

Hot topic

Striking a balance?

Recently, 70 companies received Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) Work-Life Excellence Awards which recognise companies that are committed to helping employees harmonise their work and personal objectives. Juggling these two priorities is no easy feat. Amirah Fatin asked four award recipients what key challenges they faced in implementing work-life programmes.

Ann Chua, HR director, NCS



The nature of our business makes it somewhat challenging to implement a work-life harmony programme that meets the needs of all levels of employees. Being an IT and communications engineering services provider, we handle projects of varied complexity and security sensitivity.

For example, some business units are not able to implement flexi-work hours or telecommuting because our customers expect our employees to be onsite during normal working hours. Being onsite also means that these employees are not able to participate in our health programmes such as aerobics, as they are held in the NCS Hub. That, however, does not stop us from promoting our health programmes to them. We schedule these activities later in the evening so that more people can get there on time or encourage employees to participate in classes held at another venue, SingTel Recreation, if it is more convenient for them to travel there. To ensure that employees are aware of

these programme, information is posted in our intranet and announcements are often sent out via email broadcasts.

Christine ONG, country head, UBS Singapore



At UBS, embracing diversity and being family-friendly is very much an area of focus by top management. A clear demonstration of this is the appointment of a global head of diversity to lead our work-life programmes across the globe. We aim to develop and retain talent by offering staff ways to tailor their working life such that they can have happy, healthy and fulfilled lives outside of work.

The UBS management stresses that spending extra hours at the office is only important if those hours are productive. Staff are not rewarded for the time they spend in the office, but rather the output that they generate. It's a mentality we filter to our line managers and whilst a difficult task, successfully made it part of the work culture at UBS. Globally, being 'family friendly' has been an integral part of UBS's corporate philosophy.

HR policies at UBS have evolved over recent years in keeping with the global and social developments. We've developed a more holistic way of viewing staff by seeing them not just

as an employee but an individual within a family and social context, with personal needs and aspirations. Thus, monetary gratifications alone are not enough.

Serene Tan, human resources director, Tan Tock Seng Hospital



Being the busiest acute hospital in Singapore, staff are constantly required to put in their best efforts to cope with the high demand and influx of patients. Not only does the hospital operate 24/7, the healthcare industry itself is unique and challenging.

TTSH employs about 4,000 employees. This can be challenging as it means very diverse employee needs. As such, it is vital for TTSH to ensure staff needs are well taken care of so that they can perform optimally and drive the institution's success.

Taking into account the varied schedules and differing needs, the hospital had to adopt a flexible and proactive approach when it organises programmes and events. For example, noting that the in-patient nurses are unable to attend activities organised during regular hours due to shift work, a separate programme is created especially for them to meet their needs.

Outreaching to 4,000 staff is also a challenging task. Hence the hospital adopted a five-channel approach to inform them of the various work-life initiatives. This was through our weekly email memos from the CEO, updates during nurses' forums, e-newsletters, publicity in the hospital newsletter and posters displayed at staff rest areas.

Stephen Tjoa, director, human resources, KPMG Singapore



One of our biggest challenges is to develop a culture of awareness that work-life issues are key to productivity, efficiency and staff longevity. In a profession where work remains stressful and demanding, we have been cognizant of negative effects such as burnout and other health problems associated with stress. As a result, we are challenged to examine different ways to facilitate leave planning, encourage healthier lifestyles through workshops, formulate effective work-life HR policies, focus on social and recreational activities for the firm and to provide supportive mechanisms for flexible work arrangements especially for working mothers. Finally, we hope that our culture of awareness for work-life issues will be embraced at all levels, and we look forward to further refinements of our programme to embed the spirit of work-life in everything we do at KPMG.

Guru for hire

Name

Lee E Miller

Job title

Managing director

Company

NegotiationPlus.com



In a nutshell

A Harvard Law School graduate, Miller advises on compensation and negotiation and is an adjunct professor of management at Seton Hall University, where he teaches MBA courses in negotiation, managerial decision making and human resources management.

Previously, he was the senior VP of HR at TV Guide magazine, USA Networks and Barney's New York Inc., a vice president of labour and employee relations at R.H. Macy & Co. Inc. and a partner and co-chair of the employment and labour group of one of the largest law firms in New Jersey. He is also the author of *Employment Discrimination Law* (BNA). Lee is the former chairperson of the International Association of Corporate and Professional Recruiters and secretary to the Union County Motion Picture Advisory Board.

He has written a monthly career column for Monster.com and made special appearances on ABC's *Good Morning America*, *Today New York*, CNBC's *Power Lunch* and *Bloomberg Personal Finance*.

Rehashed or new?

Miller specialises in negotiation and together with his daughter Jessica Miller, has produced an influential niche bestseller *A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiation*.

His book explains how women in all walks of life and businesses can strike better deals for themselves and their organisations. Lee's more general message to HR, though, is to learn how to negotiate and train their workforce to negotiate as well.

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