

**SPEECH BY MR ZAQY MOHAMAD, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & MANPOWER, AT THE SINGAPORE RETAILERS ASSOCIATION EXCELLENT SERVICE AWARDS 2018 HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2018, 3.00 PM, AT KALLANG THEATRE**

Mr R Dhinakaran, President, Singapore Retailers Association,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to the Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) Excellent Service Awards 2018. I am honoured to be able to join you to celebrate the outstanding work of retailers and retail staff who have provided excellent service to their customers.

**The retail industry's contribution to Singapore**

2 Globally, the retail landscape is changing due to technological advances. There are new opportunities and new possibilities that technology can bring to the retail industry, only if we are willing to innovate and transform. This is because the

retail industry is an important economic sector. It employs about 144,000 people or about 4% of Singapore's total workforce. The sector contributes almost 1.3% of our GDP in Singapore, with operating receipts totalling \$36.7 billion. Apart from its economic contributions, the retail industry also adds to Singapore's vibrancy, and makes it an interesting and exciting place for us to live, work and play.

3 To help our retailers capture growth opportunities and remain competitive, the Retail Industry Transformation Map (ITM) was launched in 2016. We envision the retail industry to be a vibrant ecosystem of highly-productive omnichannel retailers, home-grown brands with a global footprint supported by a professional and skilled workforce. I understand that SRA and the retail industry have been engaged extensively for this transformation and I am also glad that we have many partners who have come on board to provide us with guidance and expertise in this journey.

## **Technology as an edge to better service delivery**

4 Jobs and skills is one of the key pillars under the Retail ITM. In today's competitive retail climate, the ability to deliver personalised service is an important aspect of service transformation. Personalisation requires deep knowledge and a good understanding of customers' needs. Personalisation for an individual is easy, but the challenge is when personalisation is done at scale. This is where technology comes into play. Technology, when used appropriately, can augment and enhance the service experience at both online and offline touchpoints. These are the service experiences that technology can create, but transformation must also come from within. Companies must be clear of the service experience they want to offer customers, before selecting and implementing the right technologies that can enable this.

## **Leveraging the Retail Job Redesign Framework**

5 As retailers adopt new technologies to raise productivity and capture new business opportunities, the workforce will have to learn new skills to adapt accordingly. In this regard, with SRA's support, Workforce Singapore and Enterprise Singapore developed the Retail Job Redesign Framework in June 2018, an initiative under the Retail ITM. Using the framework, retailers would be able to review their business models, redesign jobs, and equip employees with new skills. Workforce Singapore and Enterprise Singapore have also appointed five consultants to help retailers conduct job redesign consultancy projects. In the next few months, companies can also look forward to a series of job redesign masterclasses, aimed at helping more retailers kick-start their job redesign process.

6 Benjamin Barker is a company that has benefited from the Retail Job Redesign Framework. With the help of the framework, Benjamin Barker reviewed the job scopes of their store

managers and fashion advisors. They started 1-to-1 coaching sessions for their front-line staff, which was helpful in identifying the relevant training to upskill their staff in customer experience management, product advisory, and service innovation. Following these initiatives, Benjamin Barker received very good feedback regarding their customers' in-store experience and scored more than 9 out of 10 on average in their customer satisfaction level.

## **SRA's platform to drive service improvement in the retail industry**

7 It is encouraging to see local companies like Benjamin Barker embark on plans to up-skill their workers and deepen their capabilities. SRA, on its part, has constantly challenged the industry to do better and continues to drive transformation by championing productivity and service initiatives. Recognising that time and manpower are often the constraints faced by employers when sending their staff for training, SRA partnered

e-learning company UpSkill People Asia, to develop a platform for employees to learn at their own pace and their own convenience. The courses were piloted across multiple Wing Tai brands in Singapore and Malaysia and all Benjamin Barker stores in Singapore. Thus far, the pilot run has been a success with more than 90% of staff responding positively to the courses. SRA is looking to expand the reach of this platform to other companies, and to develop a new suite of training programmes for employers to equip its retail staff with necessary skills to stay relevant.

### **SRA Service SuperStar Award Finalists**

8 Finally, I am happy to share that the number of nominations for the SRA Excellent Service Awards have reached a record high of 3,963, exceeding last year's nominations by 16%. This reflects the increasing importance employers place on service excellence. Let me share more about the three finalists for the SRA Service SuperStar Award.

9 Our first finalist is Ms Chung Wing Lam, a Principal Clinical Pharmacist at Watson's store in Ngee Ann City. Wing Lam is known for going beyond her duties to help her customers. One example is a case in which a customer from the UK requested for a particular brand of blood pressure medication which she was taking in her home country. Instead of simply telling the customer that the brand of medication was not available, Wing Lam spent considerable time and effort to find alternative medication which was available locally. Wing Lam also searched for references on the equivalent dosage, made a recommendation and explained the rationale to the customer and her local doctor. Her recommendation was accepted by the customer's doctor and the customer was grateful for Wing Lam's efforts. It is commendable that she has gone beyond her regular course of duty.

10 The second finalist, Mr Sim Yee Chieh is an ION Orchard Concierge. Yee Chieh used to be from the manufacturing sector

and reinvented his skillsets to join the retail service sector. While it was uncharted territory for him, Yee Chieh's proactiveness, perseverance and positivity allowed him to excel in his service journey. Apart from going the extra mile by helping a customer with her heavy shopping bags, Yee Chieh also recommended making changes to the position of signs at the car park entrance of Ion Orchard to facilitate a smoother flow of traffic.

11 Our third finalist is Ms Tan Yin Yin, Principal Pharmacist at the Guardian Gleneagles Medical Centre. She has been with the company for 25 years, and I understand that this is her first job since graduation! Over the years, Yin Yin has nurtured many pharmacy students during their internships with Guardian, readily sharing her experiences in managing customers and providing tips and advice on how to achieve high standards of service delivery.

## Conclusion

12 These are inspiring stories and I look forward to seeing them on stage later. I would like to commend SRA for the good progress you have made in transforming the retail industry. It is not just about technology, but the heart of the people - the frontline staff - who make service delivery different and shapes the industry here. I am confident that with SRA's expertise in developing the retail industry, together with the spirit of excellence as exemplified by our customer service professionals, we will be in a strong position to move ahead despite the challenges. I would like to congratulate all the finalists and winners of the Excellent Service Awards, including the SRA Service SuperStar Award Finalists and the Winner. I hope that the examples of the commitment and dedication of our retail workforce professionals will continue to spur the industry to do better.

13 Thank you.