

The Model Employer

When debating what constitutes a model employer, the tendency is to place the focus on the public sector, as it is a widely held view that government is the model employer. This may just be a presumption and not a fact but the presumption may be merited given that government as the care taker of the public sector, is expected to uphold good employment practices. In accepting this notion, it logically follows that private-sector enterprises would aspire to do likewise by promoting standard setting and observing best management and industrial relations practices.

It is to be understood that a model employer has the engagement of good human resources management practice in the operations of the enterprise or organizations. This means that there must be a good policy in place. The policy is designed to provide generalized guidance on the approach adopted by the organization, and outline various aspects of employment relationship. For the benefit of the employees, it sets out procedures and courses of action to be taken by employees, that are in line with the policies.

Government departments and agencies are expected to be exemplary in their management and industrial relations practices. It is to be regretted if arms of government stand to be accused of not conforming to the standards of practice. It is to be expected that those who are charged with the responsibility of directing and managing the affairs of any operation at which people as workers are at the core, would understand and appreciate the importance attached to following labour laws, and observing labour standards and practices. These are fundamental elements to be taken on board in order to ensure the building of a good employer–employee relationship.

Positive outcomes from the engagement of good human resource management practices will more than likely materialize where upon, there is a clear understanding of the balance role to be played in the process that meets the expectations of both the employer and employee. In an enterprise or organization, the human resources personnel have a dual responsibility to discharge. There is the

dual role of protecting the interest of the employer along with the interest and welfare of the employee.

From the employer's perspective, the human resource management personnel must ensure that the interest of the employer is advanced and promoted, by way of developing policies, operating guidelines, and processes and procedures to be followed by the employees. This on the one hand basically boils down to ensuring compliance on the part of the employees, the promotion of worker productivity, building of worker morale, creating a conducive working environment that lends to cooperation and productivity, the building and sustaining of the corporate image and reputation of the enterprise. From the worker's perspective, there is the expectation that human resources department will be directing its efforts towards ensuring that workers and human rights are protected, and to safeguard the workers' interest in cases of apparent exploitation.

The model employer should always project an image which goes beyond that of confining an interest to hiring, recruitment and the retention of employees. This is where the employer understands the value of good human resource management. This is where human resources management personnel play a pivotal role through their efforts and initiatives to improve employee morale, productivity, retention, commitment, loyalty and improve service delivery. Human resources personnel can make a great difference to enhance the perception workers have of the employer, where attention is paid to the self-development of workers. The development and offering of training opportunities, introducing mentorship programmes, catering to professional development and developing career ladders for advancement from entry level positions, offering forms of employees' assistance programmes, worker incentive and health and wellness programmes, can all raise the profile of a model employer.

For far too long, there are those employers who hold the belief that if they pay what they consider to be a good wage or salary along with a benefit package where such applies, that they have satisfied the requirements of a model employers. Then there are those who are unconscionable and knowingly exploit workers by under

paying them, often making late payment of wages and salaries, providing unfair and acceptable terms and conditions of work, providing a less than safe environment, failing to meet the statutory obligation of National Insurance payments and failing to pay severance payments when it is due. There are those who would on an annual basis, move to end the contract of employment prior to nine months of engagement, so as to deny workers vacation pay and there after rehire them. These workers are also placed in a position where they are not eligible for severance payment. In addition to this, many workers suffer the indignity of having been retrenched on the basis of the principle of 'last in first out,' or being made redundant, only to have to reapply for the job. In many cases in the latter instance, some workers are not entitled to severance payment and may only benefit from vacation pay if this is due.

In both the public and private sector, the fact of the matter is that the employer uses the human resources department to review and exploit the law, and in some instances, the outcome can be to the detriment of employees. Inasmuch as this option remains open to employers, the jury remain out on whether the idea of a model employer is no more than a figment of the imagination, rather than the ideal.