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BLOG - LYNDA WEE



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People Decision: Engage. Transform. Monetise.

By Dr Lynda Wee, specialist in Retailing, Growth Strategic Planning and Leadership

"People are our best assets", "We depend on our people to serve customers well", "We work in a knowledge-based economy, hence people's views matter" are commonly heard expressions.

In reality, most people don't feel that they are their companies' best assets - their views are not solicited or are simply ignored. As a result, they feel de-motivated. These companies in turn spend huge resources to seek ways to motivate the same set of employees. Wouldn't this constitute a cost saving opportunity if the assumption that employees would be motivated when they are engaged holds true?

Retailers face the same dilemma. One possible reason for not engaging employees is the hiring of "warm bodies" where the sense of urgency is on filling the vacant positions, never mind if they do not speak the business language nor comprehend the culture and business context.

This hiring practice is common in a tight labour market where retailing is not a preferred career option. Next, there is a reluctance to train them given the high turnover rate. As a result, the low calibre suggests that a top-down approach is more effective in managing them, and staff engagement takes a back seat.

Truth be told that hiring "warm bodies" is at best a short-term solution unless they are equipped and committed to achieve the corporate vision and mission with the core values.

This is critical, given that retailing is a people business where human interaction and connection matter - in order to bring the companies' unique value proposition to life, one at a time, by each employee to each customer. Indeed, retail branding starts from the employees and everyone needs to be engaged to give his/her best to transform.

Author Jim Collins in his book, "Good to Great", posits that successful companies think first 'who', then 'what'. He reiterates that it is the right people who think of the right thing to do and then do it right.

What if retailers rethink and outthink their people decision? What if retailers focus on hiring the right people, engaging, transforming and monetising them by Returns-on-Payroll? Return-on-Payroll refers to each employee being clear and accountable to the critical numbers that he/she shall deliver in a manner that reflects the corporate vision, mission and core values.

Vision, mission and core values need to be applied at people decision. The right people are defined as those who can and shall embrace them. Hire for attitude means going beyond educational and work qualification, instead look for evidence and willingness to embrace the core values. Once hired, retailers shall engage and transform them to achieve the mission and vision.

In retailing, one is too small a number to achieve greatness. Everyone matters and needs to be engaged, transformed and monetised by achieving the desired Return-on-Payroll, thereby promoting a yield-accretive human capital model. If an employee is not yield-accretive in his/her work, this means a cost-saving opportunity!

Dr Lynda Wee is a Specialist in Retailing, Growth Strategic Planning and Leadership. Prior to founding Bootstrap, she was the Senior Vice President of Learning and Development at CapitaLand Limited and held the concurrent post of Founding Principal for CapitaLand Institute of Management and Business. She also served as the founding member of Temasek-Linked Companies Organisation Development Network. [read more](#)

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