

SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AND MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AT THE WORK-LIFE CONFERENCE 2007 ON 24 JULY 2007, ORCHARD HOTEL AT 9:20AM

BUILDING A MOTIVATED WORK-FORCE FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

Mr Hawazi Daipi, Chairman of the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower, and members of the Committee

Ms Claire Chiang, Chairperson, Employer Alliance

Distinguished Guests

1. It is my pleasure to join you this morning.

Work-life Harmony is important

2. I am delighted to see so many representatives from the private, public and people sectors as well as the unions here to discuss how together we can help “build a motivated workforce for high performance”, which is the theme of the conference today.

3. The active promotion of work-life harmony started in 2000 when the Tripartite Committee on Work-life Strategy comprising employers, unions and the Government, was formed. Employers and employees were told of the importance of a good work-life balance. The focus then was to help employers implement and benefit from family-friendly workplace practices. The Prime

Minister in his National Day Rally speech in 2004 also talked about it, in the context of the marriage and parenthood package that was announced that year. I am glad to note that an increasing number of companies are embracing work-life balance, not as “nice to have” but as an important business strategy.

4. It is heartening that the latest Hudson Report for the quarter ending in June, which covers Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore, noted that work-life initiatives are one of the key measures companies are implementing to reduce and prevent work-related stress.¹ In fact, in Singapore, “implementing work-like balance policies” scored the highest as a solution to relieve and prevent work-related stress. Indeed over the years, more employers have begun to realise that it makes business sense to factor in work-life considerations.

Impact of work-life practices

5. In today’s globalised and fast-paced world, any organization wanting an engaged workforce cannot turn a blind eye to work-life issues. In fact, it is a smart organisation, a smart employer, a smart supervisor who pays keen attention to helping their staff juggle the many demands confronting them. Let me cite you three examples, from an SME, a voluntary welfare organisation, and a bank.

¹ Information from *The Hudson Report – Asia Employment and HR Trends* and *The Hudson Report – Singapore Employment Trends*, by Hudson, for the quarter April – June 2007

6. **NxGen**, an SME with 60 employees, introduced a tele-commuting programme allowing their employees to redirect their phone calls and faxes to their laptops, so they need not be office-bound to be effective and efficient. Similarly, **Fei Yei Family Services Centre's** integrated flexi-work programme has made it possible for a new mother to work from home so that she does not have to decide between work and baby. As a result, these two organisations have seen a drop in resignation rate. **ABN AMRO**, a bank with more than 1,200 staff, started its work-life initiatives in 2004. It has flexible work arrangements & tele-work infrastructure so that staff can better control time spent at work and outside work. ABN AMRO's turnover is consistently below the national norm.

The Public Service

7. The Public Service too has been embracing work-life practices. The most significant change was the five-day work week introduced in 2004. For many years, the public sector worked a 5 and a half-day week. It then moved to alternate Saturdays in 2000 and then to the 5-day week in 2004. Currently, 80% of the public sector is on a 5-day work week. The majority of those not on a 5-day work week are officers who are on shift or other work patterns for operational reasons. In addition to moving to a 5-day work week, many government agencies have flexi-work arrangements and other work-life schemes.

8. The Civil Service has pro-family leave benefits such as paternity leave and child care sick leave for staff with children below the age of 12 years. There is also a part-time scheme where civil servants can work between 11 and 36 hours per week. As at May 2007, 380 officers are on part-time employment, mainly for child-care reasons. Some agencies have tele-commuting arrangements. For example, one in 10 of the staff at the **Republic Polytechnic** tele-commutes. In fact, four of its administration departments (HR, Procurement, Finance and Planning) have all their staff tele-commuting one day a week.

9. There are other ways of managing work-life harmony in the Public Service. For example, the **Land Transport Authority (LTA)** introduced Listening Point – a platform for its staff to speak in confidence with in-house facilitators about work or personal problems. As a result, LTA staff indicated greater satisfaction with work-life harmony. **National Library Board** implemented a One Learning Hour programme where staff are allocated one hour every month to engage in group activities with a health or wellness theme. This programme has been well-received by staff.

10. So clearly, work-life policies help both the employer and the employee. Bosses know that employees who can better juggle work and family make for a more productive and committed workforce. Employees know that their

employers are interested in helping them find a balance between work, family and personal interests, instead of leaving them to decide between one and the other. Employers know that with an improving economy and a tightening labour market, it is the company known for good work-life policies that will not only retain talented staff but also be the choice employer.

Work-Life Advocate and Work-Life Ambassador

11. To further promote work-life balance and pro-family practices in the Public Service, I am pleased to announce that every public sector agency will have a Work-life Advocate and Work-Life Ambassador. This will be progressively put in place over the next 12 months.

12. The Work-Life Advocate, will, by its very name, be a champion for work-life and pro-family measures. He will take steps to ensure that work-life policies are in place, and more importantly, that these policies work, for the employees as well as the organisation. To signal the Government's commitment, the Deputy Secretary of the Ministry will be the Work-Life Advocate.

13. The Work-Life Ambassador will be an officer whose main job responsibility is to promote and facilitate the day-to-day Work-Life programmes in his agency. The Work-Life Advocate and Work Life

Ambassador will help the agency promote, and educate supervisors and staff on work-life matters. They will also be involved in efforts to promote pro-family practices.

14. The Public Service Division will study best practices and make recommendations for Ministries and Statutory Boards to adopt. As Singapore's largest employer, the Public Service will continue to do its part to provide a better work environment with policies that support work-life balance.

More employees and organisations to benefit from WoW! Fund

15. At the national level, the Government will also continue to promote work-life balance as a business strategy as well as a talent attraction and retention tool. The Ministry of Manpower had earlier announced that the Government will top up the Work-Life Works! or the WoW! Fund with another \$10 million to facilitate companies in their implementation of work-life strategies. Previously, the WoW! Fund was only available to private sector employers. As at the end of June 2007, 417 companies had benefited from the first tranche of the \$10 million WoW! Fund. About 95% of the recipients were SMEs with staff strength not exceeding 200. Many of the Work-Life projects involved funding for multiple components. The most popular item funded was infrastructure to support flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting.

16 With the additional \$10m funding, the WoW! Fund is now also available to public sector agencies. This new funding is expected to benefit more than 1,000 organisations. I hope this good news will spur many more to come up with good work-life initiatives.

17. While there is money for such initiatives, let me quickly add that not every scheme will require money. Sometimes it only takes some creative rearrangement of work practices. For example, the Ministry of Manpower has an officer who works entirely from home. As she is very good at answering public queries on employment issues, she is responsible for manning such email queries. She has full control of her working hours, as long as service standards are met.

Conclusion

18. I have taken some time to share with you some of the work-life balance strategies and plans implemented by a range of companies and organisations in the private, public and people sectors. You would agree that being work-life friendly does not always require a large strategy or policy. It need not even require large investments or huge resources. The key is in employers and supervisors being sensitive to the needs of their staff and finding what works for the staff and the organisation. It is about employers being flexible and giving flexibility to staff. It is about staff earning the trust of supervisors and

delivering high performance and high quality work when empowered with this flexibility.

19. Today's conference will provide a platform for many among you to share their experiences in the work-life journey. I would encourage employers, especially those who have been tentative about moving in this direction, to take small steps by creatively implementing work-life strategies that meet both your business needs and the needs of your staff. I think it is worth the investment. On this note, I wish all of you a fruitful time of learning and sharing.

20. Thank you.

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