

In Recognition Of Our Service Heroes

By **Timothy Fernandez**

Words can hardly describe the feeling of being at the receiving end of good service. Whether it is a simple nod of thanks, a friendly smile or someone going out of the way to ensure guests are as comfortable as they can be, good service staff definitely give companies an edge and the ability to thrive in this downturn.

National Trades Union Congress Deputy Secretary-General Heng Chee How, the guest-of-honour at the event, gave an example of excellent service in Mr Lim Say Boon, a Chef de Partie at the Royal Plaza on Scotts. As a chef in charge of his own area of the kitchen, Mr Lim took the initiative to prepare a special dish for a guest's baby when food on the hotel's menu was found unsuitable. This demonstration of dedication to his job was among the reasons the chef was selected by his company to win the Employee of the Year award.

In its 27th year, the Productivity Seminar cum "Employee of the Year" Awards Presentation Ceremony is an event jointly organised by NTUC, Singapore Hotel Association and the Food Drinks and Allied Workers' Union. It celebrates first-rate service in the hotel sector as well as other service and



DSG Heng Chee How (left) lauds the chef with the extras, Mr Lim Say Boon.

production related sectors.

Drawing parallels from good service to an Indiana Jones movie he watched some years back, DSG Heng elicited more than a few smiles from the audience. He likened the resourcefulness and skills of the action hero Jones in defeating a menacing villain to the "service heroes" present that were not just well-

trained at their jobs but also capable of making quick decisions.

DSG Heng said: "If Jones did not have the right equipment at that point in time, he would probably have been cut to pieces by the (villain's) sword. The same thing would have happened if he had fired and missed – in other words, if he had been unskilled he would have



Some Do The High 5... An award recipient shows DSG Heng Chee How (right) her own special handshake.

paid a high price. But an Indiana Jones, full of confidence and initiative, well-trained and equipped with a good gun, made light work of the challenge and emerged victorious."

Taking a more serious tone at the awards was FDAWU President Abdul Subhan Shamsul Hussein who reminded everyone of the difficulties faced by the hotel industry since the beginning of the downturn. Falling tourist numbers and lower hotel occupancy rates notwithstanding, Mr Subhan praised the many hotels that had taken on the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience training.

Mr Subhan said: "SPUR acts as a prompt approach to this recession. One reason for this is it helps employers prevent their staff from becoming redundant, especially during this lull period when (hotel) occupancy is quite low.

"For the benefit of the employees during this period, they can enhance and enrich themselves through the various types of training available. It also gives them the opportunity to learn from experience doing the job they are doing. At the end of the day, what we hope to enrich are their mindsets."

At the end of the ceremony, 49 awards were given out to recipients from the ages of 22 to 68 for their continuing efforts to raise service standards and be at the top of their fields.

Older, But Just As Capable



MADAM Tan Kim Eng is a stellar performer and it shows from her enthusiasm towards her work. As the oldest winner of the Employee of the Year Award this year though, the 68-year-old Sheraton Towers Singapore Hotel employee does not seem to be anywhere near ready to retire.

The sprightly room attendant, who has been with the company for 22 years, said she was honoured to receive the award which rewarded her for consistent performance and eagerness to learn.

"I will work for as long as I can work if given the chance. Over the years, I have been for several training and upgrading courses and recently took an exam for a certificate in housekeeping" Madam Tan said.

Madam Tan's bosses have also recognised her efforts at being a loyal employee who is always keen on improving her performance at work. Miss Agnes Lum, the HR & Training Manager at the hotel, admits that she was impressed by Madam Tan's ability to keep up with her younger colleagues.

"She's already 68 and is the oldest worker in the department, yet she works the same number of rooms as her younger colleagues. Just last year, she was named the 'Employee of the Year' in the housekeeping department. She had the highest number of perfect room ratings as well as a perfect attendance record for the whole year," said a proud Miss Lum.

Powering Up To Fit All



By **Naseema Banu Maideen**

Every worker should train to be like an adapter plug – one that powers up with all types of power outlets in any setting who can be of immense value.

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Heng Chee How drew this analogy to emphasise that encouraging workers to be multi-skilled is the one of the most practical ways to help them keep their jobs and increase their productivity and job worth.

Leaders from five unions – Food, Drinks and Allied Workers' Union, NTUC Club Staff Union, Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union, The Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union and Staff Union of NTUC-ARU – affirmed to continue working towards this direction in discussions held during the Labour Movement's Hospitality Cluster Workplan Seminar on 12 June 2009 at Downtown East.

The cluster will focus on enhancing the productivity of the workers in the sector through training and upgrading, and also press on with re-employment efforts.

Enhancing Productivity For Employability

The crisis has brought about lower room and occupancy rates for the hoteliers. This has resulted in a slow down on wage increments, and in some cases, even wage freezes. Workers in the industry also faced increased workload and lower over-time allowances with reduced manning, with many feeling the strain.

Such uncertainty in the industry has clearly helped focus union leaders' attention on improving the employability of their members to enable them to hold on to their jobs. DSG Heng shared that the key is up-skilling and re-training.

"In many companies in the hospitality industry, if the business climate is down in one department, there is still some activity in other units. In this instance, if the worker can only do one job, then he would face problems staying in it for long. But if we improve our workers' capabilities and equip them to do more than that one job and pursue service excellence, then they become more employable and less insecure. Their productivity also improves along the way," he said.

Strengthening Cluster Network To Build Up Job Bank

Union leaders in the cluster are also keen on working with NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) to build up the job bank. They committed to sharing information on available job opportunities in their branches which may provide job options to retrenched workers from other branches. For example, some hotels still have openings for positions, such as kitchen crew and chambermaids.

Where skills gaps may arise, jobseekers can be trained with the relevant skills at e2i and NTUC LearningHub. Some unions in the cluster are already working closely with e2i to assist in the job matching of their retrenched members. Unions in the cluster agreed that a closer knit and more responsive network will be able to surface more jobs, thereby helping more workers land a job faster.

Upgrading And Up-Skilling Workers

DSG Heng urged unions in the cluster to work with their management partners and link them up with e2i and NTUC LearningHub, which provide

upgrading courses to help both companies and workers. He also called for unions to help their companies tap more aggressively on the SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience).

Pursuing Long-Term Re-Employment Goals

The cluster will also keep tight focus on its re-employment drive. FDAWU and SISEU are actively pushing for re-employment initiatives in their branches. 89.8 per cent of FDAWU's branches have committed to re-employment as of end-May this year. Of these, 35 per cent of them have formalised human resources policies to render re-employment sustainable and scalable. 83 per cent of SISEU's branches have similarly pledged their commitment, and of these, 62 per cent of them have already incorporated re-employment clauses in their Collective Agreements. Other unions in the cluster are also progressing and actively gearing up with their re-employment efforts within their branches.

As the cluster works on achieving higher standards in productivity and service excellence, there will be no let up on pressing ahead with its long-term initiatives.