

Speak Good English, Deliver Better Service

NTUC LearningHub and Migrant Workers Centre Work Hand-In-Hand To Improve Productivity Of Foreign Workers Through English Language



By
Vanessa Teo

Improving workers lives does not only mean providing temporary material needs, but also equipping them with lifelong skills that they can use to upgrade their lives, and this is what NTUC LearningHub Private Limited and the Migrant Workers' Centre are doing. On 2 December 2009, 40 guest workers received their Basic Conversational English For Migrant Workers' course certificates from Minister of State (Trade and Industry, Manpower) Lee Yi Shyan, recognising the efforts of the guest workers for completing the 36-hour BCE For Migrant Workers' course, stretched over a period of two to three months.

"English is the working language in Singapore and this is particularly important in industries like hotel, retail and food and beverage, where workers interact regularly with customers. Employees in the services sector will increasingly need to be able to communicate in English to be effective in their jobs. Employers should equip their workers, both local and foreign, with basic English language skills so that they can be more effective in their jobs and deliver good service," said Mr Lee.

While the foreign workers work to upgrade themselves, employers too, have a part to play with the announcement of a new criteria made by Mr Lee, that will take effect from the third quarter of 2010. English language proficiency will now be an additional criterion for skilled levy status that aims to incentivise companies to equip workers with the basic English language skills. Companies will then be able to achieve cost savings of \$90 a month, if the employed foreign worker qualify for the skilled levy status-now including a basic



English language proficiency.

With this inclusion, MWC Co-Chairman and NTUC Alignment Director (All Nationalities, Quality Worklife) Yeo Guat Kwang urged employers to fully support their foreign workers, to help move towards a "Cheaper Better Faster" Singapore, making Singapore's service sector workers' more productive.

"It is important that workers in the service sector have basic English conversational language skills, as they will then be able to serve customers well, and more importantly work more closely and productively with their local co-workers. As an employer, it is their duty and responsibility that workers recruited should have basic competencies, in particular language competency. When employers recruit Singaporeans, they require them to speak basic English, so employers should post the same requirements when it comes to foreign workers as well," said Mr Yeo.

As of 2008, there are 680,000 work permit holders, excluding foreign domestic workers in Singapore.

Serving Customers Better

"I have been working in Singapore for one and a half years. Through the Basic Conversational English course, I learnt greetings, introductions and work-related issues like how to complete a form, answer a phone call. This has helped me to communicate with guests and people around me in English."

Sophia Liu, 23, Royal Plaza On Scotts Waitress

Improved Communication

"I have been in Singapore for three years, and this is my first job in the hotel line. The course has helped me to improve the way I communicate, and it was also very engaging and fun which made learning easier for me."

Justin Wan, 29, Royal Plaza On Scotts Technician

Increasing Foreign Workforce Quality

"The ability to communicate with and engage customers is crucial for service workers. Basic proficiency in English helps deliver better service and raises productivity, and companies would achieve cost savings through a lower levy bill. This is an all-win situation for companies, workers and customers, and in turn, help to increase the quality of the skilled foreign workforce in Singapore."

Lee Yi Shyan, Minister of State (Trade and Industry, Manpower)



Sophia Liu and Justin Wan

In A Nutshell

- English language proficiency will be an additional criterion for Work Permit Holders to attain skilled levy status.
- This criterion will apply from the third quarter of 2010.
- This criterion will apply to the hotel, retail, and food and beverage service industries.
- Foreign workers can qualify for skilled levy status if they possess the requisite academic qualifications or pass certain skills or trade tests.
- Employers who employ any skilled foreign worker under a Work Permit pay \$150 a month.
- Employers who employ any unskilled foreign worker under a Work Permit pay \$240 a month.



Minister of State (Trade and Industry, Manpower) Lee Yi Shyan (centre) observes a guest worker undergo English lessons together with Migrant Workers' Centre Co-Chairman and NTUC Alignment Director (All Nationalities, Quality Worklife) Yeo Guat Kwang (second from left) and NTUC LearningHub Chief Executive Officer Zee Yoong Kang (upper right).