with about 10 employees at a time and just hear from them directly. It could be couriers, customs brokers, customer service

agents, our sales people, the IT team, finance team, anyone really. Here, we talk about their working conditions and discuss things to improve upon," he says.

Ong reckons that he has met directly with about 500 employees so far this year, where these smaller group meetings are concerned. "This is the direct voice of the employees. I think they appreciate the transparency and trust that we will follow through on our promises. For instance, when we tell them that whenever we have extra money, we will invest in them, they know this to be true. Some of the benefits we have given them are unlike anything they have experienced elsewhere," he says.

At the time of writing, DHL was conducting company-wide medical screenings as part of its commitment to employee health and well-being. Employees get access to comprehensive medical screening services and there is almost a 100% uptake by the 1,220-strong workforce, says Ong.

"Those over the age of 40, regardless of rank in the company, enjoy highly comprehensive head-to-toe health screenings. Such screenings are typically only reserved for top management. But at DHL, we provide this service to all our people so long as they are over 40," he adds.

"Those over 30 — again, regardless of rank — get [slightly less comprehensive] executive health screenings. These services would cost well over RM2,500 a person if they were to go to external providers. Obviously, it helps that we negotiate for these services in bulk and therefore are able to get the screenings at a discount.

"Even so, we have had people discover heart blockages, diabetes diagnoses and even failing kidneys. Thereafter, they seek treatment [via the company's health insurance programme] and are able to continue living healthy and productive lives." **E**