

SPECIAL REPORT: HKMA SME CLUB 46TH DISTINGUISHED SALESPERSON AWARD

Happy selling nets awards

Ho Pui-man, also known as "Happy Ho", a telemarketing officer for telemarketing – acquisition and partnerships at American Express, says the "Happy Selling" theme of this year's Distinguished Salesperson Awards (DSA) neatly fits her approach to her work.

"I enjoy my job and being positive and optimistic makes me cheerful and energetic," she explains.

Since Ho's responsibilities mainly involve telesales duties, she says that participating in the DSA allowed her the opportunity to acquire new customer-facing selling and presentation skills.

"I learned new ways to build rapport and trust, and of making use of body language and other ways to understand customers' needs so I can recommend suitable products to them," she says, stressing that her newly acquired skills will contribute to her future career development.

Fellow DSA awardee Cynthia

To, account manager for premium products – acquisition and partnerships at American Express, says joining the award programme has enabled her to understand more about the importance of getting to know customers and delivering the best solutions.

"Since taking part in the awards, I have become more confident in selling our products to different customers," To explains.

Believing that practice makes perfect, Ryan Chan, account manager – premium products, acquisition and partnerships, prepared for the DSA judging by spending time perfecting his presentation skills at home and in front of colleagues and team leaders.

"I received valuable feedback from previous winners, trainers and colleagues," he points out.

Echoing Chan's belief in the value of being prepared, Joe Lau, Amex telemarketing officer – telemarketing, acquisition and partnerships, says that his preparation for the DSA

programme involved making use of extensive in-house training and practising his presentation at home and with colleagues at work.

"Preparing and taking part in the DSA has helped me polish my communication skills, which enable me to convey the benefits of our products to our customers more effectively," Lau says. He adds that it is also crucial for salespeople to understand customers' needs to provide the best solutions.

The four American Express award recipients believe the key to professional success involves continually pushing career boundaries, having a strong client focus and thorough understanding of products, and caring for the company they work for.

They also acknowledge the training and development support they receive from their company, which helps to nurture sales talent and enables them to excel at customer service.

All stories by Chris Davis



American Express winners (from left) Joe Lau, Ho Pui-man, Cynthia To and Ryan Chan believe in pushing boundaries. Photo: American Express

Banking on skills to offer solutions



Anthony Soo (back, left) and Michael Chen (back, right) with fellow awardees (back) and their supervisors (front). Photo: Wing Lung

As someone who believes strongly that customers' needs should always come first, DSA recipient Michael Chen Chi-keung, a senior relationship manager at Wing Lung Bank, says the hallmark of a good salesperson is the ability to understand such needs and provide effective solutions.

"I enjoy using my expertise to help customers," Chen says. "By understanding customer needs, I can provide them with the best solutions, which also gives me a great sense of job satisfaction."

During the build-up to the DSA, Chen's managers, supervisors and colleagues offered valuable support and encouragement. He also attended a series of tailor-made, in-house training sessions and workshops, which helped boost his presentation skills.

Anthony Soo Wing-sai, a relationship manager at Wing Lung Bank, is also a firm believer in the "customer first" philosophy. "I always serve my clients from the heart and try to offer the most appropriate solutions to help them fulfil their investment objectives," says Soo who, like Chen, also appreciates

the comprehensive training programmes the bank offers.

To ensure Wing Lung salespeople maintain exacting standards, individuals are required to complete a comprehensive regulatory products training programme and pass an assessment test.

The bank also offers salespeople a range of training on products, compliance, market trends and the skills necessary to communicate effectively with customers.

Putting his knowledge to good use, Soo recently was not only able to introduce a lady from the mainland to Wing Lung's range of banking services, but was also able to advise her about tourist spots she might enjoy visiting, and places to eat.

"The next day, the lady returned to my branch with her husband and opened a wealth management account," Soo recalls. "She told me she was impressed with the professional wealth management advice I provided and appreciated the tourist information I was able to offer."

Fulfilling clients' dreams

By taking part in the 46th DSA, Ho Kit-han, a shop manager who has been with Simmons Bedding and Furniture (HK) for 16 years, says she was able to re-evaluate her workplace abilities and learn new sales techniques.

"I enjoy selling and the process of continuously learning about products and services-related issues," says Ho, adding that she draws on her own sales experiences and management skills to train new staff.



Ho Kit-han

During the lead-up to the judging process, Ho read sales books, practised sales skills and customer-service techniques, and worked on improving her product knowledge. "It took time each week to train and learn from my boss," she says. "I also paid close attention to colleagues' sales techniques and practised with them."

She says the various customer-care training programmes Simmons has developed also helped her to



Raymond Chi

both prepare for the DSA and, importantly, provide customers with quality service and product advice. "Since every customer has different sleeping needs, our job is to help them identify and improve the quality of their sleep," she says.

Senior shop manager Raymond Chi Po-cheung, who has been with Simmons for 20 years, says that by taking part in the DSA programme he was able to meet salespeople from other companies and learn from sharing experiences.

Chi says he focuses on introducing appropriate products to customers and helping them solve problems.

He recalls an incident during the 2003 Sars outbreak, when a customer using a credit card instalment plan to pay for a mattress was too worried about catching Sars to leave her home. "I went to her home so that she could settle the instalment by using a mobile credit card machine," he remembers.

Gaining a crucial confidence boost

Taking part in the DSA programme not only provided recognition for Benson Cheung Chi-keung's sales skills, but also helped to boost his confidence.

"Making a presentation in front of the judges helped me to identify areas where I can improve my sales skills," says Cheung, a customer centre

DSA judges helped her polish her communication and presentation skills. "I interact with customers in an even more positive way since participating in the programme," she says.

Mandy Tong Man-ho, also an MSIG customer centre service specialist and DSA winner, believes sincerity is an important trait of a successful salesperson.

She recalls talking over several days with one customer, who was suffering from depression and taking medication, about life in general. "After our conversations, the customer felt a lot more positive and secure, and even took out a new policy," she says.

Part-time team leader Sandy Au Yip-king, who works at the Central branch of the Super Star Seafood Restaurant, takes a similar view. "I believe you have to continually find ways to exceed customers' expectations to remain a distinguished salesperson," says Au, who believes her smile is contagious and helps customers relax.

Very special and it has helped to broaden my career outlook," she says.

Always looking to exceed customers' expectations, Maggie Yuen Siu-fan, a senior captain who works at the Super Star Group's Empire City Roasted Duck restaurant, says she makes a point of interacting with her customers and listening carefully to their requests to ensure they enjoy their dining experience.

After receiving an Outstanding Young Salesperson Award (OYSA), awarded to those below 25, Yuen says she has become even more passionate about her work. "The experience of participating in the OYSA was

to her employer for providing the opportunity for her to participate in the DSA. "Taking part in the awards has really improved my confidence."

To provide the kind of dining experience that customers find memorable, and to keep them returning, Simon Cheung Sam-ai, assistant supervisor at the Lai Chi Kok branch of the Super Star Seafood Restaurant, says it is important to provide genuine service from the heart.

"Customers know what good service is, so I always try to treat them like family and friends," says Cheung, who has been with the group for 13 years.

Even though he has a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry, Cheung says he was able to gain new insights from participating in the DSA programme.

"It was interesting to see how salespeople in different businesses deliver customer services, and this has given me some new ideas," he says.

"I had to make my e-commerce presentation very clear and succinct, so it was easy for the judges to understand how we serve our customers," says Sum, whose role focuses on business management in China and the North Asia markets.

He believes that a good salesperson should be considerate, attentive and be able to build a friendly and relaxed atmosphere with clients. "It feels great to deliver the right solutions and being able to solve customer's challenges," he says.

In the two months leading up to the DSA, Ken Cheng Chung-kong, vice-president of Quantum Solutions (Hong Kong), provided Kwok and Sum with training on creative presentations, spontaneous responses and psychological conditioning. "The award reflects Quantum's strong emphasis on training and staff development," Cheng says.

executive in the sales department, says taking part in the DSA programme was a "rewarding journey".

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Colleague and fellow awardee Richard Sum Wai-cheung, senior account

there," says Kwok, who provides cost-effective logistics solutions for global e-commerce parcel deliveries.

A wholly owned subsidiary of Singapore Post, Quantum Solutions has a network in more than 10 countries in Asia-Pacific, offering services such as warehousing, fulfilment, pick and pack, international delivery, freight logistics, cross-border mailing and mailroom management.

Kwok says that by taking part in the DSA programme, she has not only enhanced her presentation skills, but also found new ways of co-ordinating with her firm's internal parties to improve service quality and explore ways of generating sales revenues. "Winning business makes me happy and gains me recognition in the company," she says.

Colleague and fellow awardee Richard Sum Wai-cheung, senior account

attitude to life and shows clients he puts his heart into his work. "Winning an award is a great honour, but picking up tips on communication and selling techniques is useful when facing challenges in an ever-changing property market," he says.

Embracing the 46th DSA's "Happy Selling" theme, Wang says a smile reflects his positive

immigration consultants, also says he always tries to make a memorable first impression with a smile. Winning a DSA award, he adds, is affirmation of his work and one of the most unforgettable experiences of his career. "I will be using the experience to keep on pushing my professional abilities to a higher level," he says.

Tony Lai, from Ricacorp Properties, says making presentations played to some of his strengths, but also gave him the momentum to make improvements. "The experience has given me a tremendous drive to achieve more success and make professionalism the signature badge of my career."

Mars Hui, from Ricacorp Properties, says the experience gave him invaluable customer-service insights. "Together with my 'never give up' mindset and confident smile, [it] will help me reach even greater heights in my sales career."



DSA recipients Catherine Fong and Richard Sum. Photo: Quantum

Sam Seto, Tony Lai, Mars Hui and Jacky Wang. Photo: Ricacorp

Ricacorp victors all smiles

For Jacky Wang, an OYSA recipient from Ricacorp Properties, his smile is part of a winning formula to establish a natural rapport with clients and colleagues.

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Ricacorp CEO Willy Liu (centre) joins DSA and OYSA winners (from left) Sam Seto, Tony Lai, Mars Hui and Jacky Wang. Photo: Ricacorp