

GROW YOUR BUSINESS WITH HR

The stage is set for you to take the next step. Success has paved the way for a bigger business. The question is do you have the manpower to support it? Find out how The Soup Spoon and YCH Group built a sustainable human capital pipeline in a labour market thinned by competition and a greying population.

THE SOUP SPOON:

All the right ingredients for growth

From her first store in Raffles City, SouperChef and Executive Director of The Soup Spoon Ms Anna Lim went on to open 20 more outlets in just over a decade. “When we started the business, we set out to be very ambitious. We already knew that we wanted to be the Starbucks of soup,” she said.

In spite of proving her critics wrong by turning a restaurant that serves steaming soup in hot and humid Singapore into a successful business, Ms Lim insists that the difficult part was finding the right employees. “With the labour crunch and manpower tightening, we really had to think out of the box and stop our reliance on foreign manpower.”

It starts with a rich manpower base

For starters, seniors were hired. However, it proved challenging to equip them with the all-round skills and product knowledge that

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Ms Anna Lim,
Executive Director

other store employees possess. “There were some things that our older workers were not comfortable with doing, so we had to reinvent ourselves,” explained Ms Lim. The company worked with the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) to design a more senior-friendly workflow and space. Thanks to the change, more single-role positions that better suited the seniors were made available.

Next, they spruced up employer branding to appeal to the thinning resource of student part-timers. They ran a focus group with the interns and the results proved insightful. Ms Lim learned that young people preferred jobs that gave them the opportunity to learn and experience new things. “People ask why the

strawberry generation keeps changing jobs. We found out that it’s not that they want to move, but the desire to upgrade and improve was really the motivation for moving,” she said.

The Soup Spoon also looked to address the needs of the demographic that want to work but cannot commit to a full-time job, such as stay-at-home mothers. “That is why we pioneered the Permanent Part-time Scheme where staff work 30 hours in a 5-day work week.” Today, nearly half of The Soup Spoon’s employees are under this successful in-house scheme.

Another recruitment avenue for the company is the SME Talent Programme, which helps local SMEs attract talent from tertiary institutions through internships, study sponsorships and fresh hire. Thus far, the programme has successfully matched the company with a permanent hire, Ms Vivian Zhang. This poster girl for The Soup Spoon now champions the programme at recruitment drives and road shows organised by SPRING Singapore, the agency who spearheads the programme. “When we speak, students may be sceptical. It’s just more credible coming from Vivian,” Ms Lim said.

A little garnish makes a good job great

The Soup Spoon understands that good people are hard to come by, which is why they go out of their way to keep them. If an employee has the right attitude but a seemingly wrong job, they will re-evaluate his or her skillsets and scope of work and move that employee to a more suitable role. “That’s why HR is so important. It needs to be able to identify talent and not simply write them off,” said Ms Lim.

Flexible working arrangements are also made available to employees who are unable to come in to the office, regardless what their role is. For example, arrangements were made for the

company’s payroll executive to work from home for three months because she had to look after her children.

The employee of the future thrives on new experiences and job satisfaction. Ms Lim urges fellow employers think out of the box when it comes to recruitment, and to do everything they can to make employees their top priority. “These are the people that will help us grow our brands and serve our customers better,” she said.

YCH GROUP:

Delivering the future workforce today

YCH Group is a homegrown multinational corporation that is expanding rapidly across the Asia Pacific region, creating jobs at a rate that most recruiters would find hard to fill. Head, Group Learning and Development Mr Tan Chee Yeng wants to ensure that the company never faces such a challenge again – by hiring tomorrow’s workforce today. “We cannot meet our immediate needs through the traditional way of hiring because the manpower market is just so lean now,” he said.

Creating a human resource supply chain

Leaders are groomed at YCH, which is working towards a five-year development plan for their talents. With the company currently in a phase of aggressive expansion, Mr Tan feels that grooming talents and hiring are complementary paths to the same goal, stating that “it is not possible for us to accelerate a five-year plan to a one-year programme.”

However, a lean manpower resource remains one of the biggest issues for companies. Which is why YCH is planning ahead and taking their recruitment drives to the schools. “We have strong collaborations with the ITEs, polytechnics and universities. We want to get the people in even before they join the workforce,” said Mr Tan.

Recently, YCH signified its commitment to the national SkillsFuture movement with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to embark on SkillsFuture, industry and enterprise-level manpower development initiatives to become more manpower lean and build a stronger Singapore core.

In line with the MOU, eligible local employees will get the opportunity to acquire and deepen skills through lifelong learning. The company has also embarked on the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme for Logistics sector, which offers fresh graduates from polytechnics a head-start in their career. “Coupled with YCH’s own leaders development programme, YCH aims to offer participants a career progression that may be on par or even faster than degree holders,” explained Mr Tan. Upon completion, good performing SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme trainees will be considered for the company’s Management Programme.

The MOU was not a starting point but another milestone in the company’s policy on employee

development. Mr Tan recalls an executive who joined the company in 2003. He was awarded a scholarship by the company and is the Country Operations General Manager today.

The company has also been in close collaboration with Republic Polytechnic. It offers extended six-month internships to up to 30 students a year that culminate in a final year project mentored by YCH. Between 10 to 20 percent of these students will be offered permanent jobs.

Taking people places

The next challenge is retaining these young employees. “The younger generation likes to experience change every one to two years. We try to expose them to different experiences through job rotation, here and overseas,” said Mr Tan. With operations in over 100 locations in 12 countries across the region, he believes that YCH has the depth to keep employees engaged.

YCH strives to motivate staff to excel on a daily basis. The company’s RISE Awards stems from the corporate philosophy of 升 (Sheng), which means Rise. It recognises employees who exhibit the company’s core values of Reliability, Integrity, Sincerity and Enterprise. Staff are rewarded for continually improving their performance, teamwork, and for coming up with solutions that positively impact the company’s growth.

Mr Tan is a firm believer that all HR practitioners must plan ahead and consider automation to complement manual labour. “Having recently studied Asia’s demographics, we found that with the exception of India, everyone is facing the issue of a greying population, not just Singapore,” he said. “To counter this, we are working closely with the government on ways to supplement manpower with technology, looking into automation that allows employees to undertake high-skill tasks,” he added.

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Mr Tan Chee Yeng,
Head, Group Learning
and Development



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