



## Innovating People Practices

### **Introduction**

Home-grown hardware retail-chain, the Home-Fix store, is a familiar household name in the local retail scene. From its humble beginnings as a traditional hardware store in Geylang Serai, Home-Fix now operates 23 stores in Singapore and another 11 stores in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Low brothers, Mr Low Cheong Kee and Mr Low Cheong Yew, took over the business from their father and opened their first air-conditioned Home-Fix store in 1993 at Siglap Centre. Over the past twenty years, not only have the Low brothers transformed their family hardware store, they have also reshaped the local DIY and home improvements retail scene.

The Lows share a common desire to promote the practice of DIY home improvements among consumers, by empowering them with the tools and the knowledge to 'do it themselves'. Their vision is for Home-Fix to move beyond being a mere retailer of DIY products to be a full-fledged lifestyle brand synonymous with a home-centric, home-loving and house-proud lifestyle. It has recently introduced a suite of 'DIFY' – or 'Doing It For You' – services. These include professional repair, replacement, installation, painting and handyman services.

### **Home-Fix Staff Demographic Profile**

For its local operations, Home-Fix employs over 180 staff. 150 of them work front-line in the retail stores while 30 staff provide corporate support from its headquarters. The opportunity to learn about new gadgets and products has enabled Home-Fix to attract many young people to join its workforce. 41% of its staff are under the age of 30 years old. It also has in its employ some mature employees.

### **Addressing Manpower Challenges in the Retail Industry**

Employers in the local retail industry are known to constantly battle the perennial manpower crunch and high staff turnover problems. While the Home-Fix management team has adopted an innovative approach in presenting 'old' products and services in modern, innovative ways in its business operations, it has also applied the same philosophy to its human resource practices.

#### ***Part-Time Work Arrangement***

To complement its full-time workforce, Home-Fix has utilised the part-time work scheme. About 27% of its workforce comprising students, housewives, mature employees and others, work on part-time arrangements. On average, these part-timers have been with the company between 3 and 5 years. Having a regular pool of part-timers has allowed the company to be less reliant on foreign workers. While the company can employ foreign workers up to 45% of its total workforce, its actual strength of foreign workers make up only 19% of its total workforce strength.

To integrate the part-timers into the organisation, Home-Fix regularly reviews its part-time policies to keep its part-timers engaged and committed. As is common industry practice, its part-timers used to be paid on an hourly basis, with little benefits. It has since revamped its policies. In a move to recognise commitment and experience, part-timers are now eligible for merit allowance, store-level incentives and individual sales incentive schemes.

To build their sense of belonging, part-timers join the company's annual Dinner and Dance and are eligible for different recognition awards. Where only full-time staff were previously eligible for these awards, Home-Fix now recognises the efforts and performance of its part-timers through its "Part-Timer Award" and "Gold Collar Award". Their performance is also reviewed formally through its Home-Fix annual performance appraisal exercise where, like the full-timers, they are appraised on a range of factors including customer service, job tasks, product knowledge and work attitudes. Unlike full-timers however, new part-timers are placed on a 6-month probation, since they spend less time in working in the stores.

*"Because of the 5-day work week scheme, I was able to take up a course on "Advance Certificate In Retail Supervision". Having two off days allowed me to do 2 modules at the same time - one module in the day and another module in the evening. This helped me get my Advance Certificate in a much shorter time. Thank you Home-Fix management!"*

**Mohd Hoesny Bin Mustafa**  
Retail Supervisor

### **5-Day Work Week**

Recognising that the 6-day work week is a major factor accounting for why many shun the retail industry, Home-Fix has introduced a scheme for its full time staff to work the 44-hour week over 5 days instead of 6 days. Retail staff were given the option to stay on the 6-day work week or convert to a 5-day work scheme. Since the introduction of the scheme in 2011, 90% of its staff have converted to the 5-day work week scheme. This scheme has produced encouraging results. Home-Fix's average monthly turnover rate reduced from an already low rate of 3.3% to just 2% since the introduction of the scheme. Recruitment efforts have also been easier as potential candidates are attracted to the 5-day work week option.



*Picture Above: Mohd Hoesny receiving a letter of commendation for completing the Advance Certificate in Retail Supervision from Mr Low Cheong Kee at Home-Fix Dinner & Dance 2012*

## People First and Foremost



Picture Above: Fun@Home activities attended by both retail and HQ staff of Home-Fix.

Home-Fix prides itself on the strong emphasis it places on putting its people foremost at the heart of the Home-Fix experience. The company provides a fun and close-knit environment and is generous in investing in staff training and development. It believes that when a Home-Fix team member is developed as an individual with a passion for learning and continuous development, this, in turn, will drive service excellence and business growth.

More recently in 2010, the management set up a FUN@Home (which stands for *Friends You Need@ Home*) Committee to develop and sustain Work-Life Balance programmes for staff. This has provided a platform for all levels of staff from retail outlets and HQ to interact and bond together. The fun environment it provides is particularly attractive to its young and matured workforce, which also accounts for its low attrition rate.

## Engaging Middle Managers

A key factor accounting for the company's cohesive culture and strong staff engagement lies in the company's ability to engage its middle management. A culture of strong and open communication is built through its monthly store managers' meeting at its spacious headquarters at Tai Seng. Managers are not only given operations updates, but are also involved in regular feedback sessions with the HR team. New policies are first disseminated to these managers before they are cascaded to the rest of the company. Managers are also coached and trained on good people management practices, strategies for managing a diverse team of part-timers and tips on managing mature employees. Success stories are shared, not only to recognise good people managers, but to also provide other managers with role models that they can pattern their leadership style after.

## Conclusion

With a vision to become the leading home improvement and lifestyle centre in Asia and beyond, Home-Fix is committed to continually seek out new ways to improve its business operations. It is with the same commitment that it applies to its HR practices. The key to Home-Fix's success lies in its willingness to employ creative methods to address common people challenges. These includes the introduction of the 5-day work week, adopting the perspective of treating and rewarding part-timers like full-timers and the dedication to engage and enthuse its line managers are all key factors accounting for its HR success.