

Engaged and Energised! – The Employee -Driven Work-Life Strategy at GMP Group.

About GMP

GMP is one of the largest staffing and HR service providers in Singapore. The organization offers recruitment solutions for candidates and businesses, and its niche areas include recruitment for banking and technologies sectors, senior leadership and junior/mid management positions as well as recruitment of overseas talent. It also offers Recruitment Process Outsourcing. GMP is headquartered in Singapore and currently has over 80 staff based locally.

The majority of its employees are Generation Xers and Yers (80%), with Baby Boomers making up a smaller group (20%). GMP also has a predominantly female employee base (80%). This has been a catalyst for many of the company's Work-Life initiatives; GMP pledges to create a supportive environment for working mothers; to allow them to balance caring for the family while building their careers.

“Adopting Work-Life is a mindset issue. It’s a matter of whether you want to implement it” declares Josh Goh Assistant Director of Corporate Services for the GMP Group. Indeed, this Small Medium Enterprise (SME) is showing us that a small organisation with limited resources can still have a healthy Work-Life culture, and translate this into a more efficient and productive workforce.

An effective Work-Life strategy has clearly defined goals that meet both organisational objectives and employee needs. GMP has articulated its key objectives as:

- Building a strong corporate culture of cohesiveness through Work-Life programmes. Initiatives such as annual staff retreats and other outings are used to foster team dynamics, by ensuring interaction between staff that may not otherwise have a chance to work together.
- Cultivating a healthy Work-Life environment to differentiate itself in the highly competitive recruitment industry. “Work-Life is a retention strategy” asserts Mr. Goh, who goes on to mention that it has been a positive tool in recruiting staff as well. With its growing reputation as a Work-Life friendly company, word-of-mouth referrals have increased, and GMP is seeing even friends and family members of existing staff joining them.

Leveraging Strengths

As an SME, GMP admits that it has fewer resources, than its larger counterparts. However, the company has been quick to turn its purported weaknesses into strengths and effectively leverage on these. Due to its relatively small size, the organisation quickly realised that it can offer employees more flexibility and a faster turn-around when instituting new Work-Life policies and practices.

GMP prides itself on its lack of bureaucratic red-tape. The fairly flat organisational hierarchy means that employees feel comfortable approaching their direct supervisors and management about their Work-Life needs and providing feedback on existing initiatives. The organisation maintains a firm open door policy, where staff can approach their immediate managers or management at any time they need.

Identifying these small yet significant strengths have bolstered GMP's overall Work-Life strategy.

The Work-Life practices at GMP include:

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs)
Part-Time Work
Flexi-hours
Telecommuting (Work from home)
Leave Benefits
Sabbatical Leave (Known as career breaks)
Dependant Care Leave
Marriage Leave (5 days)
Compassionate Leave (3 days)
Paternity Leave (2 days)
Employee Support Schemes
Company-sponsored participation in marathons and other recreational activities.
Sports Day
Karaoke Sessions
Staff Christmas Party (Families invited)

The Employee-Driven Approach

GMP has adopted a unique approach to creating a healthy Work-Life culture. The organisation has accurately identified that employee buy-in is vital for the positive outcome of its Work-Life strategy. With this in mind, GMP has eschewed the traditional approach of having a single Work-Life advocate drive its initiatives. Instead, the organisation has opted to offer all employees the chance to be involved in planning Work-Life programmes.

At GMP, each Work-Life event is organised by a separate committee, and each committee is made up of employees from different divisions. This method of diffusing responsibility for Work-Life initiatives throughout the organization, has met with a highly positive response from GMP employees. GMP shares the rationale behind its innovative approach with us:

Creating a Sense of Ownership

Oftentimes, we hear about organizations that attempt to implement Work-Life programmes and practices, only to be met with poor take up rates and even indifference from employees. GMP has effectively circumvented this issue by including employees in the decision-making process. By empowering staff to plan Work-Life events, Management ensures that various employees feel a sense of ownership towards the Work-Life initiative. The enthusiasm of committee members is also likely to filter down to their peers, and clinch their support for the various Work-Life programmes.

GMP's management and HR also engage employees who are not currently sitting on committees, by soliciting their feedback on Work-Life needs.

Most notably, the organisation holds monthly CEO Sessions where employees are encouraged to feedback on existing Work-Life measures and needs. Attendance at each session is capped at 10 employees to ensure everyone has a chance to be heard. While HR personnel are present to moderate, no division heads attend these sessions, to ensure staff speak freely. Once ideas have been voiced, these will be addressed by the relevant Division Heads and reported at the monthly exco meeting. HR will then conduct the necessary research and propose solutions to management

Other sources of feedback such as informal feedback at events and coffee breaks, feedback forms at events and annual surveys are also used to gather employee response to existing Work-Life programmes.

Building Team Dynamics

With GMP's highly specialised approach to recruitment, employees often work closely with members of their own teams and rarely communicate with other employees in a work-setting. GMP's management has recognised the importance of inter-divisional interaction, in building overall organizational cohesion. Thus, the organization uses Work-Life initiatives as a valuable opportunity for building stronger team dynamics and deepens bonds between divisions.

Meeting Needs Across Generations

One of the largest organizational challenges in implementing Work-Life strategy is understanding and meeting the various Work-Life needs and wants of different employees. This is also true for GMP where employees span the spectrum across multiple generations. Indeed, conceptualizing and executing Work-Life programmes that meet the expectations of Baby Boomers and Generation X and Y alike, is challenging! As each committee is made up of employees of different ages, this ensures that the needs of various generations of employees are well-represented, and ensures a balanced approach to the types of Work-Life programmes organised by GMP – there is something for everyone in the menu of initiatives offered to staff.

Grooming Leaders

GMP also recognises that these Work-Life committees are excellent avenues to groom employees who have leadership qualities. Each committee is steered by a chairman who has been selected for his or her leadership potential. This employee is then be guided by an experienced exco member on how to organise the event. Through close coaching, the chairman will pick up the finer points of organising events and working with a team, including finding creative solutions and ensuring that all employees from various generations enjoy the event.

Harnessing the Younger Generation

GMP acknowledges the need to harness the energy and enthusiasm of its younger employees, to achieve greater productivity. Mr. Goh shares that younger employees often seek out new challenges in the workplace, and relish being asked to take on new tasks outside of their usual routine. Work-Life initiatives enable the organisation to tap into the talents and abilities of these Gen Xers and Gen Yers by:

- Providing a platform to showcase leadership ability and creativity.
- Promoting the coming together of different generations of employees as they plan and participate in Work-Life events.
- Providing an avenue for feedback. The typically outspoken nature of the younger employees makes them ideal to provide regular and accurate feedback on Work-Life initiatives. By encouraging these staff to speak out on whether they like the initiatives and what can be improved, GMP shows that it values their opinions as well.

Seeing Results

GMP's progressive approach to Work-Life has served the organisation well, allowing it to retain talented employees who have stayed at GMP through various life stages. The senior managers provide an excellent example; the majority of senior managers at GMP are working mothers all of whom have been with GMP for at least ten years. Overall, GMP has reported an increase in employee satisfaction levels, a decline in voluntary turnover and better team dynamics amongst employees.

Mr. Goh affirms that despite its relatively small size, GMP is geared towards work-life, and committed to progressively implementing Work-Life measures, one step at a time.

Work-Life Hint! Critical Factors for Work-Life Success

Two key factors in the success of the GMP Group's Work-Life strategy are strong management support and an effective Communication strategy that disseminates Work-Life information quickly throughout the organization. These are vital elements that should be carefully considered in preparing a Work-Life Strategy.

The Spill over Effect

GMP's pervasive Work-Life culture has had an impact on its business and clients as well. THE GMP Group launched the 'Raffles Place Ghost' ad campaign, themed around the idea that 'no one should work late'. Through this ad, GMP was able to successfully communicate its organisation Work-Life values and increase brand awareness. They also experienced a 48% increase in resume uploads. The campaign also went on to garner advertising awards for its creative and novel approach.