

### Summary

#### OPPORTUNITY

- The hotel's approach to human resource management could be a competitive differentiator, to help it attract, recruit, develop and retain talent through the employee lifecycle

#### ACTION

- Developed and put in place a structured and comprehensive HR strategy with two main prongs:
  - Building partnerships with hospitality schools; students come in as additional resources while gaining work experience—cultivating the hotel's employer brand through positive word of mouth
  - An extensive emphasis on employee development which seeks to understand and cater to each staff member's professional aspirations

#### RESULTS

- A lower-than-industry average turnover rate of about 18% (2013), as shared by the hotel
- Strong employer brand amongst hospitality students, strengthened by word of mouth
- Healthy pipeline of potential talent for the hotel to activate in the future

#### OPPORTUNITY

#### FINDING AN EDGE IN THE WAR FOR TALENT

The Four Seasons Hotel Singapore, like many other hotels in Singapore, finds itself competing to attract and retain hospitality professionals from the same limited labour pool.

The Human Resources team realised a structured and comprehensive HR strategy - which built further on the global chain's existing approach - would help to attract, pipeline, develop and retain talent throughout the employee lifecycle. A considered approach to its employer branding, the thinking went, would give Four Seasons Hotel Singapore an edge in the war for talent.

To continue creating a pipeline for the next generation of hospitality professionals as well as boost productivity and optimise resources, the Human Resources team led by Senior Human Resources Director Celeste How developed a multi-prong strategy: deepening local school partnerships, and investing in employee development and retiree programmes (development and retention). With employee retention just as important as the hiring process, Four Seasons invests in developing existing talent and promoting from within. This allows the hotel to build a close-knit community which is familiar with and loyal to the brand.

Collectively, the comprehensive efforts by Four Seasons has resulted in a turnover rate of about 18%, considered to be below the industry average, as shared by the hotel.

Since 2006, the Four Seasons Hotel Singapore began offering structured internship opportunities for students from established hospitality schools such as Temasek Polytechnic and Republic Polytechnic, among others. The Four Seasons also runs an Overseas Student Internship Programme (OSIP) which sees students dispatched to the chain's 9 locations in Asia. With the OSIP growing from strength to strength since its inception in 2010, the Four Seasons placed 50 students around the region in 2013.

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### **Student Engagements—*Investing to build early mindshare***

- **Maintaining ongoing engagement with schools:** The hotel first started structuring internships with Temasek Polytechnic, before expanding to other schools. They also partner schools on various hotel projects to deepen the relationship with students and tap on their talents. For example, they engaged Temasek Polytechnic's hospitality and design students to help redesign staff uniforms. These sustained exposures and positive experiences grow the mindshare of Four Seasons as a potential employer even before graduation.
  - **Designing internships to gain brand exposure:** Interns usually start in operations - an average of 2 departments for a 6-month internship - starting in a line position and progressing towards a supervisory position after 10 weeks. This gives breadth and then depth to an intern's overall development.
  - **Positioning interns appropriately to department heads:** The HR team initially faced some resistance from department heads who were concerned with daily operations, worried that having to train interns would be more of a hindrance than help. Celeste took care to communicate that interns were *additional resources* – rather than replacements for full-time head count. She stressed the effort pays off over the remaining 5 months after 1 month of training. Furthermore, a meaningful, positive experience during the internship delivers the long-term impact of positive word-of-mouth regarding Four Seasons as an employer.
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### **Comprehensive Employee Development Programme—*To develop and retain talent***

- **Inculcating a promote-from-within culture:** The hotel believes employees should be given priority over outsiders in filling key positions; and indeed, many of the hotel's senior managers have started at entry-level and risen through the ranks. This practice is formalised with the percentage of positions filled internally set as a key performance indicator for managers. This drives a culture for managers to dedicate resources to upgrade and invest in internal capabilities over the long term.
- **Regular succession planning to identify development needs:** Four Seasons holds a twice-yearly succession planning exercise, in which the management maps out every single senior role within the hotel and potential candidates for succession. Making a conscious effort to identify internal candidates helps management plan ahead of time to send these candidates for further training and necessary exposure to prepare them for success in those higher roles when the time comes.

## ***Comprehensive Employee Development Programme—to develop and retain talent (cont'd)***

- **Internal transfer programmes:** Four Seasons has a number of schemes to upgrade skillsets through transfers. The Staff Assistance Programme allows staff from one hotel to transfer to another to pick up best practices – e.g. sending their Cantonese restaurant chef to the Four Seasons Hong Kong to learn from the chefs there. This short-term programme also allows the chain to better meet seasonal demand in certain properties with distinct peak and lull periods.
- **Leveraging the experience of mature workers:** The Hotel recognises the continued contribution mature employees stand to make, even after reaching retirement age. Being on the hotel's retiree programme, these mature workers continue to discharge their normal duties, while guiding and mentoring younger colleagues who benefit from their vast experience. From Four Seasons' experience, the older workers require little if any extra attention but managers typically pair mature workers with younger staff, so they can play off each other's strengths and experience. As of 2014, there are 12 mature workers with the hotel.

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### **Success Factors**

- **Strong corporate support:** Four Seasons in Singapore has strong commitment and support from corporate office to devote resources to these activities; furthermore, with the KPI of managers being set around internal promotions, this serves as a guiding signal from corporate office about its conviction to developing internal talent.
- **Long-term strategic view:** Many of the programmes by themselves do not immediately guarantee Four Seasons new hires but the company ***takes a long term view in building talent and growing mindshare.*** A young employee with a highly positive working experience with Four Seasons may leave for a competitor; but as experience has shown, having made a positive, lasting impact on a person, ***Four Seasons often finds its top talent returning with their own set of experiences.***

*“Familiarity is the basis of service. Guests come back to us because of our employees who remember them. We enjoy working in an environment where ‘everyone knows everyone’ and teamwork connects in symphony. This heightens productivity as everyone ‘dances’ around their tasks for our guests in perfect synchronization.”*

*-- Celeste How  
Senior Director of Human Resources  
Four Seasons Hotel Singapore*

- **A stronger employer brand to potential employees:** The popularity of OSIP helps raise awareness of the Four Seasons amongst not only the participating students but also amongst their peers and their lecturers, who nominate students to the OSIP. The lecturers – as trusted sources of information for successive student cohorts - also become informal advocates for the hotel upon seeing the strength of OSIP.
- **Deepened employee engagement:** The hotel's clear and structured plan for advancing employees helps to retain talent – with a turnover rate of about 18% versus the estimated industry average of 27%, according to the hotel. The opportunity to transfer within the global network of properties is a strong draw for employees, especially 'Gen Y' which seek international work experience to develop their careers.
- **Strong conversion from internship to employment:** Due to the buy-in to invest in interns, and the resulting positive learning experience, on average, **~12% of their interns successfully converted to full-timers** after the internship ended. As of early 2014, 118 local students were placed under OSIP and 14 later joined full-time. The hotel rewards interns who do so through an Internship Incentive of S\$750.
- **Building a talent pipeline:** OSIP alumni constitute a valuable talent pipeline for the hotel. Already familiar with the Four Seasons culture and brand, they form a ready part-time talent pool the hotel can call on to meet seasonal demand (with little on-boarding time) or serve as potential future full-time hires. The close relationship Celeste maintains with past interns has helped keep the network tight and sustain communication. HR is also structuring a Facebook page for alumni to sustain engagement on a longer basis, even as they go to college (or National Service).

*Teo Wan Lin participated in OSIP when she was studying in UNLV. She did her internship in Four Seasons Maldives. She joined Four Seasons Singapore upon graduation and started in June 2011 as a Floor Supervisor.*

*While at Four Seasons Singapore, she was sent to assist with the pre-opening of Four Seasons Hotel Shenzhen.*

*When the position of Assistant Housekeeping Manager opened up in Four Seasons Hotel Sydney earlier this year, she applied and successfully transferred to Sydney in March 2014.*



*Another success story is Amanda Chiam, a Temasek Polytechnic graduate who completed her OSIP at the Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita.*

*She was subsequently awarded a Four Seasons scholarship to undertake her undergraduate degree, and is now a Manager-in-Training in the Rooms division with Four Seasons Hotel Singapore.*

