

ON THE MOVE

China Titanium

Lim Chai Har: Appointed chief financial officer (CFO) of China Titanium with effect from last Thursday.

Ms Lim, 58, was formerly the CFO of four different companies since 2002, including Yongnam Engineering and Construction and Sino-Excel Energy.

AusGroup

Laurie Barlow: Named chief executive officer of AusGroup.

Mr Barlow previously worked as the managing director of minerals and industry at conglomerate Aecom Australia.

He was offered the new position after an extensive Australia-wide search.

He is taking over from Mr Stuart Kenny.

Surface Mount Technology

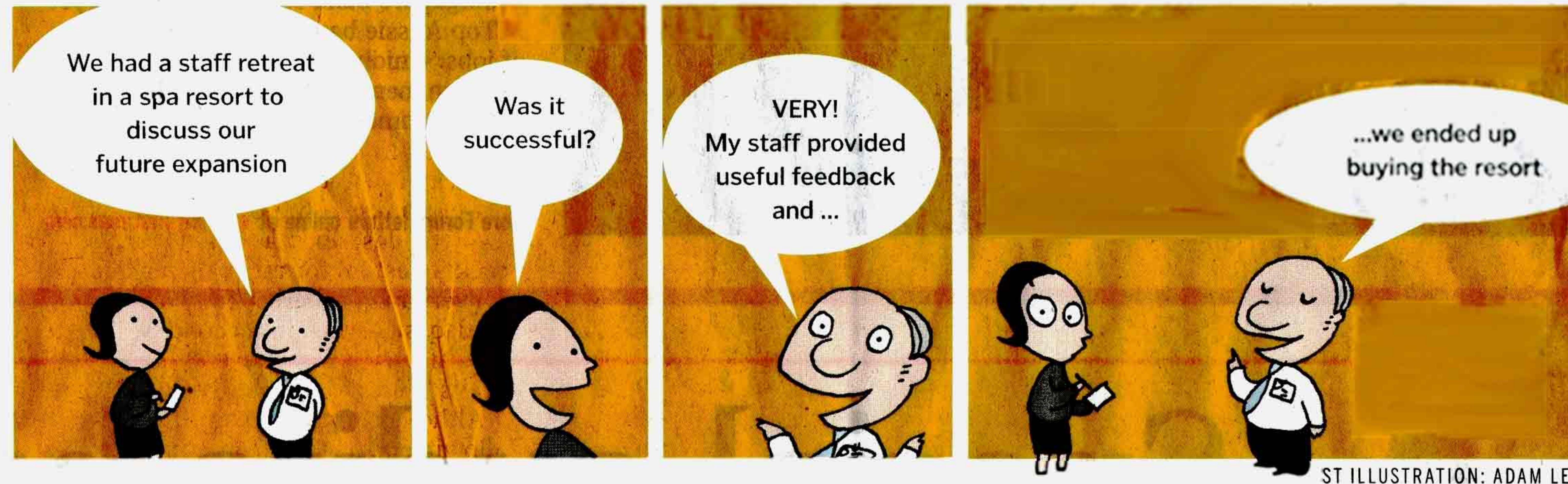
Lo Wai Kwok: Resigned as deputy chairman and managing director of Surface Mount Technology with effect from July. Dr Lo, 59, stepped down to pursue personal interests.

He had been responsible for overseeing the business operations of the company, with specific emphasis on manufacturing, new business development and research and development.

China Yuchai

Kok Ho Leong: Appointed chief financial officer of China Yuchai International last Monday.

He had previously worked as the regional commercial manager for Parker Drilling. Before that, he was the CFO of Singapore-listed KS Energy Services.



ST ILLUSTRATION: ADAM LEE

AT WORK WITH JOYCE TEO

Plan well to ensure your staff retreat adds value

Identify what you hope to achieve and have proper follow-ups

THE idea is laudable: Retreat to a tranquil spot for colleagues to share ideas, work on team building and foster a strong company culture.

The critical question, though, is how to do it well - and achieve lasting results.

"Staff retreats offer an opportunity for the employees to step back from their everyday duties to think of their work, relationships with colleagues, and reflect on the business in constructive ways," says the managing partner and chief executive officer of ChrisConsulting Executive Search, Mr Christopher Leong.

However, such retreats can take up precious time, particularly if they are held on weekends or for more than a day.

To justify this allocation of time that takes staff away from directly productive pursuits, retreats must be shown to add value over the longer term.

This is no easy task. A lot of planning

is needed to get it right. As Singapore Human Resources Institute's executive director, Mr David Ang, puts it: "If you fail to plan, you will surely fail."

Companies first need to identify what exactly they hope to achieve at a retreat and why they are holding one.

Mr Ray Bigger, managing director of Think8/Q3 Global, a consultancy that helps companies plan meetings, suggests that the company let the attendees, and not the leader, determine the content of the agenda through well-constructed questionnaires and interviews.

"The answers will surprise most functional heads who tend to create boring and predictable agendas," he says.

Another way is to "think about what's the dollar value that you want out of the meeting to justify the cost", he suggests.

A company his firm has worked with managed to hammer out a way to cut the go-to-market time from 27 months to nine months, he says.

At executive search company People-Search, which has several offices in the region, and a "very collaborative culture", staff retreats are held to strengthen cross-border relations, says its consulting director, Ms Jaime Lim.

Because the primary goal is to reward and recognise staff who have done well, they are treated to the nicest hotels and the best food and wine, she says.

Their retreats can last up to a week and have been held in cities such as Chengdu, Hokkaido, Milan and Tokyo.

"It is mostly for fun and strictly speaking, no work," says Ms Lim.

Such retreats are more like incentive trips. Others are much more practical and are held to consider improvements at work, to review policies or evaluate work processes.

Whatever the reasons, Mr Ang suggests that companies opt for an outside venue if they can afford it.

"It's good to be away from the office. There are fewer disturbances and people won't be going back to their desks to check their e-mail," he says.

It means a more relaxed setting, which will set the mood for a higher level of involvement from the participants, he says.

An outside setting - it need not be the usual windowless meeting room in a business hotel - complete with plenty of food may also encourage people to be more positive and think more creatively.

One local executive says her employer held a retreat at a trendy spot, which was refreshing.

Her only gripe: "More management presence would have been good, as they would be able to hear first-hand the staff feedback to proposed changes."

HR firm Talent2's managing director, Asia-Pacific, Mr Caleb Baker, says: "Sessions such as training and brainstorming in an informal setting allow employees to be more open and vocal with ideas, providing useful feedback to the management."

These retreats add value to businesses "in terms of agreeing on the team's focus and alignment for the coming months, as well as inculcate a sense of team camaraderie and cohesiveness that will make their working environment a pleasant one", he adds.

Experts say everyone should be involved at the retreat.

And if you have a diverse group present, you have to know how to manage diversity and encourage everyone to contribute.

Mr Bigger says: "If you give them the right environment to contribute, they will do so."

At ChrisConsulting, Mr Leong prefers to outsource the planning to a facilitator, who arranges a "highly rah-rah retreat".

He believes a good retreat provides insights, helps to solve problems and offers the chance for colleagues to talk openly. But the event should also excite the staff, keep them energised and be fun and inspiring.

There should also be a follow-up, experts say. "If anything, it's probably what happens post-meeting that is the most important," says Mr Bigger.

"People will have lots of fun and they will pop the champagne, but the champagne goes flat in a couple of hours unless you have a plan to take the ideas forward."

"You need somebody on top to endorse the ideas, and you need somebody just below him to be the driver to drive them. If you don't put names and give timelines, nothing will happen."

Mr Leong will agree. He says a retreat must bring about meaningful change to the team or organisation.

joyceteo@sph.com.sg

This is the second in a three-part series on work productivity. Next week, we touch on how to handle connectivity to work in this increasingly wired world.