



As the labour market tightens, organisations worldwide are strengthening their employer value propositions to appeal to young talents, writes SUZIEANA UDA NAGU

What works for Generation Y

HUMAN resources director Cheryl Wong has more than her fair share of local and foreign graduates to assess when they apply to join British American Tobacco (Malaysia) Bhd (BAT), a multinational corporation.

"In the spirit of diversity, BAT prefers hiring a mix of foreign and locally trained Malaysians. We believe that diversity brings better solutions, which translate into better business sense. People with different experience will bring something unique to the table," says Wong.

She has come across impressive local graduates among the shortlisted candidates.

"But they are getting harder to find. We want well-rounded candidates who possess the leadership skills we look for, as well as good academic qualifications and effective communication skills."

"Being a multinational company, we do need people who communicate well in English," says Wong.

She feels it is a shame when some local candidates show



To attract Generation Y workers, organisations must be willing to offer market-competitive propositions



Prestige attached to the scheme, says Cheryl Wong

impressive track record in academic and extra-curricular activities but cannot express themselves well.

Wong is not the only employer faced with the challenge of finding suitable candidates.

Despite the global recession and the weakest employment outlook in decades, employers worldwide are still finding it difficult to hire young people to fill positions which require critical skills such as leadership, teamwork and problem-solving.

The United Nations states that "one of the top three socio-economic issues facing the planet is the lack of talent despite population increases", underlining the worry that talent shortage is indeed a global concern.

In the United States, human resource experts predict a critical skills gap in organisations in the next five years.

They believe that by 2014, there will be a 30 per cent decline in young workers entering the workforce and a 50 per cent growth in retirement of skilled knowledge workers.

Their concern is that as the situation grows more serious, it could threaten "the engines of world economic growth and prosperity".

Governments globally are taking measures to mitigate the impending shortages such as improving educational and vocational training provisions, adopting strategic migration policies and encouraging experienced older workers to remain in employment.

Meanwhile, employers have shifted their focus on building their brands and formulating solid recruitment strategies — from simply waiting for the right individuals to come along — to attract young and talented workers.

Wong believes that to lure Generation Y workers (those born between 1978 and 2000), organisations must be willing to present "market-competitive propositions".

This is open to interpretation. NetApp, which creates innovative storage and data management solutions, offers enticing benefits — five paid days for volunteer work, on site gym and subsidised gym memberships — to woo potential staff and keep existing ones.

After six years on FORTUNE's 100 Best Companies to Work For list, it is now on the No. 1 spot.

Google, which fell to No. 4 this year from No. 1 last year, had until recently, listed afternoon teas and an annual ski trip as perks.

Despite cutting back on the frills, it still pulls in 770,000

applicants a year.

As for BAT, Wong believes that graduates are drawn to its two-year Global Management Trainee programme.

"We have become more focused in terms of recruiting people. The Global Management Trainee scheme has enabled us to train and develop managers of the highest calibre for years," says Wong.

The scheme is open to graduates aged 25 years or younger, who possess a minimum of second-class upper degree, a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or equivalent, effective communications skills in English and is active in extra-curricular activities and leadership positions.

In the 24-month scheme, management trainees spend 1½ years in a particular department within the organisation such as operations, marketing, human resources, corporate and regulatory affairs, legal, finance and information technology.

Upon completing the training, they would have learned about the different roles within a

specific unit.

If they were recruited to human resources, they are expected to be well versed in talent development, compensation and benefits, employee relations and business partnering.

The exposure would enable them to be full-fledged executives of the section that they are attached to.

Management trainees also spend the last three months of their training on a cross-functional attachment to another division.

Most other schemes, Wong says, focus only on cross-functional attachments, in the hope of exposing management trainees to different roles in their businesses.

"While they may be familiar with how various departments work, they may also lack specialist skills," she says.

Perhaps the scheme's main selling point is the chance for management trainees to go overseas on a three-month cross-market attachment.

This is meant to equip them with international experience which will essentially accelerate the company's growth.

To ensure sustainability of the talent pipeline for the management trainee scheme, BAT also conducts a talent-spotting contest called Bring Your Difference (BYD), the second one the company has held since 2007 (see accompanying story).

The competition, which ended recently received more than 400 applications from Malaysian undergraduates, which "speaks volumes about the prestige attached to the scheme", says Wong.

Winners of BYD stand a chance to be considered for Fast Passes to the graduate management scheme.

The regular route to the management training programme involves a few steps.

First, candidates sit for a battery of reasoning tests.

"If they clear this hurdle,

they can go to the second round, which involves being a part of a team to solve a business case study — similar to what the BYD contestants go through.

Participating in the BYD means that contestants have gone through a bulk of the process.

"They may get a different case study but they are evaluated using the same tools and method," says Wong, adding that the final stage of the programme is an interview with the director.

The recession is not likely to stop the organisation from funding the scheme.

"Otherwise we would have a lot of positions to fill two years down the line," she says.

If it were up to Wong, graduate recruitment and development would be part and parcel of the business strategy of all organisations.

It benefits not only the business but also students, she says.

By enhancing their appeal to talented workers, organisations can position themselves to win lasting competitive advantage in the talent marketplace.

Open to Malaysian undergraduates from local and foreign tertiary institutions, more than 400 applicants vied for the chance to win lucrative cash prizes, apart from the Fast Pass to join the company's two-year Global Management Trainee programme.

Participating in the BYD gives contestants a taste of the management trainee scheme.

"You could say that BYD contestants have gone through a bulk of the process to be eligible for the traineeship scheme. In a way, it is more gruelling for BYD contestants as they had to go through it in just two days," says BAT human resources director Cheryl Wong (see H2).

Of the more than 400 candidates who applied, only 80 were invited for an assessment interview.

From there, 40 were shortlisted for a workshop aimed at familiarising the contestants with the contest format.

In Round One, shortlisted students were divided into 10 teams and given about four hours to crack a given business case study — on rebranding a well-known snack line by introducing a new one or a healthier variety — by using critical skills, such as analysing, thinking creatively and working in teams, before presenting it to the judges.

The five teams with the best presentations advanced to Round Two, in which they executed their business plans, ideas and strategies at a real business setting.

Team Beige found cracking the case study the most challenging



Bring Your Difference 2009 participant Oliver Kau (right) persuades shoppers to buy from his booth

Taste of management trainee scheme

A TRICKY business case study pushed them to the edge of their creativity but thinking laterally won college students Wynlyn Chia, Tan Su Zhen, Oliver Kau and Tan Yee Leng — who make up members of Team Beige — the first prize in the recent Bring Your Difference (BYD) 2009 competition.

The group overcame several challenges during the two-day contest to defeat four teams and win RM12,000, a plaque and RM500 worth of book vouchers.

Second place went to Team Red which took home RM5,000, a plaque and RM600 worth of book vouchers.

Team White finished third and won RM4,000 as well as a plaque.

Team Black and Blue won consolation prizes which are a plaque and participation certificates.

BYD is a talent-spotting contest organised by British American Tobacco (Malaysia) Bhd (BAT) as part of its initiative to ensure sustainability of the talent pipeline for its Global Management Trainee scheme.

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Rewarding experience, says Tan Yee Leng



Natural to have differing opinions, says Wynlyn Chia



Understand the case study well, says Oliver Kau



Important to get along, says Tan Su Zhen

task of all.

"It was the hardest part because we had to understand the case study well before we could carry out a well-laid plan," says Kau from INTI University College.

Chia, a business student from University of Malaya, deems the case study the most difficult she had come across in her many years of competing in similar competitions.

"Other contests feature straightforward case studies but this one had a lot of twists," says Chia.

"We were racing against time — trying to analyse the case study within four hours — and that made it even more stressful," says Yee Leng, 21, from Taylor's University College.

On top of that, the foursome had to work as a team despite the fact that they had just met.

"Except for Chia and Yee Leng who knew each other from a previous competition, the rest of us had only met this morning familiarising the contestants with the contest format."

"Everyone was cooperative. We had decided from the outset to stick to any decision which we all agreed on," says Kau.

"It was important that we got along because all groups were judged based on several criteria — and good teamwork was one of them," says 19-year-old Su Zhen.

While the first day was mentally exhausting for the teams, the second day tested their mental agility and physical endurance.

Team Beige had to carefully plan how it was going to sell more products than its

competitors at Sunway Pyramid Shopping Mall.

The teams were given Japanese products — as stated in their business plans — to sell.

"Instead of just selling from our booth, we decided to take orders from shoppers and deliver our products to them. We found that we were able to convince people to buy the products without the samples."

"The organisers confirmed that providing delivery services was not against the rules. That set us apart from the other teams," says Chia.

The contest was made more challenging when BYD organisers threw a spanner in the works such as asking the teams to auction their products or attract customers by having a lucky draw.

The team believes that combining the strengths of its members helped it secure the top prize.

"It's natural to have differing opinions and it's not wrong to take a little bit of everyone's input and combine them into one great idea. Apart from that, everyone was focused on their roles and that helped us to advance in the competition," she adds.

Paying close attention during the workshop also helped.

"The facilitators at the workshop emphasised thinking out of the box. So we kept that in mind throughout the contest," says Yee Leng.

The team encourages Malaysian undergraduates to compete in future BYD competitions.

"It was a rewarding experience for us. It was challenging and it complemented what we have learned in university," says Yee Leng.