

Hiring Fair And Square Pays Off

Especially with an ageing population and a tight labour market in an economic upturn, employers in Singapore are increasingly seeing the benefits of fair and responsible employment practices. And, no, the severe economic downturn the past year has not slowed down the momentum of more and more companies reaping the fruits thereof.

Job discrimination in one form or another will always exist but the good news is that enlightened and fair employers far outweigh the black sheep. This was disclosed on 20 January 2010 at the Progress Report of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices, set up in 2006 as a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation.

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Jacob said the whole point of TAFEP in promoting merit-based, fair and responsible employment practices is because “we want employers to focus on the individual’s qualities and capabilities and not on any other factor. Certainly not a person’s race, gender, age, marital status, religion or nationality. It is what we constantly focus on.”

DSG Halimah co-chairs TAFEP with SNEF Vice-President Bob Tan.

Though TAFEP’s efforts are producing results as seen by the fact that discriminatory job advertisements fell from 19.7 per cent in 2006 to 1 per cent in 2009, DSG Halimah has her feet on the ground: “I really wish that we are living in an ideal world and that just with efforts from 2006 we could actually vanish all forms of discrimination in the workplace. We are very realistic. It is true that whilst we have seen a lot of non-discriminatory ads in the print media, in actual practice there will be instances. That we cannot completely eradicate. What we hope to do is to constantly tell people to be responsible and provide opportunities to everyone.”

Considering that last year was really bad, the fact that job discrimination complaints remained at around the usual 70 a year is indicative of TAFEP’s impact. “If we were to think of a situation where there’s no TAFEP, no efforts to promote good employment practices, it will be much worse considering the severity of the downturn last year,” and that “the ideal is zero complaints but that is a utopia not only in Singapore but all over the world,” she said.

DSG Halimah summarised that job discrimination has not seen an exponential increase since TAFEP started in 2006, progress has been made, the level of awareness has increased and the tripartite approach is a key factor. This year, there will be much emphasis on employment issues such as having an effective and pre-emptive grievance-handling mechanism.



Speaking Up For Fair Play... (from left) TAFEP General Manager Andrew Fung, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Jacob and SNEF Vice-President Bob Tan.

“TAFEP is like a lighthouse. Without TAFEP, companies will have no bearings, won’t know where to go, what is the reference point...”

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Jacob

Mr Tan urged employers to look positively at older workers and tap on their experience and knowledge. Highlighting the increasing training opportunities now available for workers, he said: “Going forward, if employers don’t engage older workers in the workforce and treat it as part of an ongoing process, they are going to have a real problem.”

TAFEP General Manager Andrew Fung stressed that it requires a mindset change “but when we ask employers, 8 in 10 said they understood that attracting and retaining talent is the key reason for adopting fair employment practices. It’s not because somebody is knocking them on the head.”

MOM Divisional Director, Labour Relations and Workplaces Division, Ong Yen Her said the mindset change the past four years is very evident: “Take re-employment of older workers for example, mindset change has been tremendous. If you look at company policies, many retain older workers. You can’t overnight achieve this and this is where promotions and campaigns are very effective.”

To date, more than 1,200 employers have signed the Employers’ Pledge of Fair Employment Practices and over 7,000 HR practitioners and line managers have benefited from TAFEP’s training workshops and seminars.

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By
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