

CHAMPIONS OF GOOD 2020

The benefits of doing good

Amgen Singapore Manufacturing and Grace at Work lauded for their CSR contribution.

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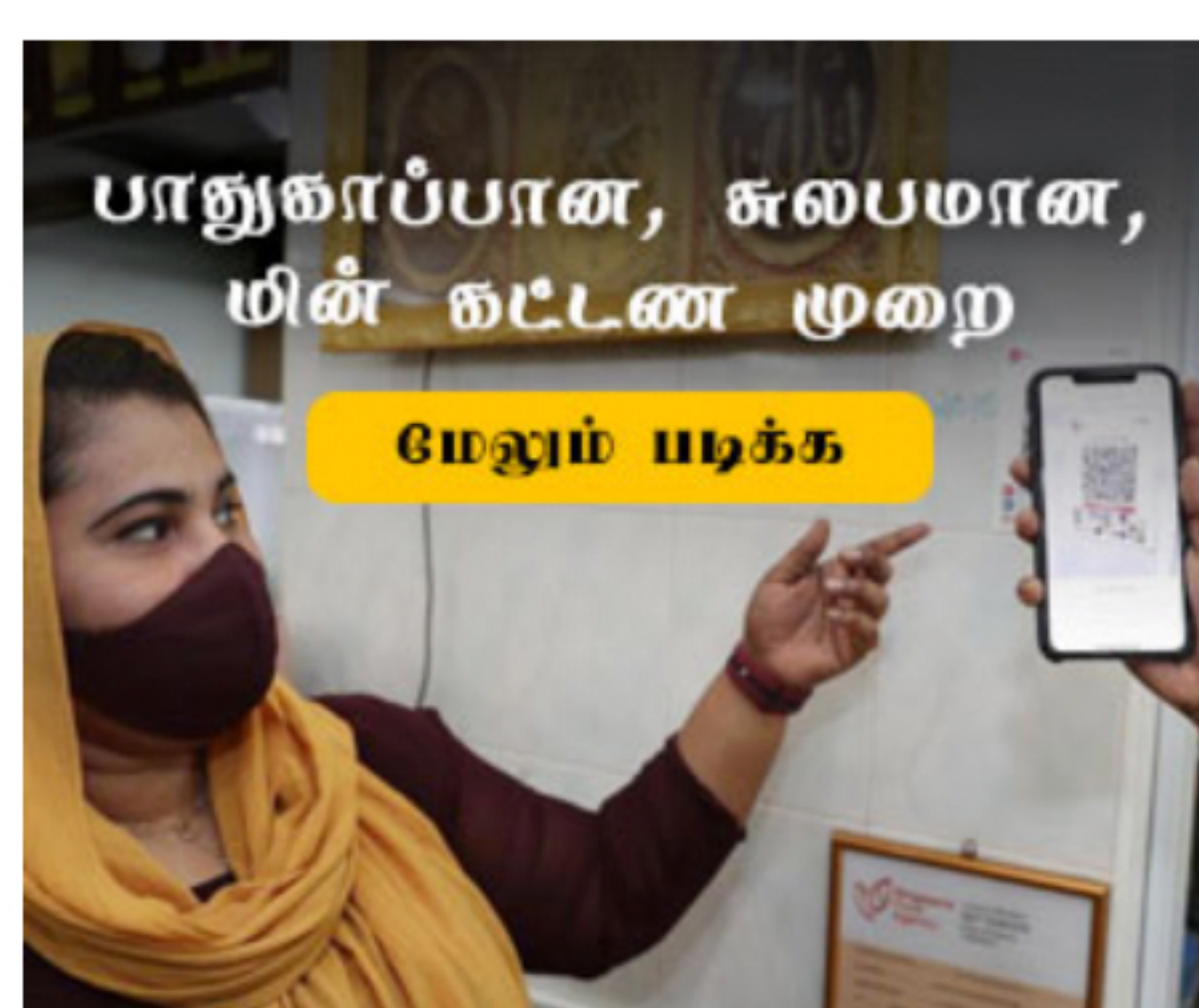
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GENETIC engineering and drug production via bacteria cultivation.

Such esoteric scientific terms were banded about at a community outreach session where staff volunteers from Amgen Singapore Manufacturing (ASM) partnered Science Centre Singapore to engage beneficiaries from the Children's Cancer Foundation.

The initiative, Amgen Biotech Experience (ABE) Befriender, is a streamlined version of the ABE programme that is offered to participating schools in Singapore through its corporate philanthropic arm - the Amgen Foundation.

Lam Yue Ning, process development associate, Amgen Singapore Manufacturing (ASM), said: "With a family history impacted by cancer, I know first-hand the difficulties and challenges faced by cancer patients and their families. I'm also a firm believer in the power of science to find the next cure to treat grievous diseases. That was why I was very drawn to become an Amgen Biotech Experience Befriender to help disadvantaged children in our communities spark a love for science and to learn how science can be fun and applicable to many areas of everyday life."



During the befriender session, DNA extractions were performed and culturing bacteria on an agar plate was simulated.

"During one of these sessions with the Children's Cancer Foundation, I saw how science can be both exciting yet empowering - having seen the looks of incredulity on the faces of children impacted by cancer when they saw the changes on real bacteria cultures, after it has been genetically engineered with the green or red fluorescent protein to glow green or red respectively. These are what motivate and give meaning to my work and purpose every day."

Emily Razaqi, vice-president of ASM, said that as a relatively new setup in Singapore, the firm recognises the importance of giving back to its communities.

For example, the ABE programme provides teacher professional development, curriculum materials, and research-grade equipment and supplies to secondary schools at no cost. This programme has reached more than 800,000 students to date and is currently available in Amgen communities across the world including Singapore. "The programme has proven popular with four out of five students expressing that they had learnt something new, while 85 per cent had enjoyed the hands-on activities that they engaged in."

Associate Professor Lim Tit Meng, chief executive of Science Centre Singapore, said: "The hands-on approach is one of the strongest unique selling propositions that ABE offers, as hands-on lab experience is something students don't usually get in school."

And while such initiatives have benefited the students, Amgen has also reaped the rewards.

Ms Razaqi said: "We find that doing good has far-reaching benefits for both our staff and for Amgen's organisational culture. Doing good greatly enhances staff loyalty, happiness, and pride, which mean we can lower our burnt-out factor which helps in the workplace.

"Beyond these benefits, such initiatives also help us to build and sustain our Amgen brand. Staff members, especially the millennials, like to be associated with values such as compassion, trustworthiness, and supportiveness. They are proud to work for a company that supports philanthropic programmes, which can lead to increased loyalty and better staff retention. This sense of pride often shows up in pulse surveys."

The company has trended lower than the average market voluntary turnover rate (Mercer's BMAC Snapshot Survey) for Singapore's pharmaceutical industry and its voluntary turnover has gone down in half from 12 per cent a year ago to 6 per cent at the end of 2020.

Some 94 per cent of the local staff had also, in a recent Great Place to Work® survey, given feedback that they felt good about the ways the firm has contributed to the community. ASM was also recognised as a Champion of Good by National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's Company of Good, and received the Community Chest Awards (Community Spirit Gold) and AmCham CARES Distinction Award.

"We believe these efforts add up to help ASM garner a 5th place ranking as one of Singapore's Best Workplaces by the Great Place to Work® Institute and as one of Singapore's 150 most attractive employers in The Straits Times Singapore's Best Employers 2020 listing."

Build and sustain a compassionate and collaborative society

As a Champion of Good, and having identified with the Company of Good's ethos of giving back to the community and advocating business to do its part to build and sustain a compassionate and collaborative society, Amgen wants to catalyse a corporate giving movement and partner with like-minded businesses to be a force of good especially during the pandemic.

"We have all learned valuable lessons in this pandemic - that no person is an island and if one part of the society suffers, every part suffers with it. . . Short-term thinking will undermine sustainable business models. To emerge stronger from this crisis, it is important that businesses look to longer-term goals to continue thriving and to use this time to bolster their business resilience, and continue investing in people, technology and the community," said Ms Razaqi.

Like Amgen, Grace at Work Teambuilding was also recognised as a Champion of Good last year.

But what distinguishes Grace at Work from other firms is that corporate social responsibility is not just an initiative of the company, it is their business model.

Tony Loo, director of Grace at Work Teambuilding, said: "Our company helps our corporate clients to programme their corporate trainings to include elements of CSR values. We believe that promoting CSR in a corporate organisation would value add to the overall culture and performance of the company. At the same time, we are also committed to our partner beneficiaries to ensure our donation products generated from the session, are suitable and relevant to them."

Hence Grace at Work has two CSR Teambuilding programmes: Build a Bicycle and Build a Wheelchair, which revolve around creating donation products for charity.

"During the conceptualisation phase of the programs, we were challenged with high cost of donation products, having to ensure the quality of the donation products and ensuring a relevant link between CSR and corporate training.

"To ensure our donation products were relevant, we conducted multiple meetings with our beneficiary partners to better understand their needs and recommendations for product features on the donation products, such as request for foldable parts on the wheelchair products for ease of transportation and storage. With these important data, we were able to work with our manufacturer to customise our product order, keeping only functions relevant for our beneficiaries and thus keeping our cost low."

The business model of CSR management service is quite unheard of locally, and when asked about its sustainability, Mr Loo said: "Coming from a corporate trainer background, I have felt that mainstream corporate trainings lack the emotional impact to positively change or affect the participants. This is where I see CSR coming in, to be able to drive the point straight to the heart. At the same time, this is a niche service which actually helps to distinguish our services from the saturated teambuilding industry. Having been in this for six years, I see growth over the years and our brand having a strong footing in the CSR industry. It is definitely a sustainable business model and the great thing is that it helps us to benefit all the stakeholders involved."

Within a span of two years, Grace at Work was able to achieve a 40 per cent increase in revenue from its programmes.

However, due to the pandemic, business has definitely been greatly impacted.

"Other than the restriction in physical gatherings for non-business essential activities, we also realise companies are reducing non-essential spending in this economy downturn. To adapt to the new environment, we have integrated virtual programmes which are able to achieve the same CSR objectives but without the benefit of social interactions. Though less experiential, it still does help our participants to relieve their longing of interaction with all their colleagues."

Mr Loo added that there is definitely room to grow the company to include a full CSR management service.

"Our initial plan before the pandemic was to grow our service to build a long-term CSR relationship with the beneficiaries. This would allow companies to have a more well thought through timeline in their CSR calendar and also constantly provide their charity to the same beneficiary. Through this continued work, we hope to help build that long-term relationship between the two entities. . . As we are not a non-profit organisation, we make it a point to be open on the fees and not hide it behind the charity banner."

Joseph Lim, operations executive, said that working for a company so entrenched in giving back is a strong motivation for him to complete the projects that he is working on as he is aware that the result will be beneficial to the charities.

"Moreover, as the programmes require creativity, it helps to motivate me in areas that is beneficial for my growth."

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