



WINNING WITH A 'PEOPLE FIRST' STRATEGY

BY TAN ZHAI YUN

For SkyWorld Development Sdn Bhd, a three-time winner at the Kincentric Best Employers (previously known as Aon Best Employers) awards, employee engagement begins when a new hire comes on board.

Fresh “SkyRians” go through an orientation programme, where the C-suite shares with them the company’s core values and takes questions from the floor. Buddies are then assigned to support the new SkyRians for three months and provide feedback for their culture fit assessment.

This level of engagement is unique to SkyWorld and it comes from founder and managing director Datuk Ng Thien Phing’s “people first” policy. The company won the Best Employer for Gen Y award in 2017 and the Best Employer award last year.

“At SkyWorld, we believe in the saying of ‘Take care of your people and your people will take care of the business’. That is the reason we have always made our people our priority,” says Ng.

This also means letting SkyRians experience the company’s services first hand. All new hires participate in a tour of its property sales gallery to experience the sales presentation as a customer. Then, they visit project sites and the SkyWorld Quality Centre, which is the first of its kind in the world.

“We invested RM3.8 million [to build the centre] as a training ground to educate employees and the public on how we assess quality in all our development projects,” says Ng.

Meanwhile, the SkyRians Exclusive Privilege allows employees to experience and enjoy the benefits of any event, programme or product before it is launched to the public.

But keeping high levels of employee engagement is challenging. The company has to keep abreast of their needs and wants. For SkyWorld, 64% of its employees are Generation Y. To keep them engaged, building a culture of empowerment is key, says Ng.

SkyWorld’s management team does so by implementing two policies that empower employees to make decisions. “Bottom-up decision [making] is where the majority of operational decisions are made by front-line employees. Minimal strategic decisions are left to the senior and top management,” he says.

“Two-tier management is where the middle and senior management have free access to all levels of employees to discuss work processes and results. This works vice versa as well, where executive employees have the opportunity to work directly with the middle and senior management for certain tasks, with acknowledgement from their direct superiors.”

These two policies help to develop and train its employees to make sound decisions and develop problem-solving skills, says Ng. They also instil open communication across all levels.

Middle management is empowered to be responsible and accountable for larger portfolios. This strengthens the company’s succession management.

“Consequently, middle management is ready to be leaders or successors in a shorter period of time. Our talent pool widens and these high performers can take up larger portfolios within two years, which is how we help our company to grow aggressively,” says Ng.

GROOMING NEW LEADERS

Nurturing a capable talent pipeline is important for SkyWorld to meet its long-term strategic business needs. Ng says its talent management team works hand in hand with its business teams to identify potential talents and develop them into well-rounded leaders.

SkyWorld has two strategies to achieve these goals. Experienced managers go through the SkyWorld Leadership Awakening Programme while young managers experience the SkyWorld Management Development Programme to prepare them for leadership roles.

“Both programmes incorporate four modules — leading self, leading others, leading businesses and leading change,” says Ng.

The two development programmes are complemented by a six-month mentoring programme, where a manager is assigned a mentor from senior or top management.

Ng believes in the “people-get-people” philosophy when it comes to hiring employees.

“We do not believe in engaging head-hunting services, using job advertisements or participating in career fairs in our hiring process. We sell our employee value proposition — ‘SkyWorld, an exceptional workplace experience’ — and provide a career platform for employees to excel,” he says. **E**