

INFOCUS



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SPOTLIGHT

I do not believe in holding FDWs to an impossible level that I don't even hold myself to.

"Sir Oli" Speaks Up

Two and a half years ago, TV hosts Oli Pettigrew and wife Linda Black employed Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) Margie Laya. Since then, Margie has proved to be an indispensable family member. In this interview, Oli explains their relationship and offers his non-conformist views on managing FDWs.

Name : Oli Pettigrew

Age : 30

Family : Wife Linda Black and two children – son Ewan and daughter Tia

Occupation :
Television Presenter, Event Host, Model

Catch him in :
AXN's TV game show "Cash Cab Asia"

Q. What are Margie's main duties around the house?

A. We made it clear to Margie that her first priority would be looking after our children. The household chores are shared by all of us. It's teamwork, you know?

Q. How did you first establish trust in Margie's looking after the kids?

A. Right from the start, Margie's confidence with Ewan (before daughter Tia arrived) enabled us to trust her quickly. She wasn't timid around him and watching how Ewan trusted her also built our trust in her.

Q. How do you bond and make Margie feel like part of the family?

A. We bond through our sense of humour. Margie insisted on calling me 'Sir', although I've repeatedly told her to address me as Oli. Nowadays, she jokingly calls me 'Sir Oli'! There's mutual respect and Margie's found the perfect balance between being an employee and a friend. We sometimes watch movies at home with Margie.

Q. How did you go about selecting Margie as your FDW?

A. Margie was a "transfer" that another FDW recommended. As a mother of two kids, she previously worked with children and a special needs child, having undergone courses in looking after such children. Linda interviewed her, after which she visited our home to meet us. I guess the deciding factor was seeing how naturally she got along with all of us.

Q. Were there any adjustment issues?

A. Margie had no problems settling in, having already worked in Singapore for four years. We gave each other the space and respect that each other deserved, without barking out orders. The morning after she arrived, she woke up early to take Ewan for a walk. Linda and I looked at each other and gratefully said, 'Let's get back to sleep!'



Q. How do you ensure your expectations of Margie are met?

A. We don't freak out over a discoloured shirt or broken plate. I've broken loads of plates myself and do not believe in holding FDWs to an impossible level that I don't even hold myself to. When Margie washed a shirt wrongly, I told her the way I wanted it to be done, without reprimanding. The next day, she managed to fix the shirt!

Q. How do you maintain good communication?

A. We believe in talking things over. If there is a problem, we sit down and have a respectful meeting

to air grievances. I don't believe in 'punishment'. When we need something from Margie, we have a quick chat at home or give her a phone call to convey our message. We also leave notes to get the message across clearly.

Q. What does work-life balance mean for Margie?

A. We give Margie a weekly day off and sometimes, the whole weekend off if we are unoccupied.

She returns to her home country for two weeks every year-end to see her family. We also provided her with laptop so she can chat with them regularly.



Margie, who is from the Philippines, shares her views on working here.

Q. How did you adjust to working with Oli and his family?

A. Initially, I was nervous about their celebrity status, but realised that they are really easy going and I'm now comfortable being around them.

Q. What do you like most about working for Oli and Linda?

A. I love that they are very understanding and let me speak with my family regularly.

EMPLOYMENT Agency 101

If you intend to hire a Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) to take care of your children or handle household chores, you may consider engaging an Employment Agency (EA) for help. Many employers, however, may not be fully aware of the processes involved when hiring an FDW from an EA. Here's a guide to get you started.

BEFORE ENGAGING AN EA

Verify the EA's licence. Make sure that the EA has a valid licence from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM). Always ask the agent for his/her registration card and cross reference it with MOM's employment agent directory at <http://mom.gov.sg/eadirectory>

Make Use of the EA Directory. Not only can you find a suitable EA that can meet your requirements, you can also check if your EA is licenced and is registered through a self-help tool, which you can access through the MOM website at <http://mom.gov.sg/eadirectory/Pages/search.aspx>

WHILE ENGAGING AN EA

Match your needs. Make sure you convey any preferences or requirements of the FDW to the EA. Matching your requirements with the FDWs' employment history – which EAs are required to show you – will help you find the FDW who best fits your needs and lifestyle.



Check the FDW's age. FDWs must be at least 23 years old to work in Singapore. Ensure that the EA has conducted proper checks.

Sign the authorisation form. Every EA needs a written authorisation from you before performing work pass transactions with the MOM on your behalf. Make sure these forms are properly filled before you sign them.

Sign the service agreement. The service agreement that you sign with the EA should contain :

- The breakdown of fees
- The circumstances for refund of fees
- The replacement of FDWs
- A description of the manner in which disputes between EAs and employers can be resolved

Sign only after you've fully understood the terms and conditions. Do keep a copy of the service agreement!

Have the EA return the passport and work permit to your FDW. EAs are not allowed to safe-keep the passports and work permits of the FDWs. Have them return the documents as soon as possible.

FAQ

Q: My FDW's contract is up and I no longer need her services. What assistance can I expect from my EA?

A: You may choose either to repatriate your FDW back to her home country or engage your EA to transfer her to another employer. Your EA should inform you, in writing, of your legal responsibilities towards your FDW as you are liable under the Work Permit Conditions as an employer. You will have to bear the repatriation costs for your FDW. Your EA may also charge you for food and accommodation while your FDW stays with them during the transfer.

Q: Who should bear the repatriation cost when the work permit for my FDW is not issued or is revoked by MOM or when the EA brings in an FDW who doesn't meet MOM's entry requirements?

A: The EA is responsible to bear the full cost of repatriating any FDW in the event that a work permit is not issued, or if a work permit is revoked when the FDW does not meet MOM's entry requirements.

Q: Can MOM help me with any contractual or service disputes with the EA?

A: MOM can only take action when there are contraventions of the law. Your EA should resolve any disputes based on the signed agreements. If the problem persists, approach the relevant accreditation body that your EA is accredited with, such as Association of Employment Agencies Singapore (AEAS) or CaseTrust. Alternatively, you can seek help from the Small Claims Tribunal.

MAKING IT SAFE

For Your FDWS

Recently, the media has reported incidents of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) falling from heights while performing household chores. These are unfortunate incidents which can be avoided. Employers often believe that working safely at home is common sense for their FDWs. But why do we still hear of FDWs falling to their deaths or injuring themselves while doing household chores? To prevent such unfortunate incidents from happening, employers can play a greater role to ensure the safety of their FDWs. Read on and learn how to make cleaning at home safe for your FDWs.

● ●
Employers must be vigilant and constantly remind FDWs on the importance of work safety.
● ●

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

- Remind your FDW on work safety tips on a regular basis.
- Ensure that your FDW locks the window grilles and that she does not stand on stools while cleaning the windows.
- Conduct random checks on your FDW when she is doing her chores.
- Take corrective actions when you spot your FDW doing chores that could endanger her life.
- Show your FDW the safe way of doing chores. Nothing beats a "live" demonstration.
- Provide cleaning tools with extended handles so that your FDW can clean hard-to-reach spots.
- Communicate! Talk to your FDW and advise her to approach you when she has any questions.



Even though your FDW may have attended the compulsory Safety Awareness Course where she is taught the dangers of working in high-rise environments and how to perform chores safely, she will still need some time to adjust to life and work here. While you should not take your FDWs' safety for granted, you are encouraged to be more patient towards your FDW during the early stages of her work.

Essentially, safety is the responsibility of both the employer and the FDW. Employers must be vigilant and constantly remind your FDWs on the importance of work safety.

Whenever possible, employers should also closely monitor how their FDWs work and take corrective actions immediately if their FDWs are found performing chores in a way that could endanger their lives. Employers should also encourage FDWs to inform or ask them if there is anything they are unsure of.

It is in your interest that your FDW observe safety practices at home, so that she can be happy working for you, knowing that she is in a safe environment. A happy FDW translates into a more productive FDW. Isn't that good for you employers out there?

DO YOU KNOW?

STAY UPDATED

and Connected

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) plans to provide SMS and e-mail updates on selected work pass services in the near future. To receive these alerts, we encourage you to update your mobile number and e-mail address with MOM.

If you are an existing Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) employer, you can update your mobile number and e-mail address by logging onto the Work Permit Online (WPOL). Click on the Change Particulars > Foreign Domestic Worker Employer / Confinement Nanny Employer Particulars' module to update contact details.

CARING FOR THE LITTLE ONES: *The Right Way*

It may seem like second nature to you, but caring for children is something your Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) may be unfamiliar with or she may observe different practices from you. Here are some important safety issues you should educate your FDW on when it comes to looking after your little ones while you're at work.

SPECIAL CARE...

is required when looking after ill children, especially when they are on medication.

Do inform your FDW of your child's medication schedule and dosages and write them down. You may want to use special pillboxes to make remembering the dosages easier.

Don't forget to leave a list of emergency numbers (along with yours, of course) for your FDW, just in case.

FETCHING THE CHILDREN...

to and from school and tuition classes can be a daunting experience for an FDW who is unfamiliar with the roads in Singapore.

Do teach the proper road safety rules and write them down. If you can, accompany her to demonstrate the correct way to cross the road and point out the traffic signs to observe.

Don't leave it to your FDW to discipline your children. Have a talk with both children and FDW on what is and isn't acceptable, especially along the roads or in public places. Ensure your FDW supervises them at all times.

AT HOME...

there lie many dangers that include sharp objects, electrical outlets, poisonous substances and the risk of home intrusions by unwanted strangers.

Do draw out a chart of dangers around the home and stick it on the wall, so that your FDW will be able to remember when to exercise extra caution. Tell her to always keep your children away from the cooking area, handling potentially harmful objects and climbing windows.

Don't let your FDW allow strangers into the house. Ensure that she keeps the doors locked at all times and never leave the children unattended at home. Tell her to call the police (999) immediately if anyone tries to break into the home.

WHAT'S UP

OUT: *English Entry Test* IN: *Settling-In Programme*

Following an extensive public consultation process, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has decided to remove the English Entry Test for first-time Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs). Instead, first-time FDWs will undergo a new, compulsory Settling-In Programme (SIP) that will take effect in mid-2012. What is the SIP and how will it benefit employers like you?



IN A NUTSHELL...

The SIP aims to provide first-time FDWs with necessary information, including basic knowledge on living and working in Singapore. This will help your FDW settle better into her position within the household and foster a better working relationship between the two of you.

CONTENTS

SIP modules will include:

- Adapting to living and working in a foreign environment, such as stress management, social norms and practices
- Conditions of employment and responsibilities of FDWs and their employers
- Safety at work in an urban, high-rise environment

EXISTING REQUIREMENTS THAT WILL REMAIN

- Minimum age for first-time FDWs still stands at 23 years old
- Minimum eight years of formal education

WHEN

The SIP is scheduled for launch in mid-2012.

HOW?

FDWs can take the course in their native languages, such as Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese and Tagalog, apart from English, for them to understand and retain the information better.

More details will be announced later. Please visit MOM's website www.mom.gov.sg for further updates.

FDW WEEKLY REST DAY FROM 2013

The Government recently announced the implementation of a weekly rest day for FDWs, with the option for compensation in lieu from 2013. Have any questions? Look out for *INFOCUS*' special issue on this new regulation coming your way soon!