

■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

CLASSIFIED POST

Best Companies to Work For®

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Jose Bezanilla, CEO of Great Place to Work in Greater China, highlighted how companies considered by their employees as “Great Places to Work” are more resilient to business and economic challenges.
Photos: Chungy Wong



Making a difference

Best Companies to Work For in Greater China 2016 awards highlight firms standing out as role models of engagement, writes **Chris Davis**

Marking its fifth anniversary on a high note, the Best Companies to Work For in Greater China 2016 awards ceremony recognised and honoured a record number of companies who are engaging and taking care of their employees – and in doing so, creating workplace environments where staff can thrive and enjoy building careers.

The awards were hosted by Great Place to Work in Greater China (GPTW), part of a global research, consulting and training organisation that helps organisations identify, create and sustain great workplaces through the development of high-trust workplace cultures. Held on December 8 at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui, the event was attended by around 180 senior company representatives and HR professionals, and followed an all-day conference covering topics across a range of talent attraction, development and engagement issues.

Opening the ceremony, Alex Ho, general manager of the education, recruitment, circulation and syndication businesses at South China Morning Post Publishers, said that, as the landscape of business rapidly changes, the need to attract and retain talent is an important priority for all organisations. “Today’s highly competitive battle for talent across the Greater China region requires

companies to distinguish themselves to attract and retain talent, and one of the ways of doing this is by being recognised as a Great Place to Work,” he said. “An increasingly discerning and mobile workforce is creating new layers of challenges.”

Following Ho’s opening remarks, José Bezanilla, CEO of Great Place to Work in Greater China, took to the stage and began by highlighting the increasing influence of the Best Company to Work For awards in the region. “The pool of participating companies keeps on growing,” he noted. “A total of 137 companies located in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland – employing more than 210,000 staff – were surveyed, 25 more than in 2015. They also came from a wider variety of industries and had more diverse origins, including more local Chinese companies.”

In all, 30 companies from nine industry sectors made it on to the Best Companies to Work For in Greater China 2016 list. Survey data measuring employee feedback indicated that 84 per cent of employees working for those companies trust their management, enjoy working with their colleagues and take pride in their jobs.

Congratulating those companies appearing on the list for the first time, Bezanilla said they had shown a strong commitment to engaging their employees and had crafted policies and programmes that suit today’s workforce. “We are very happy about companies that have been trying and trying and this year they’ve made it. You’re going to know [who they are] because they’re going to shout a lot. They’re super happy.”

Bezanilla explained how the Best Companies to Work For in Greater China list is put together using results gleaned from employee surveys in each participating organisation. The employees evaluate their companies using criteria related to the quality of

their workplace cultures, experiences, and management processes and policies. To be considered for a place on the list, participating companies need to reach a defined score on GPTW’s “Trust Index Survey” and “Culture Audit”.

“It is about how employees view their company, their experiences at work, the camaraderie they share with colleagues, and their feelings towards management and company leadership that decide the outcomes,” Bezanilla stressed.

Across companies from China and Taiwan participating in this year’s awards, the study results increased by 3 per cent and 2 per cent respectively, following drops in 2015, Bezanilla explained. In companies from Hong Kong, however, there was a decline of 3 per cent – an indication, he said, of anxiety about job security and business sustainability during a period of global economic and business uncertainty.

With another roller-coaster year anticipated for businesses in Greater China, Bezanilla said he believes companies considered by their employees as “Great Places to Work” hold a strategic advantage over their competitors. For example, he suggested, they are more resilient to challenges thrown up by business and economic concerns. They also have the advantage of lower levels of attrition and benefit from their employees acting as ambassadors to attract new talent.

“These companies are role models contributing to a better society,” he said, adding that Great Place to Work as an organisation is proud to be able to support them.

Following dinner and an impromptu group rendition of the Cliff Richard song *Congratulations and Celebrations*, Denzel Xin, research analyst at GPTW, highlighted some of the key findings from the Best

Companies to Work For in Greater China 2016 survey (for detailed results, see page 3).

Xin noted that while employees always like to receive higher salaries and more benefits, it is in the area of professional development and training where employers could be missing an opportunity to build stronger relationships with their staff.

He added that companies often declare that their employees are their most important asset, but evidence

from the Trust Index Survey and Culture Audit suggest that a lack of professional development and training opportunities leads employees – especially those among the 26-34 year old management and supervisor demographic group – to feel unappreciated or undervalued.

“Evidence suggests a large number of employees are as sensitive to training as they are to salary and this has a significant effect on emotional attachment, job satisfaction and,

ultimately, their intention to stay with an employer,” he explained.

Xin also pointed out that during activities such as M&As, cost-cutting, the implementation of technology, and new market initiatives – often referred to by organisations as periods of “transformation” – it is essential for companies to be transparent and have clear communications with employees to mitigate negative perceptions.

“Not being kept informed can lead to rumours causing anxiety among employees, which can translate into uncertainty and instability.”

With the main awards presentation just moments away, Mirley Perez, business development manager at GPTW, took to the stage to first pay tribute to four companies which had featured on the list for five years running. These companies – Autodesk, Hitachi Data Systems, National Instruments and NetApp – had demonstrated a sustained and persistent commitment to employee engagement and development, she said.

Perez added that with millennials now the predominant group in many workplaces, it is important for employers to be aware of their needs and aspirations. Without over-generalising, she said, millennials are highly connected with the world around them, but tend not to have the same ties to their jobs that previous generations had.

“They want to feel they are valued and engaged while making a positive difference,” she said. “They also want to know that the companies they work for are committed to corporate social responsibility activities.”

South China Morning Post and *Classified Post* are the exclusive media partners and event co-organisers of the Best Companies to Work for in Greater China 2016 conference and awards ceremony.

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Plantronics Trading (Suzhou)

Roche Diagnostics (Shanghai)

SAP Labs China

Shanghai Johnson

Smith & Nephew Greater China

Splunk

STS Gems

Third Bridge

W. L. Gore & Associates

¹ DHL Express's official name in Hong Kong is "DHL Express Hong Kong" and in mainland China is "DHL-Sinotrans International Air Courier".

² Mars includes all segments and brands, which are Mars Chocolate, Wrigley, Petcare, Royal Canin, M&M's World, Drinks, and Mars Information Service.

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Hyatt Hotels and Resorts

■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

Going above and beyond

Inspiration, innovation and integration are just three of the many areas companies are focusing on to create workplaces that exceed employee expectations. Reports by **Chris Davis**

Company type or industry sector matters little when it comes to creating a great place to work, as illustrated by the diversity of the 30 organisations recognised on the 2016 list of Best Companies to Work For in Greater China.

For CI&T China, a digital technology agency which provides digital implementation initiatives for leading global brands, a key factor in making the list is seeing its employees as the soul of the company. According to the US independent technology and market research company Forrester, CI&T uses best practices to build highly rated apps specifically because it brings design talent to the development team.

"We aim to create the most inviting and inspiring work environment to attract and retain top talent needed to create the cutting-edge work we do for our clients," says Felipe Rubim, Asia Pacific general manager of CI&T China.

A strong belief in the importance of talent development and innovation for driving business growth helped Cisco Greater China earn its award. Victoria Wu, general manager of human resources for Cisco Greater China, explains that talent development is a top priority for all managers and leaders at the company. "A great deal of time and energy is invested in this area," she says.

Wu adds that the company's culture focuses on "connecting everything, innovating everywhere and benefitting everyone". "Our culture helps to strengthen the emotional bond with employees, which enables them to unleash their full potential," she says.

Global hospitality group Hilton – which was included on the Best Companies to Work for in Greater China list for the second year running – has worked hard to become an employer of choice. According to Brendan Toomey, Asia Pacific vice-president of human resources, the group motivates and energises its employees to focus on doing their best in order to improve the quality of services it offers guests. This, however, is just one of the drivers that inspire the group to always reach for new heights.

"By offering great careers, great rewards and a great environment, we have been able to support our expansion in China by continuing to attract, develop and retain top talent," Toomey says. "Our employees are fundamental to providing the world-class service for which Hilton is known."

For semiconductor solutions provider Infineon Technologies, taking part in the awards is part of a public commitment to creating a happier, more motivated team and a better working environment, says Dr Su Hua, president of China mainland, Hongkong and Taiwan regions and managing director of China.

Su explains that the employee survey results gathered through Great Place to Work's assessment process provide important feedback on how well the company is doing and assist its efforts in creating a great working environment. "By ensuring we provide a great place to work, we hope the achievements of individual employees can move forward hand in hand with the company," he says.

Su adds that a concerted three-year effort has resulted in a drop in attrition

rates to about half of the market level expected for hi-tech companies. "At the end of last year, employees with more than five years' tenure with the company accounted for about 50 per cent of headcount and employees with 10 years' service or more accounted for about 15 per cent," he says.

A tradition of grooming talents in-house has helped Meltwater, a developer of media monitoring software, achieve a place on the list for the last three years, says Ewan Ross, area director for Greater China.

"All of our senior management across the globe joined Meltwater at entry level," Ross points out. "They were promoted to where they are internally due to their exceptional performance."

At fashion retailer H&M, Magnus Olsson, country manager at H&M Greater China, says he is proud the company was included on the list, adding to previous recognition in 2012, 2014 and 2015. He explains how focusing on internal promotion is one of the main factors in H&M's employee value proposition and helps support the career development of its large workforce.

"At H&M, we fill almost 70 per cent of all available roles through internal promotion," Olsson says. "There is no pre-set career path as we promote endless opportunities and a unique corporate culture."

Last year, the company featured employees from Hong Kong, the mainland and Taiwan in its "Place of Possible" television campaign, which was conceived to illustrate how careers with H&M are flexible and full of possibilities. As part of the campaign, employees described their real-life career experiences and aspirations, aiming to inspire and attract ambitious talent to join.

Audio specialist Plantronics has its Greater China base in Suzhou, with branch offices spread across the country. Susan Hansen, vice president of sales and marketing for Asia Pacific, says the company goes the extra mile to offer initiatives to make working life manageable, engaging and rewarding.

For example, in addition to internal development programmes and educational support for degrees and

(a)

(b)

A total of 30 companies covering industries from IT and finance to FMCG and hospitality were honoured at this year's awards.

We fill almost 70 per cent of all available roles through internal promotion. There is no pre-set career path as we promote endless opportunities.

MAGNUS OLSSON, COUNTRY MANAGER, H&M GREATER CHINA

job-related certifications, employees are offered complimentary membership to sports clubs and professionally led workout sessions in the company gym.

Hansen also believes that the company's commitment to CSR activities helps strengthen employee engagement. "This award is a testament to our positive work

environment of trust, transparency and respect," she says.

At Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, Katie Carter, vice president of human resources, explains that the core purpose is to care for people so they can be their best. "Our purpose is at the centre of everything we do and caring for our colleagues so they can care for our guests is our first priority," she says.

This is the third year in a row that Hyatt has made the list and Carter is delighted that all the hard work that has gone into developing a positive culture has been recognised.

"We have created an environment built on empathetically understanding our guests, and a culture that flourishes from an extraordinary group of dedicated colleagues."

Honouring persistence and perseverance

Most organisations recognise that having a reputation for workplace excellence can help attract and retain top talent, bolster productivity and set them apart from the competition. Maintaining such a workplace and creating an environment in which employees feel genuinely appreciated and engaged, however, requires sustained effort and total commitment from the top down.

At this year's Best Companies to Work For in Greater China awards, four companies – Autodesk, Hitachi Data Systems, National Instruments, NetApp –

were singled out for special recognition for appearing on the list for five consecutive years, demonstrating their exceptional persistence and long-term commitment to their employees.

KC Chan, managing director, Greater China, at National Instruments (NI), says that being recognised for the fifth consecutive year is an indication of the high level of trust that has been forged between employees and the company. As part of NI China, Hongkong and Taiwan's human resources mission to provide skills and career development, it works closely with

business leaders to ensure its talent are channelled through well-structured Engineering Leadership Programmes (ELPs).

"ELPs are our recruiting machine to attract and hire the best and brightest talent who are given the opportunity to join accelerated development paths," Chan says.

Featuring in-class, on-the-job training lasting two years, ELPs provide conduits to a choice of career paths, Chan adds. As a result, most of NI's commercial and engineering leadership positions are filled from within and the employee turnover rate

is 25 per cent below the markets in which the company operates.

Giving examples of innovative HR practices, Chan says every year, the HR department in NI China and Taiwan organises "Employee Appreciation Week", involving a week-long series of "thank you" events. These include learning and growth activities, charity initiatives, competitions, literary activities, and interaction with management.

The company also provides a furnished nursing room for new mothers in its Shanghai office and organises roundtable

events for female employees which allow them to explore their potential as engineers. Across the APAC region, between 20 and 30 per cent of mid- to senior level leadership positions at NI are held by females.

Chan adds that building engagement with employees at NI begins from the moment of recruitment with mentoring programmes, orientations and outward-bound events such as bonfire camps.

Staying competitive in China's rapidly growing technology market is of utmost importance for companies operating in this sector and for NetApp Greater China, having

employees that show an unwavering commitment to satisfying customers is essential.

Fredy Cheung, NetApp's Greater China area vice-president, says the storage and data management provider focuses on teamwork and having fun while doing the job. These form an integral part of its unique company culture, designed to generate employee buy-in and engagement.

To further support employee engagement, Cheung says NetApp offers various wellness and leadership-enhancement programmes. "We offer development opportunities in an environment where individuals are encouraged to innovate and feel they are connected to the organisation's future," he explains.

For Hitachi Data Systems (HDS), there are several factors that enable the IT services and solutions provider to successfully attract and retain key talent, says Daniel Chong, vice president and general manager of HDS China and Taiwan. These include mutual trust between executives and employees, close cooperation across different teams and sectors, friendly and harmonious working environments, and a commitment to work-life balance.

"In China, 40 per cent of our employees have worked for HDS for more than five years, and about 12 per cent of them have been with us for more than a decade," Chong highlights.

US-based software company Autodesk, which creates software for engineering, architectural and media companies, has managed to build a reputation for employee happiness to match the reputation of its products, explains Ling Zhao, head of R&D at Autodesk China.

"We're extremely proud and honoured to be recognised as one of the best companies to work for in Greater China. It's a huge recognition of our efforts in China to build up a great environment for our employees, while also showing the great confidence and trust Autodesk's employees have in the company," he says.

"We create an environment that inspires Autodesk employees to do their best, and we are dedicated to unleash every employee's creativity to fulfil their potential. This recognition will continue to give us power and confidence to unite with our employees to lead the future of making things and help more people imagine, design and create a better world."



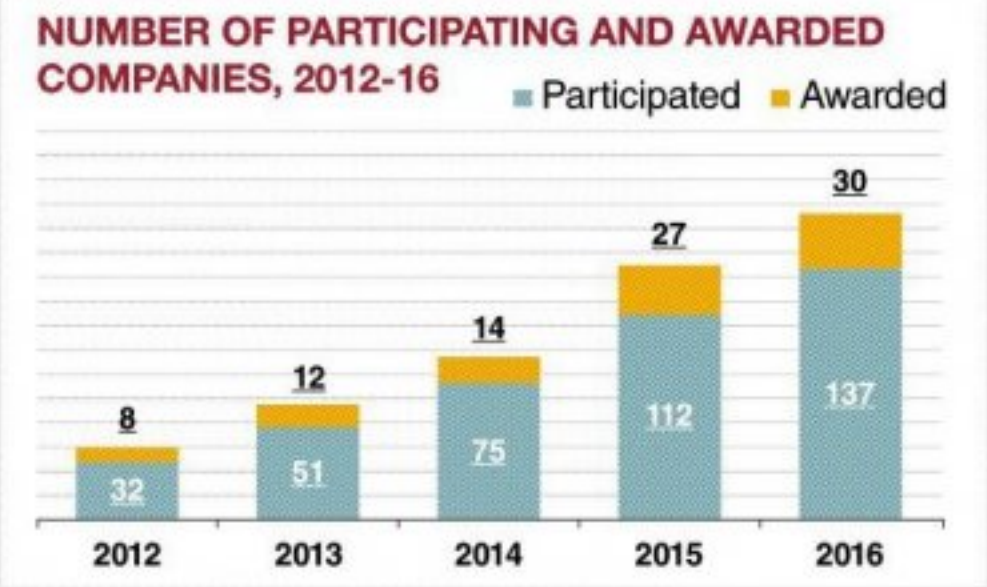
Greater China 2016 study shows region continues to outperform Asia, but many companies still not acting on their promises



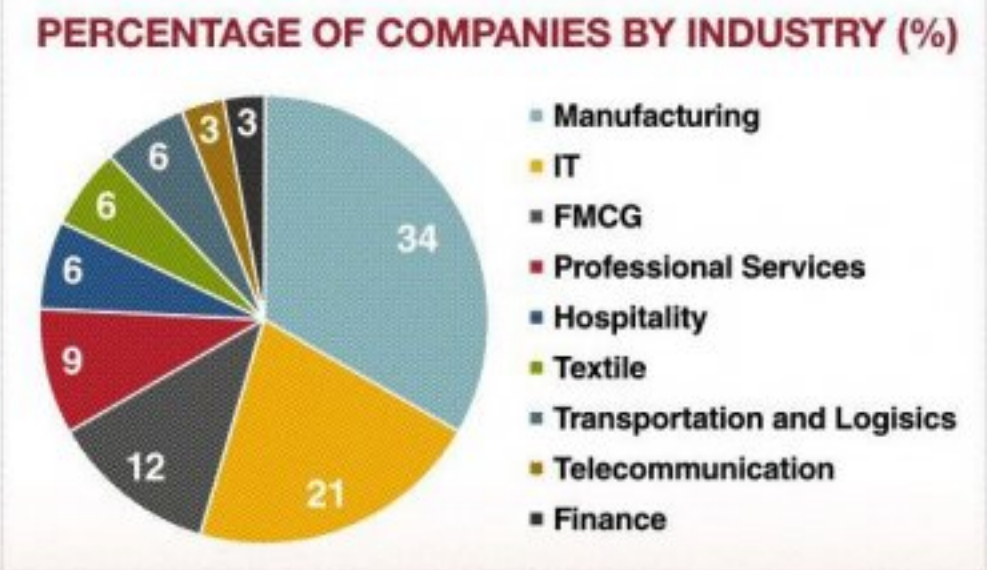
Founded in 1990, the Great Place to Work® Institute is a global human resources consulting, research and training firm specialising in organisational trust. It produces the **FORTUNE 100 Best Companies to Work For®** list in the United States and the **25 Best Multinational Workplaces** list published by **CNN and Fortune**. The Great Place to Work® Institute operates in 57 countries and assesses around 8,000 companies every year, covering more than 11 million employees.

Great Place to Work® extended its services to Greater China in 2011 and started a strategic partnership with the *South China Morning Post* in 2014. Over the last five years, it has been joined by an increasing number of companies of varying sizes, industries and regions, all of whom are eager to build up their own great workplaces. In 2016, Great Place to Work® assessed **137 companies** encompassing around **210,000 employees**.

Mr Denzel Xin, Head of Research at Great Place to Work® Greater China, says that with the rapid growth of participating organisations over the past five years, there are now 30 companies on the list of Best Companies to Work For in Greater China, coming from nine different industries.



Among all participants, the industry with the highest number of companies assessed was manufacturing, representing 34% of all companies. This is followed by the IT and FMCG industries, respectively. However, when looking at the ratio of participating companies per industry to the number of winners per industry, the manufacturing (22%) and FMCG (18%) industries are below the median – though the difference is not significant.

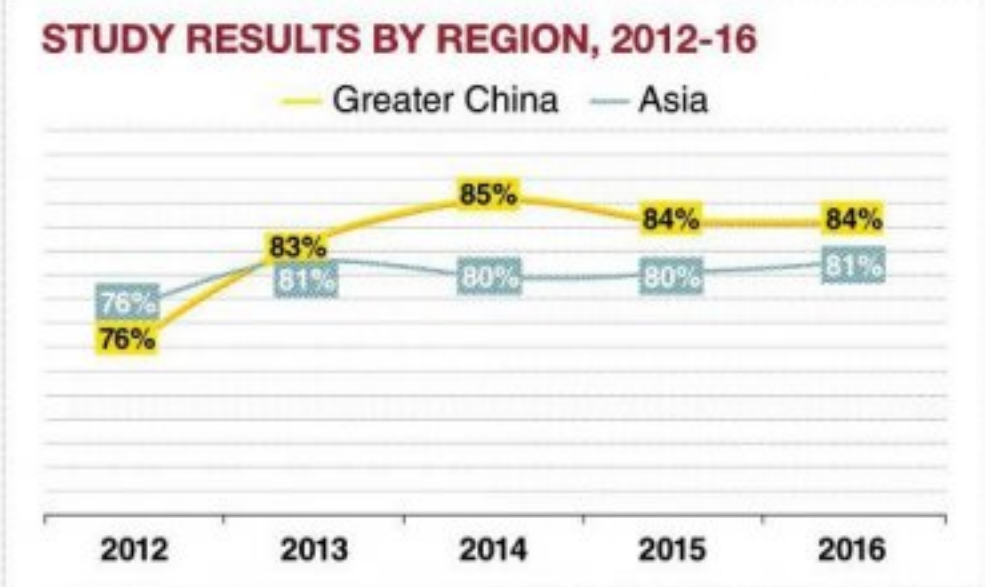


We use two measurement tools to simultaneously assess the offering from the company and the perception of the employees. Of the total score, 33 percent comes from a process called a Culture Audit®, through which Great Place to Work®'s consultants evaluate a company's people-management practices, policies and procedures in accordance with nine different dimensions, such as "inspiring" or "developing".

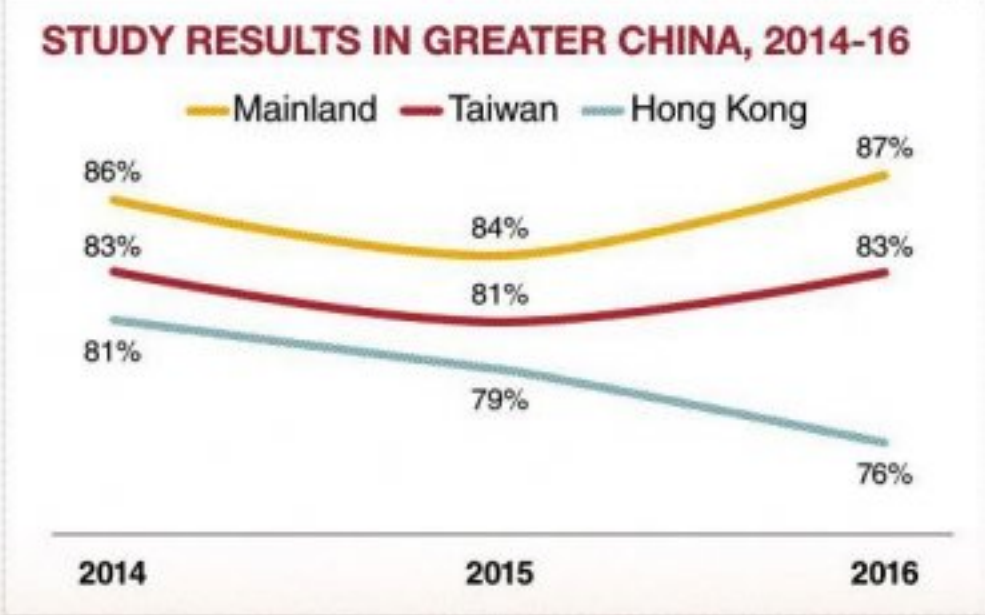
"We believe a good institutional background will motivate everyone who works in it and make them go the extra mile in their work, especially those invisible aspects not measured by KPI," Xin says. "After interviewing thousands of managers all over the world, we define a great workplace from the perspective of 'everyone gives their personal best, people work like a team or family, and eventually we reach the organisational goal together'."

However, Xin makes an important point – good practices and infrastructure are only half of the equation, or even less. That is why the Culture Audit® contributes just one-third to a company's final score. The other two-thirds comes from the employee's perception, measured by a 58-part questionnaire called the "Trust Index™".

From the survey data, we find that Greater China performs better than the average for Asia, but the gap is narrowing.



Looking closer, we find that mainland China and Taiwan are on the up after experiencing a drop in 2015; Hong Kong, however, continues to fall, as it has for the last two years.



Knowing what really affects employees' level of trust towards their company is very important. In the Trust Index® survey, two open-ended questions are asked to collect more personal stories and feelings that go beyond numerical data. While compensation and benefits is still the topic of most concern among all employees, there is no significant impact on an employee's intention of staying at or leaving a company if the company's salary falls within the 75% percentile of the market average.



"Employees actually give much more weight to their personal development than we thought," Xin says. "Almost every company claims that 'people are the most valuable asset we cherish'. However, the Culture Audit® shows that many companies don't act on their promises."

From robust statistical analysis, we find that the extent of training and development significantly affects employees' affective commitment (their bond to the company) and job satisfaction (their bond to the job). These two invisible factors explain 50 per cent of voluntary turnover.

The other results highlight another important finding from this year: we are living in a time of change. Companies are undergoing transformations driven by a number of reasons, such as the pursuit of new technology, mergers and acquisitions, new initiatives, and changing strategies. These changes will unavoidably cause instability and uncertainty, which makes communication and realignment vitally important. However, most companies' effective communication stops at manager level, as most managers are not equipped to effectively communicate with their team members the necessity of changing the way of doing things, and how to link daily work to the bigger picture.





Thank you for attending the
Great Place to Work® Conference and
Award Ceremony on December 8, 2016!



We hope you had a great experience and gained valuable insight from the expert speakers. Please stay tuned for more updates on our upcoming events and programmes.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS

We would like to express our sincere recognition to all participants for making the 2016 Best Companies to Work For® in Greater China a success.





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■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

Uniting vision with values

Three Hyatt colleagues share stories showing why the hotel group has been honoured for the third year in a row, writes **John Brennan**

Every company that hopes to succeed in today's competitive business environment must strive to ensure they are customer-focused. However, an organisation that not only adopts this approach, but also goes all out in making its staff feel as valued as its customers, is one that is turning a strategy into a culture.

There are few sectors in which this is more necessary than Hong Kong's busy hospitality sector and for Hyatt Hotels Hong Kong, its efforts to integrate its values in such a way has once again earned it recognition as one of the Best Companies to Work For in Greater China.

This is the third consecutive year in which Hyatt has won this award. To shed more light on the qualities that keep the group in the spotlight, *Classified Post* spoke to a trio of long-serving current employees, all of whom were quick to highlight the supportive, inclusive and flexible culture which makes them feel they are part of the family.

Grand Hyatt Hong Kong opened for business 27 years ago and Jackson Chan has been there ever since the beginning. As transportation team

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Inclusion Casual workers are treated as regular members of the team, receiving equal attention as their full-time counterparts.

Appreciation Managers are open-minded and welcome ideas and opinions, understanding the importance of first-hand experience.

leader at the hotel he is responsible for valet parking and chauffeuring guests, and he sees one of his most important duties as creating a great first impression for guests.

For Chan, the way Hyatt promotes teamwork and an open-minded approach – as opposed to adhering to a strict hierarchical structure – is something he greatly values. He also respects how the group provides opportunities for career advancement regardless of previous education or experience.

"In my 27 years I've seen a lot of my colleagues go from the lowest to higher levels," he says. "It's not because of their university education, but because this company gives them the training and the chance to be successful."

Chan notes that besides getting to drive some amazing cars, one of the most enjoyable aspects of his job is working with his colleagues. "They are just like my brothers and sisters. Every day when I come to work, it is like coming to a second home."

Choki Wong is assistant manager of the café at Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui. As well as looking after guests who visit the café, Wong is responsible for training her colleagues, overseeing room service – which sees her co-ordinating with various other departments in seeking ways to take care of customers and keep them happy and satisfied – and working with the kitchen team to plan different promotions to boost revenue.

Wong joined the Hyatt Regency's events department when it opened in 2009. She worked as a part-time waitress before becoming permanent staff in 2012. She was then promoted to team leader and this year became an assistant manager. She explains that one of the main reasons she committed to a full-time position with Hyatt was the opportunity for learning and development.



Hyatt colleagues (sitting, from left) Phyllis Lai, Choki Wong and (standing) Jackson Chan all point to opportunities for training and development as one of the reasons why they enjoy working at the hotel group so much.

"There is a strong focus on training, even for casual staff," she explains. "Before an event, hotel management will devote up to an hour to training prior to the start of duties so everyone is completely clear about the standards and requirements for that particular event."

The hotel's emphasis on inclusion also helped convince Wong that she could forge a career as a full-time associate with Hyatt. "When I was a casual worker, I didn't feel neglected in terms of communication. When managers shared case studies, and discussed issues and challenges, they included casual workers in the group."

For Phyllis Lai, front office manager at the Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Sha

Tin, her main duties include taking care of both hotel guests and her colleagues at the front desk, ensuring both are happy with their Hyatt experience. Though born in Hong Kong, Lai joined Hyatt in Hawaii straight after graduation in 2009 after spending her university years there.

"I started as a front-office guest service agent," she explains. "After about a year and a half I got promoted to the supervisor job at the front desk. Then, after returning to Hong Kong, I joined Hyatt's corporate leadership programme, which is a one-year programme that allows associates to try different departments."

Echoing Wong's feelings about inclusion, Lai says she feels genuinely

appreciated by management. "My manager is very open-minded and will listen to my ideas and opinions," she notes. "The management team has regular meetings with frontline staff to hear what they have to say, especially the challenges they face and the positive things they want to share."

Lai believes the company does its best to listen to the needs of its colleagues and make improvements where necessary. She cites the "Walk in Your Shoes" programme as an example of the ways in which senior management endeavours to stay in touch with the day-to-day experiences of Hyatt staff.

In this programme, general managers and department heads take

time out from their normal roles to wear the uniforms and take on the work of other colleagues, from room attendants and pastry chefs to engineers and painters.

Lai says she learns something new every day in her job. From the challenges involved with meeting customers' daily needs to dealing with things like non-functioning toilets and fire drills, the range of issues that can arise is endless. But these challenges are part of what makes her job interesting and enjoyable.

"You never know what's going to happen," she points out. "It's a very tough job but it's very satisfying. At the end of each day you feel like you've accomplished a lot."

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