

It pays to be a good boss

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Employers that pay attention to their workers' needs get their respect and loyalty

MARGARET, 35, was dismissed from her job at a call centre this year. Just before that, she was in and out of the office and had to use up her annual leave as her mother was hospitalised for a heart attack and kidney failure.

She felt she was in no condition to work, and after she failed to pick up her manager's calls, he let her go. "I never received a formal termination letter, he only told me verbally. Human resources (HR) wouldn't give it to me either since I had provided all the necessary documentation to prove I was legitimately absent from work," she says.

"HR asked me to send an appeal letter, but there was no reply for a month. Then the person handling my case resigned, and they said they would have to restart the process. They told me I could get my old position back, but I knew things wouldn't be the same."

Margaret has since moved on to a new job elsewhere. Even if you have never hit such lows in your career, dissatisfaction with the management and the workplace are a common enough occurrence for those who work in Malaysia. According to the latest Kelly Global Workforce Index, Malaysians bosses barely received a passing grade from their employees – a score of 6.7 out of 10.

Only 48% – less than half – of respondents said their employers had done a good job in preparing them for future success, while another 41% said they were not well-prepared, and 19% were uncertain.

The survey conducted by HR consultancy Kelly Services Malaysia polled some 1,00 Malaysians from various industries and sub-sectors. About 16% of the respondents were from the financial sector, 10% from

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—MELISSA NORMAN

the manufacturing sector and 9% from business services. The others were from the government, contact centre, education, engineering, hospitality and travel, information technology, oil and gas, utilities, and retail industries.

Among the notable findings of the survey were that only 48% of respondents described their organisation's leadership culture as "empowering" or "inclusive", versus 35% who said it was "authoritative" or "oppressive". Slightly less than half of employees thought their efforts at work was recognised or rewarded.

So, what were the factors that led to the poor score? Kelly Services managing director for Singapore and Malaysia Melissa Norman points out that things like work environment, leadership and management weighed heavily on employees' minds.

"It really does come down to a level of respect for your boss as

someone who is a leader and who manages their employees well. The next most negative aspect for workers was identified as the lack of upward mobility or career development and prospects," she explains.

"As Malaysia becomes more globalised, almost a quarter of employees feel they have no more room to move up in their company. It then becomes a question for employees that even though they may enjoy their boss' leadership and management, if they feel the company does not hold suitable career prospects for them in the future, they will end up unhappy in their current workplace."

When asked why it is important for employers to pay attention to the needs and development of their charges, Norman says, quite simply, that it has tremendous impact on how a business attracts and retains its workforce.

Businesses are now answerable to far greater expectations than just bottom-line delivery, she asserts, and employees' views of an organisation carry a lot of credibility about where the best places are to work. "In a competitive and borderless world, organisations need every weapon in their arsenal to attract and retain their most important and valuable asset – talent."

She adds that the balance of power between the hirer and those who get hired has changed with technology since the talent pool can easily access information on the web. Some social networking sites like SkillPages and LinkedIn exist solely for the purpose of career advancement and job opportunities.

What, then, can employers do to nurture an engaged, motivated workforce? Norman contends that they have to strengthen their

"employment proposition" and "employer branding", and one way to do this would be to draw up a career roadmap for employees, which can give them an assurance that they have a future in the company.

She also recommends nominating role models in an organisation. "This includes creating branding around your leaders and senior leadership and encouraging them to participate in different forums to attract Gen Y, Gen X and baby boomers candidates. In addition, utilise in-house resources such as current employees as 'ambassadors' and build a knowledge base about who your organisation is."

Attractiveness

Norman also thinks a performance-based culture is essential. "It can enhance the attractiveness of an employer because today's employees have high aspirations and expect faster growth opportunities in an organisation. Performance-based policies could include strong compensation plans, pay for performance, non-monetary rewards and recognition, special leaves and customised leadership development or fast-track programmes."

Higher wages, she says, does not necessarily lead to better productivity; but rather, they must be tied together.

"When an organisation looks at what motivates people in the workplace, it is clear that opportunities for personal growth and development are critical, as is the chance to perform stimulating and challenging work. Employees want to be valued in their role and take pride in what they do, and not just receive higher wages, in order for them to be productive."