

“IT’S OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY” AT WORK

Mr Palaniappan Kannan is the Deputy Project Director of Puretech Engineering Pte Ltd, and one of the recipients of the bizSAFE Enterprise Exemplary Award 2021 and the bizSAFE Star 2018. With 20 years of experience and a wealth of knowledge and expertise in developing innovative and creative technical and electrical solutions, the company believes in advocating a healthy and supportiveworkplace for their employees.



MR PALANIAPPAN KANNAN
Deputy Project Director
Puretech Engineering
Pte Ltd

Tell us a bit more about your company and what it does.

Puretech Engineering Pte Ltd is a mechanical and electrical engineering service provider. We have been serving the construction, automation, aviation, and infrastructure sectors for more than 25 years.

Many SMEs think that only MNCs can afford looking after mental well-being as they have more resources and bandwidth. What made your company think otherwise?

At Puretech Engineering, we recognise that mental health is a growing issue in Singapore, more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. We firmly believe that looking after the mental well-being of the workforce is the social responsibility of all companies, regardless if you are an MNC or SME. Armed with this mindset, our company's Safety & HR team came up with several mental well-being initiatives to help support our employees.

Were there challenges that held your company back initially from embarking on mental well-being initiatives? How did you overcome them?

Yes, we encountered some challenges embarking on the initiatives as we were unsure how to get started. A team of colleagues from the Safety & HR team then came together to share, discuss, and explore available support structures and programmes, one of which was the Total WSH Programme, offered by the Workplace Safety and Health Council.

What are some of the mental well-being initiatives that your company has in place? Why were these chosen, and who else within the company did you partner with in implementing them?

We rolled out a substantial number of initiatives related to workplace mental well-being, several of which are:

- Provision of financial support to our migrant workers' families to purchase necessities. In 2021, when our neighbouring countries were planning for a lockdown, our management recognised that our migrant workers were worried about their families back home. To put our migrant workers' minds at ease, we pooled some funds voluntarily and transferred the monies to their families so they could do the necessary preparation before the lockdown.
- Inclusion of employees' spouses in our Group Hospital Plan's insurances. Besides the basic insurance which many companies must purchase for their employees under the Employment Law, we extended our Group Hospital Plan's coverage to both employees and their spouses. Doing so gives our employees peace of mind knowing that we care for their families as well.
- Implementation of five-day work week.

- We value our employees and want them to achieve a healthy work-life balance. From 1 January 2021 we implemented a five-day work week for all employees.
- Participation in the Total WSH Programme.

To manage safety and health in an integrated manner, we signed up for the Total WSH programme offered by the Workplace Safety and Health Council. A health talk was organised on 19 February 2021 for our employees and Puretech has since completed all phases in the programme.

- Organisation of Health-Related Events and Activities
 - Puretech also encouraged our employees to sign up for NKF's Run Inspired! in January 2021, so that they can get healthy while running for a worthy cause.
 - We also engaged a vendor to plan Health and Wellness Workshops for our employees in 2022, including:
 - Mental Wellbeing Capacity Building Workshops (for managers and supervisors)
 - Mental Wellbeing Workshops (For general employees)
 - Nutrition Workshops

How have your employees benefitted from these initiatives? In turn, how has your company gained from such improvements?

Employees have benefitted immensely from these mental well-being initiatives. With a better work-life balance, they can now spend quality time with their family members. The mental health workshops also made them more aware and conscious of the importance of mental health and ways to manage it.

We treasure all our employees and believe that having a happy workforce equates to increased work productivity.

What advice would you offer other SMEs in creating a more conducive and supportive environment to encourage open conversations about mental well-being at the workplace?

I would encourage other SMEs to adopt both a top-down and bottom-up management approach. Our employees must feel a sense of support and genuine concern for their safety and mental well-being from the management. There needs to be a certain level of trust before employees have the confidence to open up and share information freely.

Having a confidential open-door policy between employees and their department heads is beneficial as it encourages greater communication. With daily demands at work and home, our employees need to feel and understand that it is okay not to be okay.

Implementing a buddy care support system can also help affected employees, who would likely feel more comfortable confiding in their close colleagues. When there are red flags, help can be quickly rendered to the affected employee.

What advice would you offer to employees who may be affected by mental health issues at work?

I will tell my colleague, "It's okay not to be okay. Please talk to someone about the issue, and we can explore how the company can help you overcome the challenges faced."

What do you think the government can do to better support SMEs?

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on many industries. Many SMEs are still struggling to survive and sustain

their operations. With workers' mental health being a growing concern, I hope the Government can extend support to SMEs by providing grants to assist us during this difficult period, as we take up programmes to support our employees' mental well-being needs. We all hope to see healthier, more efficient, and safer workplaces around Singapore.

Find out how your company can manage your employees' health and safety in an integrated way, and educate them on how to better care for their well-being through our **Total Workplace Safety and Health Programme.**