

**PRODUCTIVITY IN THE HONGKONG WORKFORCE:  
WHY IS IT ON THE WANE ?**

It might be of interest to the Government of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to learn whether or not the productivity level of the territory's labour force is higher, today, than it was about a decade ago.

According to the results of a survey, carried out by **TARGET** () over a period of the past year, suggests, strongly, that productivity in the territory, measured in terms of the rate of output per unit of input, has waned, appreciably, since 2006.

The study was carried out, guaranteeing anonymity to those parties that took part in **TARGET**'s survey.

The type of corporate entities that responded to this medium's survey covered the following sectors of the economy: Mercantile; light industry; computer software; the Chinese print media; and; service, principally.

There are no reliable statistics, allowing economists and sociologists to be able to make a definitive determination as to how today's workforce of the HKSAR compares with the comparable workforce of the Guangdong Province of the PRC in terms of productivity per man hour.

In lengthy conversations with the head of one group of companies that, over the past decade, had hired in excess of 1,000 employees, this medium was informed that, whereas, in 2006, one employee was able to meet the company's output quota within the allotted time period with considerable ease, today, the company has to employ three workers in order to achieve the same results as were accomplished by one employee, back in 2006.

When asked as to the reason for this anomaly, **TARGET** was told that, today, there was a number of factors, the most important of which was that most workers, engaged in menial tasks, are not as industrious as in the past – and they make little effort to become more industrious.

Industriousness does not appear to be in their make-up, this medium was informed.

*'Many workers are not interested in anything more than putting in the hours and going home where, for the most part, they are engaged in playing games on the Internet, going on dates, or planning their holidays', the head of this company stated.*

He went on to say:

*'What is not helpful for me, as an employer, is that a large number of workers create "holidays" by claiming, among other things, to be sick on a Friday and/or a Monday, thus permitting them to have multiple short holidays, throughout the year, regardless of any consideration in respect of their duties to the company that had employed them.*

*'When they do return to work after a long weekend, they, more often than not, submit doctors' letters, that, clearly, contains nothing but bunkum, but they think that by so doing, they are pulling the wool over the company's eyes.*

*'In fact, a large proportion of employees care little of their duties to the company – only that the company pays them their wages, on time.*

*'Money and job satisfaction are not in their vocabularies; and, they appear to be completely oblivious of such terms as company loyalty.*

*'It is, simply put, that a job is a temporary step.*

*'But to an unknown future.'*

When asked about entrepreneurialism, this erudite gentleman said that, as far as he was concerned, the majority of his workers did not know of the term and, even if they had heard of it, it was likely that they did not understand its real meaning.

One would think that this last remark should be of great interest to the HKSAR Government because, inter alia, in days of yore, the many entrepreneurs of British Colonial Hongkong had been responsible for that which made this territory the envy of many Asian countries.

The HKSAR had been known, prior to July 1, 1997 – the date that British Colonial Hongkong was returned to the PRC – to have spawned a plethora of individuals who, due to their drive, nous and perspicacity, had created hundreds of thousands of jobs and caused the territory to be known as one of the last bastions of free enterprise.

The question that one might like to pose, today is:

*'What happened to the likes of the entrepreneurialism of pre-1997 in the territory?'*

### **Entrepreneurialism in the HKSAR: Is it a Dead Horse?**

In the vineyards of the world, it is a well-accepted, proven fact that the vines that have the sweetest grapes are those that have to fight for their very survival.

Vintners know that grape vines that have to struggle in order to embed multiple roots in craggy soil do much better than they would in richer, softer sod.

New grape vines take many years before their fruit is ready for harvesting because, if the roots of the vine are not well anchored in the soil, the vine would be unable to bear the weight of the ripe fruit.

The vine analogy could well be applied to the man or woman who, through the struggle to better himself/herself, or just to survive the fast pace of the business world, becomes more creative with the passage of time.

In the matter of growing grapes, vines' very existence depends, greatly, on strife.

So, also, it is true of the man or woman, who is forced, by circumstance, to struggle in order to attempt to achieve a specific goal: He or she becomes mentally stronger and, as a direct result of strife, becomes more aware of himself/herself and of the person's innate ability.

This struggle to achieve a certain goal, very often leads to budding creativity that, in turn, could lead to the creation of a lasting legacy.

The tension of opposites is one of the attributes that points the way to the necessity of existence.

The strife of opposites means their coming together; and, out of this, harmony is created.

It could be stated that 'wars' are the father of all; and, the king of all: The greater the challenge, the greater

the reward.

‘Wars’ are all-pervading and immanent in all things that may be perceived by man.

It has been so, down through the ages, and shall continue to be such in successive centuries to come.

Reverting to the results of **TARGET**’s survey on productivity in the HKSAR, many of the prospective applicants, who came to be interviewed for positions in companies, these applicants, being between the ages of 18 years and 29 years, made it abundantly clear that their wages were not as important as employers might have surmised when they first talked to the interviewees with a view to offering them full-time employment.

It was abundantly clear the many new entrants to the workforce seem to lack drive, come late to work, and try to leave as early as possible.

During the working day, they try to sneak, sending messages to their friends and acquaintances via their iPhones even though this is proscribed by the rules, laid down by many employers, these days.

If confronted for perpetrating acts that are contrary to the rules of the company for which they work, an employee is quite likely to say: *‘Then, fire me! I don’t care.’*

Often, employees might make the accusation, when caught with the trousers, pulled down to their knees, that the employers are tyrants and have no consideration for their staff.

And, as this medium discovered, this type of employee, really, does not care about the loss of his/her wages because he/she lives in the family home where, in many instances, he/she makes not contribution in terms of adding part of their wages to the family budget.

Ergo: With a complete absence of strife, it leads to an apathetic view of life.

**TARGET** recalls that, in Los Angeles, California, during a conversation with a young lady of 18 years, some years ago, she was taken aback by the question as to whether or not she lived with her mother and father: *‘I am 18 years! I have my own life to live – in my own apartment.’*

This young lady was attending her first year in Los Angeles City College (**LACC**).

It appears that, in Hongkong, today, if a person does not need to work for a living, that person will not take the trouble to look for employment with any earnestness – if at all.

The problem, in respect of the lack of industriousness and creativity of many workers of the territory, seems to have its roots, to some extent, in the family.

In short, there is the absence of *‘tough love’* – as Americans are prone to state – with regard to parents of close-knit, Hongkong families, parents who are unwilling to be strict with a son or daughter in order to cause that person to overcome a seemingly unsurmountable problem by the adult child’s own initiative, forsaking the need for a parent’s intervention.

In another conversation with an employer, involved deeply in the service industry, **TARGET** was told that too many employees have a problem in developing language skills.

When asked to make use the Internet’s many free English dictionaries, employees often claim that the English word could not be found or, alternatively, it takes too much time to find the word.

Ironically, even in the Chinese language, many employees have an inadequate knowledge, but, even when this is pointed out, they are adamant of their failings, stating that language skills are not very important in this day and age.

This service industry employer told **TARGET**:

*'I have never seen one of my employees, during the luncheon break, crack open a book, but prefer, instead, to play games on one of the employee's "toys" – the iPhone or the iPad.*

*'They don't read and, as a consequence, they are not inspired.*

*'It is a sorry state of affairs: They don't seem to want to better themselves, no matter how hard I try to encourage them.'*

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