Opening Remarks by Minister Josephine Teo at Singapore Best Workplaces in Technology 2022 on 31 October 2022.

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Distinguished Guests

Colleagues and Friends

Introduction

1.   Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to this year's Best Workplaces in Technology Awards Ceremony.

2.   This is the fifth time I am giving out awards for Best Workplaces and I am pleased that the Awards have been expanded to recognise best workplaces in the Technology sector.

Building progressive and supportive workplaces is crucial for attracting talent

3.   The ceremony today recognises tech companies that have successfully built a **high-trust** workplace culture and kept employees **engaged**. We know this instinctively. But it is also evidence-based.

4.   Data[1] have long shown that trust and engagement are beneficial to both businesses and workers. Employees at **high-trust** companies report 74% less stress, 106% more energy at work, and 50% higher productivity. **Stronger employee engagement** – which comes with having meaningful professional bonds with one's colleagues, and learning and growing with them – also has a positive effect on productivity and leads to better products and increased value creation.

5.   So, my hearty congratulations to all award recipients! We know too well that a good workplace culture cannot be forged overnight. The recognition you receive today probably reflects years of tough decisions, change management, and commitment to continuous improvement.

6.   Many of you have been coming back year after year as Singapore's best places to work. Thank you for not resting on your laurels and for making sustained efforts in employee engagement and building up talent.

Government is fully behind industry efforts to build a people-centric tech workforce and is setting a positive example

7.   The Government, too, is committed to investing in our people. While expanding our tech talent pipeline through our Institutions of Higher Learning, we have also devoted significant resources to upgrade our workers to ensure that they stay relevant and are ready for tomorrow's challenges.

8.   While I was at MOM, we started developing Jobs Transformation Maps to mirror the Industry Transformation Maps, and to identify key technologies driving change and their impact on jobs. These Maps serve as compasses for employers to reskill their workers for the future of work, as technology becomes more pervasive across all sectors.

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[1] Paul J. Zak, The Neuroscience of Trust, Harvard Business Review January-February 2017.

9.   Just over two weeks ago, I unveiled the Jobs Transformation Map for the Information & Communications workforce. This latest effort will build up the skills and resilience of tech professionals, by identifying key trends, such as 5G and Blockchain, and guiding employers in the redesign of jobs and the provision of training or reskilling opportunities. It will complement our ongoing Tech Skills Accelerator (or TeSA) initiative, which we started in 2016, to develop and attract more talent to tech jobs to meet the industry's manpower needs. Under TeSA, we have placed and trained more than 12,000 individuals into good tech jobs and trained another 160,000 in tech skills.

10.   In the spirit of the Forward Singapore movement, the Government is committed to equipping all Singaporeans to reach their fullest potential, regardless of their background and starting points in life. In particular, while building a resilient tech workforce, we want women to have more opportunities to advance in tech. We have already made promising strides. Today, about 4 in 10 students in our local Institutes of Higher Learning studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM, are women. According to a Boston Consulting Group Study, about the same proportion of Singapore's tech professionals are women. This is well above the global average of 28%.[2] IMDA, together with industry and Institutes of Higher Learning, has made significant progress with the Singapore Women in Tech initiative since 2019. It has reached more than 120,000 people via initiatives such as coaching and hackathons by tech companies, and has entered into an MOU with all five local Polytechnics to give our girls a head start in tech.

11.   There is still so much more potential to be tapped. So, I am happy to witness the launch of a meaningful initiative today. That is the GRowing in Tech Mentorship Programme, or GRIT, by Great Place to Work. It sounds about right that these four letters were picked to form the acronym that describes the programme. I think we all know to succeed in any domain, it takes effort and hard work. Particularly for tech, which moves so quickly, and there is always a constant need to keep up. And in that sort of landscape, you cannot afford to stay still. You have to have a certain amount of grit in you to want to keep up and you are not daunted by the constant change and challenges. Through this initiative, aspiring women leaders will receive mentorship from senior women executives and broaden their networks, to grow their careers at an accelerated pace. 19 women leaders – some of you are here today – have signed up as mentors. They hail from Adobe, Cisco, Crowdstrike, Salesforce and Thoughtworks. All of these companies were recognised as Best Workplaces in Technology in both 2021 and 2022.

12.   I tell this story[3] every now and then, if you look at software engineers in the US during the 1960s, there were already a good proportion of software engineers who were women. The proportion continued to improve throughout the 1990s. Then unfortunately, the proportion of women in US who were software engineers began to decline gradually, such that the percentage of women software engineers in the US in 2013 was back to about the same percentage in the 1960s. The question is why did that happened? It turned out that when personal computer got more affordable and commonplace in homes, researchers found that more families are likely to place it in the son's room. And it was much more likely for Dad to mentor the son in the use of the computer.

13.   I tell this story only as a reminder that it shouldn't be taken as a given that there will always be an improvement in the number of women in the tech fields. The trend can always reverse. So, it is important to show girls and younger women that that there is a runway for them in tech. And that there are successful women who can show them what it takes to be a trailblazer. And also give them confidence that this is a domain that welcomes them.

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[2] BCG-IMDA Report, 2020.
[3] The story could be found in the book, "Coders".

14.   I am also happy to see many employers here today taking active steps to enhance equality in recruitment and retention practices, and upskilling their women staff members. Let me cite a few examples –

i.   Mastercard ensures that women are paid the same salary as their male counterparts for the same work done, and is on track to achieve equal gender representation across all career levels by 2023.

ii.   Cisco's JUMP programme develops mid-level women into next-generation leaders to narrow the gender gap in tech leadership. It organises dedicated networking sessions and workshops to help aspiring female leaders strengthen their strategic thinking and leadership skills.

iii.   Last but not least, GovTech established the Women in (Gov)Tech Employee Resource Group, which holds constructive conversations on difficult topics such as unconscious bias, and organises monthly career talks by women leaders in the public and private sectors.

Conclusion

15.   Once again, my congratulations for being recognised as Singapore's Best Workplaces in Technology.

16.   The award today should not be the end, but the start of new endeavours:

i.   To keep pace with dynamic workplace norms and evolving challenges;

ii.   To set a positive example for all employers in Singapore, and

iii.   To be the catalyst for change towards a happier, healthier, and more resilient workforce;

17.   Thank you.