

KAREN SAYS

ASEAN: UNITED IN DIVERSITY

DURING the time I worked for an NGO (non-governmental organisation) in Cambodia, my Swiss boss remarked that he found it interesting that “culture shock” affected people like me – Asians moving just a few time zones from home to Phnom Penh – more than it affected people coming from all over the world.

Coming from Malaysia, we certainly have grown up with diverse groups of friends and colleagues – but I do see what Pierre’s point was. Even as we identify with the large and important market of Asia Pacific, we do realise that every country is unique, and how absolutely fascinating the process of discovering each other is!

This week, in recognition of Malaysia’s Chairmanship of Asean 2015, we dedicate this issue to our Asean neighbours – looking at the opportunities that the Asean Economic Community (AEC) will bring to employees, human resources (HR) practitioners and organisations alike.

Mark Ellwood looks at the impact of the AEC on employment patterns across the Asean region, highlighting the opportunities as well as challenges that organisations may face, and some important considerations to benefit fully from the regional integration.

At a kick-off meeting a few years ago where I so very rapidly met over 600 colleagues from Johnson & Johnson offices across Asean, I remember vividly how everyone shone with pride sharing their cultures and accomplishments.

While we celebrate Asean diversity, Salika Suksuwan focuses on diversity in all workplaces – regardless of where we are in the world. She highlights the need for organisations and leaders to understand and address the needs of a diverse and changing workforce as ultimately, diversity drives better business performance.

Zooming out a little, Marshall Goldsmith makes the case for creating a positive global community – stressing the need to meet three key challenges.

Before you suffer from vertigo, we zoom right back in again to hear the account of one expat who is overwhelmingly convinced that Malaysia is the place to be for one’s career and future. Christopher Moore shares his first impressions of Malaysia, and the reasons he chose to stay.

This week, Joseph Tan really means business and aims immediately at holes in the HR strategy that some companies may unwittingly perpetuate. From pinpointing the superficialities (which people will eventually see through), Tan then shares his manpower sustainability strategies.

On a related note, Brian Fielkow reminds us of the realities of the connected world we live in – and that “the cameras are always rolling”. With regard to HR-related issues, Fielkow provides sound advice on how to tackle them, as well as how to prevent them from the start.

Have a fabulous Saturday!

KAREN NEOH
Editor
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OF MUTUAL TRUST, RESPECT AND FRIENDSHIP

By LIM LAY HSUAN
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WHEN we were children, we often heard friends utter this phrase during a misunderstanding, “I don’t want to ‘friend’ you.”

In most instances, after a few days of silent treatment, relationships are restored when one offers an olive branch to the other party, usually by initiating a conversation, and both parties are willing to forgive each other and move on.

“WE DECLARE WAR!”

It was a similar sight witnessed during the Silega Cold War™, one of the business simulations offered by Leaderonomics. In the simulation, we each governed a “country”, where we spoke in different languages, possessed different resources and had different needs.

To survive as a country on a “monthly” basis, we had to maintain a minimum level of resources as set in the simulation’s guidelines. In order to do that, we made alliances with different countries to help us meet those needs.

Because some countries spoke only one language, our alliance extended to several layers of communication.

Unfortunately, by the second “month” of the simulation, we started to witness the ugly side of countries declaring wars against each other for survival, even though we were from the same region.

It came to a point where country “X” didn’t want to speak to country “Y” in the following round because “Y” had refused to assist “X” in an earlier war.

THE TURNING POINT

Thanks to a cue by the facilitator who reminded us what our real end goal was, we finally realised that it was pointless to keep declaring war against each other in every round.



After that lightbulb moment, we slowly realigned our strategy to help each other out instead, for the sake of our region’s collective survival and sovereignty (and my sanity!).

I witnessed what I personally thought was the watershed in the simulation when country “X” finally spoke to country “Y” to keep the flow of communication and resources going for other countries.

What a beautiful sight it was when all of us began to help each other for the common good. Some of us were literally giving out our extra resources to countries in need without expecting anything in return. At the end of the simulation, we survived and were happily at peace with each other.

IN CONCLUSION

As Malaysia chairs the Asean Economic Community 2015, each member state plays a vital role to work towards one vision, one identity and one community.

To prosper together as a region, as learnt from the simulation, each member state needs to put aside their differences to strengthen the Asean connectivity (and friendship) through collaborative efforts in economic and social development.

And so, here I go again, another song playing in my head while penning this article. This time, it’s *That’s What Friends Are For*, a masterpiece written by Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager.

QUOTES

01

“It is important that individually and jointly we should create a deep awareness that we cannot survive for long as independent but isolated peoples unless we also think and act together and unless we prove by deeds that we belong to a family of South-East Asian nations bound together by ties of friendship and goodwill and imbued with our own ideals and aspirations and determined to shape our own destiny.” – **Tun Abdul Razak Hussein**

02

“And those countries who are interested, genuinely interested, in the stability of South-East Asia, the prosperity of South-East Asia, and better economic and social conditions, will welcome small countries getting together to pool their collective resources and their collective wisdom to contribute to the peace of the world.” – **S. Rajaratnam**

03

“Particularly what millions of men and women in our part of the world want is to erase the old and obsolete concept of domination and subjection of the past and replace it with the new spirit of give and take, of equality and partnership.” – **Thanat Khoman**

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