

# 'Blue Ocean' recruitment

STORY has it that the founding partner of the Kuala Lumpur Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) office was recruited at a rugby game in Australia. Apparently, one of the partners in the Sydney office took a liking to this smart young fellow who could talk up a storm and sounded as if he knew what he was talking about — an essential survival skill in the world of management consulting. This founding partner then started and is now running one of the most successful private equity firms in Malaysia, if not Asia.

This story illustrates, for me at least, the importance of recruiting talented individuals in the "not-so-obvious" places. And "looking", I most certainly am in my capacity as the director of my own consulting company, OKM Consulting, as a regional consultant with the Blue Ocean Strategy Regional Center (BOSRC) and as a member of the teaching staff at UCSI University.

I established my own consulting company with the explicit purpose of wanting to create an environment and to take on projects that would be intellectually (and sometimes even physically) challenging and stimulating for me as well as for my partners and co-workers. I was fortunate enough to have two clients on board barely a month after my company was registered on July 7 this year.

Unfortunately, I did not have an office and still don't, which meant that it was difficult for me to hire full-time staff — because they did not have an office to go to work at! I needed help in a hurry to work on projects for my two clients. And help came along in the form of a handful of very smart and talented interns who were on their summer break — students from UK and US universities.

My "lead" intern was someone whom I had taken note of on the blogosphere four years ago when he was barely 16 years of age. A precocious kid, I decided to ask him to blog with me and another friend on education issues in Malaysia ([www.educationmalaysia.blogspot.com](http://www.educationmalaysia.blogspot.com)). He had some spare time on his hands this summer and I offered him a paid summer internship with my consulting company. I hired another intern because she mentioned on twitter that she was on a one-month summer break and wanted something to do.

Another two interns fell into my lap (not literally, mind you!) via another internship programme that a good friend was running at the same time and he did not have enough work for them to do. My final intern for this summer break is a young lady whom I had read about while I was studying in the US and whom I had been in touch with while she was working as an intern journalist at Malaysiakini.com. In a space of one month, OKM Consulting had grown from just me to me and five

interns (three of them have since gone back to the UK and US)

I think I delivered an interesting and varied "consulting" experience to my interns. My "lead" intern was given the responsibility of designing and implementing a survey to measure the willingness of Malaysians to make financial contributions to political parties, the results of which were shown to the National Elections Committee of a major political party.

He was also given the opportunity to be a moderator at some of the town hall meetings conducted on behalf of the Selangor state government (of which I wrote about in my previous column last month). Finally, he was given a chance to lead the other interns in conceptualising and producing a presentation which I later delivered to Pemandu (Performance Management and Delivery Unit) as one of the 131 Entry Point Projects (EPPs) under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) which UCSI University is participating in.

And he was financially rewarded for his efforts. He earned, during his two-month internship, more than what a fresh graduate would have gotten if he or she was working full time in an organisation like, the Securities Commission, just to give a random example.

I describe the work given to my interns in detail because their experiences are part of the recruitment process. They would not want to come back and work with me if their summer internships involved making coffee for me and photocopying and printing stuff (none of them had to print stuff out, as far as I can remember and I made coffee for them on more than one occasion). Equally as important, they would not tell their friends to work

with me if they had less than fulfilling internships.

Finally, I gave (and continue to give) my interns "almost" total freedom to criticise me and my way of doing things and also make suggestions as to how I can improve myself, the work which the organisation is involved in as well as our collective output. The ability to criticise one's boss, to me at least, is a crucial element of attracting and later retaining good talent.

I am fortunate and blessed to be working in an environment at UCSI University where the founder as well as the new vice-chancellor "empower" me by allowing me to introduce to them, young and bright talent whom I think would be valuable additions to the university or to one of the companies under the UCSI group of companies. (Here, I'm referring to talent who may not quite "fit" the kind of work my own consulting company is involved in)

Most CEOs and HR managers would find this notion of talent spotting and recruiting highly inappropriate and turf-encroaching. This is a great pity since many of us meet good, young, bright and occasionally outstanding people whose full potential in their current organisations

cannot be realised and could do with a change of environment.

Of course, not all of my "hires" have worked out well. One who was "sub-contracted" to me by the above-mentioned friend was a total disaster who could not even manage the basic tasks that were assigned to him. Another hire who I thought had the possibility to be a crucial part of my consulting company did not demonstrate the kind of passion and direction in life I was looking for.

I will probably have to adapt and change my recruitment strategies as my consulting company grows (and finally get an office space!). But the underlying philosophy remains: Look for talent in the "not-so-usual" places, provide them with work that is interesting and stimulating and reward them based on their performance. Add to this mix, some bonus "items": feed them well, tell them interesting stories both work-related and personal, make them laugh, make them coffee (sometimes) and for those who can't drive or don't have a car, be their occasional driver.

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regional consultant at the Blue Ocean Strategy Regional Center (BOSRC). He also runs his own consulting company — OKM Consulting. He's always on the lookout for good talent.

by Ong Kian Ming

