

# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT A TOP PRIORITY

BY **KHAIRANI AFIFI NOORDIN**

**G**erbang Alaf Restaurants Sdn Bhd, the operator of the McDonald's franchise in Malaysia, clinched its fifth Best Employer award as well as a special recognition for talent focus — one of the new pillars of engagement — at the Kincentric Best Employers — Malaysia 2019 (formerly known as Aon Best Employers) awards this year.

The company also won the award in 2018, 2017, 2013 and 2011. It won special recognition for being the Best Employer for Women in 2015 and Best Employer for Gen Y in 2013.

McDonald's Malaysia managing director and local operating partner Azmir Jaafar attributes its success to the company's emphasis on its Employee Value Proposition (EVP), which has laid the foundation for its achievements. He says the EVP places utmost importance on its people and their needs through three core values, which are family and friends, flexibility and future.

Gerbang Alaf constantly strives to support its people in their personal and professional growth trajectories. In fact, there is an abundance of opportunities for its staff to grow within the organisation, says Azmir.

"We provide strategic career planning for our people so that they are aware of the opportunities and avenues for growth within McDonald's Malaysia. For instance, there are four areas or 'archways' [a reference to McDonald's famous golden arches] to opportunities in the organisation — Crew, Manage, Consult and Inspire. We provide the necessary training and skills development programmes to elevate each team member so they excel in specific areas," he adds.

In addition to its in-house development programmes, Gerbang Alaf has partnered Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) to enable its employees to enrol at the university's Azman Hashim International Business School. This credit transfer programme and partnership with UTM is aimed at providing its people with opportunities for career development at every level, says Azmir. It underscores the quality of McDonald's Malaysia's training programmes, where the focus is on leadership competencies,

customer satisfaction, business acumen and people skills.

Apart from providing programmes for its current employees, Gerbang Alaf is committed to bringing out the best in potential employees. It has established several talent development programmes designed to provide young people all over Malaysia with the right skills and a promising career, says Azmir.

One of these is the National Dual Training System, an industry-oriented training programme that combines workplace and institutional training. During the 18-month period, McDonald's apprentices spend 70% of the time doing practical training in its restaurants and 30% in classrooms studying the theoretical part of it.

Upon completing the programme, the apprentices are awarded the Malaysian Skills Certificate by the Malaysian Department of Skills Development. They are also offered a job at McDonald's.

The company has also introduced a Management Apprenticeship Programme, aimed at university students who work on weekends to undergo practical training on restaurant management, communication and business-related knowledge. Another initiative is a Management Trainee Programme — a structured programme developed to ensure a more effective and robust hiring process for new managers.

Since 2017, the company has hired more than 200 people as management trainees. Of these, 80% have been successfully promoted, says Azmir.

"These initiatives are part of our efforts to be proactive in training and hiring employees, in line with our plans to have up to 450 restaurants nationwide by 2025, creating 10,000 more jobs," he adds.

Azmir makes it a habit to visit the restaurants regularly and brings members of the senior management team along with him. The visits are to get a sense of the employees' morale and see how they are executing the company's growth strategy, among others. He talks to as many staff, managers and customers as possible during these visits to get a feel of the company's business health.

But things do not stop at that. Gerbang Alaf is committed to giving back to the local community. "We are committed to lead and make a positive difference in our community and environment," says Azmir. **E**



Azmir