

Older Workers... Better Workers!

By
Jansen Yeo

If you are in need of directions at Downtown East, go to the i-Help Station. More often than not, you will find Madam Leela d/o Veeraddam Raman there and she will be more than happy to guide you to the various fun spots at the family-oriented recreation complex.

Madam Leela's energy and enthusiasm belies all of her 58 years. And she is just one of the 110 employees, aged 55 and above, working at NTUC Club. And like her, all have them have the passion and the youthful vigour to continue giving their best at work.

"Our older workers are dedicated and produce good quality work. They are usually more detail-oriented, focused and attentive. They take pride in their work and have good communication skills. Maturity comes from years of life and work experiences and these traits are reflected quite evidently in their daily

work," said NTUC Club Staff Union General Secretary Charles Khng.

NCSU and NTUC Club have also been constantly encouraging these older workers to take up re-employment opportunities. So far, 10 workers have been re-employed. Strong Labour-Management Relations has played a crucial role as both parties pledge their commitments in support of re-employment of older workers.

"The management has been very forthcoming in sharing information with the union on business trend developments and challenges faced by NTUC Club. Both parties are aware that this relationship cannot be taken for granted and we have been continuously strengthening it. The cornerstone of this partnership is the trust that is developed over the years. This special relationship that we enjoy has been a boon in our re-employment efforts," said Mr Khng.

The union is also working with its management partner on various areas such as training, health and wellness programmes,

a performance-based wage system and job redesign. One such initiative has been the Portable Medical Benefits Scheme, which benefits the older workers in terms of portability and lifetime coverage.

"We want to do more in all these areas and continue to enhance our re-employment efforts," said Mr Khng.

Sure-Win Situation

Just like many enlightened employers, NTUC Club has seen the benefits of SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience). Both NTUC Club Staff Union and its management partner see it as a win-win situation – SPUR funding allows NTUC Club to cut cost and at the same time, upskill and reskill workers.

So far, more than 50 employees have attended or are attending courses under SPUR. The union and management aim to send a total of 60 employees on such courses by the end of the year.

"In terms of productivity, being in the service



Passion, Not Age, Matters... Madam Leela d/o Veeraddam Raman (behind counter, left) ensures that customers leave the i-Help station with a smile.

industry, these training courses are useful in enhancing the service standards at NTUC Club. The company benefits from these cost savings and gain from the skills upgrading of its employees.

"From the union's point of view, it's important for our members to upgrade themselves and enhance their employability. To me, SPUR is not only a win-win situation but a sure-win situation," said Mr Khng.

NTUC Club Staff Union was formed in 1994. The union has 577 members – 92 per cent unionisation rate. The union and its management partner have jointly set a target to achieve 100 per cent unionisation rate.

Man Versus Beast

And Man Wins, With Industrial Relations Manager Elvin Lee's Constant Concern For Older Workers

By
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Every time that Mr Elvin Lee (picture) visited the Singapore Polo Club and saw his union branch members at work, he felt pain all over. Sympathy pain, that is, for an older worker exercising a young horse.

"It was man versus beast all the time," said Mr Lee, an Industrial Relations Manager at The Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union, with which the Singapore Polo Club is affiliated.

"Hardly anyone applies to become a groom these days. So, syces who were hired 30, 40 years ago continue at their jobs, and we have a cluster of aged workers looking after a stable of strong, young horses. Every time the beast

reared, I was concerned that the man would be hurt!"

When Singapore Workforce Development Agency introduced the Enhanced ADVANTAGE! Scheme, Mr Lee, who is also an SMMWU Executive Councillor, immediately mounted on a project to lift the strain off man, to ensure that man never gets trampled.

"Each horse weighs about 500kg. That made me very concerned for the older workers, who are no longer as strong as they used to be. Even if the horses were well-behaved and walked when walked, all that walking was also strenuous for the older workers.

"So I had a discussion with Dr Ali Namazie, who was the Singapore Polo Club Captain

at the time, about improving the working conditions of the stable hands. I told him about the Enhanced ADVANTAGE! Scheme and shared with him how Singapore Polo Club could tap on funding to develop a mechanised horse walker."

That was in April 2008. Today, the mechanised horse walkers have been a very helpful addition to Singapore Polo Club. What we see at the Singapore Polo Club is a safe working and age-friendly environment for the stable hands which will go a long way to help them keep their jobs even beyond the legislated retirement age.

Likewise at the Bukit Timah Saddle Club, Mr Lee was concerned whether age would hinder

Fulfilling A Last Wish

A MEMBER of The Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union was recently diagnosed with a serious cardiac problem and hospitalised for a week. He told his Branch Officials that he would like to spend his last days with his family back home in India. Knowing about his financial difficulties, SMMWU Industrial Relations Manager and Executive Councillor Elvin Lee made an appeal to the Union Hardship Committee and he succeeded in obtaining funding for the member to purchase an air ticket to India.

"I was at the airport to send him off and he was very thankful to the union for helping him fulfill his wish. From his eyes, I could see that he was a very happy man. He passed away seven months later but I took comfort that he spent the last few months of his life in the embrace of his family," said Mr Lee.

the older workers and their ability to do some heavy manual work.

"So I spoke with Club Manager Chris Joseph about my concern and we came up with the idea of mechanising the horse dung disposal process – the most strenuous of all the tasks at the club. Previously, workers had to cart horse waste from one end of the club to the disposal bin located at the other end. Once there, they still needed to manually lift and throw the bags into a large bin which measured 2.2m in height. Each dung bag weighed about 20kg.

"Using funding from the Enhanced ADVANTAGE! Scheme, a tractor was purchased to cart the waste and the forklift was improvised to lift the waste bags and dump them into the

waste bin. This process improvement has helped to lighten the work of the older workers tremendously and increased their productivity, thus giving them more opportunity to tend to horses, which translates into extra income. More significantly, they are now employable beyond 62."

To Mr Lee, being an Industrial Relations practitioner is all about having the passion to help his fellow workers. It is this passion that saw him presented with the May Day Comrade of Labour Award this year. Even so, Elvin's feet remain firmly on the ground.

"Whether there is an award or not, the passion of helping workers should always be there. Simply put, 'love your job', he said.

Better To Be Sure Than Sorry

By
Marcus Lin

Publicity-shy Mr X doesn't mind sharing experiences but prefers that no names or details be mentioned so as to let bygones be bygones. After more than 10 fulfilling years in Company A, Mr X had to find out the hard way that sometimes there can be sorrow in the parting of ways.

Sometime late last year, Mr X felt that it was time to move on to new challenges and tendered his resignation which was duly accepted. While serving out the notice period, both parties did not raise any issues and Mr X assumed that all was in order.

Mr X's terms of employment were such that in addition to his basic salary, he was also remunerated with an incentive pay-out for achieving certain targets. This pay-out was given usually early in the year.

Mr X explained: "After I tendered my resignation, I assumed that I would receive my incentive pay-out even though I would already be out of the company before the pay-out date. Though I enquired about this, the company did not give me any indications of its intentions.

"It was to my surprise that when the pay-out date arrived I was told that I was not entitled to it as I was no longer in the company even though I had earned it. No matter how I tried to get what was due to me, the company would not compromise."

Mr X's position in the company was classified under the Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technical People (PMETs) category and he is a NTUC General Branch member. Putting his membership to good use, he approached the NTUC Industrial Relations Department General Branch Unit for assistance where Industrial Relations Officer Loh Pui Chun took up his case. Miss Loh's efforts with the company met with the same response as the company would not pay anything. There was no choice but to bring up the matter to the Ministry of Manpower.

Said Mr X: "MOM told me that I had valid grounds and arranged mediation sessions with all parties concerned. The company finally relented and agreed to give me an ex-gratia payment that amounted to less than half of what I had claimed.

"Looking back, I could have avoided this unnecessary episode if I had made absolutely certain about the incentive pay-out before I quit. Otherwise, I could have stayed on and quit after I received the pay-out. I learned a great deal from the experience about making sure about things and not assuming anything. My NTUC membership also came in handy as I had somewhere to turn to for help."