

# SKYWORLD LETS GEN Y-ERS TAKE PART IN DECISION- MAKING

BY MAXINE YONG

What makes a company a great employer to work for? Is it creating a conducive and friendly work environment, taking care of staff welfare or offering an attractive severance package if you have to let staff go? These may come close, but Datuk Ng Thien Ping takes the game to the next level — grooming his employees to become his future competitors.

The founder and managing director of SkyWorld Development Sdn Bhd — the property developer behind SkyArena @ Setapak and SkyAwani — says the job scope is quite focused for most companies, but not for SkyWorld. “At other companies, if you are in the design department, you will only focus on designing products. If you are on the project execution team, you will only be overseeing project execution. It is very different at SkyWorld. We encourage our employees to go through the full cycle of property development, which usually takes seven years.”

What this means is that an employee who wants to learn the ins and outs of the business would need to spend at least seven years with the company.

Ng says the full cycle of property development involves product design, construction, customer service, the handover procedure, sales and marketing as well as after-sales service. The employees are backed by a support team to ensure that they can learn everything about the business from general technicalities to the nitty-gritty.

“In the first two years, they will be involved in getting the development order, which teaches them about sales and marketing in the industry. Over the next three years, they learn about construction and have to oversee its progress and conduct frequent site visits,” he says.

In the final two years, they will learn about the handover procedure and after-sales service, as there is a 24-month maintenance period.

“So, for employees who have great ambition, they can choose to go through the full cycle. But for those who are not interested in becoming a property developer, they can focus on what they are truly interested in,” Ng says. For example, an employee may express an interest in learning about product design and construction. “We will also encourage that,” Ng adds.

This is why SkyWorld earned a special recognition for Commitment to Gen-Y

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at the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2017 awards.

“The company is overjoyed at winning as this is the first time we are participating. We never thought we would win anything. Our aim was to understand our people, how they view the company and how they fit into the SkyWorld culture,” Ng says.

“This award is truly an honour for the company, as it further cements our position as a responsible developer, not only to our clients but also to our employees. The credit goes to all our staff — one of our most valuable assets — especially the human resource department, which initiated the participation. It would not have been possible without all their hard work,” Ng adds.

He notes that the award means a lot to SkyWorld, as 55% of its employees are Gen Y-ers. Other than providing a good platform for career development, the company also has a bottom-up policy, where 80% of its decisions are made by employees. The top management only steps in when staff have different views on a particular project and cannot decide on their own.

“Our corporate culture is to let the employees make most of the decisions.



SUHAIMI YUSUF/THE EDGE

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> Ng

This is different from many companies in which the superiors dictate. We give our employees the opportunity to propose, discuss and fine-tune ideas and make decisions. They will feel appreciated when they get to [play a major role in] the decision-making process instead of only taking instructions from their superiors,” Ng points out.

SkyWorld focuses solely on high-rise properties. “Our young employees are the ones who understand the pressing needs of prospective buyers as most of them stay in condominiums as well. They can fine-tune the design to suit what people really need in their living space,” Ng says.

Naturally, they do make mistakes,

but to him, this is all part of the learning process, both for them and the company.

SkyWorld also introduced various staff engagement programmes to create a conducive working environment. This includes biannual top-down gatherings, annual employee feedback, town hall meetings and coffee chats with top management for employees to express their views freely.

Alternatively, Ng says, staff could also talk to the top management whenever they see them. For example, the company has set up SkyLounge, a cosy place for employees to relax, at its corporate headquarters on Jalan Ampang Putra. Ng often hangs out there and chats with his colleagues. It is a popular place to meet and chill out.

SkyWorld provides an attractive remuneration package as well as good training and mentoring in order to attract and retain talent. It also offers performance-based rewards and two bonuses a year.

An example of its mentoring is its bottom-20 policy, inspired by the practice of General Electric. “We pay more attention to those who have not met their key performance indicators. We will communicate with them and coach them to move them to the top-80 list, helping them achieve their KPIs and strive for excellence,” says Ng.

There is a cut-off point, however. “If they don’t demonstrate the right attitude, we may have to let them go,” he points out.

It is never easy to lay off employees, especially for Ng. He spent six years recruiting the top talent in the industry to build the best team. It was really difficult to get talent on board at first. As time passed, SkyWorld became more well-known and more people were willing to give it a shot.

Now, with the special recognition, the company will get more exposure. Ng’s strategy for hiring staff goes along the lines of “talent-gets-talent”, whereby employees will introduce the best talent they know to the company. He believes nothing works better than an employee recommending a position within the company to his friends. “We don’t do mass recruitment drives, such as advertising job vacancies in newspapers or participating in job fairs. We go the extra mile by adopting a more proactive approach. We contact talent from our talent-gets-talent programme or identify potential candidates through our business networks. This reduces the risk of a wrong hire.”

As an employer, there are three principles that SkyWorld abides by: Dare to Lead, Let’s Talk and Get Things Done. “Dare to Lead signals that we want our employees to lead and make important decisions. We will provide the necessary support to help them become leaders. Let’s Talk means there is transparency and open communication within the company. We listen to our employees, understand, appreciate and accept their feedback, opinions as well as innovative ideas,” Ng says. “Get it Done means that we will solve their problems and address their concerns. This ensures that they can complete their tasks within the stipulated time.”

Ng does not agree with critics of Gen Y-ers who claim they are hard to work with as they lack a strong work ethic and loyalty to their employers and are unable to accept criticism. “As someone who is a Gen-Y myself, I don’t believe any of this is true. Well, we haven’t seen this kind of behaviour at SkyWorld anyway,” he quips. **E**