

# Workplace happiness

Interview by Eric Collins

**Dr David Zhang Qingzhong** is Senior Vice President, Group Human Resources, Lee Kum Kee Group, and a CityU DBA alumnus. Here he talks about identifying talent, empowering the younger generation, and simple changes that may be a food for health and happiness.

**EC: Could you tell us a little bit about your early life?**

DZ: I was born and raised in Shanghai. I studied in the education spectrum for my first degree at Shanghai Normal University. I started my career as a teacher and later joined the commercial sector. I have worked for multinationals such as Phillips and Whirlpool where I have been engaged in training, talent management, and leadership development. Later, I completed an MBA degree at the University of Leicester.

**EC: Why did you come to Hong Kong?**

DZ: I switched to a different career and moved to Hong Kong around eight years ago to my current employer, Lee Kum Kee Group. As you know, Lee Kum Kee is a very popular brand in the Asian market with a long historical legacy. Actually it is not only famous for oyster sauce, it is also a very diversified group. But what impressed me most is its unique corporate culture. The Group has put into practice three key concepts that form the corporate culture – “思利及人” (meaning that considering how to do things that could bring benefits to others than just yourself), the core value for the Lee Kum Kee family, which serves as the business ethos of the Group; the “Autopilot Leadership Model,” a synergy of Eastern and Western leadership essence to attract and nurture talent; and “Constant Entrepreneurship,” which advocates seizing the opportunities for innovations and breakthroughs.

I am deeply impressed with these as it is not only the essence that drive business success but also the values that nourish personal growth. Therefore, I made a big move to come to Hong Kong with my entire family. After relocating to Hong Kong, I pursued a DBA degree at CityU.

**EC: As Senior Vice President of Human Resources what are your main responsibilities?**

DZ: It could be a long list, but to summarise, the main focus are Talent, Culture and Organisation. The ultimate goal is to establish a governance model to shape and sustain business growth.

**EC: Do you have an overall approach to identifying talent?**

DZ: At Lee Kum Kee, we believe cultural fit is more important than one's capability. We have our own developed Values, Culture and Personal Qualities (VCP), and competency models that sets different criteria for different level of employees.

**EC: How flexible is the company in listening to its employees and collect innovative ideas to improve business?**

DZ: We have to create a system to encourage innovation, apart from just talking, right? An annual employee engagement survey is one way to listen

to employees' voices, and additionally we listen to employees' opinions through conducting satisfaction surveys. By taking surveys, not only do we want to hear the feedback from employees but also set the goals for improvement. We also conduct a 360 performance review among all levels of employees. Employees are invited to give feedback to one another, regardless of ranking, objectively and on an open-ground, to ensure two-way communication.

We encourage entrepreneurship through games or competitions. We encourage younger people to create new business models or products that can really address customer needs. So actually, it's a very interesting competition and we're trying different ways to reward people like forming groups to do market studies and make proposals.

**EC: In terms of HR, do you encourage staff career movement across the subsidiaries. Is it possible that somebody who starts off in, let's say Sauce, ends up in real estate in London?**

DZ: Yes, at Lee Kum Kee, we practise “Autopilot Leadership Model.” We believe that in order for business to become sustainable, we must unleash employees' potential. Only in this way can ensure employees are happy and achieve the best results and in return, the company can attract talents.

In fact, the first element of the AP model is “Choosing the Right Talent,” which is crucial for the success of any organisation. One of the critical aspects of this element is “Positioning People Properly.” Only when employees are placed in the right position will they actualise their full potential and maximise their value to the Company. We promote empowerment and believe one should never set limits to achieve breakthroughs and innovations to gain a more diversified working experience. Such an approach provides opportunities for employees to shine and find suitable roles within the Company.

**EC: Can you talk a little bit about what empowerment means across the generations?**

DZ: Many companies are talking about empowerment, whereas our company advocates “Effective Empowerment.” Many managers practice empowerment by simply assigning jobs to their subordinates. On the contrary, managers who practice Effective Empowerment also coach their subordinates through systematic process with the necessary guidelines, leading to more impressive results. We found the younger generation have their own individual explicit needs. They're looking for more freedom, more flexibility and more recognition instead of criticism or too much tough feedback. And they have their own lifestyle. They were born in this mobile digital





world. By Coaching and Developing Talent, it nurtures individuals to grow their skills and become better team players, ultimately contributing to business sustainability. Especially in the post-Covid world, we need to be more flexible than before, although we should gradually encourage more face-to-face interactions. In general, I would say coming to the office for two or three days per week would be good. But it should be flexible enough that for certain jobs, you can join Zoom meetings when you are on the go or from different time zones or remote locations.

**EC: What qualities do you look for in university graduates?**

DZ: So if we're using our core culture as a starting point to look for talent, you need to have some teamwork, team spirit, which we called "We > I" (We are Greater than I). And we need people who really can play a future leadership role. People who can build a strong team, develop talents, and demonstrate becoming a role model. We also need talents who can demonstrate "Constant Entrepreneurship," so they're willing to take risks and are also open to creative thinking. We

think a personal mission is very important which means that people are clear about their values, purpose, and meaning. At Lee Kum Kee, we strive to promote "Health and Happiness." We invite people who share the same beliefs to join us to co-create a happier world.

**EC: You talked about "Health and Happiness" just now. How do you plan on becoming a role model?**

DZ: Well, I am deeply impressed by Lee Kum Kee's mission of promoting health & happiness and its corporate culture. Health and happiness start with yourself — I believe the path to health and happiness begins with simple daily routines. There are a number of simple tips that helps to recover your energy.

First, encourage yourself to go to bed before 11pm. Second, take a quick nap after lunch to feel refreshed. Third, eat a healthy diet, and aim to walk ten thousand steps a day. Fourth, maintain good relationships with your partners and friends. Additionally, you can also practice positive thinking, which helps to change your perspective and boost your happiness. Even small steps can make a big difference.

