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THEY WALKED THE TALK

The GMP Group scrapped job application forms 2 years ago

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EVEN as companies are urged to tweak their job application forms to leave out fields such as age and gender, one employer has already gone the extra mile by doing away with such forms altogether — and that was two years ago.

Recruitment agency The GMP Group's chief executive Annie Yap said feedback from potential employees has been good.

"To the company, the form is redundant because the applicant's cover letter and resume are more than enough. The applicant is happy because he need not disclose information such as parents' names and where his siblings study — questions which are common on most forms today," she said.

Launched last Thursday to combat discrimination at the workplace, the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices urges companies to refrain from asking for information unrelated to the job.

GMP faced some teething problems when eliminating the use of forms.

Said Ms Yap: "At first, some candidates left out essential information, such as part of their educational background. So, our recruiters had to make an extra effort to contact them and find out more.

"Nowadays, this does not happen as often because job-seekers are increasingly more aware of how to write detailed cover letters and resumes."

While the tripartite alliance hopes as many companies as possible will adhere to the new guidelines regarding the application forms, it does recognise some exceptions. Where security clearance is needed, for instance, it suggests that the personal information be disclosed only to the person conducting the screening process.

The tripartite alliance said such procedural safeguards should be made known to all applicants.

While he applauded the guidelines, Next Career Consulting's managing director Paul Heng said success would still depend on whether the employer "firmly believed" in being fair in the first place.

"There are ways to get around the guidelines. You can take out the age requirement, but it's very easy to find out when a person graduated from university — you can count backwards," he said. "What will eradicate discrimination is a mindset change, not so much the tools and processes."

So, could Singapore one day see all employers follow the example of the GMP Group and discard the job application form?

Unlikely, said Ms Yap, as the form is still an efficient tool when recruiting for entry-level positions, such as cafe service crew — it could guide job-seekers in providing vital information such as work experience.

Among the 420 employers who have pledged to implement fair employment practices are 59 ministries, statutory boards and government agencies. They are committed to implement the new guidelines as part of their overall recruitment policy.

But the manner in which each does so, however, may vary according to their operational needs.