It wouldn't be too far from the truth to say Singapore Management University (SMU) has little trouble attracting talent. A major contributing factor to this success in drawing and retaining employees, from faculty to administrative personnel, is its work-life initiatives.

"The four pillars of our organisation are what drive us forward in providing a world-class environment for our students and employees here at SMU," says Ong Tiong Eng, Director, Human Resources, SMU. "The pillars are work-life harmony, life-long learning, performance-based organisation and health and wellness."

Creating An Attractive Environment

"The new generation of workers doesn’t care about working 20-odd years for one single organisation," says Ong. "Nowadays, people factor in their families’ expectations when they are job-hunting and are more demanding in terms of family time when they consider their career options." This change in mindset was an important consideration when senior management was shaping SMU’s work-life strategy to ensure they create a positive and attractive work environment.

One of the things that make SMU’s work-life integration programme stand out is that it takes the entire workforce into consideration and goes beyond catering to a single group, for example, working mothers. "With increasing diversity in the demographics of the workforce, employees at different stages of their lives have different needs, which the traditional one-size-fits-all benefits programmes no longer cater to," explains Ong.

They realised the importance of developing a customisable initiative, which allows employees to have a say in what works for them. The result is Flex-Ben (Flexi-Benefits) Programme, where employees choose from a set of benefits that caters to their individual needs. Single employees, for instance, might make use of benefits to...
pay mobile phone bills or go on a vacation, while married employees might choose to spend their benefits on family members instead.

**Attention To Detail**

Another popular initiative is the one hour of physical activity per work week allotted to employees. Employees can go to the gym or for a run anytime during office hours. "I really like this initiative as I can exercise up to three times a week, by dividing up the allotted hour. This shows that the organisation is really concerned about its employees' well-being, even down to our general health," says Haslinda Shamsudin, Manager, Office of Campus Development, SMU.

In addition, extra effort is put in to foster a work environment that values transparency and open communication. Feedback from employees regarding their general work satisfaction level through office surveys is factored into the appraisal of their respective superiors. This gives employees confidence that their opinions are being heard and their wellbeing is of concern to top management.

It is such attention to detail that really sets SMU apart as a choice employer, and this cannot be possible without strong endorsement from the top. Professor Howard Hunter, President, SMU, concurs. "Initiatives such as the one hour exercise time included in our employees' work hours are small gestures, but these are the things that show them that we, as an employer, care enough about their work-life harmony to look into the nitty-gritty details," explains Professor Hunter.

With other initiatives like flexi-time and amenities that promote a pro-family work environment, such as a lactation room, thrown into the mix, SMU is certainly deserving of the clutch of awards it has received for its best-in-class practices - from recruitment, compensation and benefits to development and retention.