

#CareerHacks101: Hey, Don't Count (S)ME Out!

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Okay first things first. What are SMEs? They are small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs contribute to 48% of Singapore's GDP, employs about 65% of its workforce and makes up 99% of the job market. SMEs are known for their family-oriented approach to work culture as well as their super cool and casual office spaces. Why then are there still reservations about joining an SME? Enter: Sylvia Chan from NOC, Lynn Wong from FirstCom Solutions and Lawrence Chai from 3E Accounting to help us debunk the common myths surrounding SMEs and tell us why there's no time like the present to take a little chance and join an SME.

Myth 1: SMEs are small, so they cannot offer career progression.

True? False! Unlike MNCs, bosses in smaller companies tend to be more aware of your efforts and rewards are given accordingly. Take Lynn for example. Like Drake, she started from the bottom but now she's here — the General Manager of FirstCom. She first joined the company as a project manager and within three months she started leading a group of project executives. A year and a half after joining, she was put in charge of managing the designers as well as the project executives. She even started the digital marketing team before leaving for maternity leave. That earned her the rightful spot as the General Manager.

Myth 2: SMEs do not offer job security.

When the pandemic hit our shores, Lawrence's company, now 50 men strong, was able to adapt quickly and nimbly due to the size of his company. This meant being able to adjust and onboard everyone effectively to the new work-from-home norm. This ensured continued productivity, job security for his employees, and the ability to take on more employees even during the pandemic.

Myth 3: Working for an SME means that you have to double-up or triple-up on roles.

“Well, it is true.” Lynn laughs, “but what’s the harm in that! It only means you get to try out more things and get more experience under your belt. It also essentially means you get to progress up the ladder a lot quicker.” Wherever you go, people value good work ethic. Just be sure to communicate your expectations and restrictions with your hiring manager beforehand.

Myth 4: SMEs do not have unions for their employees to join.

“YES WE DO!” Lawrence and Sylvia chimed in triumphantly. “Unions are great and they come with so many benefits for our employees. The availability of a union really depends on each individual company — even MNCs!” If you didn’t already know, companies that are unionised can tap into the Labour Movement network through U SME. Through this platform, SMEs can engage and exchange tips on HR practices, or arrange for staff to attend and network at events such as the SME Symposium. Some companies even provide their staff with NTUC union membership, which allows staff to get access to free training and up-skilling courses.

Myth 5: The welfare provided by SMEs are not comparable to MNCs.

False! To get the pick of the litter, you need to be able to pay for welfare. This includes medical and dental benefits, gym membership reimbursements and even birthday vouchers! Sylvia pointed out that, conversely, because there is a lot less manpower in SMEs, they make it a point to train and up-skill each individual and maximise each person’s potential and productivity.

Myth 6: SMEs do not have the resources to develop and grow human capital.

This question got a hard no from all three speakers.

Sylvia: “I feel like SMEs are the ones to actually grow and develop their human capital! At NOC, we attend SkillsFuture courses together. We know each other’s potential and so we put in the time to develop talents. SMEs do care a lot — potentially more than MNCs!”

Lynn: “It’s not easy to attract talent. So when we do, we do our best to keep them. This includes monthly check-ins and a portal where staff can write in requests to HR for courses they are interested in.”

Myth 7: SMEs are not able to meet my pay expectations.

“Definitely not true!” Lynn argued, “ We pay our talents competitively.” Sylvia explained it this way — in SMEs, your efforts directly impact the company, making it way easier to request for a pay raise or for bosses to see who is doing a good job and reward each

individual accordingly.

At the end of the day, Lawrence advised job seekers to focus on developing your individual skill sets rather than on pay grade at this moment. Meanwhile, Lynn and Sylvia placed emphasis on keeping an open mind. “It may not be your ideal job but if it’s great for development, why not? If you’re not looking for a job at this moment, take the chance to learn a new skill (especially digital ones!) and try again once you’ve up-skilled.”

Learning points from working in an SME:

Lynn: It made me resourceful and independent. Give everything a shot!

Sylvia: You never know what the possibilities are. But it makes us stronger!

Lawrence: SMEs are great for learning a lot in a short period of time. Build as many skill sets as possible in your time here.

So you’re interested in working for a SME now — where should you look?

Check out the websites of individual companies, LinkedIn, JobStreet, WSG’s website as well as Lit.sg! All three companies (FirstCom, NOC and 3E Accounting) are hiring so be sure to check them out.

If you’re an SME and interested to find out more about U SME, visit [this page](#) for more.

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