

inFeedo

Global CXO's Secrets to Retaining Top Talent

in South East Asia



Introduction

Since the pandemic, employees in Southeast Asia are leaving the workforce or switching jobs in droves. For many, employers have played a big part in why they're walking away.

When the pandemic began, Lindsey Chao* quit her plush job as the CFO at a multinational company and switched to a startup where she now teaches underserved children in third-world countries. Why? Because she always wanted to teach. She finally decided to follow her happiness. Similarly, for some workers, the pandemic precipitated a shift in priorities, encouraging them to pursue a 'dream job', or transition to being a stay-at-home parent. But for many, many others, the decision to leave came as a result of the way their employer treated them during the pandemic.



Ooi Lay Tin, when asked if she wasn't worried that she may not get a job post the pandemic says, "There will be new job opportunities as the business disruption is now under control, at least in my line of work-- and the private higher education industry. There is a huge demand for e-learning, remote learning and online courses. So, during this break, I will be exploring new growth areas in the education-related industry, pursuing knowledge through courses offered by MDEC, LinkedIn Learning and networking with like-minded professionals. I have also considered consultancy work with my vast years of experience with education brands. In short, my mindset is to take clear and determined action for what I want."

Usha Devi, a renowned HR leader in Southeast Asia chose to take a sabbatical in March 2021. When asked why, she said, "Due to family commitment, I had been toying to go on a career break but resisting before. But the pandemic accelerated my decision as it opened the window to rearrange my priorities. As an HR leader, I can say for certain that jobs aren't going anywhere. I believe that each of us has our own intrinsic value that we can bring to organizations and our communities. What's more important to is to continue developing ourselves to bring value to others in any way we can"



Usha Devi
Ex - HR Group head,
Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care

Ooi Lay Tin
Sales & Marketing Director
International University of Malaya-Wales

Meet Amber

As per **Amber's data**, the top 3 reasons employees across Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Vietnam have cited for exiting an organization are:

1. **Lack of career development**
2. **Inadequate diversity and inclusion programs**
3. **Poor work-life balance**

Presently in this region, talent is in high demand and many organizations are struggling to attract and retain the right people with the right skills in the right roles. Could this Great Resignation bring about meaningful, long-term change to workplace culture and the way companies invest in their employees?

How can CXOs ensure that their organizations are continuing to attract and retain top talent while juggling other priorities like securing funding, closing strategic contracts, promoting for management roles and innovating to stay ahead of their competition?

We asked 9 of the most celebrated CXOs from all across Southeast Asia. Here are their hacks to thriving amidst the chaos, all the way to 2022.



Sunil Setlur

Chief People Officer

Great talent will always be in high demand and what we are seeing today is competition for ALL talent. This trend is driven by a few key factors. First, as “lockdown life” starts to ease across many markets, businesses will invest in ramping up and expansion again which will lead to a need for more talent.

Second, new growth areas that have emerged as a result of post-pandemic shifts in lifestyle (and companies addressing those) have created new opportunities for talent. With a lot of work now able to be done remotely, this will certainly heat up demand for specialist skill sets across the world, particularly in parts of the world where the cost of talent is lower, such as South Asia and Southeast Asia. While there will be a period where organizations compete for talent, this will normalise as automation investments start yielding dividends, alternate or non-traditional talent profiles gain wider acceptance (companies are already looking to hire people without traditional university qualifications, for instance) and as people who are moving across roles within companies today become entrenched incumbents in their organizations.

What employees look for from their organizations depends on various factors, such as the nature of work, generational nuances and each market’s local culture.



Foundationally, however, the act of work is a profoundly social experience across most Southeast Asian cultures. People hold workplace relationships in high regard and thrive on interactions with teammates, so employee policies and culture must support those aspects. Generally speaking, people are looking for certainty and choice from employers. The pandemic has upended a whole range of fundamentals for many companies, especially business models, strategy, core values and ways of working. This has led to people rethinking the working relationship they have with employers and what they are seeking in a job. People now want to know what companies stand for and whether that aligns with their current beliefs and way of working, so communicating with clarity about purpose and culture while helping employees make the mental leaps to the new paradigm will be important for organizations to focus on. In addition to creating a sense of identity and belonging, organizations will need to invest in enabling freedom of choice for employees on how and where to do work. These will be crucial differentiators for organizations.

Sunil's #1 tip to CHROs out there on attracting and retaining top talent

CHROs have to enable flexibility to attract and retain top talent. This means giving employees agency and autonomy across all areas of work. Cultures will need to become more employee-led than they have ever been and CHROs are going to need to be at the forefront of facilitating that transformation in their organizations.



Sunil Setlur

Chief People Officer



Dudi Arisandi

Chief People Officer

Employees in Southeast Asia are looking for 3 things right now: right culture, growth opportunity and competitive compensation.

The war of talent is real no matter the situation, pandemic or not. In the tech industry, there is no significant difference in terms of talent war, pre-pandemic or during the pandemic. Attracting and retaining talent is challenging nonetheless, since every company is now moving to digital. On a side note, I believe this pandemic is a crucible for us to be more technology friendly, so that the talent war can continue, but with more flexible options for employers and employees.

Dudi's tips for global corporate leadership to stay ahead of the curve:

- Build an employee-focused culture, not only something you put on the walls but in daily real life.
- Recognize and celebrate the achievement.
- Make your team/employee feel connected.
- Building best employee experience.
- Be a good listener for your employee and take action from their feedback.

Fermin Diaz

Deputy CEO & Group Director

Employees want the flexibility to choose options and align it to the common items on their personal and professional bucket list. Millennials, in particular, need special attention as they have become the largest segment of the workforce. They grew up in the world of the internet, and read reviews on multiple options before they make a purchase. Companies can increase their employer brand by doing the same as well. The idea is to build a moat that differentiates this company's offerings from the rest. It is also known as bringing about pricing confusion when it comes to value by adding so much value you cannot compare apples to apples from role to role across companies.

For example: Should all employees be paid with the same base salary + bonus model? Can we give employees a choice? Some employees may choose the current approach. Others may want all base, no bonus. There are ways to do this. Or how about scheduling? 4 days of 10 hours or 5 days of 8 hours? Or hybrid work models? Or trade salary for vacation days? There are many approaches companies can take if they break away from old paradigms of one-size-fits-all and all-people-are-motivated-by-money, which have proven to not be true.



Fermin's #1 hack on attracting and retaining top talent

Design a development/retention based approach for compensation - Learning and development opportunities, travel opportunities with the role, public speaking opportunities to build their profile, coaching certifications for managers, remote working possibilities, a cool working office space that feels like home/college, stock options, unlimited leave options, travel sponsorships etc. These, and the ones we listed above, are some suggestions that companies can readily implement. However, one caveat is that these strategies should not be just for the Millennials, but for everyone. Therefore, the idea is not to create a Millennial-specific approach, nor a Millennial-tailored approach that now all other staff have to abide by. Rather, companies should develop an approach with the flexibility to accommodate all generations of employees. Should employers pay Millennials based on qualifications and work experience or skill-set? Not just for Millennials, but paying by skill set would be a more reliable way to pay all employees, as roles can get decomposed with the gig economy, and the traditional hierarchy begins to blend into ever-changing technological needs.



A graphic illustration featuring a glowing lightbulb hanging from a cord, a smartphone with an '@' symbol on its screen, and a checklist with four items, the second of which is checked. The background is white with a black and yellow diagonal stripe at the bottom.

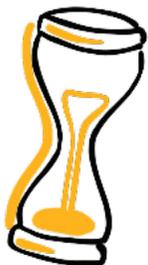


A circular portrait of Fermin Diaz, a middle-aged man with a grey beard and balding head, wearing a light blue button-down shirt.

Fermin Diaz
Deputy CEO &
Group Director



NCSS
National Council
of Social Service



Olivia Chua

Chief Human Resources Officer

The war of talent is underfoot. Although most countries are in lockdown, it's much harder to attract talent in the middle of a pandemic as candidates are afraid to lose job stability. Naturally, the number of available candidates have reduced significantly in growing markets. There is a rise of unemployed people, but they may not meet the specific requirements for the jobs applied.

Olivia's #1 tip for CXOs to build the right team

Be patient; getting the right person for the right job is still crucial and we should not settle for less. Otherwise we would have a harder time managing them or replacing them. Pressure from the business would be significant, getting their support would be crucial, may be a good time to look at how we can be creative in designing a flexible rewards program, and to consider a flexible work arrangement post pandemic. For talent retention, to have continuous check-ins with your top talent, continue with their development and get them involved in significant projects.



JEBSEN & JESSEN

Fong Tuan

Group Head HR

Post-pandemic, talents will be looking for some form of security and stability. A strong brand name with sustained success even in the face of tough challenges. Organizations that took a stand to put the wellbeing and livelihood of their people first. Organizations that continuously innovate to stay relevant as their businesses were forced to pivot by the collateral effect of COVID-19. Talents are no longer just looking for the usual career development, rewards, etc. They are now looking for organizational resilience, longer term wellbeing, sustenance and leadership courage.

Fong's #1 secret to attracting and retaining top talent

Good talent will always come at a premium because the supply is scarce. Post pandemic, however, will see an increase in this supply as revenge job hopping may happen as talents who have otherwise been well protected by their respective organizations, feel compelled to change jobs after 2 years of being cooped up. This pent up demand will provide choice for organizations. The answer is to attract and identify the right people. This pandemic though challenging, may be a blessing in disguise. Organizations that chose to stick by their people, prioritising their wellbeing, protecting their livelihoods, ensuring that no one is left behind, are the ones that the market looks up to. What we do during times of difficulty and turmoil differentiates the merely good from the really great.



Dr. Loo Leap Han

Group Head, Talent Management

Labour shortages are expected to be a persistent challenge for many organizations in the near future. Now is the time for HR leaders to plan for this new world of work, which includes flexible and hybrid working policies, competitive remuneration and well-being scheme, increased upskilling and reskilling program/initiatives and other critical priorities like workplace safety and diversity, equity and inclusion, so as to win the fight for top niche talent.

The prospect of career progression is another core fundamental in a talent's decision to accept a job offer. It is essential for CHROs to explore all available opportunities for professional development initiatives that focus on increasing the hard and soft skill sets of employees to attract those top talent thinking about longer-term career development. I highly recommend introducing a job rotation and enrichment programme that provides employees with a good overview of the different skills needed in the company.





Dr. Loo Leap Han

Group Head, Talent
Management



Dr. Han shares 4 pathbreaking ways to transform EX from within

1. **Employment flexibility options.**

Employees are looking for flexible work models; working hours, location, work-life integration. The hybrid flexible workplace model allows for structure and sociability (at the office) while offering independence and flexibility (at home).

2. **How productivity is measured.**

Employees want to be measured on the value they deliver, not the volume. And they expect to be given the space and trust they need to do their very best work, wherever they happen to be. Employees would prefer to work for a company that prioritizes outcomes over output. Company to design people-centric experiences that give employees the space they need to unlock their full potential and deliver transformative results.

3. **Work with a diverse team.**

Employees want to work for a company that prioritizes and demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion, address workplace inequality and doubling women in leadership roles.

4. **Re-training and re-skilling**

Companies provide the skills needed for their current jobs and the jobs of the future. The most in-demand skills are artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, cybersecurity, disaster recovery, blockchain, healthcare IT, digital transformation and UX design.

Gadis Lukman

VP of People Operations

There was already a war of talent, well before the pandemic. The world is changing, and it's changing very rapidly. In order for us to crack all the problems we're facing, we need brilliant and intelligent and kind-hearted workers and, to be honest, they're in scarcity everywhere we go. So, in Indonesia, all the companies are fighting to get the best, but very few want to get their hands dirty and develop the people (who are mostly coming from the 2nd group who need to be developed to reach their potential).

I am not sure I can speak on behalf of the other Southeast Asian countries, but in Indonesia, there are different groups of talents --and motivation to work differs from one group to another. I would take an overgeneralization of the groups, to make things easier.

- Top-level talent: White collar workers who form the top 1% of the total population and usually come from a middle-upper class, with a minimum of a bachelor's degree. This is the group of people who are high-achievers, they are very tech savvy, and aim to climb the corporate ladder all the way. These may be seen as future leaders of the country. This group of talent will look for an organization that can help them get to the top quickly, allow them to explore many things, give them trust and freedom to shape up the organization and its business.



- Pay is not the main factor, but it does feel good to be contributing significantly and get a good pay. Recognition and appreciation matter more to this group of people.
- Middle-level talent: White collars who constitute a big group of the population (the rest of 30%), usually come from the middle class, with good education (diploma, bachelor degree). They're not as ambitious as the high achievers and prefer comfort, stability, and good pay. They also appreciate some good training. They need to be led, coached, and empowered to be able to reach their maximum potential.
- The rest of the talent: Mostly blue collars doing admin work. Most of this group carries out physical labour or at least works in an office/warehouse to operate things. Unfortunately, this group cannot work from home. For this group of people, job security is very important. So employment status and a stable income stream are a must. They're not looking to climb the ladder much. But, again, this is an overgeneralization, surely there are outliers.

Gadis' trick to building an 'unquittable' company

Understand what motivates your employees, and be creative in exploring the things that can retain them. For example: Wellbeing allowance is very popular these days. It's a gesture that shows that the company pays attention to the employees' wellbeing. But what if you don't have the money to do it? This is the part where you need to be creative. Have talks about wellbeing, ask the managers to hold a 'support group', have a one day break for the company to ask their employees to take care of themselves, etc.



Gadis Lukman

VP of People Operations



Dr Esther Loo

Head of Human Capital Transformation & Analytics

War for good talent is always there. Be it pre or Post pandemic. People are always looking for promising talent. However, with the acceleration in technology and the understanding that digitalisation would be the way to keep a business competitive, the urgency in obtaining suitably skilled talents became more apparent. As a result, while some organizations will opt for upskilling/reskilling, others with deeper pockets will aim to poach talents from other organizations or tap into the rich contingent/freelancers ecosystem to meet their immediate skill gaps requirement. I am seeing a global trend, not just with SEA employees today, where the workforce is changing their workplace priorities. The hybrid work environment partially contributes to this. For example, people are no longer looking at organization perks (e.g. office space, free coffee etc.) as the motivator for their work. However, more employees are looking beyond that, and they are factoring in experiences as reasons for their continuation. Therefore, an organization that offers holistic employees experiences that allow for flexibility, personalised growth, and well-being would be preferred to one with a fixed benefits setup.

Dr Esther Loo's #1 to nurture an enviable talent pool

CHRO's need to take full advantage of innovative technologies available today to improve employee experience and engagement within the organization. This includes using the available data and insights, learning technologies to design personalised offerings for the workforce.



Nadiah Tan Abdullah

Chief Human Resources Officer

Employees today are hungry as we live in a world of personalised demand. Technology has allowed for more access to information and this liberalisation has led to more informed employees. They look for career development and exposure that comes in various forms of employee experience (EX). They want to have the opportunity of getting the wisdom of experience from mentors and also want to be involved in business decisions. As the need for a more agile workforce will mean that the talent pool will be quite limited as the best talent who are agile and quick to respond to the changes in the market landscape will be very limited. All of the organizations will be looking for such talent and businesses are also remodelling their business model hence the total shift in the demand of talent mix.

Nadiah's #1 secret to winning the war of talent

Be very clear of your value proposition and articulate it well with a lens of future sustainability as talent today are very in tuned with the environment and speak the business language even more.



Setia
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Thomas Suhardja

Chief of Human Capital

In my experience, what employees in general are looking for in an organization is career and money. For some people it's more about building their career, while others look at the money.

For people focused towards their career- these people look for something that can enlighten them, something that opens their horizons and gives exposure to multiple avenues.

It's like an assignment/project, for eg, for a Product Manager it would be about getting to a higher position in their career and get a lot more exposure by leading different teams that manage project expansion, incubation, etc. The second is money. In some stages of life, people look at different things, some look for an increase in their salary, some look at the benefits. These types of compensation benefit mix are very important in an organization.



Thomas Suhardja

Chief of Human Capital



Thomas' #1 tip to retaining and attracting top talent

For retaining top talent, obviously money is important when you look at your talent management, but I think the mix is important. Some people want the money for appreciation, but, they do want to get recognition as the biggest contributors in the organization. Equally important is how you recognise talent, how you give appreciation to talent and the benefits you provide. Also, it is the development, once rightly mixed, you will retain your top talent. What also plays a key role are the managers. People will stick to their companies even if other companies pay higher if the employees see value in working with their managers.

For attracting top talent, you need to have a person in the organization that people look up to. I think that's important when you are attracting talent. A prominent leader, a well respected, highly regarded individual in society might just be able to attract ordinary talent, but, if you get someone who is in the business and attract the Chief Commercial, the VP commercial, then everyone starts understanding that this is someone who really wants to expand in the market. Yes, money is important, but it's about what you are going to do with your organization, how you save your organization, so that people look up to your organization.

Did you know?

In recent years, an increasing number of companies in Southeast Asia have trusted Amber with employee wellbeing, engagement and retention in their organizations, and they've all seen exemplary data-driven results.

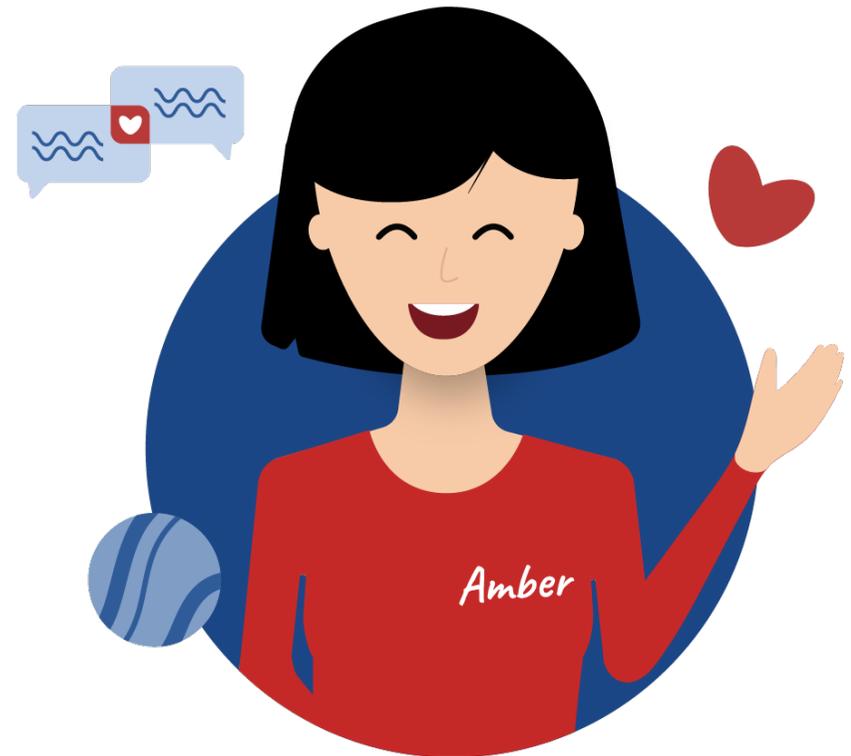
Amber starts by connecting with employees to ask the right questions based on inFeedo's research-backed EX framework at specific milestones in their tenure. She kills survey fatigue with empathetic conversations. Analyzes sentiment and shares insights regularly with leaders to act on. Lastly, Equips HR with data to proactively drive focussed interventions to resolve employee concerns, prevent exits, and improve organizational culture.



Amber can:

- Contextualize deep dive conversations with real-time pulse insights to gain a rich understanding of employee experience.
- Share learnings and metrics with people leaders so everyone can be fully informed at every moment.
- Observe how new initiatives and changes impact the employee experience in real-time so businesses can course-correct or double-down.
- Highlight employees who need special attention and nudge leaders to take action.
- Speak multiple languages including Malay, Indonesian, French and English.

Amber speaks to roughly 500,000 employees around the world across brands like Tiket.com, Celcom, Puma, Lion Parcel, Aboitiz Power Hedcor, and Zalora.



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