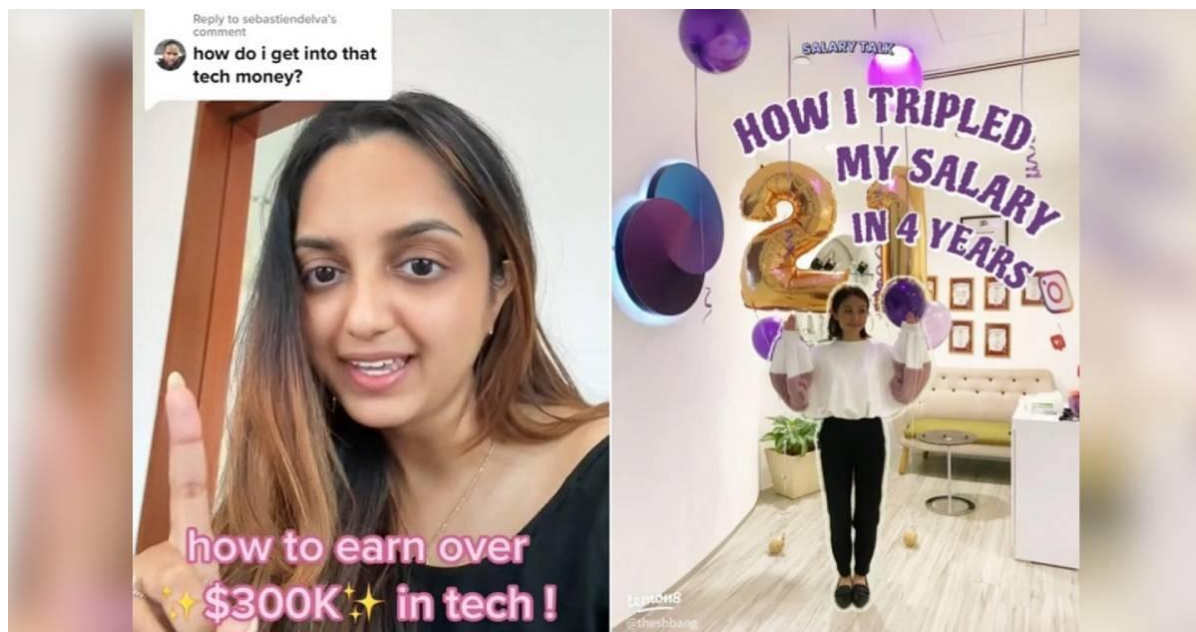


Publication: Asia One Online

Date: 3 December 2024

Headline: 'It's good to know where you stand': Younger workers are using social media to push for pay transparency

'It's good to know where you stand': Younger workers are using social media to push for pay transparency



SINGAPORE — Karishma Jashani earns more than \$300,000 annually working in tech sales.

This is not a secret — she has shared it with her 25,000 followers on TikTok and anyone who chances upon her account, where she details her job scope and what she does daily. She also shares tips, such as what those looking for a similar job should keep an eye on in their salary packages.

"I wanted to empower women because there are not many people who know you can earn that much in tech sales, and it's a male-dominated industry," said the 28-year-old.

"It's important for people to know the salaries in the market as a way to benchmark themselves; if there are gaps, to find out why that's the case and at least there's a sense of accountability for employers too."

Jashani is among a growing group of people in their 20s and 30s — both men and women —breaking the taboo around salary talk. Both in workplaces and online, younger workers have been sharing their salary details with colleagues and fellow social media users.

"I think a lot of younger people want to discuss it. It's less common here than in America and Europe, but I think Gen Zs will move towards these conversations," said Jashani.

Globally, pay transparency has been increasingly practised in workplaces worldwide. States in the US, such as New York and Colorado, have in place transparency laws to ensure job seekers and employees have access to salary information.

Singapore does not have laws that require companies to disclose salary ranges, but younger employees are taking matters into their own hands.

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Is pay transparency a boon or bane?

When Joy Wang was working as a growth product manager at a fashion tech start-up, she learnt from a counterpart who had a similar job scope that he was paid 66 per cent more than her.

This prompted her to ask for a promotion and a pay raise.

"I think this happens quite a bit in different workplaces, and in this case, it's good to know how you're being paid or where you stand," Wang, 31, told The Straits Times.



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Content creator Daisy Mitchell, a British-born permanent resident, was inspired to share about her wages with her followers on TikTok after seeing other creators worldwide do so. She chronicles her monthly income on the platform, breaking it down to the cent.

In October, she shared that she earned \$6,426.07 — \$4,770 from a theatre production, \$1,250 from TikTok consulting services, \$387.70 from teaching and \$18.37 in commission from promotional codes.

Full-time freelancers like herself have no protection from being undercut, she added, citing the absence of unions or minimum wage. "Clients often choose cheaper options, pushing down wages and bargaining power for creatives."

Mitchell, 26, also noted that pay transparency is crucial to closing the racial wage gap.

When taking on hosting and singing gigs, she realised she was getting paid about four times more than her co-performers purely because her clients "wanted a Caucasian person".

"Racial preferences in commercial work are very blunt here in Singapore," she said.

Discussing salary packages with your colleagues can help to identify significant pay disparities and ensure that your salary is competitive, said Joel Toh, general manager of The Supreme HR Advisory.

"There are cases where new employees receive higher salaries than existing staff, who may not receive any salary increments during an economic downturn," said Toh, citing the pandemic.

Salaries should be discussed in ranges rather than absolutes, he added, as minor differences may be due to varying factors such as experience or educational achievements.

However, pay transparency is a "double-edged sword" as it may give rise to discontent among workers, said Dr Shereen Fatimah, assistant professor of organisational behaviour and human resources at the Singapore Management University.

"When pay differentials become public information, it creates perceptions of inequalities among co-workers which could lead to resentment, disengagement at work, and a lack of collaboration among peers," she said.

Thus, to negotiate salaries in a sustainable manner, employees can choose to make idiosyncratic requests, instead of focusing only on monetary rewards, which are limited in organisations.

This includes asking for parking benefits, or requests tailored to career growth, such as opportunities to attend workshops or take on new tasks, said Dr Shereen.

While Singapore does not have laws prohibiting employees from discussing their wages with others, some companies include non-disclosure clauses in employment contracts.

Employees may be held legally liable if they break these agreements, said Toh, although these clauses are often challenging to enforce as the company would have to prove and quantify damages.

Driving the movement

Publication: Asia One Online

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Expectations of young workers entering the workforce are driving the growing demand for pay transparency, said recruitment firms. While there are no laws dictating its necessity, more job listings are stating salary bands.

The inclusion of salary ranges in listings has seen a "dramatic rise in recent years", from about 50 per cent in 2022 to 90 per cent today, said Eugenia Ng, director at Michael Page Singapore.

Listings with salaries attract significantly more views, applications and saves, she added.

Kirsty Poltock, director at Robert Walters Singapore, said about 90 per cent of the listings on the firm's site have associated salary ranges.

Being clear to job seekers is crucial, added Poltock, as it fosters a discussion on whether the seeker and the organisation are aligned.

"In the current market with rising costs of living, (pay transparency) is a consistent question posed," she said.

Ng said Singapore's workforce, especially younger professionals, now prioritises fairness and clarity in pay and career progression, thus pushing employers to rethink their hiring and retention strategies.

Encouraging the salary conversation

Wang said that she did not hold the pay disparity against her colleague, whom she described as someone she knew she could confide in.

"When asking for a promotion, you should use current industry data and your own performance to show why you should be paid a certain amount," she said. "I would not recommend using another person's salary to advocate for yourself."

She was eventually offered a 15 per cent salary increment, shy of what she had asked for. She felt that she was undervalued and eventually left for a new job at a fintech start-up, which offered her a salary that was 60 per cent more than her previous.

She now owns a bridal e-commerce business and shares her experiences negotiating salaries on Lemon8, a social media platform.

Mitchell said: "We all talk about our mental health, our relationships, our daily lives.

"Finance is something everyone interacts with, so why not share what you can?"