

UPBEAT

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an **EMPLOYER ALLIANCE** Publication

Becoming an Employer of Choice[®]

by Joyce Gioia

Work-Life
Conversation
with an Expert
- Hewitt Associates



Employers of Choice Put Employees First

- Cherie Hearts Group
International Pte Ltd

Strategized Initiatives Retain Key Staff

- Republic Polytechnic

Small Businesses Can Be Great Employers

- KH Security Agency, Focus on the
Family and Xcellink Pte Ltd

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Employer Alliance – Resources and Services





About Employer Alliance

U pbeat is just one more service of Employer Alliance (EA), designed to complement its comprehensive website, www.employeralliance.sg, as well as the numerous Work-Life seminars and forums it organizes.

You will benefit greatly from its newest resource, an online one-stop Smart Kit where you can learn from a variety of creative flexible work arrangements, employee support schemes and leave benefits, to suit any company's budget.

Employer Alliance is a network of corporations committed to create an enabling work-environment to support Work-Life Integration. Its vision is to build corporate awareness of the contribution of Work-Life to business results. Singapore corporations are challenged by talent management and staff retention; therefore a sound Work-Life strategy is the key.

More than 700 companies have joined EA as corporate members and the number continues to grow. These corporate members come from different industry sectors such as manufacturing, retail, services, financial and hospitality. Membership is free and member benefits include access to our resources and invitations to forums, events and key Work-Life conferences.

For further information or to join as member:
log on to www.employeralliance.sg or
email admin@employeralliance.sg or
call (65) 6837 8631

Editorial Committee

- | | |
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Message from Chairperson



An Employer of Choice, by definition, refers to an organization that employees choose to work for. Such employers compete for talent at a completely different level in the marketplace – talented individuals actively seek them out and existing employees perform at their best in order to stay there.

Any organization can be an Employer of Choice – this attribute is not the prerogative of large organizations or brand name MNCs. Key characteristics of Employers of Choice include their care for and respect of employees. This is unsurprising, given that it is these very employees who choose whether to stay with the organization or vote with their feet.

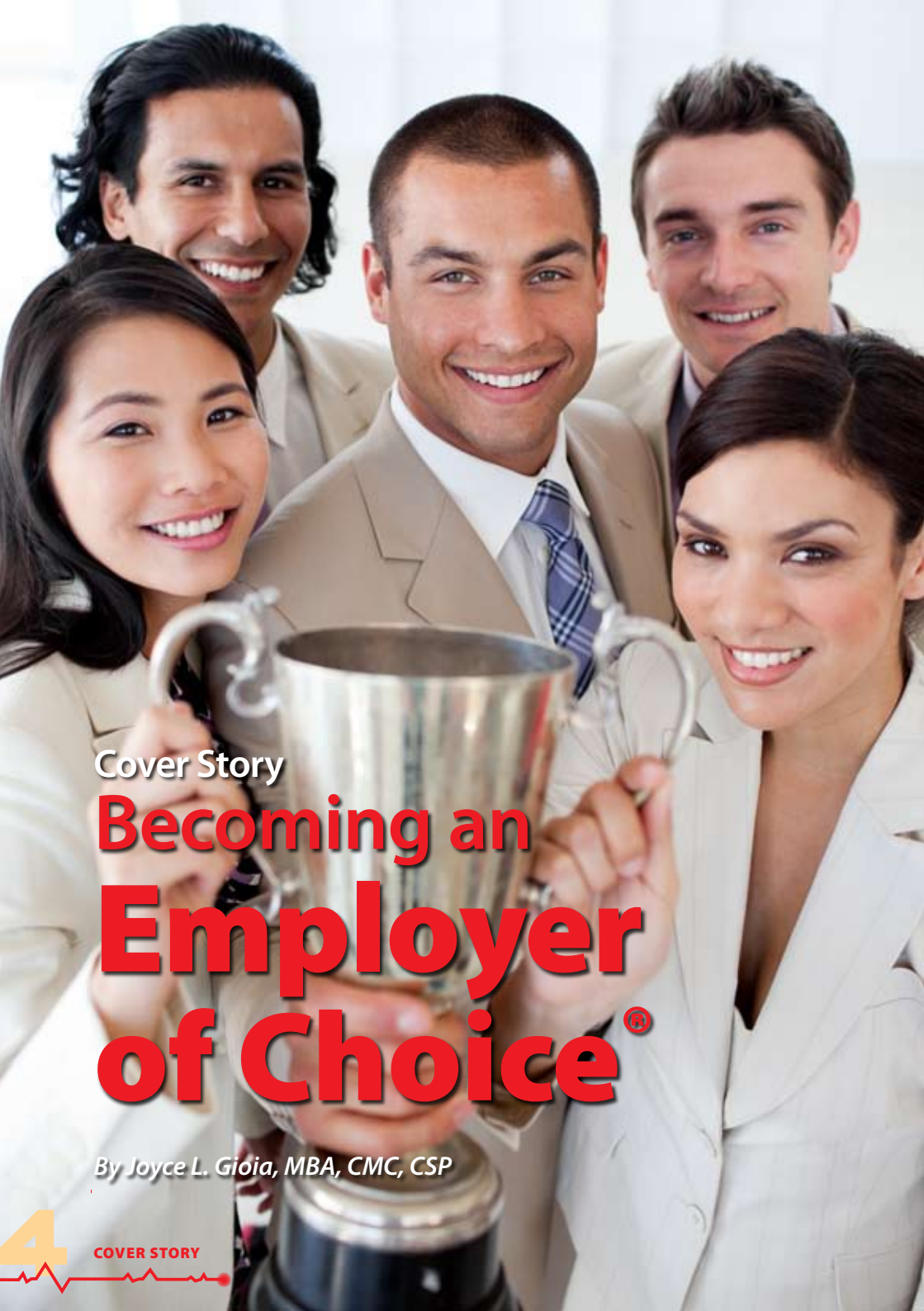
Recruiting talented individuals and getting the best from them are only some of the benefits – greater employee engagement, increased customer satisfaction, higher productivity and company returns often result from the same organizational factors that contribute to becoming an Employer of Choice.

In this issue of Upbeat, we will demonstrate that Work-Life Integration is a key factor for any organization aiming to be an Employer of Choice. The cover story describes the characteristics of an Employer of Choice, Best Practice companies explain how Work-Life programs have contributed to their organizations' success and employer branding, and Hewitt Associates speaks on the topic of becoming an Employer of Choice in Singapore.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Chiang".

Claire Chiang

Chairperson, Employer Alliance



Cover Story

Becoming an Employer of Choice®

By Joyce L. Gioia, MBA, CMC, CSP

Strategic Business Futurists Joyce L. Gioia is President of The Herman Group, a firm of Certified Management Consultants in Greensboro, North Carolina. She is author of five business books, including *How to Become an Employer of Choice*, a business bestseller. She is a sought-after speaker on the international speaking scene and is often quoted by journalists writing on workforce and workplace issues.



With the recovery knocking on everyone's door, it is only a matter of time before employers have significant problems recruiting and retaining talent. In fact, for many employers seeking hard-to-find skill sets, the employment marketplace never really eased. Because of their respect for being very good workers, many Singaporean workers have even more regional opportunities than their counterparts in other parts of the world. Employers, eager to differentiate themselves from other organizations to hire top talent, want to be characterized as "Employers of Choice". Organizations that earn the right to be described as "Employers of Choice" will enjoy a higher level of performance, greater workforce stability, and the level of continuity that assures preservation of the knowledgebase, customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and stronger profits (from *How to Become an Employer of Choice* by Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia).

In tomorrow's sellers' market for skilled labor, workers will make deliberate decisions

about where they work, why they work, and for how long. Our research shows a number of common attributes that influence those choices:

Attributes of an Employer of Choice®

The Company

An Employer of Choice® has a solid history and good reputation in the community and its industry. The company is financially stable, enjoying increasing sales of its high quality products or services. Respected in its industry and in the community, its executives are often invited to speak at meetings and to hold positions of authority in community organizations.

The Culture

An Employer of Choice® has a well-established culture that supports high values and standards with a strong sense of ethics, integrity, honesty, and trust. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and fairness in all dealings. Life-work balance is important

— when people are able to balance work with their personal lives, they feel better and are more productive.

Enlightened Leadership

The visionary leaders of an Employer of Choice® know where they're going, have a clear vision, and communicate that vision well. These leaders are visible and accessible, available to all employees, whenever needed. Their style is one of coaching, not directing. They also model life-work balance and encourage their employees to balance theirs as well.

Care of People

With the recognition of people as the company's most valuable asset, an Employer of Choice® features an employee-centered environment, often providing a wide range of services that improve the quality of life for the employees.

One way to demonstrate care for employees is through supporting them as they strive to achieve life-work balance. Recognize and respect that they want time for themselves and their families.

Champion Flexibility in All Forms – Today's employees want flexibility in their lives and in the way they do their work. Explore a range of flexible schedules and time-at-work policies; and ensure that the culture supports its employees as whole persons with families, not just work machines. (* EA: *In Singapore, many organizations implement flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, flexi-time, part-time, compressed workweek and job sharing, etc.*)

Involve Employees' Families – Employers of Choice reach out to involve their employees' families, building a cooperative three-sided relationship. Family events are recognized and celebrated or support is given, as appropriate. (* EA: *Work-Life programs commonly practiced among Singapore organizations include marriage leave, family care leave, first-day-of-school leave, Family Day, child / elder care arrangements / subsidies, bring Your Child To Work Day, etc.*)

Promote Convenience – Employers who make their employees' lives easier and more convenient will certainly be more attractive than companies that ignore this important aspect of people's lives. (* EA: *Organizations in Singapore have introduced concierge services, on-site childcare centers and childcare subsidies for this purpose.*)

Growth and Opportunity

An Employer of Choice® provides its valued employees a substantial requisite number of training hours per year. Smart companies regularly send their people to off-site seminars and have those people share their information upon returning to the workplace.

Meaningful Work

Employees want opportunities to make a positive difference, to have a positive influence on the lives of others. They want meaningful work, e.g. having ideas valued, having specific responsibilities with measurable results, high degrees of autonomy, independence, a clear connection between the individual's work and the company mission and goals, etc.

Compensation and Benefits

Employees desire competitive pay; they want to be paid what they're worth, comparative to their community and industry. An Employer of Choice® generally offers a generous array of other perks, including perhaps good prices on brand clothing, company products, and/or tickets to special events.

Making the World a Better Place

Employers of Choice® demonstrate high levels of social consciousness, both for global and local causes. Workers who participate in reaching out to their communities gain a deep sense of giving. It makes them proud to be employed by the company.

Well Worth the Effort

The investment of time and resources to become an Employer of Choice® will pay off handsomely for your organization, its people, and the community. Begin today. You will be glad you did!

**To learn more about Work-Life Initiatives and programs implemented by organizations in Singapore and read their success stories, please visit Employer Alliance's online work-life toolkit at www.employeralliance.sg/toolkit*

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To find out more about workshops on “Employer of Choice” conducted by Joyce Gioia, please call Sam Loo at 65 6376 2018 or email to sam@lciseminars.com.

Interviewed by Pauline Loh

Strategized Initiatives **Retain Key Staff** - Republic Polytechnic

Republic Polytechnic (RP) is a post-secondary educational institution offering diploma programs. RP practices an IT-enabled work environment where staff are not restricted to the office. It has 735 staff.

Whether a company is a positive or negative workplace can be weighed by its employees' physical and mental health, their satisfaction with the company, and their commitment to it as translated in attendance and loyalty.

For the first factor, Republic Polytechnic takes active steps to give its staff maximum opportunity to improve their health. To this end, the Poly has a dedicated Health and

Recreational Committee (HRC) tasked with the creation of an environment where staff can enjoy their work and achieve Work-Life harmony.

Mandy Low, a Senior Academic Staff from the School of Hospitality, describes some of RP's health initiatives, "I get lots of satisfaction from participating in activities like yoga, frisbee games, museum excursions,



Celebrating its 7th Anniversary in style.

just to name a few. I am also impressed with the OSIM massage chairs and i-squeeze leg massager that never fail to rejuvenate me. The best part of it is, nobody will scold you for getting a massage at any time of the day! And I was pleasantly surprised and touched when HR agreed to sponsor the registration fees of a run that a team of us has signed up for."

As for staff satisfaction, when employees were asked to describe the institution during a 2007 focus group discussion conducted by Hewitt Associates, they said that RP had "Work-Life balance", "flexibility", "trust", and "it does things differently".

Natasha Raina, Senior Manager from the School of Applied Science, is impressed by RP's way of "doing things differently". She explained, "I am relatively new to RP, but thus far I am so impressed with the culture here which is so different from a lot of the other places I have worked in. The whole HR emphasis on staff welfare and well-being is the most important distinction."

It is this focus on staff welfare which has spurred RP to pursue a paperless and e-enabled culture which promotes telecommuting. Full-time staff can enjoy working from home once a week; once connected to the RP's intranet, staff can work from anywhere in or out of the campus. Staff are also given the choice to start work any time between 7.30 am and 9.30 am.

An important factor that singles out RP as a desirable employer is its ability to harness talent. In its unique Associate Scheme, daily rated teaching staff are hired under its Academic Associates scheme while non-academic home-based workers are hired as Administrative Associates. This gives opportunity for talented people who

cannot commit to a full-time job to continue contributing to society. The scheme is also a cost effective way for RP to maintain a flexible workforce. In view of Singapore's ageing population, the Singapore Human Resources Institute also expressed approval of this scheme as it is ideal for mature workers approaching retirement to continue earning an income with flexible hours.

As a result of its strategized Work-Life Initiatives, RP's turnover rate in 2008 was 20.9% and it reduced to 12.5% in 2009. Another significant figure is the near to 0% turnover of RP's key appointment holders. These tangible results point to Republic Polytechnic's capability in the area of retaining staff as an employer of choice.



Balancing work and life

Employers of Choice **Put Employees First**

- Cherie Hearts Group International
Pte Ltd

Cherie Hearts Group International is one of the largest childcare operators in Singapore. It has 60 local centers with 700 staff and has also set up childcare centers in neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China and Korea. Cherie Hearts was awarded the Work Life Excellence Award 2008, while co-founder Dr Gurchran Singh was awarded the Work Life Leadership Award in 2008.



How Cherie Hearts became an organization that employees choose is by choosing to put employees first. In the service industry, it is easy to be so focused on putting customers first that one can lose sight of employees' needs. However, Cherie Hearts was able to use a systemic approach by utilizing the HIPO Model to Work-Life. This model incorporates healthy lifestyle programs like offering subsidized gym memberships, health talks and screenings; flexi time and

flexi place schemes like staggered working hours and telecommuting; and bonding sessions between management and staff by organizing company-wide recreational activities. As a bonus, Cherie Hearts offers free childcare.

To stay on the cutting edge of the childcare industry, Cherie Hearts also prioritizes ongoing academic development for its staff. This has further enhanced its reputation as an employer who grooms

its employees and gives them learning opportunities outside of their immediate job scope.

Cherie Hearts' Work-Life Initiatives were not arbitrarily chosen. During the setting up of the company nine years earlier, the founders used a hands-on approach and this gave them keen insight into the common challenges faced by childcare staff. The management also keeps itself updated on the employees' current needs by conducting annual appraisals where staff are free to talk about their concerns and plans for personal and career development.

"With Cherie Hearts, I feel less like just one of many employees and more like an important valued member of the family," said Ms Angelina Ng, VP, Franchise Development. "The management actively creates opportunities for staff to gather. It's not uncommon to find the Group President chatting with the general worker or junior staff, which makes everyone feel welcome and valued. The informal and relaxed setting makes a good platform to get to know staff on a personal basis and even their families who are always invited to our gatherings. Needs and concerns that may go unaddressed due to busy schedules are visited. And I suppose in that sense we are all part of a big extended family. Friends in other organizations talk of indifference towards colleagues, even hostility towards a superior; I'm happy I cannot relate to that. With family, you go through thick and thin together."

It is endorsements like the above which has created a reputation for Cherie Hearts in the market as an employer of choice. Such a reputation has reaped the company rewards



One of Cherie Hearts' healthy lifestyle programs.

in terms of staff retention and attendance.

The company experiences 0.8% staff turnover, low compared to the industry's average of 2.2% (year ending 2007). The teachers and staff also seldom take medical leave - 1.1% in comparison to the national average of 6.5%.

Productivity and synergy among staff is high thanks to the contribution of the HIPO model. Such teamwork ensures the smooth setting up and operation of all the centers, and facilitates the execution of new initiatives and major events.

Apart from measurable business outcomes, the management is particularly proud of its open door policy and two-way communication. Work-Life programs can be discussed at all levels, from official meetings to informal coffee sessions.

Dr Gurchan Jit Singh, Group President, said "Taking care of our people is one of our top priorities, although it's easy to let this fade into the background when faced with hectic work schedules and so forth. But it's important because it is the support and contribution of each staff that makes the company what it is today,"

Summarized by Pauline Loh

Small Businesses Can Be **Great** **Employers**

- KH Security Agency, Focus on the
Family and Xcellink Pte Ltd

It is not just MNCs that are voted by employees to be a great place to work. SMEs prove that, by identifying and implementing needed Work-Life measures, they can also build a reputation in the job market as employers of choice. KH Security Agency, Focus on the Family and Xcellink Pte Ltd describe their experiences.

The bottom line of good management is staff retention and low attrition rate. Xcellink Pte Ltd, an IT Outsourcing Company with 33 corporate staff, has managed to retain outstanding staff, lower its attrition rate and continues to attract good talent. Eight of the corporate staff have worked with the company for almost nine years and another has stayed with the company for 12 years.

Ms Adelene Tan, Assistant Director of Corporate Services, talks about her personal brush with the Xcellink management, "If my boss hadn't offered me a part-time arrangement, I would have left."

Seven years ago, she had been on the brink of resigning because she needed to coach her son for his examinations. To her

amazement, her boss proposed that, instead of quitting, she could work half a day in the morning, and return home to coach her son every afternoon. She happily accepted.

Since then, Ms Tan, a mother of three, has been loyal to the company. As Human Resource is part of her Corporate Services portfolio, she proposes and implements Work Life Initiatives programs, which she does so passionately because she believes in them.

The best judge of whether a firm is a desirable employer is its employees. KH Security Agency, a security manpower provider with over 160 staff, reports high employee satisfaction – 78% of staff said their satisfaction level is "Very Good" and the



KH Security personnel feel secure with their employer.



With Work-Life harmony, Focus on the Family staff can focus on their families too.



After working hard, Xcellink staff plays hard.

remaining 22% rate it as “Good” (year 2008). Ninety-six percent indicated that they were now better able to manage stress. Moreover, the company’s revenue rose 27% within one year from 2006 to 2007.

The agency has implemented flexi-work arrangements, shorter work week, part-time work and job sharing which were all well-received by staff. For example, Mdm Sanimah is a single parent and needs kidney dialysis three times a week. KH allows her to leave work two hours earlier on days that she needs to go for treatment and gives her less strenuous tasks. KH won the Leading HR Practices in Quality Work-Life Award (Special Mention) in 2008.

It is tough for non-profit organizations (VWOs) like Focus on the Family to engage in expensive recruitment drives or use the lure of generous salaries to attract talent. “As a charity, we work our staff as hard as any corporation, but unfortunately we cannot afford to remunerate them accordingly,” said the President of Focus, Mrs Joanna Koh-Hoe. “Work-Life Integration programs help to meet employees’ needs and improve job fulfillment where monetary compensation cannot.”

Focus offers a great Cause (its mission is to help families). In addition, it sustains its staff with flexible work arrangements like flexi-

place and flexi-time. There is high staff morale; the employees’ families get involved as volunteers, and – surely the best endorsement – the staff recommends the company to others as a good place to work. Thus, the charity’s best, and most economical, form of recruitment is through word of mouth by employees.

In a ceaseless drive to better understand their employees’ needs, Focus and KH Security have taken part in Employer Alliance’s First Mover Initiative (FMI). In this project, Work-Life consultants analyzed the Work-Life needs of 30 SMEs and gave customized recommendations to each of them. Focus’ involvement in FMI prompted the charity to tap on the Work-Life Works! (WoW!) Fund from the Ministry of Manpower.

All three firms have put the WoW! Fund to good use - buying IT equipment to promote telecommuting for staff and building lactation rooms.

Mrs Koh-Hoe believes that goodwill is always returned. She puts it succinctly, “You can’t build loyalty from a purely monetary relationship. The employee that buys into the organization is better able to sell the whole organization, and not just its products and services.”

To find out about Work-Life Movers, please visit www.employeralliance.sg/worklife.

Spotlight on EA Activities



Participants learn about EA's online Work-Life toolkit.



Ms. Claire Chiang, EA Chairperson, emphasizes the importance of flexibility at the Work-Life Conference.

2009 At a

- Over 750 EA members
- Over 90 organizations contributed to EA's Work-Life initiatives
- Over 1,500 people benefitted from EA Work-Life presentations at various events



EA members at a Capability Development Forum learn from experts in Work-Life Integration.



The newest batch of Work-Life Consultants at the Launch of the Work-Life Smart Kit.



Mr Hawazi Daipi, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower & Health and Chairman, Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy, and Ms Claire Chiang unveiling Upbeat at the Launch of EA's Work-Life Smart Kit.



Participants at a presentation on the three components of EA's Work-Life Smart Kit.

Glance

- Published four newsletters with a circulation of over 1,000 per issue
- Reached over 2,000 people through our e-blasts and mailers on Work-Life
- 22 new Work-Life Consultants trained to support companies



Panel discussion at the inaugural bilingual Work-Life Conference.



Ms Ean Yeo, Director for Work-Life, shares the benefits of flexible work arrangements at a Work-Life Forum.



Representatives from participating organizations of the Research Study on Flexible Work Models.

Work-Life Conversation with an Expert

Hewitt Associates has provided clients with best-in-class human resources consulting and outsourcing services for more than 65 years. It consults with more than 3,000 companies globally to develop and implement HR business strategies. Hewitt conducts the Best Employer in Asia study as well as in other locations like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Europe and Latin America.



Upbeat: What are the characteristics that differentiate an Employer of Choice?

Hewitt: In examining the Best Employers, we found a common trait amongst all of them regardless of industry or size. They took pains to ensure that their people practices and programs are aligned to their overall organization's mission and values. Their people strategy is tied closely to their business strategy to enable their employees to achieve successful business outcomes. These companies typically choose to focus on one or two key people initiatives and do them well, usually either focusing on leadership, career development or talent management.

Upbeat: How does Work-Life Initiatives contribute to being an Employer of Choice?

Hewitt: Best Employers focus on aligning their business strategies with their people

practices, and Work-Life Initiatives are one of the people practices where they need to ensure alignment exists.

Upbeat: What are the key findings from your 2009 study of Singapore firms?

Hewitt: The Singapore market is a relatively mature one with many organizations possessing similar people practices and common characteristics. These are:

- a. Effective and committed leadership. Leaders with The Best display a more caring approach to people. They place great importance on ethics and integrity, and the creation of a working environment that nurtures learning. Leaders at The Best have higher levels of personal engagement, and build a culture of trust within the organization.
- b. Talent as a part of strategic focus/ people

focus. Best Employers have clear talent management strategies that include the following imperatives:

- Powerful leadership and talent strategy;
 - CEO ownership of talent and leadership development;
 - Robust performance and competency assessment leading to talent segmentation; and
 - Compelling development practices and processes.
- c. High-performance workforce. The Best build high-performance workplaces by:
- Building accountability everywhere in the business, for the right results;
 - Making sure the people they depend on for high performance are valued; and
 - Managing opportunity so the strongest performers are in key jobs, and every job provides the chance to grow.
- d. Effective HR and HR practices. Employees at The Best feel that HR is able to identify and implement HR strategies and solutions that are critical to meeting business needs.

Upbeat: What more can Singapore companies do to attract and retain talent and be an employer of choice?

Hewitt: There are a few things which organizations can do to attract and retain talent:

- Have an effective and committed leadership team in place
- Have talent as part of the strategic focus/

people focus

- Create a high performance workforce where accountability is built, people feel valued and opportunities are given for key talent
- Effective HR practices which focus on meeting business needs.

Upbeat: What are the benefits of Work-Life Initiatives to an employer of choice?

Hewitt: Work-Life Initiatives need to be reviewed together with the rest of the people practices existing within an organization to ensure alignment between that and the business strategies.

Some examples of benefits derived from organizations studied include:

- An international household brand of consumer products shared that employees cited Work-Life benefits as “very important” to their decision to stay with the organization.
- A business unit in an international IT company that introduced a compressed workweek saw their productivity double.
- A major bank offering childcare subsidies reduced turnover by over 20%.
- A well-known document management company experienced a 30% drop in absenteeism at one branch which offered employees flextime and compressed workweek.
- A local insurance company benefitted in reduced turnover, increased staff motivation and a drop in medical leave with the implementation of Work-Life programs.

The Case for **Work-Life** *Integration*



Our associates' overall well-being plays an important part in enabling the Hotel to achieve its business success. Since the launch of our Work-Life program, we have seen a tremendous improvement in associates' health and productivity. The Management and I are extremely pleased with the success of this Work-Life harmony.

Mr Francis Tan, Director of Human Resources, Sheraton Towers Singapore Hotel

We believe that enabling our employees to balance their professional commitments and personal pursuits is essential to ensuring a balanced and fulfilled workforce. This in turn ensures greater employee commitment, higher levels of efficiency and productivity, and helps retain talent. We see it as a sustainable route to meeting the objectives and needs of both the organization and the employees.

Ms Chua Pek Kim, Director, Human Resources, Kandang Kerbau Hospital

Effective Work-Life Integration hinges on two key concepts – Achievement and Enjoyment. You must be aware of your values and priorities in order to achieve your full potential in and outside of work and enjoy life to the fullest.

Ms Imrana Soniya Hossain, Human Resource Executive, Yayasan MENDAKI

How much does staff turnover cost your company? What is the value of improved customer satisfaction? Work-Life balance enables employees to build sustained careers with the organizations they work for and helps build commitment. If you are clear about what you want to achieve and plan your programs carefully, you will find that the pay-off is an engaged workforce that is willing to go the extra mile.

Ms Grace Chun, Internal Communication Manager, Mercer (Singapore) Pte Ltd



Work-Life Excellence Award

**WHEN YOU PUT YOUR PEOPLE
FIRST,
YOU ALWAYS COME OUT
TOPS.**

**THE WORK-LIFE EXCELLENCE AWARD 2010
CALL FOR ENTRIES IS NOW OPEN.**

If your company has achieved its business goals while meeting the personal needs of its employees, enter the Work-Life Excellence Award 2010 and get the recognition you deserve. You can also nominate individuals who have made lasting Work-Life contributions for the Work-Life Leadership Award 2010.

After all, you've embraced Work-Life strategies all year long. Now it's your chance to shine.

Enter the Awards today at www.wleaward.com.sg

Closing date: 31 March 2010.

ORGANISED BY THE
TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE
ON WORK-LIFE STRATEGY.

Employer Alliance – Resources and Services

- **Online Work-Life Toolkit** which offers definitions, tools and success stories in flexible work arrangements, leave benefits and employee support schemes. Please visit www.employeralliance.sg/toolkit for more information.
- **Features on Public Champions** in the Work-Life Community who generate interest and inspire others. Read about our Work-Life Movers at www.employeralliance.sg/worklife.
- **Work-Life Forums** to increase public awareness on Work-Life Integration and share information on grants and programs to facilitate implementation. To find out more, please email info@employeralliance.sg.
- **Expert Forums** to build Work-Life capability development among organizations and HR leaders. To find out more, please email info@employeralliance.sg.
- **Upbeat Newsletter** features current “hot topics” in Work-Life, best practice companies and expert advice. To request earlier issues of *Upbeat* (while stocks last), please email admin@employeralliance.sg.



If you have made use of any of these resources or services, please send us your feedback at admin@employeralliance.sg. The first 100 respondents will each receive a token of appreciation.



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