

HONING MILLENNIAL TALENT AT ECOWORLD

MOHD IZWAN MOHD NAZAM/THE EDGE

BY OLIVER CHRISTOPHER GOMEZ

Eco World Development Group Bhd has been in business for only five years, but that has not stopped the property developer from bagging a fourth consecutive win at this year's Aon Best Employers awards.

EcoWorld has become a top destination for talent, thanks in no small part to the leadership of its founder and chairman Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin and CEO Datuk Chang Khim Wah.

"I would like to thank Aon Hewitt for recognising us for four years running. I attribute these victories to the culture that we have been able to cultivate at Team EcoWorld," says Chang.

"One must realise that the company is only five years old. We were created in the growth stage — we did not start small. And in that short time, our talented, diverse and dynamic team has managed to accumulate 8,000 acres of land and create an overall gross development value of RM87 billion.

"Our teams have achieved RM15 billion in sales in Malaysia alone and we have closed nearly RM7 billion in sales in London and Australia. In this short time span, we have learnt together, grown together, suffered together, failed together and enjoyed success together."

Chang was effusive in his praise for the company's 1,500-strong workforce, 70% of which are millennials. "They contribute so much in terms of creativity, ideas, energy and feedback on how we can improve and stay ahead of today's trends," he says.

He adds that millennials are exceptionally well educated and independent thinkers. This contributes to them having very unique drives and motivations.

"It is important that our senior managers are able to align these drives with company objectives while balancing that out with career milestones that will enhance millennials' careers here at EcoWorld. That is why when we conduct training and development programmes, we constantly ask for feedback from the millennial staff on the kind of training programmes they may require," says Chang.

The company's faith in its young talent is paying off handsomely. Millennial staff are responsible for some particularly unique property innovations.

Eco Ardenace, for instance, is one of the company's more recent flagship developments. Boasting a gross development value of RM8.5 billion, the more than 200ha "eco-township" in Setia Alam is growing quickly.

Located within Eco Ardenace is a 27-acre hub simply known as Ardenace Labs. Chang tells *The Edge* that it was the company's mil-



Ardenace Labs

lennial staff that first mooted the idea of creating such unique commercial zones. "These are very nicely refurbished containers that we have put next to relaxing lake scenery and open fields. There are plenty of great retail options here, but it is also a place for young businesses and startups to engage in co-working."

The co-working concept is something that resonates with millennials because they are heavily inclined towards entrepreneurship. "Many of our more experienced team members may not have considered this idea very feasible. But our millennial staff — who were guided by their senior managers — understood that these concepts are very popular among the younger generation. There are rapid social changes taking place in our country and in order to keep pace with these shifts, we need input from those who are immersed in the culture," says Chang.

EcoWorld's millennial staff also play a prominent role in the company's marketing and branding strategies. "This is almost totally driven by our millennial staff. Our content and visuals, in addition to our social media presence, have channelled a lot of new customer interest our way."

SIMPLE THINGS DONE WELL

Key to the company's success with its millennial staff is the active engagement that takes place. "Young people are keen to know where their careers are taking them. They want to know what is going on with the company and they want to know how they are contributing to these goals," says Chang.

"Engagement takes up about 40% of our time here at the company. Channels of engagement can take many forms. Our chairman, Tan Sri Liew, goes round to all the business units every six months or so to conduct open dialogue with the staff. As for myself, I try to go round to all our business units every two months or so and conduct dialogue sessions."

The company has weekly "Good Morning EcoWorld" staff meetings in each department. This is where the staff gather to discuss business and human resources-related issues. It also runs its own intranet and social media portal specifically for employees.

Here, employees are able to keep track of the company's events, major announcements and even staff birthdays. "The staff can be plugged into the goings on of the company if they so choose," says Chang.

At its core, becoming an employer of choice is a matter of taking standard employment practices in the industry and executing them really well. "There are many employment policies that are quite standard for most of the

industry — things such as medical insurance and annual leave allowances. To this end, the company provides incentives to employees who remain productive and engaged. For instance, an employee who needs to look after a sick child and is unable to find a babysitter may apply for childcare leave," says Chang.

This will be deducted from their medical leave quota, he adds.

"But the talent you attract really depends on the employer's position in the market. The brand needs to stand for certain values. This helps us attract people with similar values. There is a certain standard and quality to our product offerings and naturally, this attracts a certain kind of talent to the company."

In this regard, Chang praised EcoWorld's talent management team, attributing the company's overall employment and employer brand to the team's robust hiring and employment policies. "We are very lucky to have a talent management team that thinks far beyond the present. They effectively deploy talent where it is needed the most and help us to quickly recruit the people we need. Over the last five years, the team has helped our people with multiple training and development programmes and opportunities for growth, in addition to providing staff with new challenges to help them perform."

This deeply engaged and proactive style of employee management is what creates the company's culture of excellence, says Chang. "Being a relatively new company, we tend to be quite hands-on with the entire team. When we have product launches, we mobilise many of our staff to help. Everyone interacts with one another to get these events off the ground. So, the active engagement at the company does not just take place via official channels. There are many opportunities for staff to engage with one another across departments."

The company's commitment to its staff is why the turnover rate comes in at 8% — well below the industry standard of 12%, according to Chang. "Of course, one factor that does contribute to the turnover is the fact that the people who join us are very talented and well-trained. Often, there are some who venture out and start businesses of their own. Sometimes, they receive offers to work overseas. This isn't a bad thing because it shows that our people are able to grow," he says.

"We are very happy with the fact that we have been able to retain all of our most experienced managers, as well as a large number of millennials who joined us over the last five years. They have grown in their work and in their own personal capacity. Thus, they continue to power the company forward and give us many new ideas."

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