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Diageo Asia-Pacific's human resource director John Patterson says respecting employees and treating them with dignity are important values at the company, one of the top 11 people-friendly firms in Singapore recognised in a study by Hewitt Singapore. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

How the winners stack up

HEWITT BEST EMPLOYERS IN SINGAPORE 2009

- Arup Singapore
- Diageo Singapore
- Federal Express Singapore
- Hilti Far East
- Housing & Development Board
- McDonald's Restaurants
- Nanyang Polytechnic
- Singapore Food Industries
- Singapore Marriott Hotel
- Singapore Prison Service

SPECIAL COMMENDATION AWARD

- The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

11 people-friendly employers lauded

By ANANYA ROY

SINGAPORE'S best employers have been recognised in a study that ranks the country's top 11 people-friendly firms.

The Hewitt Best Employers in Singapore Study - media-partnered with Singapore Press Holdings' CATS Recruit and Business Times - looked at 50 companies across various industries, focusing on three key areas: leadership, corporate culture and career opportunities for employees.

It then decided on those that excelled most in all areas and listed them unranked in alphabetical order.

Ms Julia Smith, country leader at Hewitt Singapore who opened the awards ceremony at the M Hotel, said: "What our study revealed is that Hewitt Best Employers have learnt that creating and maintaining an environment focused on key human capital elements and making minor adjustments, without losing sight of the goal, allow them to sustain their strong position and prosper - or be set to prosper - when the economy improves."

The study has been conducted once every two years since 2001 and usually bestows 10 honours. This year, a special commendation award was given to the Ritz-Carlton Millenia Singapore for its well-rounded performance.

Receiving the award, general manager Peter Mainguy recalled how on his first day he was told that "employees are not servants, but service professionals - ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen".

Second-time winner and Singapore-headquartered Diageo, which counts the world's premium drinks such as Smirnoff, Johnnie Walker, Baileys, J&B and Guinness in its range, said that its employees are at the core of its business.

Respecting employees and treating them with dignity are values stressed by Diageo Asia-Pacific human resource director John Patterson. "We always try and connect our employees to our company's purpose - celebrating life," he said.

Like other companies, Diageo has had to make difficult decisions about retrenchment, but Mr. Patterson added

that "transparency, support and respect for employees have remained key".

A first-time winner was real estate engineering, design and planning consultant Arup. Its principal office leader Peter J. Hoad said the company viewed all its staff as shareholders and that the firm "belongs to our employees".

"During these times, companies have to do whatever they can to retain people. And regular communication with employees is very important," he added.

He said the firm - which has Singapore Expo, the National Library building, SMU campus, the Marina Bay Sands integrated resort and Singapore Flyer on its project portfolio - has not been hit much by the recession.

Presenting the awards were Ms Smith and Ms Elsie Chua, executive vice-president at CATS classified marketing division, who said that rather than effecting massive retrenchments, "companies have to recognise that people are repositories of experience, skill, knowledge, innovation, dedication, loyalty and much, much more". "Can you expect the same from your machine, systems or databases?" she asked.