

## Tips for companies to promote mental wellness in workplace

Toxic managers should be held accountable and purposeless meetings dropped, says SICC chief



People with disabilities working on assigned tasks at Bizlink Centre in February. The non-profit was one of 12 organisations recognised yesterday for their efforts in creating a mentally healthy working environment. LIM HE ZAO/BAO FILE PHOTO



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The Covid-19 pandemic has had a transforming impact on society, and those who denied or ignored the importance of mental health experienced such issues for themselves when it struck, Singapore International Chamber of Commerce (SICC) chief executive Victor Mills said yesterday.

Speaking at the Silver Ribbon Mental Health Awards Ceremony for Employers 2021, which was held over Zoom, the Singaporean added that mental health issues should not be treated as a weakness.

Mr Mills, who was in financial services for three decades and previously sat on the board of trustees of ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, recommended some steps companies here can take towards promoting mental wellness in the workplace.

"Treating mental illness in the workforce starts with eliminating all possible stress triggers. Toxic managers should be held accountable, and sent for help. Root out purposeless meetings, don't call your colleagues after office hours, and certainly not on weekends, unless it's an emergency," he said.

Mr Mills added that staff should also not be expected to respond to an e-mail "at some ungodly hour".

"Don't treat mental health issues as a weakness. We expect others to be considerate of us. And here's a news flash: They expect the same consideration from us."

He said it is now time to put to use the lessons learnt.

"We must all be prepared to build on the momentum, which the pandemic has provided, and not waste this moment in history to make meaningful changes to how we as societies and businesses treat mental illness."

Yesterday's inaugural ceremony saw 12 organisations recognised for their efforts in creating a mentally healthy working environment.

These include offering job opportunities to persons with mental health issues, equipping staff with mental health knowledge on identifying mental health issues and promoting positive mental health awareness at their workplace.

Jardines Mindset was one of the 12 organisations named.

## Silver Ribbon Awards recipients

- Bizlink Centre Singapore
- FedEx Express
- Jardines Mindset
- Jebsen & Jessen Group
- Johnson & Johnson Singapore
- Otsuka Pharmaceuticals (Singapore)
- Pocari Sweat Singapore
- Project X
- PSA Corporation
- Rio Tinto
- Singapore Civil Defence Force
- Twitter Asia-Pacific

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MR VICTOR MILLS, CEO of Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, on the steps to be taken.

The registered charity for the Jardines group has hired about 230 people with mental health conditions over the past 10 years, and helped place another 310 in organisations outside the group.

Its chief executive Jeffery Tan told The Straits Times that some have the misconception that hiring a person with a mental health condition will disadvantage an organisation.

He said hiring such people actually "makes the organisation receive more in return", as it gives others the opportunity to understand that those with mental health challenges are just like anybody else.

"It also gives us an opportunity to journey alongside individuals to see how they improve and integrate to the office environment, and gives you an opportunity to display empathy as well," he added.

Ms Ang Li May, chief executive of non-profit Bizlink Centre Singapore, said it is important to have a culture in which people understand one another's working styles and help those with mental health conditions to feel comfortable in the workplace. "It's about how we help them to cope if there's a project coming in (or) a more stressful period," she said.

A spokesman for global mining group Rio Tinto said that the group believes investing in mental health and wellness programmes and committing to an inclusive environment is "not only the right thing to do, but it is also good for business".

Senior Minister of State for Manpower Zaqy Mohamad, who was at the ceremony, said mental well-being at the workplace has become a growing concern, especially as employees face changes in working arrangements amid the pandemic.

"It is therefore encouraging to see companies doing their part to care for and support their employees' mental well-being - and that we recognise these efforts through initiatives like the Silver Ribbon Awards," he added.

He said that supporting the mental well-being of workers is a priority for the Government, citing several recent efforts such as the launch of the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces in November.

Mr Zaqy said: "I want to emphasise that mental health is just as important as physical health - and it can have a significant impact on workers' productivity. I am glad that more employers recognise this, and are taking the first steps to introduce mental well-being initiatives at their workplaces."