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We must instil culture of taking pride in our work

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I HAVE noticed that of late, our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has been stressing on the need for us to promote a culture of maintenance and to get rid of our prevailing lackadaisical attitude. The call is timely.

I have also noticed this attitude which permeates both private and government sectors alike. I hope that all sectors concerned will take heed of his advice.

We need to be less complacent, to take pride in what we do. A cin-cai cin-cai or tidak apa attitude has no place in our work culture if we are to excel and compete on a global platform.

I would like to share my experience regarding work attitudes which I encountered in two different government agencies.

I went to renew my maid's work permit at the Ipoh Immigration Department and was pleasantly surprised by the speed and efficiency with which the work permit was granted.

I submitted the permit at 12.30pm on a Saturday and was told that as it was almost closing time, I could only collect my maid's passport on Monday as they only work half-day on Saturdays. On Monday, the permit was ready for collection as promised.

The Immigration Department is to be congratulated for their foresight in re-structuring their work processes which were previously cumbersome and time consuming.

The previous renewal procedures for foreign workers only benefited a lot of agents who preyed on consumers' ignorance for quick profits. Their new streamlined work permit processing not only helps employers save time but also prevents fraud by unscrupulous employment agencies.

However, my experience with another government agency was sadly different.

It is none other than our Inland Revenue Board - specifically the Assessment Section.

Firstly, those on the "pay as you earn" tax scheme who have tried to get their taxes assessed to determine if any rebate is due will understand my predicament. For starters, one must check with the Assessment Section of the IRB office where one's file is kept quite far from the main Collection Centre (located near Jln Duta).

In this case, most of my husband's colleagues had received their statement of assessment from the IRB office but his had not been sent. Thus, we decided to check with the IRB Assessment section in Shah Alam.

When we showed the officer there an acknowledgement card from the IRB branch at Jalan Duta where we filed the tax forms, she replied that the delay in my husband's assessment was because "You filed at Jalan Duta, It's the branch's fault as we do not have on record your tax form for 1998. If you want us to assess please fill up a new form!"

Imagine being told that. No efforts were made to locate our tax returns forms for 1998 and to add insult to injury, we were then curtly told that the assessment will only be available in a weeks' time. Anyway, my husband turned up a week later only to discover that they had wrongly assessed his taxes as the officer concerned missed out the EPF deductions.

How can the IRB staff be so careless as to miss out the EPF component which is an integral part of the tax calculations.

We requested for the new assessment to be mailed to us and were told

that it would take two weeks for the new assessment form to reach us.

Two weeks came and passed and when the same officer was phoned and queried regarding the delay, the reason offered was the file had been passed to another officer and she would need to check when it could be processed.

Finally, we had to make another trip to IRB's Assessment department to collect the amended tax assessment statement as we had lost all confidence in their ability to mail the statement without any hiccups. This simple task of getting one's tax assessment statement took us a month to accomplish. This kind of lackadaisical attitude will cost us. If we broaden the areas and multiply this by the number of incidents of inefficiencies then the wastage in terms of man-hours can be horrendous and the toll exacted on our nation's productivity great.

Thus, what we need is not just a culture of maintenance alone, but in addition, one which promotes a sense of pride in one's work and to constantly strive to improve oneself.

This is the attitude which the Japanese and some European cultures have which we sorely lack!