

Strive To Be 'Singapore United And Unlimited'



A Tripartite Call... Singapore's strength lies in the rallying together of workers, employers and the Government in creating a pro-business and pro-worker environment.

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By
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Tripartite partners in Singapore are continuously leaving no stone unturned in exploring programmes and solutions that will serve as lifelines to save both businesses and jobs. Together with the concerted efforts to manage the crisis, National Trades Union Congress Secretary-General Lim Swee Say said tripartite partners have two targets to achieve through this downturn – Keeping up as “Singapore United” and emerging as “Singapore Unlimited”.

“Tripartism is the unique strength of Singapore, therefore, we should ride on these strong ties of tripartism and bipartism. It is also important that we continue doing the right things in the right ways by building capacities to emerge as ‘Singapore Unlimited’ when the upturn eventually shows up,” said SG Lim.

He was addressing German business leaders at the Singapore Tripartism Forum’s dialogue session for the Singapore-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce on 18 May 2009 at The Pines Club, which featured panel speakers SG Lim, Singapore National Employers Federation President Stephen Lee and Minister of Manpower Gan Kim Yong.

Minister Gan reinforced that the Government and unions in Singapore are very pro-business, creating an environment for our businesses to be pro-workers and pro-Singapore. He also added tripartite partners in Singapore work very closely to ensure that businesses survive and thrive well against the odds.

Mr Lee’s call was also in synchrony: “In this particular downturn, Singapore’s response is different from that of other Asian countries. We have more tools in our toolbox, and as a result, have been able to save more jobs and businesses. As you take this message back to your headquarters in Germany where you plan your global strategies, you can help us save more jobs in Singapore.”

Updates on the latest national schemes that would benefit businesses, such as SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience), the Jobs Credit scheme and the Professional Skills Programme was another key takeaway.

In another Singapore Tripartism Forum on “How To Better Manage The Business Downturn” on 20 May 2009 at the Ong Teng Cheong Labour Leadership Institute, more than 500 employers, key union officials and Government representatives came together to discuss ways of riding through the crisis.

Companies that came forward to share on their cost-cutting measures had one key message – lead by example.

Mr Richard Woo, General Manager for Human Resources and General Affairs at Mitsui Electronics Asia Private Limited shared that its managing director was the first in the organisation to practice cost-saving tactics.

“For example, he significantly reduced expenditure by entertaining clients in less posh restaurants. He provides constant motivation and encouragement to his employees. It is this value that he places on his people that makes our company grow stronger in the process.”

Mr Tan Seng Chai, CapitaLand Group’s Senior Vice-President for Human Resources, said his management’s main strategy in managing employees during this downturn focuses on effective communication.

“Our leaders believe that reaching out to

engage all levels of staff within the organisation works best when tackling issues of business challenges.”

On top of this, top executives at CapitaLand also took the biggest pay cuts of 15 to 20 per cent in January this year, with smaller pay cuts for junior staff. They also introduced some innovative cost-cutting measures, such as paying out part of the bonus for managers in the form of CapitaLand vouchers to support their tenants businesses.

These employers reactions summed up the basic principles spelled out in the Tripartite Guidelines to Managing Excess Manpower, said Ministry of Manpower’s Divisional Director for Labour Relations and Workplaces Division, Mr Ong Yen Her.

“These examples illustrate that employers practice the principle of equal sacrifice - a mark of being in the crisis together. It also shows their principle of consultation and consensus. Management taking the lead mobilises the entire workforce right from the top to deal with the crisis.”

Mr Koh Juan Kiat, Singapore National Employers Federation’s Executive Director also acknowledged the key role that unions played in managing a retrenchment exercise responsibly. NTUC Competency Director (Industrial Relations) Cham Hui Fong added that some companies have given ample notice to unions on their lay-off plans in the past few months.

“It is important to inform the union, even if employers do not inform the members as this may affect the morale on the ground. When informed earlier, NTUC’s Industrial Relations department will work out some plans with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) for training assistance for the workers to ensure that workers are treated respectfully.”