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# How to make happy workers

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*Here's how one company entered the lucrative business of improving employee morale.*

Companies around the world are realising that happy employees are more productive and that investing in morale will pay dividends in the form of more creative and loyal workers. Several American companies have stood out by offering their employees great perks, such as Google's free gourmet meals and Pixar's free movie screenings. For years, companies have also used organisations like Outward Bound to give employees the opportunity to get out of the office and into the great outdoors where they can participate in leadership and team-building activities together.

This mindset is now becoming more common among Asian organisations, according to **Felix Sim**, the CEO of a Singaporean team-building company, Playlor! "In a given year, an estimated \$785 billion is spent on employee benefit products and services alone," he says. "Asia is becoming more and more focused on employee engagement, and Singapore is no exception."

## A booming industry

There is now an entire global industry devoted to helping companies nurture their employees. Companies like Playlor! make it easier for employers to foster employee engagement through team-building exercises. "Team building is a subset of the Human Capital industry," says Sim. "This is a service that has been around for the last 10 to 15 years." Since many of corporate team-building activities have not changed much over the last decade, Sim wants to re-invent team building with a Singaporean flair. This is evident even in the name "Playlor!" which incorporates the uniquely Singaporean suffix "lor".

Sim started Playlor! two years ago to help companies create customised one to three day team-building activities for their employees led by instructors at either a large indoor facility or an outdoor venue. These activities are often inspired by popular TV shows such as Survivor and Running Man. "We pride ourselves in being able to bring what you see on TV to real life for our clients," says Sim. According to Sim, the most important part of the team-building process is to create strong memories that employees can bring back to the office with them. "Unlike many of our competitors," he says, "we do not claim to be able to improve team spirit in a matter of hours or days. Neither do we organise meaningless events that focus on the adrenaline of the moment." In other words, Sim is interested in creating events that employees will remember in the months and years to come, long after they have returned to the routines of corporate life.

In Singapore, the team building market is saturated with dozens of events companies offering team-building services that range from cooking classes to paint ball games. This is a good indication of the widespread demand among Singaporean companies to invest in employee satisfaction and morale. Individuals who are interested in entering the Human Capital industry in Singapore must consider both the challenges and the rewards of entering this business.

## **The key to success: programme innovation**

Despite challenges, Playlor! has managed to break even a little over a year after its creation. For Sim, the road to success has been to set his company apart in terms of innovative programme development. "In order to compete in this impossibly competitive industry, Playlor!'s model is to focus on value innovation, which is basically to continue developing programmes and our own teams towards the pursuit of differentiation and lower costs." He believes this has been a good strategy and advises others interested in going into this business to focus on developing new programmes. "If this is not your forte, then at least work with someone who has this skill," he says.

It is also important to be responsive to the individual needs of each client. A one size fits all approach does not work in this industry. "In order to be successful, you must be able to digest the client's objectives, translate that into customised team-building programmes, and deliver these programmes flawlessly," he says.

As the Human Capital industry in Singapore matures, Sim predicts that there will be greater differentiation within the market. He thinks that we will see two tiers of organisations: those that will provide operational and logistical support for company events and those that will focus on team development programming. "The only companies that will survive and thrive in the team-building industry will be those that invest in continuous programme development and improvement," says Sim.