

***Flexibility & Innovative Talent Management for  
Successful Work-Life Integration***

**Background**

The Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore at Zhongshan Park are jointly managed by the Wyndham Hotel Group. The management, Front Office and F&B associate functions have been centralised for both hotels; a total workforce of 250 associates are trained and cross-deployed at Ramada and Days Hotels depending on manpower requirements. 40% of these associates are Management and Executive staff while 60% are Operations / Non-Management associates.

**Organisational Work-Life Strategy**

At the Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore, Work-Life integration is an organisational priority and the management strives to offer associates a flexible work culture that allows them to pursue meaningful careers while still meeting personal responsibilities. The variety of flexible measures include:

- Flexi-Work hours where associates in the executive office can choose their work day start and end times; they can start work between 7.30am to 9.30am and end between 5.00pm to 7.00pm. This has worked especially well for associates in the Finance department who are in the office early to prepare financial reports; they can now end their work day earlier by 5pm. Overall, 60% of the associates in the executive office have used this scheme.
- Telecommuting is available for associates that have to tend to family responsibilities within the work day, as well as those who prefer to work from home without the usual workplace distractions. An estimated 10% of associates use this scheme such as their Learning and Development Manager, who works from home when preparing training resources.
- Flexible benefits are offered to all associates to promote personal well-being. Associates are given an annual allowance of \$300-\$500, under a 10% co-payment scheme, to purchase products and services related to health and well-being. This scheme has been especially successful, with a 100% take-up rate. Associates have used this sum for a variety of purchases including gym memberships, health products and personal development courses.

As part of the effort to promote health and fitness, free health screenings are provided to all associates on a yearly basis, and they can use their flexible benefits to get more extensive health checks done.

*“Work-Life integration extends beyond our associates’ personal time. It is even more important that our culture makes the Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore a better work place for our associates – that is the basis of our long-term vision and Work-Life strategy.”*

**Tony Cousens  
General Manager  
Ramada and Days Hotels**

Various success factors have contributed to the effective Work-Life strategy at Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore. Importantly, there is a strong culture of trust and personal ownership of projects within the workforce. Indeed, while associates are required to inform the team and managers when they use a flexible work option, they do not need to wait for formal approval of adhoc requests; an employee can make an online application to telecommute and freely do so the next day, as long as work goals and deliverables are met.

The organisation has also maximised its resources by tapping on the then Flexi-Works! Grant<sup>1</sup>. With the \$10,000 grant, the management purchased laptops for associates who were telecommuting and also invested in a Work-Life workshop for their HR.

As a result of their comprehensive Work-Life strategy, the Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore have been able to tap on under-utilised sources of labour such as back-to-work mothers and also mature workers who want meaningful post-retirement careers. The various flex work options allow these associates the opportunity for gainful employment while still meeting personal needs and responsibilities. One example of this is the hotels' in-house seamstress, a mature associate who lives near the hotel. Previously a housewife, she wanted a job to fill her time as her children are now in university. Another mature associate was hired to fill a call centre position, and while she required some training to use the equipment, the company found that her personable and confident nature made her a valuable asset for the hotels.

One of the key challenges identified by HR is that while associates' buy-in was vital for the launch and effectiveness of flexible work arrangements, it was hard to get the majority of them to agree to these flexibility initiatives as these would not necessarily be applicable to all associates – for example, an F&B operations associate would not be able to telecommute. The management and HR resolved this issue by creating opportunities for all associates to utilise the various FWAs; by experiencing these first-hand, they were able to fully realise their usefulness and relevance to the entire workforce. Operations associates were given the opportunity to work on mini-projects which required planning meetings which were held off-site, as part of the telecommuting programme.

### **Organisational Leadership Strategies**

At Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore, the leadership highly values the engagement between management and associates. The General Manager, Mr. Tony Cousens, is known as a people-person and makes it a point to personally offer birthday greetings to each associate and present them with a \$100 F&B voucher. These personal touches also set the tone for the rest of the management team, who actively dialogue with associates and make it a priority to understand the Work-Life needs and sentiments of their departments.

The management team also promotes Work-Life integration and a flexible work culture by utilising the various flex schemes themselves. When associates see their managers tapping on flex schemes and still being effective and productive at work, they are encouraged to make Work-Life integration a reality for themselves.

To show their commitment to Work-Life integration for all associates, senior management voluntarily reduced their annual leave from 21 days to 15 days, and the difference has been redistributed amongst the other associates to ensure that they have sufficient rest and personal time. The associates reciprocate by giving their best to the company and the guests in the course of their work.

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<sup>1</sup> The Work-Life Grant under the new one-stop WorkPro Programme provides substantial funding and incentives for organisations to create and sustain a more supportive environment for Singaporeans to form and raise families.

## **Information Management Strategies**

Transparent and consistent communication is vital in maintaining the effectiveness of the hotels' Work-Life strategy and the underlying trust culture these are founded on. Employees are clearly briefed on the current Work-Life initiatives through an orientation session when they are first hired, and the information and updates are also readily available via an associate handbook, HR notice board and regular emails.

Feedback channels have been set up for associates to surface Work-Life needs, gaps in existing Work-Life programmes and policies and even offer suggestions to refine the current initiatives. This can be done via the ATRO (Action That Reach Others) Committee which was formed by the associates themselves as a sounding board for the hotel associates, or the bi-monthly gatherings which are open to all employees. On a more informal level, the HR team regularly meets up with different groups of employees over lunch-time or tea breaks to get candid feedback and input in a more relaxed environment.

## **Performance Management Strategies**

The Talent management strategy at Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore is integral to the organisation's goal of hiring and retaining quality associates who will go the extra mile for hotel guests and customers. The hotels' talent management programmes complement the organisational Work-Life strategy; when associates are trained and equipped to be highly productive and effective at work, overtime and longer hours at work are reduced, freeing up more time for personal pursuits. The organisation's aim is to create a 'fun and enriching workplace in a culture that fosters learning and professional growth'.

The hotels' have a progressive career development plan called ME LEAP! that systematically nurtures operations associates, through different phases of training and exposure to various jobs in F&B, Front Office and even supervisory skills for exceptional individuals who display leadership qualities. Importantly, the talent management strategy allows associates to learn new skills at their own pace and is an opportunity for cross-training so that employees can be deployed to different jobs within the two hotels, depending on manpower requirements.

## **Outcomes and Conclusion**

Hiring and retaining quality talent who will positively impact the bottom-line is an ever-present challenge for companies in the service industry. In the on-going manpower crunch, the Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore have successfully differentiated themselves as Employers of Choice. By offering flexibility initiatives coupled with innovative talent management schemes they ensure that their associates are equipped to achieve optimal Work-Life integration – delivering their best at work and in their personal lives.