

The growing preference for '21st century skills'

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE proficiency and having an international outlook are among the "21st century skills" that are becoming more important in evaluating potential candidates for a position, executives said.

British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Executive Director and Trustee Christopher James Nelson, who

has spent more than 40 years in international business, told *BusinessWorld* by phone that applicants must have an "international outlook."

"In a sense, we're trying to connect companies. We're trying to grow the Chamber. That requires us to know what our members want at the same time, trying to bring new companies

into the Philippines. (That requires) an international outlook," he said.

Mr. Nelson said team spirit, though a cliché, is important for hirers.

"Because we are a Chamber... our key role is to help our members. You look very much for that team spirit and that willingness to help people. It's that interest

and enthusiasm in the areas that we work in," he said.

Mr. Nelson highlighted the importance of being a "generalist" because Chamber work involves the "complete gamut of various matters."

"Our members are all in different sectors. We need to have generalists, so I look for people who can research (what they need

to know), rather than (specialize) in a specific area only," he said.

Jack Madrid, IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines president and chief executive officer, said cloud skills are important for those looking to work in tech.

"Cloud engineers and cloud developers are needed for AI (artificial intelligence) ... Skills

needed are diverse and include data analytics, cybersecurity as well as (a familiarity with) healthcare, accounting, and financial services," he said in a Viber message.

Strong comprehension and critical thinking will also help a potential employee stand out from the rest of the talent pool, he said. — **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**

OPINION

Motivation via snack parties

Andy, a fellow manager from another department says he doesn't mind spending his own money to motivate his people. He pays 100% the cost of hosting a snack party for his team at least once a month. But not every manager can afford that. What do you think? — Blind Corner

The question is not about Andy's ability to afford such treats. Is he getting his money's worth? If he has reduced absenteeism and tardiness in his department, then that could be one measure of his success. But that should not be all. What is his department's productivity?

IN THE WORKPLACE REY ELBO

ELBONOMICS: One inexpensive approach in motivating people is by active listening.

How about efficiency, manifested through the timeliness of projects being completed, even ahead of time? What about camaraderie? These are inter-connected. You need to understand whether Andy is getting his money's worth.

Understanding employee motivation is a major concern of all managers. Understanding motivation and why people do the things they do will help you determine how to respond to your staff.

If you don't have money to spare for your team, you can always engage people via casual talks. First and foremost, be kind and courteous to them. Talking to your direct reports on an individual basis is the best option. Ask them about the difficulties of their job. Offer your assistance in solving problems.

Then connect them all to what you know about their individual career goals. All this is in indispensable part of an engagement dialogue.

COMPANY-SPONSORED

One option you may want to consider is for the organization to shoulder the cost of the monthly snack party. This is a long shot. However, with the help of human resources (HR) you can discover industry practices, if not those of other organizations, which result in high levels of productivity and low employee turnover.

If you're serious, then assist HR in doing the research. That could serve as your template.

A growing number of companies, mostly foreign-affiliated ones, pay readily for food and beverages. They do it as often as weekly, even every day. Instead of an afternoon snack, they offer breakfast as an incentive for punctual workers.

With HR, you can make a strong case before management. Therefore, your first step in the process is to talk to HR and discover how this idea might be implemented. At the same time, prepare for a situation in which HR might seek to dissuade you from continuing with your idea because of cost.

LOW-COST STRATEGIES

At the core of an energized workforce is the quality of a manager's professional relationships with their direct reports. This is best shown in the amount of trust and respect that workers give to their managers. Getting the best out of positive work relations is an element of the soft side of management. Let me give you some low-cost strategies:

One, spruce up the workplace. This could be done through 5S good housekeeping with the help of employees. It is a good option that you can pursue without a budget or even in the absence of a

corporate-wide 5S program. It is easy to justify this as most people would like to work in a clean, orderly, and well-organized system.

Two, organize a morale-building celebration. You can make this happen with modest budgetary support from the organization. This is easy to do as long as you can find a good excuse to celebrate certain department milestones.

Three, manage by walking around. Do this on a regular, casual basis. Connect with people by visiting their work stations so they can feel free to speak up. When you do this, ensure that no one suspects you of "snooping." Rather, connect with people with genuine interest in helping them deal with their work difficulties.

Four, give people the chance to shine. Ask them if they want to go on a challenging assignment. If they succeed, you have a good excuse to celebrate. Coach them along the way. Ensure that they achieve the mutually agreed objectives.

Five, empower people to decide small things. Encourage them to look for problems and solve them with inexpensive solutions. People at the bottom of the pyramid know many things that top management doesn't know. If you're successful in making this happen through some pilot projects, you can expand the practice within your department.

The above list is incomplete. There are many inexpensive strategies that you can turn to to energize people. It's only a matter of understanding what motivates them.

Bring REY ELBO's leadership program called "Superior Subordinate Supervision" to your management team. Contact him on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, or e-mail elbonomics@gmail.com or via <https://reyelbo.com>



Low firefighting pay blamed for 2024 fires in Brazilian Amazon

SAO PAULO — Brazil's Amazon rainforest has experienced its largest blazes on record in the first four months of the year, with the environmental workers union placing partial blame on lower government spending on firefighting.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has staked his international reputation on protecting the Amazon rainforest and restoring Brazil as a leader on climate policy.

The Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, is vital to curbing catastrophic global warming because of the vast amount of greenhouse gas it absorbs.

A record drought in the Amazon rainforest region, driven by the El Niño climate phenomenon and global warming, has helped contribute to dry conditions fueling fires this year.

More than 12,000 square kilometers of Brazil's Amazon rainforest burned between January and April, the most in over two decades of data, according to Brazil's space research agency Inpe.

That's an area larger than Qatar, or nearly the size of the US state of Connecticut.

Fires in the Amazon generally do not occur naturally but are ignited by people, often seeking to clear land for agriculture.

Firefighting budget cuts are also partially to blame, environmental workers union Ascema said in a statement.

They complained that this year's budget for environmental agency Ibama to fight fires is 24% lower than 2023.

In a statement, Brazil's environment ministry said that the Amazon fund, which draws on donations from foreign governments, put 405 million reais (\$79.4 million) toward firefighting at the state level under Lula's current administration, which began in 2023. — **Reuters**

US says tariff increases on Chinese EVs, batteries, and chips to start Aug. 1

WASHINGTON — Some of the steep US tariff increases on an array of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles (EVs) and their batteries, computer chips, and medical products, will take effect on Aug. 1, the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office said on Wednesday.

President Joseph R. Biden will keep tariffs put in place by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump while ratcheting up others, including a quadrupling of import duties on Chinese EVs to over 100% and a doubling of semiconductor duties to 50%.

USTR said in a federal notice that a 30-day public comment period will close on June 28. The trade agency is seeking comments on the effects of the proposed tariff increases on the US economy, including consumers, and on whether a proposed 25% duty on medical masks, gloves and a planned 50% tariff on syringes should be higher.

The United States in 2023 imported nearly \$640 million of gloves, masks, and syringes from China that will be affected by the new measures.

The notice also provides specific tariff codes for some 387 product categories affected along with new duty rates and implementation dates. Tariffs targeted to start in 2025 and 2026 will start on Jan. 1 for those years, USTR said.

The proposed Chinese tariff increases include "products targeted by China for dominance, or are products in sectors where the United States has recently made significant investments."

Washington is investing hundreds of billions of dollars in clean energy tax subsidies to develop US EV, solar, and other new industries, and has said China's state-driven excess production capacity in these sectors threatens the viability of US companies. The tariffs are meant to protect American jobs from a feared flood of cheap Chinese imports.

The new measures affect \$18 billion in current imported Chinese goods including steel and aluminum, semiconductors, electric vehicles, critical minerals, solar cells and cranes, the White House said. The EV figure may have more political than practical impact in



JUICE-UNSPASH

the US, which imports few Chinese EVs because of prior vehicle tariffs.

BATTERIES LOOM LARGE

The largest two categories, making up \$13.2 billion of the targeted imports from China in 2023, are lithium-ion batteries, according to US Census Bureau data.

Duties of 25% are due to start in 2026 on the \$10.9-billion non-vehicle lithium-ion battery category, which has grown quickly and is now the third-largest US import category from China after smartphones and personal computers.

The US imported \$427 billion in goods from China in 2023 and exported \$148 billion to the world's No. 2 economy, a trade gap that has persisted for decades and become an ever more sensitive subject in Washington.

The Retail Industry Leaders Association said it was evaluating the list of specific products subject to new tariffs and added that "retailers are growing increasingly anxious about the current product exclusions that are set to expire at the end of the month."

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has said the revised tariffs were justified because China was stealing US intellectual property. Ms. Tai has also recommended tariff exclusions for hundreds of industrial machinery import categories from China, including solar product manufacturing equipment.

Ms. Tai said Wednesday the formal notice is an important step in making "substantial tariff increases on targeted, strategic products."

The Chinese Embassy in Washington said China's government will "take all measures necessary to defend our rights and interests." It said the tariff hike "will not only disrupt normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US, but also significantly drive up the cost of imported goods, inflict more loss on American companies and consumers, and make the US consumers pay even more."

On Sunday, Beijing announced a new anti-dumping probe on certain industrial plastics from the US, Europe, Japan, and Taiwan.

USTR said it would provide details on how companies could apply for machinery exclusions from the tariffs in a separate notice. But it said any exclusions granted would be backdated to start on Wednesday and end on May 31, 2025.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday she was pushing for G7 (Group of 7) allies at a finance ministers meeting in Italy to jointly push back on China's industrial policies, although she said she was not asking them to mirror the new US Tariffs.

The G7 industrial democracies are the US, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, and Canada. — **Reuters**

Germany backs ending EU tax break that helps Shein and Temu keep prices low

LONDON — Germany supports an overhaul of European Union (EU) import taxes which could end an exemption for cheap parcels that has helped online retailers Shein and Temu grab market share with their cut-price clothes, accessories, and gadgets made in China.

Critics of Shein and Temu in the United States have already complained that they use an import tax exemption there to undercut rivals and avoid customs inspections of their products.

The practice helps the two companies offer dresses for as little as \$8 and smart watches for \$25 to shoppers around the world. Shein is currently stepping up preparations for a London listing, after an attempt to float in New York faced pushback from US lawmakers.

Under current EU regulations, packages purchased online from a non-EU country are not subject to customs duties if their value is under €150 (\$163).

Germany's main retail association, Handelsverband Deutschland (HDE), has been lobbying the German government, saying the exemption has encouraged a massive increase in small parcels entering the EU from online platforms like Shein and Temu, and that customs authorities lack the capacity to check all the products comply with EU rules.

Germany's finance minister Christian Lindner "has signaled that Germany will support the abolition of the €150 duty-free limit at the European level," the HDE told Reuters.

Germany's finance ministry said it welcomed the fact the European Commission had put forward "proposals to adapt European customs law to the challenges of e-commerce," referring to a broader reform plan that includes ending the duty-free limit.

In response to Reuters' questions, Shein said: "We seek to comply with all relevant local laws and regulations of the countries in which we operate, including in relation to customs and tax compliance."

The EU is discussing abolishing the limit as part of a customs reform project proposed by the Commission in May 2023.

Asked about the EU possibly scrapping the limit, Shein said: "Contrary to some common misperceptions, we keep prices affordable through our technology-based on-demand business model and flexible supply chain."

Rival Temu, owned by Chinese online retailer Pinduoduo Holdings, has also denied that its growth has been mainly driven by the duty-free policy.

"The primary drivers behind our rapid expansion and market acceptance are the supply-chain efficiencies and operational proficiencies we've cultivated over the years," a Temu spokesperson said in written responses to Reuters' questions.

Industry association Ecommerce Europe, whose members include Amazon and eBay, has said scrapping the duty-free limit would increase trade frictions and could result in retaliatory measures from key trading partners like the US.

The European Parliament approved the customs reform bill in a preliminary vote in March, but the bill will be assessed further after European elections in early June, with a new parliament in place.

Two billion parcels with a declared value of less than €150 arrived in the EU from outside countries in 2023, according to the Commission, which says "the sheer volumes of e-commerce are testing customs' limits."

The Commission has also said the import tax exemption encourages sellers to split shipments up and as many as 65% of parcels are undervalued to benefit from the tax break.

Shein said it makes relevant declarations and pays required taxes on orders shipped to customers in Europe, including relevant customs duties on orders valued above the €150 threshold.

Temu said it does not split parcels to bypass customs controls or engage in false declarations. — **Reuters**