

FOR AGILENT, BUILDING TRUST IS KEY

BY TAN ZHAI YUN

Creating trust is very important for organisations and one of the best ways to do so is through authentic communication. In the past few years, Agilent Technologies LDA Malaysia Sdn Bhd has implemented measures to promote employee engagement. These efforts have helped the company win the award for Best Employer at the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2018 awards, says country manager Chai Meng Fee.

This is the second time Agilent has won the award since 2011. The Penang-based company is involved in life sciences research, clinical and diagnostic testing and analytical instruments and supplies. Its core values of trust, respect and teamwork, innovation, uncompromising integrity, speed, focus and accountability have stood it in good stead.

“What we have been driving for the last three years is basically to develop greater trust among teams and to do the right thing for our employees. We believe that our employees want a workplace that is conducive for them to do their best. So, we get their feedback on what they think we can do to make it a better workplace for them,” says Chai.

“Agilent has an open-door policy. All employees have direct access to all the managers. They are free to share their ideas, voice their concerns or speak out on things they feel are not aligned with the company.”

Every quarter, the managers sit down with their teams to discuss the key challenges they face. The managers evaluate the feedback and design training programmes that can address those issues. They also work with the human resources department to figure out how to help employees collaborate more effectively.

“We also have conversations where we get a manager from outside the work group to sit down with the employees to talk about what is troubling them and what we can do to help them make it better. We call it a ‘Stay Interview’, where we say it is better to have the employees talk to us when they are still working at Agilent than in an exit interview. This programme has been well received,” says Chai.

The Stay Interview is done on a random basis and in a confidential manner. The company’s goal is for one-third of its employees to have this conversation every year. About 250 employees have gone through the programme since it started two years ago.

“These are conversations that are more open and we really want to hear from them. It will be reported back to our site managers to see if there is a pattern that we need to address or if it is a more individual problem. Sometimes, we will come in and help address the environment that is less than perfect,” says Chai.

HELPING EMPLOYEES STAY ENGAGED

As more companies head to the northern state, Agilent faces greater competition

for talent, Chai observes. This creates a challenge for employees because when someone leaves, they have to shoulder the extra workload while the company looks for a new hire.

This makes it crucial for the company to create a conducive working environment for employees. A key solution is to improve the quality of the managers.

“When we looked at the things that impact employee engagement, number one was the effectiveness of our new managers. That is why we have prepared a lot of training programmes and workshops to help them develop effective leadership skills. By doing this, we can lessen the frustrations that employees experience and establish a more balanced workload for them,” says Chai.

It is also important to make sure that the employees’ views are heard by the managers. In addition to quarterly meetings and the Stay Interview, the company also compiles the feedback from employees and shares the results with them.

“We are actively inputting their frustrations into a table that we share with employees on a regular basis. While we may not have solutions for some of these things yet, it is on our minds and we provide regular updates on the progress. We also ask them to contribute what they see as potential solutions that would work for them. By doing this, we see a lot more engagement,” says Chai.

Training programmes are provided to help employees prepare for promotions and learn new skills. Agilent provides on-

line and classroom training as well as coaching by a manager or expert.

“Our employees are really passionate about what they do and are constantly innovating. We recognise the innovations and improvement ideas that our employees share with us,” says Chai.

“On a quarterly basis, we have what we call the innovation awards for all employees. We pick the best innovation and publish it to recognise some of the good ideas they have come up with. We are a science-based company and are going through Industry 4.0, so we need to change ourselves to drive effectiveness and efficiency.”



Chai