

Balancing act

Young Executive of the Year winner relishes the challenges in his job

by lynn seah

WHEN a FairPrice branch was set up at the foot of an HDB block in Lengkong Tiga, residents were worried about the din from delivery trucks.

To allay their fears, Mr Chia Jingwei, who was in charge of the branch then, visited the residents with his staff, bearing gifts of oranges and listening to their concerns.

Taking their feedback into consideration, Mr Chia and his team implemented measures to reduce the noise from the trucks. "In the end, many of the residents we visited became our regular customers," says Mr Chia.

It is such leadership, as well as his emphasis on service, that has enabled the 31-year-old to excel in his career with FairPrice. It also won him the Young Executive of the Year award in this year's Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) Retail Awards.

"Service is the cornerstone of the retail industry," he says. "Often, customers will remember the kind cashier who bagged

their groceries carefully with a delightful smile or the knowledgeable retail assistant who suggested recipes for vegetables bought at the store. Customers will always come back to the supermarket that provides them with the best service experience."

Mr Chia joined FairPrice in 2009 after graduating from Singapore Management University with a degree in business man-

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— Mr Chia Jingwei, branch manager, FairPrice Finest

agement. He worked as a branch executive at several outlets before being asked to set up and run his first store at Lengkong Tiga in 2011. It was an opportunity he relished.

"Running a store means I am also given responsibility to manage my own business. This is an experience that most of my peers at my age don't get," he says.

Later, when he was in charge of another outlet at Woodgrove, he piloted a self-bagging cashier counter and system at the branch.

Talking to customers, the team realised that, besides dealing with technical difficulties relating to the design of the new counter, they also had to work with behavioural issues.

For example, although customers were willing to bag their own groceries, they didn't want to embarrass themselves if they bagged things wrongly and held up the queue.

"Armed with this information, we tweaked our design so two shoppers can bag at the same time," says Mr Chia.

Ms Rebecca Teo, director of human resource at FairPrice, says Mr Chia has a "positive and open-minded attitude", which "makes it easy for him to accept changes and new ideas". "He strives for productivity and profitability in the stores he manages and this ensures that higher returns can be realised," she adds.

She also notes that he "conducts himself with a bearing that is appropriate in a leader and earns the respect of his subordinates".

Managing his staff had been particularly challenging for Mr Chia. Many of the team leaders who report to him are older and have more experience at FairPrice.

"Working with senior and more experienced staff requires me to balance humility and stern leadership. Without humility, a young manager will come across as arrogant and haughty. If we are not assertive enough, there may be staff and performance issues," he says.

Now the branch manager at the FairPrice Finest outlet at Seletar Mall, Mr Chia has enjoyed every step of his career in retail so far.

"From opening a small supermarket at Lengkong Tiga to converting and renovating the Woodgrove branch to a Finest store, to opening a brand-new Finest store at Seletar Mall, these experiences have left a lasting mark on me," he says. "I have learnt to become more resilient in the face of challenges and more determined in each task given to me."



Mr Chia has enjoyed every step in his retail career so far. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG