

Managing a huge group of employees and making sure they feel a sense of belonging can be a tough job. But what if the employees are also from diverse backgrounds and different countries?

It's a challenge that Aegis BPO Malaysia Sdn Bhd has taken on by managing more than 3,000 employees spread out over its three centres in Malaysia. These employees are from 33 countries around the world.

Despite the obstacles, Aegis BPO Malaysia earned special recognition for commitment to engagement at the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2017 awards. This is the first time that Aegis BPO, which acquired Symphony House BPO in 2014, has won recognition at these prestigious awards, no mean feat for a company dealing with the usual post-acquisition integration issues.

Chief operating officer Divya Dutta attributes the company's achievement to its efforts in emphasising transparent communication and creating growth opportunities. "We are very clear in our business that employees are our strength and we have to make them feel valued from day one. We have to treat our employees the way we treat our customers because if our employees are not happy, our customers will not be happy," he says.

Aegis BPO is a business process outsourcing company that provides customer experience management for global businesses across various sectors. Headquartered in India, it is present in 44 locations across nine countries and has over 40,000 employees. Up to 85% of them are voice agents who have to communicate with clients.

Aegis BPO has completed one round of acquisitions and is headed for another. In April, Essar Global Ltd announced that it would be selling its stake in Aegis BPO to Singapore-based private-equity firm Capital Square Partners.

Dutta says he understands the stress that comes with the job, so he wants to make sure his employees have enough support and training to handle these situations. "I was a call centre agent myself when I

HAPPY AEGIS BPO EMPLOYEES MEAN HAPPY CUSTOMERS

BY TAN ZHAI YUN

headset and get screamed at by customers who take out their frustrations on you. We try to provide staff with all the necessary assistance. For instance, if we know that an agent is handling a rude customer, we have trainers and coaches to speak to them after the call, to help ease their tension."

Creating a cheerful office environment is also important. "If you visit our offices, you will see a lot of colours, a lot of pictures with positive messages. We want our employees to be proud to work in a place like this. Ambience makes a big difference," Dutta says.

The company has structured programmes and dedicated personnel to help employees feel engaged and voice their opinions. Every month, Dutta holds a coffee session with his employees to exchange views on how to improve their situation and help them add value to their customers.

"We have different teams servicing 33 sectors and we get 15 to 20 people in each session, which may last from one to 1½ hours, to bring up issues they are facing. We talk about them and they go back and communicate our views to their team. This way, I'm hearing their voices and they are hearing mine," Dutta says.

It is one way of obtaining feedback in a company with more than 3,000 people.

The company also has a dedicated en-



and for some employees from countries such as China and Korea. The engagement team has to ensure that the needs of staff are properly taken care of.

"The idea is that these guys [the engagement persons] talk to them day in and day out and feed back the information to us so we understand how the teams are doing and whether they are happy and motivated," he says.

Each employee is assigned a colour, based on the likelihood of their leaving the company. Red indicates someone who is about to move out while green is for someone who is really happy and motivated and who wants to remain in Aegis BPO. Yellow is for someone who is on the borderline.

"The engagement team and supervisors will talk to the reds and convert them to yellows and they will try to convert the yellows to greens," he says.

Another key component is a training and development programme to reward employees who perform well. The programme was launched three years ago after the leadership received employee feedback regarding the demand for such opportunities. "If you have potential and the right attitude, you can grow in the system," Dutta says.

He ensures that only 45% of the employees go for these trainings at any one time

rather than an entitlement. "We have different structured training programmes across different levels for each employee," he notes.

This programme makes employee evaluations more transparent. "Employees are not shocked by their evaluations at the end of the year because we have been assessing them from month to month. Also, if somebody is recognised for good work, it is not a surprise to everyone," Dutta says.

Being recognised keeps employees engaged and motivated. Also, being an international company, Aegis BPO can post its employees to different locations, which serves as an additional incentive for staff to perform.

"We have a global talent exchange programme. We have already moved some 200 people at different levels to other offices. When we have job opportunities in our global offices, we are very clear that we will fill them up within the organisation. If a person is performing, you have to reward them, and the reward isn't always in the form of money or a trophy. It's also about exposure," Dutta says.

According to him, the company currently has a 45% annualised attrition rate, which is a huge improvement from the 120% it recorded four years ago when Aegis BPO first entered Malaysia.

"We have a motto of 'get-set-go'. 'Get' means getting the right talent; 'set' means setting them up for success; and 'go' means going ahead and growing in the organisation," Dutta says.

He adds that the company believes in keeping all its stakeholders — employees, customers and shareholders — happy. "As long as we achieve this, we cannot falter. We've never lost a business in the past three to four years."

Dutta plans to participate in the Aon Best Employers — Malaysia 2017 awards next year. "This award means a lot to us. We really appreciate not just being nominated but also getting the special recognition. It makes us feel proud that what we've been doing has been recognised and it motivates us to do even better," he says.