

## CASE STUDY: SHERATON TOWERS – A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

### Background

The rapid opening of new hotels, integrated resorts, food and beverage outlets and restaurants brings with it a growing demand for manpower in the hospitality and food and beverage industries. This manpower crunch is felt most at the operations level. Reported news of staff shortages in the industry leaving restaurant owners strapped, anecdotal accounts of poaching and employees exiting in droves towards better paying jobs, abound. In 2010, the hospitality industry's average monthly resignation rate hovers around 4.4%<sup>1</sup>. Yet, Sheraton Towers' average monthly turnover rate stands at a low of 2.9%. How does Sheraton do it?

### Work-Life Strategy

Sheraton's Work-Life strategy is not an afterthought, nor are its Work-Life programmes implemented just to meet the Work-Life Excellence Award criteria. Work-life strategy is part of the fabric of Sheraton's culture. Walk into this charming 412-room hotel, voted by Conde Nast Traveller Gold List as one of the best places to stay in the world, and you will immediately experience the sense of family warmth. The hotel's timeless grace and charm exude through the physical ambience of the hotel and is lived out by its associates (as Sheraton's staff are addressed). Associates are known by their first names to the senior management staff and many have been a part of the hotel for over 20 years - affectionately calling the Sheraton their second home.

Indeed, the essence of Sheraton's Work-Life strategy is to make the workplace a home away from home for the associates – engaging both associates and their family members. Its Director of Human Resources, Mr Francis Tan, a 2010 Work-Life Leadership Award winner explains, "Companies need to realise that the end goal of their Work-Life strategy is the family. In their programmes, they need to engage the family as well." This philosophy underlies many of Sheraton's programmes and activities – which are open to associates' family members.

### Senior Management Support

#### **Mission**

##### **Product**

Together we offer well defined products and services focused on our guest needs

##### **People**

We provide a caring environment for our associates to learn, develop and grow

##### **Profit**

We optimise the financial returns to our stakeholders

So integral is Work-Life strategy to Sheraton that its Work-Life philosophy is incorporated within its corporate mission statement, core values and culture statements (see inserts). These statements were crafted to demonstrate the organisation's commitment to create a lasting Work-Life culture to support organisational high performance. At the core of its Work-Life philosophy is the tenet of "Care". Sheraton believes that it needs to build a Caring Culture – that the same care and respect

<sup>1</sup>Source: Singapore Hotel Association Survey

accorded to guests, must first and foremost be extended to its associates. And as associates experience the genuine care from the organisation, they can in turn serve guests with the Sheraton's difference, making ordinary service encounters extraordinary.

## Ensuring Sustainability

### A Caring Culture

#### Care for Associates

Provide a caring environment for our associates to learn, develop and grow

#### Care for Guests

Offer well defined products and services, focused on our guest needs

#### Care for Business

Optimising the financial returns of our stakeholders (Owner, Guests and Associates)

#### Care for Community

Always play our role as a responsible corporate citizen to benefit our community at large

Building a sustainable caring culture does not happen overnight. It takes the deliberate effort of all throughout the organisation, with the senior management staff taking the lead. To demonstrate ownership, Key Performance Indicators based on "Care for Associates" are built into the managers' annual appraisal system. Managers are measured by indicators such as the "Associate Satisfaction Index", "staff MC rate", "staff perfect attendance rate", "percentage of staff attending health and wellness activities" etc. Its Work-Life programmes and activities are regularly reviewed and refined, taking into account staff feedback and changing needs. Quantitative indicators are put in place, tracked and reported regularly at management meetings to support and measure the impact Work-Life programmes have on Sheraton's bottom-line. These indicators include: "revenue per associate", "man-day loss", "guest satisfaction index", and "staff turnover".

## Work-Life Programmes

Sheraton's strength lies in its holistic and systematic approach in creating its Work-Life strategy. Using the Work-Life Excellence Award framework as a benchmark six years ago, Mr Tan has put in place a comprehensive health and wellness framework, systematically identifying staff needs, implementing programmes targeted at different groups of staff and tracking them to measure effectiveness. A monthly budget is set aside for these programmes, which are broadly categorised under "Food", "Health", "Sports", "Family" and "Welfare and Benefits".

## Core Values

#### Warm

Genuine & welcoming, conveying a generosity of spirit and caring for and about our guest needs

#### Connected

Able to connect with what matters most through our signature spaces, amenities and services

#### Community

Providing a social place for people to come together and share experiences. No matter where you are in the world, at Sheraton, you belong

## **Food and Health Initiatives**

### **Annual Health Surveys**

Like many organisations, Sheraton organises annual complimentary health screenings for its associates. However, the intervention does not stop here, it takes a step further by analysing the organisational health screening report provided by the vendor. This report is tracked on a year-to-year basis to address worrying trends in the organisation. To cite an example, in their recent health screening exercise, it was found that there was an increase in the percentage of staff with weight issues. Health talks on “Weight Management” intervention programmes were planned and organised for staff while the wellness team worked with the caterer to ensure that healthier food options were provided at the cafeteria.

## **Welfare and Benefits**

### **Lunch Time Health Talks**

Other than “Weight Management Talks”, Sheraton regularly invites other experts to conduct lunch time health talks for its staff. Health talks on topics such as “Eat right for your blood type”, “Osteoporosis”, “High blood pressure – the silent killer” and “Dietary approaches to stop hypertension” have also been conducted this year. Sheraton’s efforts to get staff to live and stay healthy have definitely paid off as evidenced by an increase in staff awareness on health issues. Some associates have even gone on to research and read up on better ways to lead healthy lifestyles.

## **Sports and Family Initiatives**

Associates are encouraged to involve and invite their family members in some of Sheraton’s health and wellness activities, such as the weekly jogs, the corporate marathons and movie days. The involvement of family members stems from the management’s belief that it is important for family members to be aware of the staff’s work environment. Mr Tan explains, “When family members get to know the environment and the colleagues that the staff work with, they will be more accepting and be connected to the organisation. This will help our staff feel happier and be more engaged.”

## **Seeing Results: Success Indicators and Stories**

Since implementing its Work-Life Strategy, Sheraton has seen improvements in its bottom-line performance. Its Associate Satisfaction Index has risen from 4.14 in 2006 to 4.25 in 2010. On an annual basis, over a third of its staff strength would be awarded the Perfect Attendance Award – an outcome that can be attributed to the strong health and wellness programmes that the hotel has put in place.

### **Ms Michelle Charn, Assistant HR & Training Manager**

Ms Michelle Charn started her career as a HR coordinator with Sheraton Towers back in 2005. It was while working in Sheraton that she got married and started her own family. In the initial

years of her marriage, Ms Charn contemplated resigning from Sheraton, as her regular working hours did not allow her to reach home on time to prepare dinner for the family. Upon hearing her predicament, the department made adjustments to her working hours, which allowed her to reach home early enough to prepare meals. This flexible arrangement worked well for her. Over time, Ms Charn's husband also joined in Sheraton's activities and at times, assisted in the coordination of activities for staff. By opening avenues for family members to be involved, Ms Charn's husband has been won over and today Ms Charn is a committed staff on the HR team, having been promoted from HR coordinator to HR Officer and in November 2009, the position of Assistant HR & Training Manager. In 2011, she was on a telecommuting work arrangement in the last couple of weeks leading to the delivery of her baby. Ms Charn and her husband are now the proud parents of a newborn baby boy.

#### **Case Study: Ms Joanne Leong**

Ms Joanne Leong started off her career as a secretary to the Director of Sales and Marketing. In recognition of Joanne's good performance and as a form of career development, Joanne was transferred to the Business Development (BD) team, starting off as a BD executive and was promoted to BD manager. Joanne then went on maternity leave for four (4) months. On her return, she was pleasantly surprised to learn that she was promoted from BD manager to Senior Business Development Manager. This is contrary to the common belief that one may lose her job after returning from maternity leave or her career progression within the company may be "stifled". Joanne's case is a positive affirmation of Sheraton's commitment to develop and reward good performing staff – a cornerstone of Sheraton's "care for associates" culture.

#### **Going Forward**

Sheraton is committed to enhance the associates' well-being and caring culture through its Worklife Excellence programmes and initiatives. When asked how Sheraton would sustain its Work-Life strategy, Mr Tan aptly summarises Sheraton's operating philosophy, "I am Sheraton, I make the difference". This belief determines how Sheraton operates and how its staff and guests are treated. "For us at Sheraton, *life is better when shared*. We will continue to make Sheraton a better place for all to live and work in."

With a management who is deeply committed to providing its associates with a CARING environment for them to learn, develop and grow, Sheraton is truly a great workplace!