

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO BUSINESS

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The company's products are indispensable to the healthcare industry.

For one company, the health of its workers is as important as ringgit and sen.

In today's workplace, being fit is always a good thing.

Top Glove Corporation Bhd founder and chairman Tan Sri Lim Wee Chai takes this so seriously he has toothbrushes, toothpaste, tongue cleaners and dental floss issued to all Top Glove employees.

Lim encourages the staff to brush their teeth three times a day as this will help to get rid of residual food particles in the mouth that can travel to the throat and cause illness.

“As the world's largest rubber glove manufacturer, our product is a basic necessity in the healthcare industry. Hence, issuing toothbrush to our employees is very well-aligned with the company's mission and vision to

enrich and protect human lives,” he says enthusiastically.

Research shows that, because digestion starts in the mouth, a clean mouth prevents aspiration pneumonia, gum disease, and helps prevent heart disease.

This practice started in 2009 and Lim says the staff are pleased that management cares for their health and well-being to such an extent.

“New employees are still often surprised to learn that we provide toothbrushes and toothpaste. They are happy to align themselves with the practice of brushing their teeth three times a day,” he says.

The cost to provide oral care products to the company’s 10,000 employees across its Malaysian and overseas operations can add up to RM130,000 every year.

Lim adds that it is a worthwhile investment in the well-being of the employees.

“On our part, we have inculcated the importance of healthy practices, of which brushing their teeth regularly is one, and provided them the tools. We also place notices in canteens and washrooms, and remind all employees of the importance of practicing healthy habits, on a regular basis. The rest, we have to leave it up to them,” he says.

“I am happy to have seen many of our staff walking to the washroom after lunch, toothbrush and toothpaste in hand,” he adds.

Just like an ecosystem, health is one area where one activity can have an impact on another.

Hence, Top Glove has a list of programmes to keep its employees healthy, in line with its motto “Top Quality, Top Efficiency, Good Health, Safety First and Be Honest”.

Founded in 1991, Top Glove has come a long way from its humble beginnings.

Starting with one factory, three production lines and 100 staff, the export-oriented public listed company is now the world's largest rubber glove manufacturer, with 25 factories, 464 production lines and a capacity of 41.3 billion gloves a year, following the recent consolidation of its China operations.

“Foreseeing a greater emphasis on healthcare and the resulting increase in demand for medical gloves, I ventured into the rubber glove industry. The glove business was flourishing and competition was stiff, from both local and foreign players alike,” he says.

Funding was hard to come by and he worked and saved hard, raising the initial capital of RM180,000 to start the business.

Today, the company is able to invest in a dedicated quality management department (under its Quality, Safety, Health and Environment division), looking into optimising the health and well-being of employees.

Two nutritionists, two quality assurance staff and a manager, as well as an inspector work closely with the management to develop and execute programs and activities to promote good health amongst the staff.

To enhance the nutritional value of food served in company canteens, canteen operators are given training to educate them about healthier cooking methods using less salt, oil and sugar and serving food that is high in fibre.

Fruits are also given to staff in Malaysia and Thailand to help improve the nutritional value in their food intake. The company's latest initiative includes the setting up of a dedicated vegetarian canteen at their latest facility.

They also have a no-smoking policy in their factories.

"We have a very clear direction not to hire smokers. Smoking is bad for health and is not aligned with our focus on health and well-being," he says.

Apart from that, all employees are required to undergo a scheduled body mass index (BMI) measurement on a quarterly basis. Those with a BMI measurement in excess of 30 (which is in the obese category) will receive dietary counselling and have their BMI monitored for improvement.

Other efforts the glove maker implements include health awareness programmes where the company regularly arranges talks and health screenings.

Managers and executives are also required to read and summarise a chapter from a health book during weekly meetings.

Apart from monitoring and educational activities, the company also organises various sports activities including badminton, futsal tournaments and fun runs. The company also provides subsidies for gym memberships.

As a result of a combination of several activities and initiatives carried out under the overall health program, Lim says one of the programs which has had a positive impact on the employees is BMI monitoring, as evident from the trend of BMI progression over 2012.

Following one of Top Glove's Business Rules "Do not lose our health", Lim says, "While we have seen a reduction in medical claims, the figure would not be a true reflection of the effectiveness of our health initiatives

as it factors in the increase in headcount and medical costs every year.”

But he states that the BMI monitoring programme has reaped some encouraging and more representative results. Lim says the percentage of obese Malaysian employees in Top Glove stood at 25.5% as of December 2011, significantly lower than the national percentage of 43%.

This philosophy of not losing one’s health is not a surprise as Lim, who grew the business in adversity and believes fitness is important in withstanding adversity, says that during the early days when the glove industry was promising, everyone jumped on the bandwagon. This eventually resulted in oversupply, causing prices to drop and forcing many out of the industry.

“However, we persevered and it has paid off handsomely,” he says.

Lim adds that the company’s financial results have generally been on an upward trend and he believes this has to do with the health programmes, which continue to be enhanced and improved.

For the first quarter of its current financial year, the glove maker saw an upturn of 4.7% in revenue to RM574mil and an increase in net profit of 3.9% to RM50.3mil compared with the previous quarter.

Year-on-year, it experienced a 10% volume growth.

“We have been exporting most of our gloves from the onset. A company that wishes to grow must take on the international market. Malaysia has just 0.5% of the world’s population; we ought to set our sights on the remaining 99.5%,” he says.

Recognising that expanding the business would entail raising funds, Lim said he realised that a listing exercise would also enhance its image.

In 2001, the company was listed on the then Second Board of Bursa Saham Kuala Lumpur.. Compared to being an SME, Lim says as a listed entity. the company is accountable to an additional group of stakeholders,

namely the shareholders.

There is also a necessity to hire specialists and professionals for each function, leading to more resources and staff to manage.

“Our business is very much focused on health, from our products to our philosophy. Health is an asset to all employees.

“We believe that without good health, one cannot work efficiently or contribute positively. For a company to compete and succeed especially in the global arena, its employees must be consistently fit, both mentally and physically,” he says.