

## **Equal opportunity for all**

**Embracing fair employment practices and diversity could solve your talent attraction woes**

For the last three years, Fortune magazine has been compiling a list of the top 100 companies to work for in the United States. The list was compiled by surveying nearly 100,000 employees of some 1,500 firms. In today's talent crunch, no employer would want to miss the chance of being among the shortlisted companies on the list. Getting ranked as a top employer is like winning half the battle for the war for talents. But what makes these organisations talent magnets? And what makes them so appealing?

While perks and pay could be some of the possible incentives why talents are attracted to these companies, but they are not the only reasons why they are on one of the most coveted lists in the business world. One evident trait among these employers is that they understand that talent comes in all shapes and sizes. These employers have a hiring policy that values diversity. They recruit based on a fundamental principle of equal opportunity for all - may the best person get the job.

It is not hard to understand why these great companies adopt these practices; they have become a tool for survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment. With talent becoming more mobile and scarce, diversity is no longer optional. Therefore, it is in the best interest of companies that they work towards this approach.

Take Starbucks Coffee Company as an example. Jumping 21 notches from 29<sup>th</sup> position in 2006 to 8<sup>th</sup> in 2008, they recruit and select employees based on merit and welcome all qualified applicants regardless of personal attributes like race, gender, age, religion, disability, and marital status. By observing fair employment practices, Starbucks strives to create a work environment that is conducive to attract and retain its talent.

To be non-discriminatory employer, firms need to practice consistent and fair selection criteria throughout all stages of the recruitment process. During the recruitment process, the selection criteria must be specific and relevant to the job requirements. Employers could state the amount of experience, the specific skills and educational qualifications required for the job. Employers should, however, refrain from using age, race, language, gender, martial status and religion as selection criteria as they are irrelevant to the job. In cases where the job is physically demanding, employers should state clearly that the job entails candidates to handle heavy loads.

In addition, while it is in human nature to be surrounded by people we are familiar and comfortable with, such behaviour should not be encouraged as it is not effective or efficient in the business world.

The tight labour market has made recruitment a long and at times, an expensive process. It is not uncommon for employers to place several advertisements before they are able to fill an internal position.

With fair and merit-based hiring, employers cast a wider net to capture the potential talent and this increases the chances of hiring the best qualified person for the job. Placing repeated recruitment advertisements is reduced and opportunity cost is also trimmed as the lead time is shortened while waiting for the new employee to come on board. And needless to say, such practices boost productivity because the talent is able to perform and deliver results with minimal training and the human resources department is able to focus on more strategic and productive issues instead of operational tasks.

Besides recruitment, employers should also be fair in remuneration. Pay should be reflective of the value of the work, performance and contribution of the employee and free from any subjective aspect such as age and gender. Finally, employers should also have a fair and objective performance appraisal system in place to ensure all staff are evaluated impartially and rewarded appropriately.

It may seem like a tall order to embrace fair employment practices, but with the aging population and shrinking birth rate, employers can no longer rely on its old practices. The sooner employers embrace fair employment practices and diversity, the better equipped they will be to handle the new set of business challenges. Ultimately, the reward is a more competitive workforce hired based on talent, which in today's business environment, allows a company to differentiate itself from competitors.

*This article is contributed by Mr Josh Goh of GSI Executive Recruitment (Thailand) Ltd*

**GSI Executive Recruitment**

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