

PARTNER OF LABOUR MOVEMENT

Ken Tong

Founder and Director

The Eyecare Initiative – Optical Pte Ltd

Nominated by NTUC U SME

Ken Tong, President of the Singapore Optometric Association and Founder of The Eyecare Initiative – Optical Pte Ltd (a.k.a. Eyesight.sg). He also sits on the advisory panel for several government initiatives to champion community optometry.

Brother Ken's constant pursuit of helping others and educating people about primary eye care has led him to establish his own Singapore-based company. His priority has also been to ensure employees are well-compensated for their hard work. Despite the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, he managed to keep all my employees employed and later implemented a sustainable wage increase program.

His employees now earn a living wage better than market rates, with an annual pay increase and bonus payouts of up to 3 months' pay. He shared that during the pandemic restrictions, his two practices only allowed one worker to be at work per day, which meant that his other four workers were redundant. But he did not lay off any workers and managed to work and survive the tough times.

Brother Ken makes it a priority to create a positive and supportive work environment for his workers. He provides ongoing training and development opportunities and a competitive salary and benefits package to help them grow personally and professionally. It was also critical to redesign jobs to differentiate strategically as a business, as business starts with their people. He believes that a company's success is directly tied to the well-being and satisfaction of its workers.

His team conducted a competitive analysis to identify best practices. His workers underwent the Service Industry Transformation Programme (STIP) to become better eye care health specialists. The service excellence and service blueprint helped change the perspectives and mindsets of his workers to cater to needs-based consultation. It has become one of their core competencies. They continue to give professional recommendations that create value for their patients.

All the implementations gave his staff a sense of purpose to serve the community. To encourage and reward their workers for upgrading and upskilling themselves, the company offered study and exam leave to their workers. The company also qualified for the U SME initiative "NTUC In Your Workplace" to improve the workplace, work, and workers.

Brother Ken also implemented programmes to upskill and re-skill workers to be future-ready and aligned with industry transformation maps. Through digitising their workflow, his workers are now more proficient, leading to higher productivity and better pay for them when business output has increased. Brother Ken also instituted a mentorship program that paired experienced optometrists with those just starting their careers. The mentorship not only helped the newer workers hone their skills but also provided a supportive network and helped foster a sense of camaraderie among the staff.

He also works closely with institutes of Higher Learning, such as Singapore Polytechnic and Ngee Ann Polytechnic, to engage and attract local young talents to join the company. He is also in talks with Young NTUC to work on a potential collaboration to reach out to youth to deepen the industry's career opportunities and aspirations for optometry.