



Putting People First

to Help Malaysia Achieve Vision 2020

by George Aveling, TMI Consultancy Sdn Bhd

So, what is it about Malaysian attitudes and mindsets that organisations need to change? This is a complex question. However, there is no doubt that education and training are a major part of the solution.

An important place to start is the management mindset. We live in two worlds – the Bottom Line World and the Beyond the Bottom Line World. The Bottom Line World is the world of facts - the world of targets, KPIs and systems.

Beyond The Bottom Line World is The World of Feelings - the emotional world - the world of feeling valued, inspired and engaged to achieve team objectives. It is in this world that a true performance driven culture will be created, for it is from this

“ A change in skills without a change in attitudes will have little long-term impact.”

world that human energy to perform and do the best possible is tapped and released.

In TMI's experience, the current management paradigm in Malaysia is heavily skewed towards the Bottom Line World – the driven world of achieving the numbers. This world clearly is important. However, we need people to achieve the numbers, to drive our businesses forward. To achieve the most out of our people requires that a significant part of our focus is on the world of feelings. In shorthand, to create true performance driven cultures, we need to put people first.

Wegmans is an 89 year old grocery chain that Fortune Magazine earlier this year stated is “trouncing the competition” in a very tough industry. Wegmans in fact was voted America's Best Company to Work for earlier this year by Fortune.

The Wegman's way is to put its people first. By doing so, Wegman's employees will put customers first. “No matter how much we invest in our people, we get much more in

Malaysia is a country in a hurry. The Vision for the year 2020 is that Malaysia will be a developed country. One of the challenges to achieving this Vision has been identified by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who states that Malaysia has first class infrastructure, but a third world mentality. Mindset change will be a major driver behind success.

return,” Robert Wegman was quoted as saying by Fortune. “When I visit our stores, customers stop me and say, ‘Mr. Wegman you have a great store, but wow, your people are wonderful.’” Wegmans has created a truly performance driven organisation – with the driving being done by energised employees.

FedEx, a highly successful and admired company is another example of how this philosophy is applied with great success. Its PSP framework - People, Service and Profit - recognises that the starting point is people who feel that they are making a difference, who feel supported in life beyond work, who feel that they are appreciated and listened to.

From our experience in the UK, Europe, the US, Australia and Asia, attitudinal change programmes which focus on managers as people, rather than as managers, can be highly effective. In the UK, a celebrated example of this approach was TMI's work with British Airways.

This process included a two-day programme for 38,000 employees with the theme, “This programme is about YOU. Wouldn't it be nice if BA got something out of it as well?” The impact on the whole organisation was enormous, and led to the TMI approach becoming a major spearhead of BA's change programme.

Just imagine the results if the people in your company were energised to do their best for the team, to look for better ways to do things, if they were emotionally engaged in the desire for the company to do better. Energised people create winning organisations.

Think of great leaders from history. Did Napoleon win his battles by himself? It was only by having an army of people who were prepared to give it all that he became successful. Similarly, it is people that build great companies. It will be energised,

motivated people that build a great Malaysia.

Therefore, a critical step to the achievement of Vision 2020 is to have managers who put people first. This involves a combination of personal development and skills training. A key challenge in Malaysia is for managers to have recognition of others – family, friends, work colleagues and employees – become a way of life.

Can education and training have an impact on attitudes? The short answer is yes. TMI's philosophy in Malaysia is that “the hands will not do what the mind does not understand and the heart does not commit to.” A change in skills without a change in attitudes will have little long-term impact.

In Malaysia, TMI has coached people in the “art of giving strokes” at home and at work with great positive impact. People feel good by creating a recognition culture in their organisations – by learning how to put people first. In doing so, they create performance driven cultures that are not only driven by numbers, but are powered by human energy.

There is no doubt that Malaysian managers are performance driven and are hard working. But by adopting a Putting People First mentality they can tap into the human spirit and unlock human energy. It will create company cultures where people not only turn up – they also tune in! And in doing so, Malaysia will move closer to its Vision of becoming a developed nation.

George Aveling, International Partner,
TMI Consultancy Malaysia Sdn Bhd.
Tel: +6012 3766 931
or +603 2039 4375

*TMI is a consulting and learning
organisation with resource centres in
38 countries around the world.*