

Employer duty of care amplified when employing migrants

By Tanya Gray

In recruitment and human resource management, we often have to reconnect with the fact that we are dealing with people. Much as we would like to sidestep some of the people-care processes (and some employers in fact do), taking care of people in our employment is actually a primary requirement for employers.

Employing people effectively brings them into a family. The sense of belonging and of being valued is 100% the single most emotive motivating factor for employees. This sense of belonging, of collaboration and involvement, is what builds loyalty, determination and drive in a team. The way you lead people determines how they will value you, the depth of your culture and the bonds between the people in your organisation.

MIGRANT WORKERS

What about when those people in your team are living away from their home country, as so many are in the broader New Zealand construction industry at present – how does this change things? In a word, it doesn't, but it does intensify the needs of your employees.

When people feel included and cared for, they tend to thrive. When people feel isolated or uncared for, a myriad of negative emotions take control of their mind-set, making consistently good work almost impossible to achieve.

People working in a foreign country of course feel isolated, so the corresponding effort required to allow them the emotional confidence of fitting in is magnified – employers must amplify their efforts to make foreign workers feel welcome, cared for and valued if they wish the relationship to be successful.

It makes perfect sense therefore that foreign workers require an extra focus on duty of care. However, many New Zealand employers make no effort in this area – now a legal requirement in the case of Filipino workers.



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WORLDS APART

From the moment a Filipino worker sets foot on New Zealand soil, their new employer and new chief benefactor becomes the nucleus of their world.

While there are strong parallels between New Zealand lifestyle and Filipino everyday lifestyle, the two worlds are also very far apart. Culture shock is common, homesickness is very real, and being paid a New Zealand skilled worker's wage or salary has a huge impact on the life of a newly imported Filipino.

With this in mind, the Philippines government, together with the New Zealand government, placed key rules on NZ employers some years ago – which some employers are ignoring:

- ▶ All Filipino workers must be met at the airport on arrival and transported to their new residence – a residence to be provided by the employer at no charge to the employee for at least 12 weeks
- ▶ All Filipino workers must be provided with transport to and from their new place of work every day for a minimum of 12 weeks after arrival, if not ongoing should there be no public transport
- ▶ All Filipino workers must be paid for a minimum of 30 hours per week for the duration of their contract – you may not stand them down if your business goes quiet or if you have project delays. These

people are here to provide a future life for their families at home and send money back to the Philippines from every pay cheque

- ▶ No Filipino worker should pay for their own visa or travel – this is 100% the responsibility of the new employer – nor may they be asked to pay for their own trade tests.

Some New Zealand employers sadly are cutting corners on these requirements and are endangering the positive reputation of our country for the Philippines as a destination for skilled workers – reliable, positive skilled workers – who just want to work hard and please their employer, while also managing to build a more positive future for their family at home.

THE RIGHT TO DUE CARE AND RESPECT

The unforgiving and all-revealing media spotlight is now pointing at the NZ construction industry. Terms such as exploitation, people trafficking and illegal immigrant are being brought to light by the

media, often without the owner of the business actually being aware that they are at fault – a victim in their own right.

However, the point that we wish to make here is not about the employers; it's about the workers. Do these workers not deserve the right to due care and respect while away from their home country, while they are enabling projects to be continued (accelerated even)? Are they not worthy of a spend of a few thousand dollars to follow correct process, not just for the sake of the processes being followed and that the work and business profit may continue, but because they are hard-working people with families from whom they are distanced?

They deserve to be cared for and to become part of an employer's family – any and everyone who has ever brought a Filipino worker into their business will attest to this.

Immigration New Zealand has published an excellent guide for employers, 'Are you recruiting migrant workers from the Philippines?' which is available online (www.immigration.govt.nz).



Tanya Gray is the owner and manager of RecruitNZ, a POEA certified employer, which means they have proven to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration that they follow correct processes and procedures in the recruitment of migrant workers to New Zealand recruit-nz.co.nz

Matt Hatchard named NZCB top apprentice

Northland's Matt Hatchard, 36, has claimed the title of the country's top building apprentice in the New Zealand Certified Builders (NZCB) Apprentice Challenge.

The NZCB Apprentice Challenge is held in association with the Industry Training Association Building (ITAB), which offers the building industry's most comprehensive apprentice training scheme combining extensive theoretical and practical training.

This year's competition attracted a record number of entries nationwide. Matt Hatchard of Northland was the winner, with Robert Piutau, 33, from Auckland, in second place, and Thomas Ashley, 25, from Nelson, in third.

They were among 19 finalists from across the country who were winners of the regional competitions. The final was held at the NZCB annual conference in Rotorua in late May, where finalists were judged on examples of their work, dedication towards

their apprenticeship, and a presentation to the over 700 NZCB member builders attending the conference.

IMPRESSIVE SKILLS

NZCB chief executive Grant Florence says the record number of entries meant this year's challenge was highly competitive, and all 19 finalists demonstrated impressive skills.

"At a time when we need more skilled builders than ever to meet increasing demand, it's great to see the enthusiasm and aptitude of all the apprentices taking part in this competition. Our annual NZCB Apprentice Challenge is a great opportunity for us to celebrate emerging talent in this



NZCB Apprentice Challenge winners Robert Piutau (left), Matt Hatchard (centre) and Thomas Ashley (right)

crucial sector of the economy," says Mr Florence.

As well as the recognition from taking out the national competition, Matt heads home

with a prize pack valued at \$20,000. The second and third place-getters each walk away with tools and

building supplies valued at over \$4000 and \$2500 respectively.