

# HR MATTERS

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## LOCATING AND RECRUITING THE BEST

# CONTENTS January 2013

## Features

### Workforce Trends

#### 11 Passing Along Wisdom When the Younger Set Isn't Interested?

Why we need to get techno-savvy souls to embrace the wisdom that older co-workers can share. By *Robert W Wendover*.

### Organisational Change

#### 14 Leadership Development – It's All in the Mind!

Effective leadership models and ideas cannot concentrate solely on behaviours – attitudes and emotions are also hugely important, *Alison France* asserts.

### Courage

#### 16 Courageous Leadership Skills : Backers or Busters?

*Sandra Ford Walston* explains that one way in which a leader constructs courage is by revealing vulnerability.

### Positive Psychology

#### 18 Keeping What We've Got!

Could it be that the reason we sometimes miss out on achieving desired outcomes lies in the fact that we change too often and too soon? *Sulynn Choong* makes the case for repetition –not just repetition but incremental development at each turn.

### Leadership

#### 20 Exemplary Leadership : Encouraging the Heart

Encouragement is absolutely essential to sustaining employees' commitment to organisations and outcomes, says *Judith Brown, Ph.D.*

### HR Practitioner

#### 26 Brand Building at Gamuda

Recent accolades prove that human capital and talent management are key concerns for this leading infrastructure play, and instrumental to its long term sustainability. By *Peter Raj*.

### Workforce Planning

#### 28 Building a Sustainable Talent Supply: The Drive to Strengthen Workforce Planning in Malaysia

With talent scarcity believed to increase over time, it is no wonder why there has been growth in the RPO (Recruitment Process Outsourcing) sector. *Doug Edmonds* outlines the business benefits so associated.

### People and Sustainability

#### 29 Care-Connect-Co-Create : A Message from 900 A.D.?

According to *Jayantee M Saha*, history proves that everything we do whether as individuals, organisations or society is a matter of choice and brings consequences, good or bad.

### Building Leaders

#### 31 Grow Your Brain

If your brain is indeed the most important part of your body, what are you doing to ensure you understand how it works and how best it can be developed? *Roshan Thiran* is on a new journey to discover the power of the brain in leadership.

### Special Feature - RECRUITING

#### 33 What Does It Take to Locate and Recruit the Best?

*Rowena Morais* talks to three winners from Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For 2012 List about the recruiting landscape and projections for 2013.

### Talent Management

#### 38 Millennials Reshaping the Workforce

*Kartina Abdul Latif* talks to *Isabella Chan* about the ramifications of key findings from a PwC Malaysia survey on how our workforce is being reshaped by the preferences of a new generation of talent.

### Trends

#### 39 What's in the Year Ahead?

Are we the calm in the maelstrom? Do we focus on small, impactful activities continuously? How should we approach our employees' health and wellbeing and is this the year of focused convergence? HR leaders tell *Rowena Morais* what they see ahead, for themselves and for HR.

### Awards

#### 45 Malaysia's 100 Leading Graduate Employers for 2012

The inaugural Malaysia's 100 Leading Graduate Employers Conference focused on attracting and retaining talent. The Conference also recognised and rewarded the most popular graduate recruiters in the eyes of students and fresh graduates. Sector Winners and Finalists announced.

### Outsourcing

#### 46 Latest Trends in HR Outsourcing in the APAC Region

Key findings from an exploratory survey on human resource outsourcing. By *Mandy Sim*.

### Governance

#### 50 Improving Risk Competency Should Be Top Priority for HR

*Vijayam Nadarajah* says that if corporations do not have sufficient people at all levels of the organisation analysing business risks, then companies will not be apprised of risk status –risk priorities will either not be there or be high enough for a comprehensive focus.

## In This Issue

09 News

13 Featured Blog Dan Pink

23 Lit What the Most Successful People Do on the Weekend and Making Ideas Happen

26 HR Practitioner Lai Tak Ming

30 Diary

46 Q&A Latest Trends in HR Outsourcing in the APAC Region



33

For us, the most significant factor in attracting the right calibre of talent is the beauty, consistency and dedication to the technical quality of each of our films. That's what people see and know. – **Tim Norman**



39

A key component in driving tomorrow's business success is the fact that the workforce ethos is changing. – **Adriana Botha**



26

Every organisation should have a story to tell. Without a story, there is no dream, to capture the imagination. – **Lai Tak Ming**



28

While RPO is usually associated with reducing cost to hire, its positive impact on business means that it should not be thought only as an outsourcing solution in hard times. – **Doug Edmonds**



# WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO LOCATE AND RECRUIT THE BEST?

**ROWENA MORAIS** talks to three HR leaders representing winners on Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For 2012 List – Zappos.com, Dreamworks Animation and Qualcomm. We discuss the recruiting landscape, the inherent challenges and enticing dream candidates who are not looking to move.

## What are your projections for 2013 in terms of the recruiting landscape in your industry?

**Christa Foley** : We are always hiring for our customer loyalty team (our call centre). But we do get many referrals from our employees, so there are many candidates coming through at any one point. We are also hiring for our merchandising and technology teams, for example, software engineers.

**Tim Norman** : I see continued growth and a more competitive recruiting landscape, especially internationally. The established animation, visual effects and game companies will continue to look for the top technical and artistic talent across the globe while new companies continue to sprout up in emerging markets increasing competition for all studios. In the past, however, talent had fewer options.

As the appetite for higher quality CG animation and VFX increases, as the media consumer continues to understand that CG animation can look rich and elegant, that there is an art and deep technical craft to CG animation, local studios across the globe continue to deliver top-tier product, drawing talent away from the larger studios. I think all large studios or established VFX shops will have to consider a more global competitive market in 2013 and identify ways to continue to excite and recruit the best. As it applies directly to us, we are really excited about 2013 because of our new studio in Shanghai, China that will allow us to focus on recruiting talent that may not have been as accessible to us in the past.

**William Chin** : Consumer demand for smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices are growing at an astronomical rate, this attributed to the continued adoption of devices embedded with 3G and next generation wireless technology. The Asia market has become the worldwide leader in terms of market share for wireless



connected devices. Boasting a significant share of mobile users and since some of the top mobile manufacturers are also located here, it makes sense to bring engineering talent closer to our customer base. This in turn is driving the increase in hiring wireless engineering talent in Asia.

## What is your most challenging issue when locating and recruiting the best talent?

**Christa Foley** : Technology is the toughest area to fill - this is consistent across the board in the US. Our challenges are shortage of talent and our location. Las Vegas, where we are headquartered, is not currently considered the hotspot for technology. However, we've undertaken work to revitalise Downtown Las Vegas to change this. Our third challenge is related to the lack of awareness that we are a technology company. Whilst we are an online retailer, we place a huge emphasis on technology – so, there is more to us than working on a pricing engine.

How do we deal with these challenges? The talent shortage is addressed by employing a degree of creativity in our recruiting strategies. We do consider candidates who may not be looking to move or who are already firmly established. There is a certain amount of direct sourcing. We're also pretty active in social media, for example, tweetups (like meetups). We've launched a college recruitment programme, specifically on the technology side so that we can source and attract people early. More recently, we've launched a training programme where people are paid to come in and get training on coding, for example. While it is still in beta mode, the results are positive – we've hired up to 40 percent of those in these programmes.

The location issue is addressed by spending time and effort on promoting and emphasising family and culture in the city, which candidates may not be entirely familiar with. But we find that what works best for us is getting the candidates to come physically to this city and then giving them a tour of our office. We find that the entire experience is immersive and the conversion rate is good.

While we maintain a small office centred

on innovation in San Francisco, all of our people are right here in Las Vegas. We believe the team needs to stay together but ultimately, we treat people as adults. People have the choice whether to work from home when needed or leave early and we work on ensuring that people understand this and the culture of our organisation during the recruitment process.

**Tim Norman** : Recruiting the best technical talent is a little more difficult for us. People assume we are just an animation company, a company that makes movies, and only hire artists and production talent. Of course we do, but we are a technology company as well as a film studio, sourcing and recruiting top technical and overhead talent from around the world. Unlike finding animators that have seen every one of our movies and have wanted to animate since watching Shrek, we have to source and recruit software engineers that don't realise that DreamWorks Animation has to build the software that our animators use; or that we are a super-computing facility that needs excellent systems engineers to design, architect and support our rendering systems infrastructure exceeding 20,000 cores and multi-petabyte storage footprint. Getting that technical message out and branding ourselves as a technology company is paramount to successfully recruiting technical talent that already knows and leans toward the technical prowess of a Google or a Microsoft.

We hire the best and sometimes that means recruiting internationally. One of our biggest challenges when we identify a top artist or technologist from a foreign country is navigating the immigration and Visa laws process. While we are successful in obtaining Visas, there are sometimes

delays and timing issues that slow down, or otherwise hinder a quick and efficient onboarding.

With Oriental DreamWorks specifically, we are going to face a myriad of yet undiscovered recruiting challenges, I imagine—from complex and new labour laws to simple CV and resume style differences and everything in between. We will have to change the way we think about recruiting professionally and culturally while maintaining the basic and successful principles, art and science of recruiting. It's an exciting problem that we are all very much looking forward to attacking.

**William Chin** : Identifying and hiring top-calibre talent is central to our recruiting culture. Hiring the best will ultimately have an impact on our ability to continue delivering next generation wireless technology innovation to the market. There are several themes Qualcomm strives for when selecting candidates:

**Customer Astuteness** – we look not just for talent who possess strong core engineering skills but are astute with customer and market needs.

**Technology Savvy** - Most of those who work in areas such as marketing, finance or HR are not trained as engineers. However, we strive to select those who “tinker” with wireless gadgets and who are tech savvy.

**Cross-cultural Leadership** - In leadership roles, we look for individuals with a proven track record of building and leading strong engineering organisations.

**In the recruitment process, how do you ensure an alignment between the organisation's corporate culture and the**



Whilst we are an online retailer, we place a huge emphasis on technology – so, there is more to us than working on a pricing engine – Christa Foley.



There is consistent and challenging work always. The different production philosophy, artistic and technical challenges, different directors and production executives and the uniqueness of each film mean that employees know they will be challenged with diverse responsibilities at each turn – Tim Norman.



**expectations you're created to position the company to prospective candidates?**

**Christa Foley** : Our core values are part of every aspect of the business so we make sure it's up front during the recruitment process. We treat candidates like customers: everyone is contacted and replied to. We emphasise our casual and laid back culture - this is reflected even in our application forms where we inject humour in between all the legal jargon. In this way, the culture is infused at each touchpoint. Every candidate gets a tour and themed interview rooms (a replica of Cher's dressing room, for example) help to avoid the interrogation feel. This gives the candidates a clear sense of who we are and ensures a good fit.

**Tim Norman** : Mostly, it's pretty simple. The DreamWorks corporate culture is one of the best around and is well known by artistic and production talent in the industry. You grow up knowing about all the companies and studios out there doing what you want to do and you know people that work at each studio, you visit them as well. So when recruiting artistic or production talent, simply reinforcing what most know about the culture is easy to do because it is genuine and real.

For technologists or overhead candidates that may not have an idea about our corporate culture, initial visits and campus tours usually impress so that they instantly feel our culture. However, we do continue to highlight the culture throughout the recruitment process by giving candidates insight into our work-life balance philosophy, which includes a number of perks and

services such as free breakfast and lunch for all employees, artistic development and exercise classes, movie screenings and an onsite medical clinic, to name a few.

In my opinion, one of our corporate cultural strengths is that we immediately challenge almost every hire we make to achieve. I let candidates know throughout the recruitment process that we will have high expectations right away, that they will be challenged quickly, that our corporate culture supports excellence but also supplies the freedom to achieve that excellence. That message seems to really inspire.

**William Chin** : Part of our formula for success is getting the sharpest, most forward-thinking minds working together. But here's the unique factor that puts Qualcomm over the top: we love what we do. It is an exhilarating experience working with the highest calibre colleagues sharing knowledge, and exchanging ideas with one another. Our employees are the best ambassadors of the Qualcomm culture and they spread this throughout the industry through their conversations with family, friends, colleagues and industry partners.

**What aspect of your recruitment process do you believe to be the most significant factor in attracting the right calibre of talent on board?**

**Christa Foley** : It's the onsite interview. We won't hire until the candidates come in and understand what the culture is like... which also gives us a chance to see whether they have the right fit. Ultimately, we want them to experience a day in the life. But since

we hire for both cultural and technical fit, if it doesn't work on one level, then we don't hire. Is this too subjective? Well, we look to find areas of disconnect. Consequently, we ask a lot of behavioural questions. There's also a failsafe catch - if someone is able to get through the interview, the resulting four week new hire training programme will also enable us to identify any lack of fit very quickly.

**Tim Norman** : Number one has to be the beauty, consistency and the dedication to the technical quality of each and every one of our films. That's what people see and know and is the most important aspect of our recruitment process as I see it. Artists, technologists and production professionals know what it takes to make our films and understand that we expect and support the highest level of work from all.

A close second is that we release three movies a year and have more than ten in production at any one time. There is consistent and challenging work always. The different production philosophy, artistic and technical challenges, different directors and production executives and the uniqueness of each film mean that employees know they will be challenged with diverse responsibilities at each turn.

Innovation needs to be included in this as well. DreamWorks Animation was instrumental in bringing 3D Stereo technology to animated and live action films. On the technology side, we continue to innovate by building new Lighting and Animation software that will significantly

▶ **RECRUITING THE BEST**  
[continued on page 37]



## ► RECRUITING THE BEST

[continued from page 35]

improve our artist's workflow, speed up production while improving the quality of our films. Artists and technologists need to know they will innovate.

I understand that the above are not specifically part of the recruiting process, only that we recruit candidates that make the above possible. During the recruitment process, we highlight these points literally by discussing them but also by demonstrating them with engaged and respectful communication support throughout recruitment.

**William Chin** : One of the most significant factors of our ability to attract top talent is through employee referrals. Employees who love what they do naturally look for others with similar passion. Over 30 percent of our recruitment efforts in Asia Pacific are through referrals.

### How do you entice your dream candidates if they are not currently looking to move?

**Christa Foley** : A combination of things. We pay competitively and have an amazing benefits package. Our selling points are fair pay, great benefits and a wonderful culture. We also work on converting people to make the leap from general interest to coming out physically to our offices. In a recent coding challenge we started, winners get a fast ticket to interview at the company. Some of these interested candidates were working on their own startup at the time (therefore, not looking) but we convinced them to come out and that we would learn from them. We find that coming down here physically really works to give them an experience that words, by themselves, cannot convey.

**Tim Norman** : Usually, by giving them work on something they haven't worked on before or something new and revolutionary. For a software engineer who longs to work with computer graphics software, there are not too many companies in the world that

One of the most significant factors of our ability to attract top talent is through employee referrals. Employees who love what they do naturally look for others with similar passion – William Chin.



build and enhance their own rendering or animation software, especially software that is immediately implemented and utilised right down the hall by a world class artist. It's the same for a story artist, animator or other artist. We have had talent come to the studio just to work on a particular film like Kung Fu Panda or How to Train Your Dragon.

I think Oriental DreamWorks will provide a new and added enticement in 2013 and beyond. We are going to build a world class animation studio—much from scratch—and artists and technologists are likely to be excited about the new adventure and the challenge.

Our company benefits are pretty strong and attractive as well. We are able to attract candidates because they appreciate our real commitment to our employees in the way of our many perks and amenities. There is a strong family culture here.

One more powerful tool for helping undecided talent to commit is the dedication and availability of our CEO, Jeffrey Katzenberg, to be part of the recruitment process. Anytime recruiting needs his help, Jeffrey will call a prospective candidate to discuss DreamWorks Animation and answer questions – it doesn't matter how junior or senior the talent is. I don't know how many CEOs in the world make that commitment.

**William Chin** : Talented individuals are always highly regarded and engaged in high profile projects. They often are not looking for the next move but already have a clear designated career path. We make it a practice to involve our hiring managers and executives in building relationships with prospective candidates. They may meet for a casual coffee to exchange ideas or follow up periodically for career opportunities.

Sometimes it may take a year or two to entice a candidate to join the company - this obviously is a long-term strategy. Social media platforms have been a great aid in helping develop and sustain these relationships. ■

**Tim Norman** is Director of Overhead and Technology Recruiting at Dreamworks Animation. He has been there for just over five years, prior to which he was Director of Recruiting for Prosum Technology Services. Tim has also held director level positions in HR and staffing for film and entertainment companies.

**Christa Foley** joined Zappos.com, Inc. in 2004 and is currently the Senior Human Resources Manager. She leads the Recruiting team within HR as well as internal and external training via ZapposU. She scours the planet for people that are "fun and a little weird" and works to provide employees with a culture where they come first. Prior to this, Christa spent over eight years in the staffing industry.

**William Chin**, having over 15 years of Human Resource recruiting experience, is the APAC Staffing Director for Qualcomm. Here, William is chartered with building up Qualcomm's human resource capability as the company expands in the region. William was a long-time recruiting veteran of Intel and led the start-up recruitment efforts for the \$1 billion manufacturing facility in Vietnam. A frequent speaker at HR conferences, William also writes occasionally at Asia HR Blog. William holds a BA in East Asia Studies, an MA in Education and a certificate in Human Resource Management.