

# Firm develops trust with staff

Leo Paper Group has training programmes and benefits in place to get the best from employees

## Kennedy Lau

**L**EO PAPER Group, established in 1982 with fewer than 20 employees, has become one of the major players in the printing and packaging world, and now employs more than 20,000 people. A harmonious relationship with the firm's employees is contributing significantly to this success.

The company went through a tough time during its start-up phase, but found a growth path by exporting to the United States in 1989, and has been riding on lucrative double-digit growth since.

Human resources director Lai King-lung saw the growth potential on the mainland and in 2004 devised a system to retain the talent pool, which was vital to capitalise on this promising growth.

"Fidelity and trust are the basic foundations for every employer and employee relationship. We recognise the fact that our staff want job satisfaction and their achievements to be rewarded, and we deliver that," Mr Lai said, adding that the working environment needed to be comfortable.

The company knows where to position itself to retain the best people. Apart from Hong Kong, Leo Paper has offices on the mainland, in the United States and Europe. The ideology is to use local people to manage the local business. This gives a sense of security and creates harmony among employees.

Employment opportunities abound in the printing industry, so keeping staff turnover low is the priority.

According to industry sources, many employees leave their jobs because of conflicts with colleagues.

The company tackles this problem by constantly monitoring the salary trend in the industry from a global perspective, paying particular attention to the multinational corporations where the true competitive force lies.

It does not necessarily mean paying top dollar; the aim is to ensure the firm always stays ahead of the average, benchmarking with international peers.

Beyond monetary remuneration, building up morale and job satisfaction are the real challenges.

The company recently adopted a five-day working week schedule and employees were more satisfied and motivated, and productivity had improved, Mr Lai said.

A happy workplace helps reduce stress. Leo Paper provides free snack bars, biscuits

and instant noodles in modern and inviting pantries. Alleviating stress through a short tea break makes staff happier. The company even provides clinical psychological services in co-operation with the Hong Kong Christian Family Service Centre.

Seeing how US firms work to keep staff motivated, the company set up a recreation room of games such as PlayStation, chess, table tennis, books and a massage chair.

"This recreation room fills with people during lunch breaks. The idea is to let our employees have fun while working. We also hold birthday parties for them," Mr Lai said.

Leo Paper's employees also have the benefit of extra-curricular activities to help improve their work-life balance. Socialising with colleagues also helps build team spirit.

While employees are having fun, they have a clear vision of their job responsibilities.

A job grading system involves giving employees clear instructions while being open to staff feedback so that human

resources can understand employees' aspirations in career advancement and job difficulties. Each new recruit is put through a creative training programme.

Each new staff member is assigned an "angel" who introduces the recruit to the friendly environment and company culture.

This angel approach helps to accelerate the induction process and helps newcomers become familiar with their colleagues.

The company also has a "Smartalent" programme to foster future leaders.

The Hong Kong Productivity Council acts as a consultant to select 40 potential leaders and put them through two years of intensive training to develop their trust.

### PAPER CHASE

- Leo Paper constantly tracks salary trends in the industry, benchmarking them with international peers.
- It adopted a five-day working week to boost employee morale.
- Each new employee is assigned an "angel" who acts as a friendly mentor to help newcomers quickly become familiar with their new working environment.
- The company encourages employees to get involved in extracurricular activities to help improve their work-life balance, socialise with each other and improve their team spirit.



Lai King-lung says the recreation room fills with people during lunch breaks. Photo: Edward Wong