Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices

Content

Preface

Formulation of Measures

1. Enlightened Practices Helping Employees Achieve Work-Life Balance
2. Multi-pronged Approach to Fostering Culture of Communication and Mutual Trust **Eaton Hotel
3. Open Your Ears before Formulating Thoughtful Measures **Delifrance

Family Leaves & Flexible Work Arrangements

15. Pioneer in Launching Filial Leave **South Pacific Hotel
19. Caring for Employees-Flexible Seven-Day Paternity Leave **Nanyang International Logistics
23. Five-Day Work Week for the Retail Industry: Mission Impossible? **Hing Kee Java Edible Bird's Nest
27. Trust and Support-Home Office for Staff **adidas
31. Prescribing Maximum Working Hours to Achieve a Win-Win Situation **Green Island Cement
35. Flexible Working Hours Fostering Stronger Sense of Belonging **Tradelink
39. Flexible Work Arrangements Facilitating Family-Work Balance **Citibank

Family Support

44. Staff are More Devoted to Work with their Children Around **HSBC
48. Well-equipped Nursing Room Facilitating Breastfeeding for Working Mothers **Tseung Kwan O Hospital
52. Activities Boosting Family Harmony Generate Dedicated Staff **A.S. Watson Group
56. Employee Assistance Programme Attending to Overall Well-being of Staff **Urban Group
60. Employers and Employees Joining Hands to Develop Family Support Measures **HAESL

Other Caring Measures

65. Caring Initiatives Promoting Employee Enhancement **City Telecom
69. Cash Subsidy Encouraging Staff to Do More Exercise **Rohm and Haas Electronic Materials
73. "3 Lows, 1 High" Healthy Kitchen Nurturing Healthy Staff **CLP
77. Volunteer Team Organised for Living Up to Corporate Social Responsibility **IKEA

Conclusion

82. Good People Management Creating Win-Win Situation
Preface

Harmonious Labour Relations Bring Prosperity

Good people management helps promote harmonious labour relations, which are the cornerstone of Hong Kong’s prosperity and success. With the co-operation and support of employees, enterprises can respond quickly and effectively to changes, so that they can survive in an ever-changing business environment and seize opportunities arising from economic changes.

In brief, the key to good people management lies in five qualities that an enterprise should possess. Enterprises should promote communication and co-operation among staff through “empathy”, with the objective of building a quality team. Employers should show “care” in identifying the needs of employees and their families and provide them with a worry-free work environment. Employers should also listen to employees’ views with “patience” and proactively transform them into effective measures. Noting the “sincerity” of the employers, employees will work with “willingness” and enhance the productivity of the enterprise.

Amid the current abrupt downturn of the global economy, the world is facing an enormous test and enterprises have to re-position themselves to meet forthcoming challenges. The publication of this booklet enables employers to revisit the employee-based management concepts. Through the actual cases cited from various industries with creative ideas, employers will understand and be enlightened about the importance of good people management in enhancing corporate efficiency and competitiveness.

Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Preface

Family-Based Policy

Cherishing the family has always been a core value of Hong Kong society, and a happy family is indeed the foundation of social stability and prosperity. In fostering a family-based policy, the emphasis should be put on supporting and strengthening families, and promoting the welfare of family members.

Family-related issues involve different policy areas such as education, housing, tax regime, sports and recreation, medical and welfare. Therefore, welfare services alone can hardly render effective support to families. In the policy portfolio of the Labour and Welfare Bureau, promotion of family-friendly employment practices is highlighted to nurture a culture of mutual support and concern at the workplace, while reminding employers that working people are also members of a family with multiple roles as parents or children. If employees can fulfil their work and family responsibilities and strike a proper balance, it will help reduce family problems, resulting in increased productivity and sense of belonging to the enterprise.

Apart from the Government’s active promotion of family-friendly employment practices, the concerted efforts of corporations, non-governmental organisations and employees are necessary in building a family-based and harmonious community in Hong Kong.

Paul TANG Kwok-wai
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Preface

Let’s All Start with One…

Harmonious families are the foundation of a harmonious society. And the nurturing of a culture of gender equality, mutual respect and care is the cornerstone of a harmonious family, in which all its members, irrespective of their gender and age, can share family responsibilities and together enjoy love and care. At the same time, they can also enjoy the opportunity to fully develop their potentials throughout the different stages of their lives in accordance with their aspirations and capabilities.

The Women’s Commission has been encouraging all sectors of society to adopt family-friendly employment policies and practices. Through the provision of a highly flexible and accommodating employment environment, employees would be able to meet their family commitments whilst at the same time making their life choices according to their different needs at different life stages. A family-friendly employment environment would enable men and women to share family responsibilities, thus strengthening the family as a place of mutual support, care and love, and thereby promoting harmonious families.

Implementing family-friendly employment policies and practices in the workplace indeed not just benefit employees but also employers. Reported benefits on the company after adopting family-friendly employment policies and practices include: gained reputation of being an employer of choice, improved morale, increased ability to attract high-performing and experienced employees, enhanced working relationships between colleagues, and reduced turnover. Besides, care and concern for employees and their families are widely regarded as important aspects of corporate social responsibility. Thus, adopting family-friendly employment policies and practices is the most direct fulfillment of corporate social responsibility by any company.

This booklet on Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices compiled by the Labour Department showcases the good practices of different employers, including flexible working hours, five-day work week, compassionate leave, employer provision of crèches etc, all practical examples for our reference. These examples fully demonstrate that good people management and family-friendly employment policies and practices do not necessarily require additional cost, but can bring benefits to both employers and employees.

Let’s all adopt a family-friendly employment measure from today, with a little more empathy and consideration for the employees, and a little more creativity. To strive for a harmonious society, let’s start with nurturing harmonious families through the provision of family-friendly employment policies and practices.

Sophia KAO Ching-chi
Chairperson
Women’s Commission

Preface

Employee-oriented Management Practices

The Labour Department has been encouraging employers to adopt employee-oriented, good people management measures. Family-friendly employment practice is one of the major programmes for promotion in recent years. Building up a family-friendly working culture and environment requires the concerted efforts of all sectors of the community. In this regard, the Labour Department has been acting as a facilitator in promoting the concept among employers, employees and the general public.

I am very pleased to note that more and more employers have implemented good people management practices. In order to provide enterprises with real-life examples for reference, the Labour Department has commissioned the Hong Kong Economic Times to conduct case interviews with various enlightened organisations. A series of 20 newspaper supplements was made for weekly publication in the Hong Kong Economic Times from July to November 2008. Various good people management practices were introduced, with more coverage on family-friendly employment practices in particular. Through sharing the real-life experiences of different enterprises, we hope that employers and human resource professionals can gain a better understanding of the design, formulation and implementation of the good people management measures. The caring measures mentioned in the series also serve as proof that implementation of caring and considerate measures for the employees may bring about unexpected returns.

I would like to dedicate this book to all enterprises in Hong Kong. I do hope that both employers and employees can be enlightened and benefited from reading it.
The buoyant economy brings to every trade the challenges of manpower strain and high turnover rate. For employers, employees are the most valuable asset of the company. Employers will certainly benefit if their staff are happy with their work and maintain a strong sense of belonging and high efficiency. The key to attract and retain talents, apart from reasonable remuneration, is good people management and family-friendly employment practices. Nowadays, employees expect not only reasonable pay and benefits but also the “heart” of employers. Their care and consideration for employees is, in the long run, the solution to the brain drain problem.
Good people management practices should embody three main principles: employee-oriented, law-abiding, and equal and fair. Through the adoption of such practices, employers and employees can establish partnership and create a harmonious working environment. It also helps to build up a highly motivated and efficient workforce which will enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the company.

Value Both Work and Family

Family-friendly employment practices, which are gaining popularity among employers in recent years, are in fact one of the employee-oriented management practices. While employers expect their staff to be devoted to work, they must be aware that their employees are also shouldering various family responsibilities, such as taking care of their children or parents. The implementation of family-friendly employment practices is to help employees fulfil their work and family responsibilities simultaneously, thereby balancing their work and family lives.

Efficiency Enhanced with Greater Sense of Belonging

The adoption of family-friendly employment practices will bring many advantages to both employers and employees. First of all, these practices can address employees’ needs to take care of their families so that they can work wholeheartedly with their mind at peace, thus enhancing their productivity and work performance. Besides, with the relief of the pressure of family caring, employees will be less likely to be absent from work due to sickness or occupational accidents.

On the other hand, employees’ sense of belonging will increase if they feel valued and cared for. Correspondingly, staff turnover will drop and the related recruitment and training expenses can be reduced. In addition, these employment practices not only help organisations build a positive corporate image and attract different talents, but also facilitate their long-term development.

There is a wide range of family-friendly employment practices, which can be generalised into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant special leave to meet employees’ family needs</td>
<td>*Marriage leave, paternity leave, compassionate leave, parental leave, special casual leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work arrangements</td>
<td>*Five-day work week, flexible working hours, home office, job sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide living support</td>
<td>*Child care service, counselling services on stress or emotional management for employees and their family members, medical protection, family recreational activities</td>
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Cultivate a Family-friendly Corporate Culture through Communication

Family-friendly employment practices are not exclusive for large enterprises. They can be implemented by employers just with a little more care and consideration and a stretch of imagination. Of course,
the management must support and endorse the concept of good people management and family-friendly employment practices for gradual establishment of a family-friendly corporate culture. During the planning process and prior to implementing each measure, employers have to communicate with their employees thoroughly to understand their genuine needs.

### Five Keys Aspects of Good People Management

1. **Pledge for recruitment, selection and employment**
   - The employer should analyse the duties and requirements of the post objectively, ensure equal opportunities in employment in the selection of suitable candidate and draw up written employment contract to protect the interests of both the employer and the employee.

2. **Staff training and development**
   - The employer should provide orientation and on-the-job training for employees, regularly evaluate their training needs and map out career paths for them.

3. **Safety and health at work**
   - The employer should develop a safety policy, safety standards, training programmes, monitoring and review systems and a safety organisation.

4. **Employer-employee communication**
   - The employer should establish regular and effective two-way communication channels, and formulate and effectively implement complaint and disciplinary procedures.

5. **Termination of employment**
   - The employer should treat employees equally when their employment is terminated. In case of dismissal and redundancy, the employer should provide employees with reasonable compensation, appropriate counselling and assistance according to clear and objective criteria and procedures.

Even the biggest and the best-capitalised enterprise cannot achieve sustainable development and scale new heights without active participation and cooperation of its staff. Eaton Hotel Hong Kong (“Eaton Hotel”) always perceives its staff as an important asset. It puts particular weights on the culture of mutual communication to ensure that the management can widely gauge the views of its employees and foster a stronger sense of belonging.
According to Ms May Chan, Human Resources Manager of Eaton Hotel, a warm smile is indispensable to the customer-oriented services industry. “After the renovation in 2004, the service quality of our employees is in need of overhaul to match up with our four-star hotel standard.” To bring about the reform and develop a mutually compatible vision between the management and staff, the management should adopt an enlightened attitude and take the lead in communication.

Mutual Exchange of Opinions

Ms Chan notes that the traditional top-down unilateral management style is no longer applicable as human resources management nowadays strives for teamwork. Communication is at all times the formula of better understanding. It is also the bridge leading to the reform of Eaton Hotel and its employees as well as cultivation of mutual trust.

Endeavouring to adopt an interactive open management style, Eaton Hotel hence set up various channels to enhance the transparency of management and to achieve two-way communication. Ms Chan says, “Eaton Hotel regularly organises a variety of gatherings, such as Coffee Break with HRM, Tea & Chat and Quarterly Town Hall Meeting, where employees are kept abreast of the latest policies and development of the company. Through such direct interactions with the management, we encourage our staff to freely express their views, which helps strengthen their sense of belonging.”

Ms Chan admits that the front-line staff were timid at the very beginning to exchange their views with the Managing Director and the management in the Quarterly Town Hall Meeting. To encourage their participation, the company lured them with the bait of delicacies, lucky draws and games, as well as a free and easy atmosphere. Gradually, trust started to take shape and the front-line staff became used to conveying their opinions before the Managing Director.

Eaton Hotel also conducts an annual anonymous employee survey to collect staff’s feedback on working environment, departmental operation and administration. Sound suggestions put forth will be adopted. This management culture underscoring two-way communication is well established and highly acclaimed by employees, thereby boosting their work efficiency and morale.

Incentive Programmes Create Consensus

Eaton Hotel specially introduces the “We Care” programme covering 5 major targets: “We care about our colleagues; our guests; our hotel; ourselves; and You”. It is believed that only if employees enjoy their work will they provide the customers with quality service.

Besides, Eaton Hotel has introduced various incentive programmes, such as “The Outstanding Employee of the Year” and “Idea Passport” to commend outstanding performers and those who actively give improvement suggestions to the hotel. Mr Lam Chi Wai, Driveway Attendant, was awarded “The Outstanding Employee of the Year” for his remarkable performance in 2007. He was also the champion of the...
“Idea Passport” for reflecting his views which prompted the hotel to make immediate improvement by levelling the uneven driveway to prevent customers from tripping. “I am surprised that the company values the opinion of a front-line staff so much, which makes me take to heart and work in full swing,” says Mr Lam.

In November 2008, Eaton Hotel launched the “WOW Eaton Miles” project, which is an extension of the “We Care” programme. “We incorporate the concept of flight mileage into the incentive programme. The staff can earn different points for pursuing further studies, taking part in competitions, joining voluntary service or achieving the performance standards. Every five points accumulated can redeem a supermarket cash coupon.” Ms Chan adds that the management highly recognises the importance of innovation, and therefore launches new measures to facilitate exchanges of ideas in an interesting way and to maintain the culture of communications and mutual trust.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Bilateral Communication

- Adopt an interactive and open management approach
  Enhance the transparency of the management and keep employees abreast of the latest policies as well as development of the company.

- Collect staff feedback through various channels
  Embody the importance attached to staff opinions by the “We Care” programme.

- Advocate incentive culture to boost morale
  Innovative incentives are introduced to encourage employees to express their opinions.

Salary and prospect definitely count when employees consider working for a company. Yet, if the employer can go one step further by opening its ears to the employees and attending to their subtle needs, it can foster a joyful working atmosphere. In turn, employees will be motivated to perform better and a win-win situation for the enterprise, its employees and its customers will follow.
Embracing the corporate culture of "Work as a team. Play as a team.", Ms Ada Wong, Head of Human Resources and Training of Délibrance (HK) Limited ("Délibrance"), reveals that the Human Resources Department designed a mechanism of multi-level communication channels years ago to find out the various needs of its employees. It helps employees to realise that the company cares for them and strengthen the ties between the staff and the company.

Listen to Other Views

When it comes to formulation of measures, the management should never rely on conjectures alone. Délibrance has therefore laid a solid groundwork for collecting staff opinions. In addition to internal opinion surveys, Délibrance also creates tailor-made opportunities to consult staff at different levels. Apart from regular meetings for the senior management, retreat seminars and team-building workshops are arranged for middle-level staff to reinforce their key role in the communication channels and ensure smooth and seamless exchanges.

Délibrance in particular values the comments of employees at the junior levels. Regular sharing sessions are organised to encourage the exchange of views on various issues, such as customer services and welfare benefits. Ms Wong considers that as a player in the catering industry where front-line staff account for the majority, Délibrance must listen to their views when drawing up any measures. "To cater for the needs of front-line staff, store managers will collect their views before each meeting and then examine various options with the management."

Délibrance has set up a well-defined feedback framework to let employees know that their voices are heard by the management. Based on the feedback received via different channels, the Human Resources Department holds two formal discussion and in-depth review sessions each year, and adopts the good people management and family-friendly employment practices that can meet the operation needs and enhance employee benefits. Ms Wong reveals that once the measures are finalised, store managers will be provided with sufficient training and guidelines to ensure a smooth and consistent workflow. Upon implementation of these measures, tea gatherings will be held regularly to collect employees’ feedback.

On top of marriage leave, paternity leave and compassionate leave, Délibrance also offers other family-friendly employment measures which show its uniqueness and thoughtfulness. Ms Wong believes that these small and thoughtful measures are operationally more flexible and employees can better appreciate the company’s genuine concern for them.

Compassionate Leave Brings a Stronger Sense of Belonging

Ms Wong points out that their no-pay leave, introduced on the basis of mutual understanding, trust and support, caters for the individual needs of employees. If an employee needs to leave Hong Kong for a prolonged period on family grounds, provide domestic care when a family member dies or is sick, or take a long break owing to his own illness, Délibrance will consider such applications with discretion. The leave thus granted ranges from one week to a year. "We understand it'
leave thus granted ranges from one week to a year. “We understand it’s a hard time for the staff. Instead of approving their resignation, we’d rather grant them long leave to settle their personal affairs. They will develop a stronger sense of belonging when they resume work,” says Ms Wong.

Thoughtful Gestures Add Personal Touch

Ms Wong observes that front-line staff are often too young to see the need of planning for mishaps. They seldom think about taking out life insurance policies to protect themselves and their families. In light of this, Délifrance provides life insurance cover which gives them and their families free protection against any non-work accidents.

According to Ms Wong, apart from extra leave and insurance coverage, their 900 odd employees will receive birthday cards signed by their boss and colleagues. In addition, office staff will be provided with seasonal Chinese herb tea. All these small and thoughtful gestures are in fact good employment practices that can touch the hearts of employees. Ms Wong says frankly that the objective of these measures is to create a caring work environment, so that the staff can work devotedly in a relaxed manner.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Thoughtful Measures

- The management values the opinions of its employees.
- Frameworks and mechanisms are established for extensive collection of employees’ feedback before the formulation of measures.
- Attend to the subtle needs of employees so as to foster a stronger sense of belonging.
As the saying goes, an enterprise is the epitome of society. In ancient times, Confucius advocated that emperors should implement humane policies and rule with kindness. Is humane governance commendable for enterprises nowadays? South Pacific Hotel launched the “filial leave” in 2005 and has since demonstrated how Confucian values could be applied to hotel management.

Mr Yohan Yuan, Executive Director and General Manager of South Pacific Hotel, says that many enterprises adopt quantity-oriented systems and stringent management these days. Nonetheless, to him, the Chinese people are more sentimental, and enterprises should make corresponding adjustments on the ground of humanity. “The staff are the most important asset of an enterprise. Therefore, we treat our staff as family members and friends.” Believing that the character of a person affects his attitudes towards others, the hotel especially instils in its staff the concept of filial piety. He explains, “Those who do not show filial affections are unlikely to be amiable to colleagues, superiors or customers.”

Half-Day Leave for Celebration of Parents’ Birthdays

To encourage its staff to show filial piety, South Pacific Hotel introduces the “filial leave” for each employee to take half-day leave twice every year to celebrate with parents or senior family members on their birthdays. A complimentary birthday card and a cake will also be provided. In addition, the hotel introduces the “Most Filial Employee Award” as further commendation for filial piety. Employees can nominate themselves or be recommended by their supervisors for the Award.

Mr Yuan admits that they once worried their staff might be unenthusiastic and not react positively to the policy at its early stage of implementation. Yet they were surprised and gratified to see that it was well received. He stresses that to enhance operational efficiency,
the company and its staff should have a common philosophy and shared goals to strengthen their sense of belonging. In fact, a caring and considerate enterprise which always bears staff interests in mind is not far from success.

The employer-employee relationship has to be two-way. Mr Yuan points out that employees will give their best when they feel the sincerity of the company. “Our survey shows an average score of over 80 in staff satisfaction and the turnover rate is very low. The overall performance of our staff shows continuous improvement.”

What the Staff Think

Amongst its pool of over 160 employees, 70% of them have been serving South Pacific Hotel for over five years. Ms Elaine Wong, Front Desk Supervisor, has been working there for 12 years and has never thought of leaving because she thinks the hotel really cares about its staff. ‘When my friends heard about our filial leave, they asked me if it was true. They all envied me for such benefit.’ Ms Wong is proud to be part of the hotel team. The considerate management and the absence of hierarchy make her feel that the hotel is like a family, pulling them together to work with vigour.

Red Packets and Gifts on Festive Occasions

Apart from compassionate leave, marriage leave, maternity leave and sick leave, South Pacific Hotel also gives red packets and festival gifts to its staff, as well as provides assistance fund and life insurance to needy staff. In recent years, Mr Yuan has come up with many new ideas to create a more interesting working environment, such as organising parties and travel lucky draws to relieve the work pressure of staff.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Filial Leave

1. Formulate the policy in light of the fact that the Chinese people are more sentimental.
2. Instil positive values in staff and set a common philosophy and shared goals between the company and the employees.
3. Supervisors and colleagues encourage fellow colleagues to care about their family members and be considerate to the needs of their families.
Pregnancy is of course an arduous task for mothers, but fathers are not spared for they have to take care of their families and work at the same time. Foreign companies have long been implementing paid paternity leave to facilitate male employees to attend to their wives and newborn babies. Here in Hong Kong, Nanyang International Logistics Holdings Limited (“Nanyang”) is one of the companies adopting similar measures.

“Today, a husband not only has to work but also to look after his family. During pregnancy and the postnatal period, the wife needs extra care and support from her husband,” says Mr Henry Tsoi, President of Nanyang and a father himself, explaining the rationale behind the paternity leave initiative.

Flexible Prenatal and Postnatal Leave

The company offers its employees up to seven days of paid paternity leave. To cater for individual needs, the leave can be taken flexibly before or after the expected date of delivery. “Whether it is for attending antenatal check-ups with their wives, handling hospital admission and discharge procedures, or spending more time to take care of their spouses and babies after delivery so as to lessen the burden of their wives, male employees can arrange their leave according to needs as long as it remains at seven working days and the application is submitted one month beforehand,” says Mr Tsoi.

He adds that the initiative was introduced to Hong Kong and the Mainland offices in 2007. There is no limit on the number of applications per employee and the
Nowadays, husbands have to give considerations to both family and work. Paternity leave allows them to take care of their wives and babies wholeheartedly at critical moments.

Smooth Operation Backed by Acting Staff System

However, when every second counts in the logistics industry, how does the company solve the problems of handover of work and staff deployment to make the seven days of paternity leave feasible? The answer is the “Acting Staff System”. With the aid of technology and a comprehensive computer system, other employees can substitute those who are on leave, thus alleviating the pressure on the workflow.

According to Mr Tsoi, the “Acting Staff System” has been implemented before the introduction of paternity leave. Guidelines on the scope of work and duties of different departments and posts are well defined and the required standard operational procedures are clearly recorded in the computer system. “Under the system, there is a ‘primary acting officer’ and a ‘secondary acting officer’. When a staff member is on paternity leave, no matter how long the leave takes, the primary acting officer will follow up and take over the work of his co-worker on leave according to the computer records. If the primary acting officer is also on leave, the secondary acting officer will take up his place,” says Mr Tsoi. Building on the Acting Staff System, the company has implemented the paternity leave smoothly.

Company Benefiting from Higher Efficiency of Staff

Ms Linni Wong, Assistant Manager of Human Resources and Administrative Department, says, “During the paternity leave, the fathers can put aside their work and take care of their wives and babies wholeheartedly at the critical moments before or after delivery. With the pressure relieved, they will be more devoted when they return to work.” Ms Wong also believes that the initiative increases the staff’s sense of belonging. While sharing the same goal with the company, employees will make every effort in work, hence higher efficiency and performance conducive to the development of the company.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Paternity Leave

- Seven days of paid paternity leave allows employees to spare more time looking after their wives and babies and be more devoted to work when they resume duty.
- Under the flexible and systematic arrangement, male employees can take leave before or after the delivery.
- The Acting Staff System clearly specifies that another employee will take up the work of the one on leave to ensure smooth handover of duties.
Five-Day Work Week for the Retail Industry: Mission Impossible?

Hing Kee Java Edible Bird’s Nest

The five-day work week initiative has been generally well received since its introduction by phases in the Government in 2006. More and more enterprises have now adopted such arrangement in their employment terms to attract talents. However, for the retail industry with shops open all year round, moving to a five-day work week is easier said than done. Yet each problem has its solution. Taking the lead, Hing Kee Java Edible Bird’s Nest Co., Ltd. (“Hing Kee”) implemented a five-day work week at the end of 2006, which has led to higher operational efficiency and greater profitability.

Employees in the retail industry generally work six days a week with hectic weekends and long working hours. Heavy workload exhausts them both physically and mentally. In view of this, Hing Kee proactively introduced a five-day work week in two phases at the end of 2006. In addition to the weekly rest day, their employees are granted an extra “day-off for family, rest and study” every week. All their retail outlets are included in the first phase.

Communication and Consultation before Implementation

According to Ms Mandy Chan, Administrative Manager of Hing Kee, the company all along attaches great importance to providing a good working environment for their employees. The five-day work week policy was not a hasty decision. It was adopted for phased implementation after thorough consideration and a six-month internal consultation by a dedicated working group.

“We have maintained harmonious labour relations through effective internal communication. Under the five-day work week policy, our staff can have more time for rest and family gatherings, thus relieving their work pressure and improving their quality of life,” says Ms Chan. In order to give employees longer rest time, shop supervisors will arrange for the weekly rest day and the day-off for family, rest and study to be taken consecutively as far as possible.

A five-day work week has always been considered a “mission impossible” in the retail industry. Holding the belief that “you can only succeed if you try”, Hing Kee never sways from its determination. Ms Chan recounts that some supervisors have expressed concerns over the possible difficulties in staff deployment in the initial consultation. However, after thorough consideration, Hing Kee decided to adopt a five-day work week taking into account the small impact on its overall operation and the support given by its staff in general.
Smooth Transition with Back Office Support

Unlike other companies which conduct a trial in its back office, Hing Kee rolled out the five-day work week arrangement first in their retail outlets and only extended it to the back office three weeks later. Mr Joe Lui, Human Resources Executive of Hing Kee, explains that this is a meticulous move, not to create greater challenges, but to ensure more effective implementation.

“Five-day work week is a new initiative of our company. Unforeseeable challenges may arise at the early stage, in particular in the front-line outlets in which supervisors should maintain a day-off roster taking into account employees’ preferences and operational arrangements.” It is therefore decided that retail outlets are covered in the first phase while the back office renders support to facilitate the smooth implementation of the policy.

Higher Staff Morale and Greater Efficiency

Hing Kee has been implementing a five-day work week for almost two years. Ms Chan says that there is no significant increase in costs though additional staff have been recruited to enhance the flexibility of manpower deployment. Meanwhile, a review conducted by Hing Kee showed that improvements were seen in both staff morale and business performance since the implementation of a five-day work week. “After a good rest, our employees are more energetic at work and have actively proposed workflow improvement to enhance operational efficiency. Besides, they have a stronger sense of belonging towards the company and are more willing to join training programmes. All these are the intangible benefits of the policy.”

Keys to Successful Implementation of Five-day Work Week

- **Close communication between the employer and the employees**: The employer should understand the needs of the employees and consult them as well as the management at various levels before implementation.
- **Careful planning beforehand**: As greater difficulties are expected in implementing a five-day work week in the front-line outlets, the company has conducted a trial in the outlets first, allowing the back office to render support when problems arise.
- **Being far-sighted in seizing opportunities**: Though the retail industry faces greater challenges in moving to a five-day work week, it will bring benefits in the long run. A forerunner who keeps going despite difficulties reaps even greater benefits.
Trust and Support - Home Office for Staff

adidas

“We adopt the home office policy because some employees found it hard to cope with their work and wished to quit due to reasons such as taking care of their children or personal health. Hence we reached an agreement with them on home office arrangement so that they could continue to serve the company,” explains Ms Anne Tsui, Human Resources and Administration Director of adidas.

Flexibility in Approving Cases

“Employees with special needs can consult their supervisors on the feasibility of working at home. We will consider their requests, taking into account their reasons, the departments they belong to, work types, years of service and whether they have a mature personality and can exercise self-discipline.” She admits that it may be difficult to implement the home office policy for jobs which require workers to be on duty, like front-line and warehouse posts, etc. On the contrary, there are fewer constraints on project management or creative posts. Through implementing the home office policy on a case by case basis, the company can maintain greater flexibility in human resources management.

The company maintains an open attitude to the duration of home office arrangement, which generally lasts for three to six months. Ms Tsui adds that where necessary, their employees can discuss with the company on other forms of flexible job arrangements, such as shortening

Many wage earners might think, “Staying at home is good but working at home is great!” Yet for those who have to juggle their work, family, health and other considerations, working at home may be the key to keep them in employment rather than just a far fetched idea. But how is the home office policy to be implemented? How can staff efficiency be ensured? By putting trust in its employees and providing some suitable support arrangements, adidas Hong Kong Limited (“adidas”) allows its staff in need to work at home, thus successfully retaining their “body” and “heart” without affecting company operation.
the working hours or switching to part-time employment. There may be salary adjustments depending on the circumstances of each case, but the basic staff benefits will remain unchanged.

**Clear Performance Indicators to Ensure Efficiency**

How does the company ensure the efficiency of its staff working at home? In fact, adidas has a clear set of Key Performance Indicators for its employees. Before an employee starts working at home, he has to agree on the working schedule with his supervisors, like handling emails in appointed time slots, reporting work progress to his supervisors regularly, or checking the progress of his subordinates and giving them instructions so that they can meet deadlines and fulfil the requirements of performance indicators. During the home office period, the employee is only required to return to the office for meetings and other special activities occasionally.

To facilitate cooperation among colleagues, the relevant departments and teams will be informed of the working schedules of the home-office staff through internal circulars. “With the current advanced communication technology, working at home or in office can have no significant difference if there is good arrangement and mutual trust between the company and the employee,” says Ms Tsui. The case of adidas has also shown that home office will not hinder company operation or team cooperation. On the contrary, employees will have a stronger sense of belonging when they realise that they have the trust and support of their employer.

**Provision of Software and Hardware for Information Security**

For smoother operation of the home office arrangement, adidas also provides notebooks as hardware support for its staff. “The notebooks are pre-installed with suitable software and hardware. Our employees can use them to log onto the company’s internal computer system, check emails and perform other word processing tasks at home,” says Ms Tsui. She adds that adidas only allows its staff to log onto the company’s system via the designated notebooks to lower the risk of information leakage. These hardware and software do not incur much financial costs.

With trust in the employees and suitable support arrangements, adidas has successfully put the idea of home office into practice. For other organisations thinking of implementing the home office arrangement, Ms Tsui suggests, “If an organisation allows its staff to work at home, it should have total trust in them. Their work progress can be regularly evaluated according to the mutually agreed performance indicators.”

**Keys to Successful Implementation of Home Office**

- Approve home office requests on a case by case basis to allow greater flexibility in human resources management.
- Devise a clear working schedule and performance indicators, and allow employees to work at home with mutual trust.
- Provide notebooks for the home office staff to safeguard information security.
As we all know, different industries have their respective service hours. Similarly, different occupations also vary in their working hours. To maintain flexibility in operation, Hong Kong enterprises seldom set a ceiling on the weekly or monthly working hours for their staff. Yet, an enterprise implemented the maximum working hours policy years ago and has achieved a “win-win” situation for both the company and the employees. Without compromising productivity, the initiative has enhanced staff efficiency, occupational safety and health, as well as the technical skills of the employees.

Green Island Cement (Holdings) Limited (“GICH”) is located in Tap Shek Kok, Tuen Mun. Its remote location and unique business nature make recruitment a challenge for the company. Due to tight manpower, the employees were asked to work overtime in the early years. In the 1980s, employees even worked 72 hours a week, or 12 hours a day on average.

“Our policy mandates payment for overtime work,” explains Mrs Virginia Ma, General Manager of Group Human Resources and Administration of GICH, “In those days, our employees were younger and did not mind working overtime to earn some extra money.” With the expansion of company, the issues of labour shortage and long working hours needed to be resolved.

Working Norm Changed, Income Maintained
To ease the manpower shortage, GICH started acquiring auxiliary machinery in the 1990s to simplify the labour-intensive processes. The need to work overtime was thus gradually reduced. Eventually, the daily compulsory four-hour overtime was cut down to a maximum of two hours a day if required.

Shorter working hours means less overtime and thus a lower income. How does GICH strike a balance to put employees’ mind at ease? The answer is the introduction of a number of measures such as providing bonuses and study allowances, as well as increasing...
the wages of individual posts to maintain employees’ income after reduction of overtime work. GICH also arranges training programmes for employees to enhance and broaden their skills to better equip them for promotion and pay rise.

Moreover, the maximum working hours policy of GICH gains the support of its staff. Mrs Ma explains, “We realise that our staff have different needs at different stages of life. Many of them got married in the 1990s. They want to finish their work earlier and spend more time with their family. Prescribing the maximum working hours can thus address their needs in this respect.”

**Shorter Working Hours and Enhanced Efficiency**

According to Mrs Ma, the employees become more alert and energetic as they work shorter hours after implementation of the policy. The number of workplace accidents has significantly dropped from the highest 80 incidents per year to only a few cases per year recently, far lower than the average figures in the industry. At the same time, the employees can master more skills as they have more time and opportunities to attend training, hence a remarkable improvement in work efficiency.

**Effective Communication Facilitates Policy Formulation**

Mrs Ma points out that the crux to successful implementation of the maximum working hours policy is communication. In addition to the comprehensive formal communication channels, the GICH management makes use of various informal channels and occasions to gauge views, such as staff birthday parties, lunch at the staff canteen and commuting time on company coaches. “A win-win situation can be achieved if the management understands the needs of the employees and formulates policies accordingly.”

**Keys to Successful Implementation of Maximum Working Hours Policy**

- Establish multi-pronged communication channels to understand the views of employees.
- Implement the initiative step by step and complement it with measures such as training and better remuneration.
- Formulate the policy according to the age and life stage of employees.
Flexible Working Hours Fostering Stronger Sense of Belonging

Most enterprises stipulate regular working hours for their employees. Though a more systematic operation can be attained, the rigid working hours imposed may affect those who need to take care of their families or pursue further studies for self-enhancement. Some enterprises therefore introduce the measure of flexible working hours to provide its employees with greater autonomy and flexibility in working hours.

Soon after the inception of Tradelink Electronic Commerce Limited (“Tradelink”), an e-commerce service provider, the management realised that its employees had to attend to work, families and personal lives. Flexible working hours were thus introduced allowing its employees to freely adjust their working hours within a designated timeframe. This measure currently applies to about 75% of the employees.

Core Working Hours and Clear Attendance Record

Ms Jackey Lam, Vice President of Human Resources and Administration Department of Tradelink, explains that employees who are originally scheduled to work between 8:30 am and 6:00 pm may opt to start work between 8:00 am and 9:00 am and to end their day between 5:30 pm and 6:30 pm to suit their individual needs, provided that the required total working hours are met. To ensure fairness, their working hours are clearly recorded in the attendance system which automatically checks whether the required daily working hours are fulfilled.

Has there been any internal discord with the adoption of different working hours? Ms Lam assures that although the working hours of their employees are slightly different, Tradelink has stipulated the core working hours from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm, within which all employees are required to be on duty. Inter-departmental liaisons and meetings are conducted within the core working hours. Underpinned by the clear and well-defined policy, the measure has been operating smoothly.
With good communication work, the flexible working hours measure is more than halfway to success. The remaining issues to be solved are just simple technical adjustments such as fine-tuning the computer programme of the attendance system. Ms Lam says that it took only three months from preparation to formal implementation. “Since the measure is beneficial to employees, it should be put in place as soon as possible.”

A Cost-Effective Way to Boost Staff’s Morale

The one-hour buffer brings great convenience to employees who are parents or who need to pursue further studies after work. Ms Lam therefore recommends other enterprises to follow suit. “The measure does not require any special investment and it helps enhance the sense of belonging, morale and team spirit of employees notably. Under a happy working environment, employees will provide higher-quality services.”

Orderly Preparation and Ample Communication

Ms Lam says that Tradelink attaches great importance to staff’s opinions. Through communications with staff, the management gained an understanding of their views on flexible working hours and then instructed the Human Resources (“HR”) Department to prepare for its implementation. The HR Department first consulted all department heads and asked them to assess the operations of their departments including which posts were suitable for adopting the measure and the impacts on their operations. Policies and plans were subsequently drawn up based on the assessment. Department heads then explained the measure to their staff and made relevant arrangements.

Ms Lam stresses that flexible working hours are implemented on the premise that the standard and quality of their services shall not be compromised. Except for staff who need to contact customers and handle phone enquiries including receptionists and customer service representatives manning the hotline centre and the service centre, as well as engineers providing technical support, the remaining majority responsible for administrative and back-office work are suitable for working flexible hours. Ms Lam adds, “Since the employees working on shift are well aware of their job nature and the company’s service pledge prior to their appointment, they show understanding why the measure does not apply to them.”

Keys to Successful Implementation of Flexible Working Hours

- Allow employees to adjust their working hours within the designated timeframe.
- Define core working hours to ensure smooth operations.
- Assess which posts are suitable for working flexible hours and explain the details to all employees before implementation.
Long working hours is common among wage earners today, and those who have to look after their families are even under greater pressure. If a company assists its employees caringly in managing their family affairs through implementing a flexible work policy, they will be more devoted and committed to their work. With such conviction, Citibank has introduced the comprehensive “Flexible Work Strategy”, which includes the not-so-common “Job Sharing” measure, to assist employees in balancing their work and family responsibilities.

Mrs Maisie Lam says, “Implementation of the Flexible Work Strategy requires full recognition of the management. It is vital to ease the worries of the department heads and employees.”

Attracting Talents with Flexible Arrangements

Mrs Maisie Lam, Human Resources Director of Citibank (Hong Kong) Limited (“Citibank”), indicates that according to the findings of an internal survey, balancing the work and family responsibilities is taking its toll on the employees. As it cannot be resolved merely through streamlining the workflow or increasing the manpower, flexible work arrangements appear to be a more practical solution. Citibank has hence launched the Flexible Work Strategy as part of its family-friendly initiatives. The new measure not only portrays the bank as a caring enterprise, but also attracts and retains outstanding talents and enables the bank to sustain development in the highly competitive industry in the long run.

Specific arrangements under the Strategy include flexitime, compressed workweek, part-time arrangement or reduced schedule, remote work, job sharing and leave of absence. These diversified arrangements aim at allowing employees more flexibility in arranging for the schedule, place and mode of work while taking into account their family needs at different stages of life without hampering the overall operation and work efficiency.

Mrs Lam stresses that due to differences in job nature, the above arrangements may not be applicable for all posts. Those in need can first assess the feasibility of adopting a flexible work arrangement by completing the Self-Assessment Form designed by the bank, and then submit their applications to their supervisors for further consideration.
Citibank attaches high importance to family life of its staff and introduces flexible work arrangements such as job sharing for those in need.

**Sharing One Post by Two**

Job sharing may be a new concept in Hong Kong. How can a post be shared? Job sharing is indeed an arrangement in which two or more people share the duties of one or more jobs and in practice, it is more common for two people to share a single job. Mrs Lam explains that job sharing is feasible when two employees with similar skills and duties want to suspend full-time work and opt to share their tasks at the same time. They have to assess how the job is to be shared and work out the handover arrangements. The company may need to deploy manpower to take up the other duties of the two employees concerned. In general, relatively independent and easily accountable posts are considered more suitable for job sharing. As multifarious issues such as duties allocation, communication, accountability, adjustment of remuneration and fringe benefits as well as leave arrangement are involved, it requires a closer collaboration between the two employees and the company. The complexity in implementation also explains why job sharing is not commonly found in Hong Kong.

“Having said that, Citibank has established a comprehensive system that enables the company to deliberate and coordinate, as well as follow up on the related administrative work, when an employee in need submits an application,” Mrs Lam continues. “Citibank always believes that remuneration should be commensurate with duties and responsibilities. Job sharing or switching to part-time does not necessarily imply cutting half of the salary. The adjustment will be based on the actual situation.”

**Recognition from All**

Has Citibank’s management ever worried that the Flexible Work Strategy might increase operation costs and affect work efficiency? Mrs Lam states that efficiency has always been the premise to any new measures as the banking industry is constantly working against the clock. The management, department heads and employees concerned each play an important role in the successful implementation of the Strategy. In addition to a caring management culture, active involvement of department heads is indispensable. In order to ease the worries of department heads in relation to implementation, the bank explains the principles and rules of each measure through internal briefing sessions. Last but not least, it is equally important for participating employees to understand the advantages of the Strategy and strive for high efficiency to sustain this benevolent policy.

**Keys to Successful Implementation of Flexible Work Strategy**

- Conform to the company’s caring culture and gain full recognition from the management.
- Ease the worries of department heads and employees concerned by establishing clear policy and guidelines on implementation of different measures.
- Take into account the overall business operation, job nature of individual posts and employees’ family needs in devising flexible work arrangements.
Working parents are very common in Hong Kong with its high costs of living. During weekdays, it is almost bedtime for their children when these parents return home from work. Family gathering is only possible during weekends or holidays. However, Mr Chan, who works in the Information Security Department of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (“HSBC”), and his wife, who is also a busy beaver, do not have such regret.
Mr Chan, father of two sons, works at Tai Kok Tsui HSBC Centre, just around the corner of Wayfoong Nursery School where his 4-year-old elder son studies. “The school hours are 9 am to 5 pm, but the school opens from 8 am to 7 pm. My work starts at 8:30 am, so I usually bring my boy to school before work and pick him up right after work. My son always shares his interesting stories of the day with me on our way home.”

Mr Chan lives in Tung Chung. Not only can he meet his son immediately after work, he can also spend more time with him during the daily journey between school and home. In fact, more than half of the parents in Wayfoong Nursery School take their children to school and bring them home by themselves like Mr Chan.

School Opening Hours to Align with Bank Operation

The school specially arranges parental functions to be held during lunch hours or in the evening to enable parents nearby to attend these activities without taking leave. As a result, the attendance rate always stands high. For example, Mr Chan’s past attendance rate was nearly 100%!

Apart from accommodating to parents’ working hours, the school also strives to align its holidays with bank operation. For instance, the school opens on Saturday mornings for parents who have to work on Saturdays. It only has 17 to 18 holidays each year, fewer than other nursery schools. In December, which is the busiest month for the bank, the school only closes on public holidays. Even during the outbreak of SARS and the avian flu, it still tried its best to provide services. According to Ms Josephine Wu, Principal of Wayfoong Nursery School, the school endeavours to provide support as some parents have not hired domestic helpers and their children will be left unattended at home when they are at work.

Staff Feel Assured at Work and Maintain a Closer Relationship

The proximity of the office and the school offers plenty of convenience to both parents and children. However, will the children demand more attention when they know their parents are nearby? “On the contrary, the children feel more secure when they know that their parents are around. Parents also feel assured when they can occasionally catch a glimpse of their children playing in the podium from the office window,” says Ms Wu, the Principal.

HSBC established Wayfoong Nursery School in 1990 for the children of its full-time staff. The school was first located in Cheung Sha Wan and moved to its present site when HSBC relocated its offices. Today, it has 136 places for children aged between two and six. Staff can apply, via email, for admission for their children when they attain the age of one.

Ms Amy Lee, Corporate and Employee Services Manager, Administration Asia Pacific of HSBC, explains the reasons for establishing the nursery. “We have more female staff in HSBC. They are under a lot of pressure as they have to look after both their work and families. In order to let them work with peace of mind and reduce the turnover rate, we set up the nursery school.”
Through attending the school’s activities, the staff parents have built up a closer relationship and created a kind of informal network. Since these parents are working in the same organisation, the Parent-Teacher Association meetings always run harmoniously and amicably.

**Identifying Partners for Professional Services**

As nursery education is a professional domain, HSBC invited Hong Kong Christian Service ("HKCS"), an organisation with solid experience in providing educational services, to organise and operate the school. HSBC is mainly responsible for preliminary preparation such as collecting application forms and verifying information while HKCS is responsible for interviewing the applicants and providing nursery services. The school holds coordination committee meetings quarterly, reporting to HSBC and parent representatives the latest development of the school and consulting them on school affairs.

Ms Lee suggests that enterprises interested in implementing the measure should conduct detailed survey beforehand. “We randomly interviewed 1,700 staff with children aged between two and six to understand their needs on nursery education. Then we visited a number of nursery centres and studied their modes of operation to select the one which best suits the needs of our staff,” she adds. The school location is also very important. Apart from its proximity to the office, it should preferably be located on the ground floor, facilitating access by parents and students.

**Keys to Successful Implementation of Nursery School**

- Conduct detailed survey beforehand to understand the needs of the staff.
- Work with professional institutions to ensure the quality of nursery education.
- Visit other nursery centres and make reference to different modes of operation.
- Select a location close to the company for ease of parents.

In view of the low birth rate in Hong Kong, the Chief Executive has earlier appealed to citizens to accord higher priority to bearing babies. However, working mothers have to resume duty after maternity leave. What initiatives could organisations take to cater for their needs and remove their worries about childbirth? In line with the Government’s efforts to promote breastfeeding, Tseung Kwan O Hospital, where 80% of its employees are female staff, specially set up a nursing room in its new wing to allow employees to continue breastfeeding when they return to work after delivery.
Well-equipped Nursing Room Facilitating Breastfeeding for Working Mothers

Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices

From left to right: Ward Manager Miranda Lui, General Manager (Nursing) Keung Sau Ho and Dr Huen Kwai Fun talking about the advantages of breastfeeding.

What actually bothers breastfeeding mothers? Many women who breastfeed their babies during maternity leave find it inconvenient to continue breastfeeding at the workplace after resumption of duty. This is particularly true in the case of hospitals where shift work is required. As a result, they have no choice but to give up breast milk for milk powder.

According to Dr Huen Kwai Fun, Chief of Service of Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Tseung Kwan O Hospital, breastfeeding can accelerate the mother’s recovery, and continuous breastfeeding for six months will strengthen the infant’s health. To facilitate breastfeeding mothers to express milk at work and bring it home to feed their babies, Tseung Kwan O Hospital set up a nursing room in September 2002. Employees are free to use it during working hours on need basis.

Facilitating Breastfeeding Brings Higher Attendance

Ms Miranda Lui, Ward Manager of Tseung Kwan O Hospital, says that with the opening of the nursing room, breastfeeding employees no longer have to rush home to nurse their babies. Thus, the rate of late arrival or early leave among female employees is reduced. “Sometimes the fathers come with the babies so that the mothers can breastfeed their infants on the spot. This helps strengthening the parent-child relationship.” Other colleagues also show understanding and accept the needs of breastfeeding mothers in expressing milk regularly.

Comprehensive Facilities with Strict Privacy

The nursing room of Tseung Kwan O Hospital is painted in pastel colours. It is equipped with breast pumps, milk bottles and even milk storage bags, all of which are centrally sterilised by the hospital for staff use. Mounted on the walls are breastfeeding illustrations and guidelines as well as photos of the staff’s babies. “Employees can express breast milk in a cozy and quiet environment by resting on a tailor-made sofa bed and listening to classical music. An armed chair especially designed for breastfeeding is available too,” says Ms Lui. Moreover, the red light outside the nursing room will be turned on when the room is occupied, thus allowing the user undisturbed privacy.

Simple Setup

Is it feasible to set up nursing rooms in private enterprises too? Noting that small enterprises may be concerned about resource implications, Dr Huen points out that a nursing room is in fact similar to a staff lounge. A comfortable high-back chair and a washing basin are all it needs. “Breast milk is a natural substance. The key is to keep the accessories clean for expressing and storing breast milk.”

Ms Keung Sau Ho, General Manager (Nursing) of Tseung Kwan O Hospital, adds that enterprises may provide a small refrigerator and an electric breast pump for staff. These pumps are not costly. An electric breast pump usable for years is priced reasonably at around $2,000. Employees can also bring their own milk bottles and storage bags.
Initiatives to Promote Breastfeeding

Although breastfeeding is beneficial to the health of mothers and babies, it is still not very popular in Hong Kong. Dr Huen hopes that enterprises will help promote breastfeeding by setting up nursing rooms for their staff. Most importantly, everyone within an enterprise should adopt an understanding and considerate attitude towards colleagues who need to breastfeed their babies. The Department of Health has all along encouraged enterprises to support working mothers to breastfeed their infants. To do so, enterprises can lower the turnover rate of working mothers, enhance staff morale, promote harmonious labour relationship and establish a positive corporate image.

A.S. Watson Group

Keys to Successful Implementation of Nursing Room

- A clean and private room.
- Basic facilities include a comfortable high-back chair and a washing basin.
- Management and employees should adopt a positive and supporting attitude towards breastfeeding mothers at the workplace.

Who doesn’t want to fulfil family and work commitments concurrently? However, you simply cannot have your cake and eat it. Pulling oneself entirely out of work so as to take care of the family is hard, but putting heart and soul in work before family is even harder. A considerate enterprise therefore should be empathetic to the dilemma that their staff face. To this end, organising family activities to enable family members of staff to better understand their work may be an effective option.
“If the staff worry about their families, their performance will be affected.” Ms Winnie Chow, Human Resources Director of Retail Hong Kong of A.S. Watson Group, states clearly that family and work are interactive. So how can an enterprise help its staff manage both family and work? A.S. Watson Group established its “Lifestyle Club” in 2005 to organise wholesome recreational activities for its staff and encourage participation of their families.

Committed to Creating Chance for Family Bonding

Large enterprises may have spare manpower to organise recreational activities, but how about small and medium enterprises? Ms Chow advises companies intending to advocate family activities policy focus on the “heart” rather than issues of resources and cost. “The scale of an activity comes second as the most important thing is company’s attitude and orientation. ‘Whether the company really cares about its staff’ is the core.”

As the key is creating family gathering opportunities, simple activities such as inviting staff’s family members to have meals together will allow the staff and their family members to better know each other, and achieve the goal of boosting family harmony.

Staff may not be eager to join the activities sometimes. How can the company mobilise its staff? The key is “love and care”. The company encourages supervisors to pay attention to the needs of its staff such as emotional and family support, and renders appropriate advice where necessary. Mr Wong Po Man, Store Manager, says that he will take the initiative to find out the reason behind if his colleagues are found to behave differently. “If they encounter family problems, I will encourage them to enrol in relevant talks on raising children, building happy marriage and managing wealth in order to ease their negative emotions and stress.”

“Barbecues, hiking and volunteer work organised by the company allowed my family to meet my colleagues and know more about my job. They understood how hard it was for me to manage both the family and work at the same time.” The windfall of these activities is that her children have become more independent and supportive as they hope that their mother can concentrate on her work and be free from worries of family matters.
Useful Talks on Family Issues

Ms Man Kam Lin, who has attended a talk co-organised by the company and a non-profit making organisation, says that, “Not until listening to the experts’ advice did I realise that I have all along used the wrong way to discipline my kids.” In order to address their needs, topics of these talks are decided based on staff’s feedback. To facilitate the participation of front-line staff, the arrangements of talks are flexible under which the course will be held after office hours and at accessible locations. Even the spouses of the staff are welcome to join so that they can share the knowledge. Ms Chow adds that the talks are particularly useful to those who are away from home most of the day as they can learn how to spend quality time with their families. She says, “An employee with a harmonious family is more devoted to work. It is a win-win situation no matter how you see it.”

Hong Kong people are under stressful life and constantly head the list in related global surveys. Stress, whether arising from personal, family or work, inevitably affects one’s emotions and work performance. In light of this, rendering assistance to employees in addressing their negative emotions and stress has become a challenge for both the enterprises and their employees, and provision of “employee emotional support service” is a way out.
“Such service attitude is not acceptable nowadays!” The prospects of service industry, one of the economic pillars of Hong Kong, hinge directly on the performance of front-line operatives. Ms Janna Cheng, Senior Group Manager - Human Capital of Urban Group, remarks that the most important task of professional property management companies is to provide their clients with outstanding management service. Employees thus become the spokespersons of their enterprises. “Yet, the front-line staff are confronted with various stresses in their daily work, and if they are bothered emotionally, how can they maintain a good mental state for delivery of quality service to their clients?” In view of this, Urban Group launched the Employee Assistance Programme (‘EAP’), under which different types of stress management workshops and activities are organised regularly to enhance the physical and mental well being of its staff.

Relieve Stress to Enhance Service Quality
Ms Cheng believes, “‘Happy staff bring happy clients.’ We embrace the management philosophy of ‘Focus on People and Treasure the Value of Human Assets’ and trust the enhancement of staff quality will bring profits to the enterprises.” Addressing to the physical and mental health of its staff, Urban Group’s EAP covers a wide range of activities, including inviting experts to host stress management workshops, organising Tai Chi courses, hiking and sports days. In time of crisis, the company will commission social service organisations to conduct crisis management workshops and set up counselling hotlines. Ms Cheng indicates that benefits of these workshops and activities are multifaceted. Not only do they help staff to relief personal stress, but also equip them with stress relieving and counselling techniques which are applicable to their daily work.

Flexible Arrangements for Timely Support
As Urban Group has allocated resources to organise talks on emotional support, Ms Cheng hopes that all front-line staff can participate. Yet, she emphasises that it is not compulsory; otherwise it will generate another type of stress on employees. “We’ll make appropriate arrangements, such as production of learning cards, for those who could not attend to know about the course content.”

Understanding the Needs of Staff with Empathy
Most people think that it requires considerable resources to initiate activities like EAP and thus making it rather difficult for small and medium enterprises (“SMEs”) with fewer resources to do so. However, Ms Cheng is of the view that SMEs are in a better position than large enterprises with a larger workforce which may have a diversity of concerns over the implementation of EAP. “Compared to a big family, a small one certainly has more opportunities as far as communication is concerned. It is crucial to treat employees with empathy and regard them as your family members. What SME owners need to do is to pay more attention to their staff and offer timely assistance when they display disturbed emotions.”
What is Employee Assistance Programme?

Employee Assistance Programme comprises services which aim at helping employees to balance work and family lives, as well as fostering holistic wellness amongst employees and enterprises. These include professional consultation and counselling services, activities promoting physical and mental health and holistic development, job skills and efficiency training, team building and outplacement support. The services, which are mostly launched in collaboration between enterprises and social service organisations, are tailor-made to suit the needs of enterprises.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Employee Assistance Programme

- Recognise that “happy staff bring happy clients”.
- Encourage the participation of employees and make flexible arrangements as far as possible.
- Treat employees as family members with empathy.

Employers and Employees Joining Hands to Develop Family Support Measures

We all have different roles in family and at work. Family matters, children's education, parents' health, finance as well as many other trivial things may loom large in our minds every day. If these are not handled properly, our work performance will certainly be affected.
Enterprises are attaching more importance to the provision of living and family support to cater for not only the needs of employees, but also their families. These measures, which are more favourable than the basic requirements of the labour legislation, are launched voluntarily by enterprises. The case of Hong Kong Aero Engine Services Limited (‘HAESL’) is a very good example.

Family Support Taking Worries Away

HAESL has over 900 staff, which makes it connected to more than 900 Hong Kong families. Mr Stephen Chu, General Manager (Commercial and Materials Management) of HAESL, says, “The management recognises employees as the most important assets of the company. Stress is unavoidable in the workplace, but if the company is doing more on family support, staff can be relieved of their family pressure and enjoy a happy family life. It will in turn allow them to focus on their work and enhance efficiency as well as sense of belonging.”

“Special leave” is one of HAESL’s measures tailored to meet employees’ needs. When an employee needs to take leave for urgent personal or family matter, he can apply to the department head for special leave. Mr Chu stresses that the measure is built on mutual trust. “As emergency is always unexpected, the implementation of special leave offers flexibility to our staff in attending to their personal/family affairs.”

Financial Assistance and Free Medical Examination

Financial assistance is probably the most practical family support. Mr Chu understands that parents always hope to offer the best education to their children but as the tuition and related fees of tertiary education are high, some employees may not be able to afford the expenses even when the academic results of their children are outstanding. In order to help these worried parents, HAESL established scholarships for children of its employees who are pursuing tertiary education. The scholarship is granted according to the financial condition of the families and academic performance of the children. In addition, an emergency fund is set up so that employees with pressing needs may apply to overcome their financial difficulty.

The work performance and livelihood of an employee are directly influenced by his health. As timely treatment of any disease is vital, an employee who detects minor health problems at an early stage can significantly reduce the risk of serious illness in future. Therefore, HAESL has put in place free medical examination. Any employee aged 40 or above can enjoy a free biennial medical check-up. “On top of the group insurance offered to all employees, this measure offers an additional health protection which will relieve worries of their family members,” says Mr Chan Man Hung, staff representative of its General Staff Consultative Committee.

Measures Developed through Bilateral Consultation

In fact, formulation and design of HAESL’s family support measures usually originate from the discussions of the General Staff Consultative Committee, which comprises the company management and nine elected
staff representatives. Through regular monthly meetings, the management can directly communicate and exchange opinions with the staff representatives on work and employee benefits. As one of the staff representatives, Mr Chan tells us that the provision of medical examination was one of the measures proposed by the staff representatives during regular meetings and finalised after consultation between employer and employees.

Mr Chu concludes that the idea of family friendliness is neither difficult to understand nor complicated in implementation. “The key lies in communication and care. Cooperation is always better than working alone, so the management should accept employees’ views with an open-minded attitude. Only a family support measure which is generally recognised in the company can truly fulfil the needs of employees.”

Promote an exchange of opinions by establishing a two-way communication channel between the company and employees.

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Understand and handle the urgent needs of employees flexibly.
Many working people want to better equip themselves through part-time study. However, heavy workload hampers them from realising such a wish and impedes development of the talent within the enterprises. To encourage continuous learning among its staff and allow them to upgrade themselves at ease, City Telecom (HK) Limited (“CTI”) has introduced a number of caring initiatives.

“Employees are our important assets. If they are happy and satisfied with their work, they will work harder and help drive the company towards success,” says Ms Mimi Choy, Director of Talent Management of CTI. But how can a company make its employees happy and satisfied? On top of the basic benefits such as five-day work week, paternity leave and staff canteen, CTI has specially devised an array of measures to facilitate and encourage its staff to pursue further studies, so as to help them develop their career as well as boost their job satisfaction.

Professional Training towards Excellence

Ms Choy notes that CTI places heavy emphasis on nurturing its employees for their all-round development, and a Life-Time Learning Centre is thus set up to provide them with comprehensive training. For instance, renowned artists have been invited to share with customer service staff on the subject of proper customer attitude, and professional consultants have been engaged to coach the installation technicians on the skills of maintaining courtesy towards customers.

Apart from arranging various training programmes, CTI organises a half-day Group Reading Session each month. Under the guidance of training specialists, employees read and discuss selected reading materials on business and personal growth etc., which helps broaden their knowledge and horizons.
Sharing and Learning through Secondments

Ms Choy reveals that CTI also arranges staff secondments to different organisations, including government departments. Such opportunities of understanding the operations and cultures of other organisations help stimulate the seconded staff’s thinking and enable them to perform better after resuming work.

Developing Talents through Encouraging Further Studies

In addition to internal training, employees at all ranks who enrol in courses of other organisations can apply for education allowance of up to 80% of the course fees or up to 30% of their monthly salaries. Full subsidy may also be granted to employees with outstanding performance. Ms Choy remarks that CTI sponsored nine outstanding executives to enrol in the EMBA programmes last year.

To cater for learning and other personal needs of the staff, CTI allows employees with over five years’ service to apply for unpaid leave for a period of up to one year with benefits entitlement. Thus, the employees need not worry about losing their jobs while studying abroad.

Enthusiastic Responses and Enhanced Creativity

Ms Choy reveals that employees have responded to the initiatives positively since its implementation and are eager to apply for the education allowance in particular. A half-yearly employee survey shows that most employees are satisfied with the measures. In parallel, CTI observes significant improvement in staff creativity and efficiency, which greatly facilitates business development in a volatile and highly competitive telecommunications industry.

Setting Examples and Better Communication

Ms Choy believes that the key to a successful continuous learning policy is to understand the needs of the employees via different communication channels before its formulation. Besides, internal publicity should be enhanced before its implementation to make employees aware of the benefits and accept them more easily. What’s important is the support from the management. “Active learning attitude of our management team has fostered a learning culture and poses a multiplier effect on the measures.”
Waves of sports fervour swept Hong Kong during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. With the passion cooling down, will the people continue to squeeze time out of their busy schedules to keep doing exercise? A company has come up with the idea of providing its employees with cash subsidy to encourage them to exercise after work so as to maintain their mental and physical well-being.

Everyone knows well about the benefits of exercise. But after a hectic day of work, how many people still actively take part in sport? In light of this, Rohm and Haas Electronic Materials Asia Limited ("Rohm and Haas") has introduced the Employee Wellness Program ("Program") since 2005. Through the simple subsidy Program, employees are encouraged to set their own quantitative and feasible goals for regular exercise to maintain their good health.

Self-defined Goals Help Achieve Physical Wellness

What is a quantitative and feasible goal? Ms Cecilia Yuen, Human Resources Manager of Rohm and Haas says that playing badminton twice a week or taking a fitness or sports course are good examples. At the beginning of every year, the Human Resources Department announces the details of the Program through internal circular. Interested staff can submit their goals to the Department, which will assess their feasibility, give advice for improvement and remind the applicants on points to note if required. "Staff are free to set their goals to suit their needs, as long as they are quantitative and feasible. Of course, the means to achieve the goals has to be healthy and safe. If an employee joins a slimming company to lose weight by taking drugs, the application will be rejected," says Ms Yuen.

Mr John Cheng, Human Resources Officer, explains that there are two types of cash subsidy under the Program. One is for purchase of sports equipment and the other is for participation in fitness/sports activities or courses. An employee can buy...
up to two pieces of equipment at a maximum of $975 or join one sports event or course at a maximum of $1,950 each year. The expenses will be equally shared by the company and the employee.

Ms Yuen adds that the employees have to pay the cost first and keep the original receipts for submission to the Human Resources Department at the end of the year for reimbursement. Subsidies will be made upon approval. “Since our aim is to encourage our employees to engage in frequent exercise, the Program is in a relatively simple design complemented with clear guidelines. This helps boost the employees’ interest in joining as well as reduce the administrative workload in approving the applications.”

Fostering Friendship and Cooperation

The Program has won great applause from all the employees. Many staff immediately put words into action by planning how to make the best use of the subsidy. Mark, who works in the Laboratory Department, joined the Program years ago. He loves spending the hours after work on playing badminton with colleagues of other departments. “With the subsidy, I can acquire better rackets and shoes, and even take training courses. Not only my badminton skills and confidence are enhanced, but my body immunity is also built up through frequent exercise. Besides, my colleagues and I have developed friendship, which fosters smooth workplace cooperation.”

With professional hockey gear purchased under the Program, Danny from the Circuit Board Technologies, Research and Development Department performs much better and has the confidence to compete and has won in higher-level competitions. Danny highly appreciates the flexibility of the Program as it allows the employees to set goals according to their own physical conditions and interests, brings a stronger sense of commitment and reduces dropouts.

Reasonable Cost Brings Win-Win Results

Employees’ active participation renders the strongest support for the Program. Ms Yuen encourages other companies to adopt this simple measure, which can meet the diversified needs of staff for sports activities and help them maintain work-life balance without high financial and administrative costs. With a healthy and rejuvenated team, the company will definitely benefit in terms of work efficiency. Ms Yuen further adds that to provide a comprehensive care for their employees’ physical and mental well-being, Rohm and Haas will actively consider extending the Program to cover the area of mental health in future.

Keys to Successful Implementation of Employee Wellness Program

- A program in a simple design can boost employees’ interest in joining and reduce the administrative workload in approving the applications.
- Employees are allowed to set quantitative and feasible goals for doing sports. This can help enhance their sense of commitment and the effectiveness of the Program.
- Provision of subsidies for employees to purchase sports equipment or join fitness/sports activities or courses can flexibly cater for the diversified needs and interests of employees in sports only at a limited cost.
Staff canteen is normally associated with highly seasoned, high-meat and low-vegetable dishes. However, the canteen of CLP System Control Centre in Strafford House, Tai Po Kau, gives a completely different impression as the food served there fulfils the principle of low fat, low salt, low sugar and high fibre, ensuring that the staff can enjoy a nutritious meal.

Menu Composed by Dieticians

According to Mr Daniel Chu, Human Resources Manager of Power Systems of CLP, the company is very concerned about the healthy diet of its employees. Especially for some departments in remote sites such as Strafford House where some 100 people are working, the employees have no other choices but to have their lunch at the staff canteen every day. To safeguard their health, the nutrition values of the dishes served there must meet the prescribed standards.

“In an opinion survey, some staff reflected that the canteen food was highly seasoned and high in meat. CLP thus decided to transform the canteen in Strafford House into a Healthy Kitchen in late 2006,” says Mr Chu. To ensure the dishes are healthy, CLP commissioned professional dieticians to review the original menu and organise seminars and training for the chefs on the use of low-fat ingredients and healthy culinary methods, like steaming or baking. With full preparation, the Healthy Kitchen commenced operation in July 2007.

Non-greasy Delicacies

The trained chefs now prepare over 150 dishes under the new healthy menu. Every lunchtime, two healthy meals less than 500
Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices

– Other Caring Measures –

He discloses that he has joined the company’s pilot Smoking Cessation Programme introduced in May 2008 in the hope of quitting smoking and improving his health.

Promoting Healthy Message

“The calories, nutrition and health tips, cooking notes etc. of each dish of the healthy diet menu are stated clearly for reference to enhance the staff’s awareness of healthy diet. Such health tips can be brought home for benefiting the whole family.” Mr Chu emphasises that since the healthy diet is highly acclaimed by the employees, they will consider setting up the Healthy Kitchen in canteens of other departments in the future.

In fact, the Healthy Kitchen is one of the projects under the CLP Quality Work Life Programme which commenced in 2003. The Programme aims at creating a better workplace, helping employees maintain good mental and physical health and achieving work-life balance through various activities.

Excelling in the Fitness/Health Challenge, CLP staff Mr Yim Hon Man admits that he is happy to work in a company which cares about the health of its staff, and he has benefitted a lot from taking physical exercise after work. “With the assistance of the company, I have adopted the two-pronged approach of balanced diet and exercise, which enables me to lose 40 pounds in four months and improve my health greatly.”

calories each are served. Mr Chu says that the cost of the new menu is the same as the old one, so the food price remains unchanged. The biggest challenge is to maintain the taste and appearance of the dishes while conforming to the healthy eating principle. “Some staff were used to strongly flavoured dishes and found the healthy meal less savoury at the beginning. So we set up a seasoning stand in the canteen for them, but they seldom use it now after getting used to the new menu.”

Keys to Successful Implementation of Healthy Kitchen

- Value the health of staff
  Give top priority to the health of the staff and win their support by introducing healthy elements into traditional kitchens and canteens.

- Seek professional advice
  Commission dieticians to conduct a full review of the original menu, assist in training the chefs and organise healthy diet seminars etc. to enhance the staff’s awareness of balanced diet and facilitate effective implementation.

- Gradual implementation
  Set up a seasoning stand in the canteen for staff who find the healthy meals less savoury and adjust their eating habits gradually.

- Healthy and delicious
  Design a diverse menu offering healthy dishes that look, smell and taste good.
Volunteer Team Organised for Living Up to Corporate Social Responsibility

Ms Carrie Tse, Human Resources Director of IKEA, recalls that in 2000 Hong Kong was experiencing the aftermaths of the economic turmoil and its economic outlook was gloomy. To help employees in need as well as to improve work ambience, the management initiated a range of caring measures including a counselling hotline for employees to confide their feelings. As a responsible corporate citizen, IKEA is zealous in playing a part in matters such as community services and environmental protection. Recognising that there are many needy people that warrant our care and attention in society, IKEA established the IKEA Volunteer Team (“Team”) in 2002. It has since been encouraging its staff and their families to join the voluntary work in their leisure time so as to return to the community.

Focusing Service Targets

Ms Tse explains that in light of the vast number of people in need, IKEA set up a focus group and conducted surveys at the very beginning to collect employees’ views on service targets and mode when organising voluntary activities. Targeting children at the outset, the Team later extended its helping hands to the ex-mentally ill. It also initiated collaboration with different social services organisations, such as Hong Kong Family Welfare Society and New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, in organising various voluntary activities. As understanding, which in turn fosters consensus and brings team spirit into full play at the workplace. It also enables the company to fulfil its corporate social responsibility.

“As a responsible corporate citizen, IKEA is zealous in playing a part in matters such as community services and environmental protection,” Ms Tse says.

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etting up a volunteer team in a company serves the manifold purposes of giving employees a sense of satisfaction from helping others and promoting mutual communication and understanding, which in turn fosters consensus and brings team spirit into full play at the workplace. It also enables the company to fulfil its corporate social responsibility.
the partnership and the volunteers’ commitment grow, the scope of voluntary work continues to expand. “Our staff enjoy and participate enthusiastically even though the activities and the training on service techniques they sometimes have to undergo in advance will take up their leisure time or holidays.”

As the retail industry operates all year round and front-line staff have to take shifts, voluntary work arrangement poses a challenge to the Team. To allow flexibility to front-line staff, voluntary activities are mostly arranged within non-peak hours, i.e. on mid-week or Saturday mornings, so that they can take into account their rosters as well as holidays in balancing work and voluntary services. According to Ms Tse, the participation rate of the front-line staff in voluntary services has been growing steadily.

**Awards for Outstanding Volunteers**

In fact, effective dissemination of activity information to all staff members is important to get more employees involved in the voluntary activities and reap better results. Apart from having regular focus group meetings to determine voluntary work projects and themes, IKEA enlists help from staff of its design department, who use their expertise in devising posters and slogans for the voluntary activities to attract the attention of more colleagues. On the other hand, members of the Team are eager to share their volunteering experiences with other colleagues, who may be inspired to join the volunteer service. Such peer influence is proved to be more effective than slogans calling for actions. IKEA has also established the Volunteer Award Scheme to commend devoted employees using their spare time to serve the community. The award recipients will be granted an extra half-day off or arranged to take leave on two consecutive Saturdays.

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**Volunteers’ Feedback**

Yan of the Customer Services Department comments:

“Voluntary activities have given me a great sense of satisfaction. I have also developed better communication and presentation skills, which benefit my work significantly.”

Bonnie of the Design Department notes:

“Knitting scarves for the elderly living alone has become an annual event of the Team. The company has even put in place different awards to encourage participation. Everyone looks forward to this annual event.”

Becky of the Logistic Department says:

“I have been thinking of volunteering but just didn’t know where to start. The establishment of the Team offers me a good opportunity. I will try to join as many Team activities as I can and hope to bring my children with me in the future!”

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**Keys to Successful Implementation of Voluntary Activities**

- Select service targets according to the abilities and opinions of employees. Work closely with relevant social service organisations.
- Arrange voluntary activities with flexibility to tie in with the timetables of front-line staff. Take into account the needs of those who take part in voluntary work when granting leave.
- Encourage volunteers to share their experiences, thus inspiring other colleagues to join.
An employee-oriented approach is always the golden rule for business success. To date, an increasing number of companies have adopted good people management practices and successful cases can be found in different trades and industries. This helps foster closer and more harmonious labour relations in Hong Kong.
Family-friendly employment practices, being one of the good people management measures, has become popular in recent years. Since work-family responsibilities and balance will have direct bearing on employees’ performance, companies wishing to provide a pleasant working environment not only need to improve the workplace, but also take care of their employees’ families. A company that realises the advantages of family-friendly employment practices and introduces appropriate measures timely, taking into account the needs of the company and its employees, would certainly create a win-win situation which benefits both the employers and employees.

Setting Role Model for the Industry
The growing number of enterprises adopting family-friendly employment practices has indicated that effective people management can boost staff morale and team spirit. In time of robust economy, a united team can certainly help the company achieve greater success whereas during economic downturn, the staff are willing to work together against all odds.

These companies set good examples for other players in the industry and their experiences are definitely worthy of sharing. For instance, regarding granting leave to employees on the ground of family needs, South Pacific Hotel takes the Chinese traditional value of filial piety into consideration and introduces the unprecedented “filial leave” whereas Nanyang International Logistics offers seven-day paternity leave to new fathers, thereby attending to both employees’ needs and business operation.

In respect of flexible work arrangements, Hing Kee from the retail sector has illustrated how a five-day work week can strengthen employees’ sense of belonging towards the company. With proper staff deployment to meet family needs, Green Island Cement’s maximum working hours, Tradelink’s flexible working hours, adidas’s home office and Citibank’s Flexible Work Strategy have all rewarded the companies with numerous benefits as well as more devoted staff.
Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices

— Conclusion —

Comprehensive Caring Measures

Many enterprises have also adopted a wide range of innovative family support measures. For instance, HSBC caringly sets up a nursery school for their employees near the workplace; Urban Group launches an employee assistance programme which emphasises on both counselling and activities to ease employees’ stress; A.S. Watson Group organises diversified family activities to foster harmonious family relationship; HAESL offers free body checkups for the staff and scholarships for their children while Tseung Kwan O Hospital sets up a nursing room for working mothers. Such measures have greatly alleviated the stresses and strains of family burdens on the employees.

Other outstanding good people management initiatives deserve our applause too. They include the Healthy Kitchen of CLP which promotes healthy diet; Eaton Hotel’s open management which establishes a communication culture based on mutual trust; the Life-Time Learning Centre set up by City Telecom which assists employees in pursuing further studies; Employee Wellness Program of Rohm and Haas designed to encourage exercising; Delifrance’s caring measures launched upon extensive staff consultation; and the Volunteer Team of IKEA to fulfil their corporate social responsibility.

Employers Benefit from a Loyal Workforce

Implementation of the above measures not only caters for the family needs of employees, but also shows them how much the companies care for them, thus nurturing a more devoted, cooperative, loyal, efficient and innovative workforce. Undoubtedly, employers would benefit the most from an enthusiastic and committed team.

In fact, regardless of the size, financial strength and number of staff, a company can always implement good people management practices successfully with goodwill, sound preparation and perseverance.

Eight Tips to Successful Implementation of Good People Management and Family-Friendly Employment Practices

- The management recognises the concept of good people management and offers full support in terms of resources and action.
- Establish a comprehensive mechanism of consultation and communication within the company.
- Collect opinions from the management and employees before formulating a measure so as to understand their needs and concerns and make corresponding adjustments.
- Carry out internal publicity to explain the details and advantages of a new measure to the management and staff before implementation.
- Offer training to the management and staff to facilitate the implementation of new measures.
- Formulate clear guidelines on the arrangements and requirements of the measures.
- Ensure up-to-date information related to the measures is available to employees and their feedback and comments are well communicated to enhance effective implementation.
- Foster a culture of understanding and mutual trust and implement relevant measures with flexibility.
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Publisher: Labour Department
Editing and Publishing: Hong Kong Economic Times
Interview: Anita Lam, Eugenia Lau, Iris Kam, Simon Chu, Winnie Ho
   (In alphabetical order)
Editor: Yip Yee, Angela Chun
Designer: Eva Mok
Publishing Date: February, 2009
Printer: Elegance Printing & Book Binding Co., Ltd

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