

# HRSINGAPORE

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## **Question - HR as a Neutral Party - Update 1**

Hi all,

I am currently appointed as the first HR person in my company, working alongside the admin manager who has been handling HR administrative functions solo since day one.

Our company was an SME and was previously a family-owned business.

Up till recently, they have adopt a somewhat laissez-faire HR management system, with some staff enjoying 'special treatments' e.g claiming above and beyond the stipulated medical benefits, reporting to work late and going off as and when pleases, applying for leave via whassap / sms and not follow up with forms when back to work .... the basic terms and conditions as stipulated in their employment contract.

The company was acquired by a foreign MNC early this year. Day-to-day operation is still status quo.

The work of putting things ' in place ' fell on my lap when I joined the company.

Naturally some staff are not happy with the enforcement and my ensuring they follow company policies. They were told nothing much will change (by the ex-management team).

I believe what I am facing is just the beginning of the rest to come ...

I have also drafted an Employee handbook and HR policies for the upper management to discuss and decide.

Honestly, I do not know what is worse than having to face confrontation with staff who knows there will be changes but are still not prepared to accept these changes.

I am also not in favour of collecting feedbacks before any implementations as I do not want to be seen as discussing details of company matters that are confidential.

Please share.

Thank you.

Khim

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## REPLY 1

In my opinion, I think you are acting correctly in terms of good HR practices and in the interest of both the employer and employee.

Yvonne

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## REPLY 2

Dear Khim,

Thank you for sharing, indeed you have a MIGHTY TASK.

Just to share that I was placed in a similar place just like you 7 years ago when I came back from Singapore to Malaysia. I had to start from scratch and all my hard work has paid off.

Most importantly you have the new management to support you in every move you make. The first few things I did was to personalize my relationship with each employee, I walked the place, I traveled to the branch, I sat with every manager and I made sure I heard them and gave them an opportunity to share with me what their expectations were, hear what their challenges were. I had my feet grounded and humbled myself to hear them out.

I mixed and matched the need to elevate the present basic needs then slowly implemented the new policies, the employee handbook. Revised the policies, showed statistic reports to the management before implementing the new policies, handling tardiness was the worst. At that point of time my goals were to breakthrough and reform the work force / organization to a level much higher than the present state. We as HR practitioners have to wear many hats so to speak.

Key point --- The more I listened to them, They listened to me. Those who didn't budge, got my warning letters, work a long side the Managers to handle the team. Initially there was a time the turnover was so high, either people left because they cant accept the culture or because changes were disrupting some peoples comfort zone and threatened to leave. We let them leave. Only negotiate and keep key people who was an asset to the company and those who contributed towards the organization.

- Have a great feedback session, it will help - Find out why any sort of change is not possible.
- Build relationship, As HR we uphold the policies and also executioners but we are also the Bridge between the employees and management
- Dont let those leaving effect you emotionally, let those who cannot accept the positive change go - Don't let them weigh you down.
- Re-Hire for an excellent mix of positive minded people to infuse fresh energy to the

group

- Re-locate those who are not suited, mostly getting people to love their JOB make a huge difference. re-ignite their passion. They will be more adapting.
- Team building and Training an initial investment - to see great results its a must
- Have reward programs. Employees who feels appreciated will give you their best without even asking.

End of the day, we have a wonderful work force, and excellent culture and we have been very successful. Haven't looked back since.

I leave back to Singapore end of the year, I just hope to be where I can contribute the same way again.

All the best to you Khim.

Marina

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### **REPLY 3**

Hi Khim

It's always in a difficult situation like this when you need to balance the interests from both parties – the company & the employees.

It's gonna be important for you to get the buy in from the management team & support this top down.

Then the next step is about educating the line managers on the rationale why this has to be done, especially when monetary related benefits / leave would have an impact on the company's financials. Imagine someone has accumulated a huge number of Annual Leave balance & leaves the company – be it voluntary or non-voluntary. Have the line managers accountable for their own teams & this is what they are being hired for in the first place.

Finally, it would then be company-wide announcement to be made to all employees. Let the line managers deal with the unhappy staff at their end.

Hope the above helps.

Sabina

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### **REPLY 4**

Hi Khim,

Congrats to you, firstly.

Well, understand your situation and heavy responsibilities.

You need to do what you need to do.

To set things right, from the beginning, the proper way, since you took over the role and responsibilities.

You cannot make everyone happy, for sure. You don't need to.

You are doing the right thing, back to the basic, get the handbook, rules, policies etc done first.

Drafting the Employee handbook and HR policies for the upper management to discuss and decide, is the right way ahead.

Once approved and signed, you will implement accordingly.

You may or may not need to discuss or get feedback from employees before any implementation.

You can benchmark from other similar industry or companies.

As long as what is written, is reasonable and meeting the MOM requirements and the law.

You will encounter resistance and unpleasant remarks/feedback, for sure.

Take it positively, as those employees have enjoyed the "freedom" too much in the past.

You just need to reply :"" These were decided and set by Management, you can either feedback to Management directly or to me to bring up to them "" , when you encounter confrontation.

Any feedback, you will consolidate and report back to higher Management.

Be brave, stand firm and enforce all the rules and policies.

Take all necessary actions accordingly, when someone break the rules or refuse to cooperate.

There will be culture shock, during this transition period, for the implementation.

After few months, when all employees have adjusted and settled down to the new system, everything will be on track and you will be fine.

Don't worry, enjoy your work.

Good luck

Yamada

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## **REPLY 5**

Dear Khim,

The single most important thing that you have to answer to yourself is do you have the top management's full backing and support for all the changes that you are implementing or going to implement? This is the single most critical factor for a successful change implementation. If you do not have strong and solid backing, the road ahead is going to be

challenging and many things will go back to the same as before despite you putting up a proper HR framework. A lot of your hard work will be wasted. You may have all the papers done but at implementation level you will meet a lot of obstacles. Change implementation is a very challenging job. But if you have the top management's backing, you can do it quite confidently despite all the commotion and confrontation. You just have to be firm and take independent stand. I suppose there is a strategic direction for the Company when the MNC took over the Company. HR has to align with this strategic direction. If your HR change implementation (regardless whether it is at business level or day to day functional level) is in line with the Company's strategic direction then you are in the right track. Changes has to be seen as objective, unbiased and is to meet the vision of the Company. However, if the new MNC management is not pushing for change, then there is really no point in fighting this battle alone.

I am speaking from experience. When I took over HR in my current Company I had to consolidate the HR processes of 7 subsidiary companies – all of the companies have been operating in silos with their own systems, rules and regulations for the longest time. Asking them to surrender the HR functions to a centralized HR was a huge battle. If not for top Management's firm backing it could not have been done. So my take is that, go have a word with top management first and seek their full backing. If you have that, implementation can be pushed through despite all the resistance and confrontation. As I have seen it, some of the worst confrontations come not from the ground but from the business unit managers and line managers – so you definitely need top management to support you. Once the business unit managers and line managers have accepted the changes, the rest is easier to tackle.

All the best.

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