



HIRING & MANAGING GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS OF MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

Written by:



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Check out the Fair Employment Agency Get Answers portal which is regularly updated with guides and information relevant to hiring and managing.

INTRODUCTION

The support of a migrant domestic worker can enable you and your family to meet a range of household and lifestyle needs. Ideally, you will have a long-term, positive working relationship that benefits you both, as well as your household. How you as an employer hire and manage will be key to making this happen.

While management is not natural to most people, managing an employee who comes from a different culture and lives with you has additional and unique aspects and challenges. This guide aims to equip you with key perspectives to navigate this special working situation and set you and the domestic worker up for success. Keep an eye out for links to take you to full articles and more relevant information

at our Get Answers portal

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Let's get started!

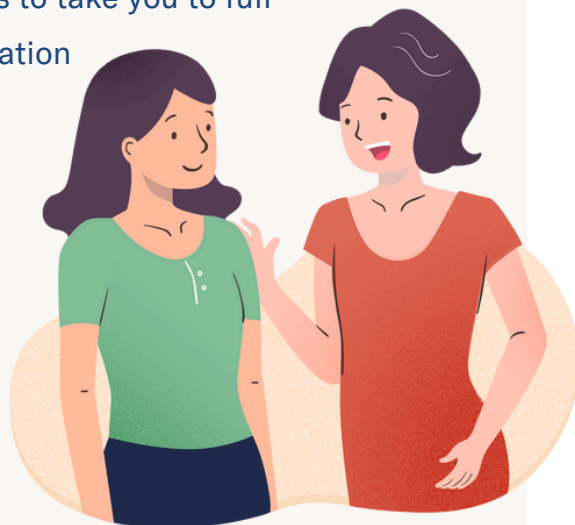


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1. GETTING STARTED



THE MANAGEMENT MINDSET

A management mindset is crucial for long-term success

Taking a management approach towards a domestic worker employee might not come easily to an employer for a number of reasons:

- wearing a manager's hat at home feels unnatural,
- household duties and preferences may seem "common sense"
- seeing the domestic worker as a family member instead of an employee

In fact, for long-term success, it is crucial that you as the employer take a management mindset and continue to engage in the role of manager throughout the working relationship.

What is a management mindset?

- Remembering that you are not only an employer but also a manager,
- defining responsibilities as well as the skills and attitude needed to fulfil it, and
- creating an environment where an employee can sustainably carry out responsibilities to the best of their abilities



1.2 Understanding your management style

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE

Clearly define and communicate your preferences

Management styles refer to the preferred methods for managing an employee. These are based on individual preferences and there is no right or wrong. What is important is that you as an employer are aware of your preferences and are able to clearly communicate them to the domestic worker. Below are some questions to guide you in understanding both [your management style](#) and [your preferred employment relationship type](#).



Management Style

- How do you prefer to organise the work schedule?
- Do you prefer to discuss the working duties or would you rather just give instructions?
- How much flexibility and autonomy do you want the domestic worker to have when organising their work?
- Are you direct and task-oriented or do you prefer a collaborative decision-making process together with the domestic worker?
- How frequently do you interact and communicate with the domestic worker?
- How comfortable do you feel delegating more sensitive tasks such as handling money?

Employment Relationship

- How important do you think the social or familial element is in the relationship?
- Do you prefer a closer relationship or one that is strictly professional?
- Do you prefer to have clearly defined employer-employee roles?
- How will you and other household members such as children address and greet the domestic worker?
- Will the domestic worker take part in family quality time and gatherings? Eg. family meals, events and special occasions?

1.3 Understanding the migrant domestic worker employee

UNDERSTANDING THE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKER EMPLOYEE

Inform your management approach with a basic overview

These are broad points to give you a fuller picture of a migrant domestic worker. Keep these in mind in your management approach, as well as when setting and managing expectations.



- Be aware that migrant workers and their employers must comply with strict immigration and labour laws or you will risk fines, deportation or even imprisonment.
- Know that basics such as hygiene, communication, and eating habits that may seem “common sense” to you may be very foreign to the worker. Make sure to explain and check for understanding to overcome differences in culture and language barriers.
- Remember that migrant workers are away from family and loved ones. Homesickness or issues at home (long-distance relationships, parenting, health issues, etc.) can impact the work.
- Understand that loneliness and confusion, especially during the first few months of adapting to a new country is very common. Account for an adjustment period and support the worker by explaining cultural/lifestyle differences and encouraging the worker to build a social network of their own.
- Be aware that domestic workers may not always choose or be able to prioritise their physical and mental health, although this is key for them to thrive in their jobs. Support the worker by encouraging and enabling them to get proper rest and care for their own wellbeing.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Begin by identifying your priorities and setting clear expectations

The [management mindset](#) begins before the domestic worker joins your household. Being clear about your needs, preferences and responsibilities will put you in a stronger position to succeed as a manager.

There are often multiple duties under the role of the domestic worker. These may include duties as varied as cook, caregiver, babysitter, housekeeper, pet carer, tutor, gardener, etc.

To set your domestic worker up for success, it is important to think through how many of the multiple domestic duties the worker is expected to be taking on. [Spend time to identify your priorities and clearly articulate these to the worker.](#)

As time goes on, you may have to adjust the number of duties in order to manage performance, job satisfaction, and changing household needs.



2. HIRING



2.1 Choosing an agency

CHOOSING AN AGENCY

Avoid agencies with illegal and unethical practices

There are many domestic worker employment agencies in Hong Kong, but the sad reality is that many of them operate unethically, charging employers for bad service while secretly charging domestic workers illegal fees too. [Choosing the right agency is crucial.](#)

Take these steps when considering an agency

Carry out due-diligence

Make sure that the agency is [fully licensed](#) and accredited by the worker's home country by checking the [Indonesian](#) and [Philippines](#) consulate's accreditation lists.

Get a detailed breakdown of costs

Many employment agencies often sneak in hidden costs during the process when you have no choice but to proceed. [Understand upfront what is covered by the fees you pay.](#)

Ask the domestic worker what they have been charged

While placement fees to workers are illegal in both Indonesia and the Philippines, [many are still charged illegally.](#) Ask the worker about what they paid during the recruitment process in Hong Kong and their home country.

Make sure the worker has access to their passport

Passports are often held by employment agencies as collateral for recruitment fee loan repayments. It is illegal for a worker's personal travel documents to be withheld.



Potential agency red flags

Offers unusually low prices

Be wary of the agency charging the worker recruitment fees or sneaking in hidden costs later in the hiring process.

Offers an 'exit to Macau' option:

This option is illegal and exposes both the domestic worker and the employer to prosecution for violating immigration law.

Offers unusually fast processing:

Avoid agencies using unrealistic marketing tactics, as agencies have little control over the processing timeline.

BEFORE HIRING

Let's begin with understanding your responsibilities and eligibility to hire

Am I eligible to hire a domestic worker?

[Make sure you fulfil the requirements](#) (financial, housing capacity, etc.) set out by the government to hire a migrant domestic worker.

Do I need to use an employment agency?

Required use of an employment agency [depends on the worker's nationality and contract status](#). Be aware of and avoid unethical and illegal practices by agencies.

What are the costs involved in hiring?

From initial hiring costs to mandatory insurance, monthly salaries and flights, there are [a number of costs to take into account](#).

What are the hiring timelines?

If you are working with an agency, ask for a breakdown of the processing timeline. Be wary of agencies promising unusually fast timelines. Hiring a worker from [the Philippines](#) and [Indonesia](#) involves strict government processes.



CREATING A JOB DESCRIPTION

Be clear about what you want and you'll have a much better chance of success.

Determine personality and fit

Start by determining and prioritising one or two skills or characteristics that are important to you. It's unlikely that any domestic worker will be an expert at everything!

Hire for attitude, train for skills

We strongly recommend that you “hire for attitude, train for skills.” Attitude is the most important thing to look for when hiring. You should look for adaptability and a willingness to learn. Also, consider how the applicant will fit into your family culture.

Consider the personality fit

Most household duties can be learned, even if the applicant doesn't currently know how to do it. Personality, on the other hand, is often what determines how well suited a domestic worker may be for your family.



RECRUITING CANDIDATES

Prepare by determining your needs and priorities, then kickstart the hiring process



Finalise your job description

Use the information you've gathered in the previous steps to create a job description including priorities, tasks and a worker profile. This will help to set clear expectations with candidates.

Know your offer

Before beginning the interview process, have your offer defined: the proposed salary, food arrangement, schedule, rest day, and accommodation. Keep in mind that in order to hire a competitive candidate, your offer should be competitive too.

Have clear objectives

Use the interviews to understand the candidate's personality, attitude and working style.

Prepare to make an offer on the spot

As an employer hiring for a domestic worker, you are expected to make hiring decisions quickly. Many candidates have several interviews in one day and may accept another job offer while you are deliberating. It is also easier to negotiate salary, start date and rest days face-to-face.

INTERVIEW PRACTICALITIES

A valuable opportunity to get to know your candidate

[Here are a few important tips on how to make the most out of this process](#)



Meet in-person:

Meeting in-person allows for better communication and gives the worker a chance to see where they will work. If video call is the only possibility, make sure to hone in on [the personality fit questions of the interview](#) and show the candidate their expected accommodation.

Give a sense of what it'll be like:

When possible, meet together with family members to give the applicant a sense of the work environment. Ideally, the direct manager should do the interview. Go over the basic weekly schedule and the tasks you expect the domestic worker to manage. Clarify practical details such as the anticipated rest day and make sure to set clear expectations.

Ask situational questions:

Find out how the applicant will react in different scenarios by asking '[situational questions](#)'. The goal of this exercise is to improve your understanding of their personality and how they problem-solve.

Throughout the interview, ask yourself (not the applicant):

- Do they seem to have initiative and a willingness to learn?
- Do they have a positive and friendly attitude?
- Is it easy to communicate with them?
- Do they seem open to instruction and guidance?
- Do they seem like they would get along well with your children?

Open up for questions:

The domestic worker may have questions for you. Make sure you allow some time for this and encourage the worker to ask questions and request clarifications. This will help the worker determine whether they are a good fit with your family.

Take notes:

As you consider different candidates, [note down your observations to help your decision making later](#).

3. ONBOARDING



3.1 Onboarding plan

ONBOARDING PLAN

Set yourself up for success

Begin by [preparing your household before the worker arrives](#) with an onboarding plan. Once the [worker first arrives](#) we recommend you to follow these steps:



Introduce your family members

Share how you prefer each of them to be addressed and let the worker know which family members they will be caring for.

Introduce your home and neighbourhood

Identify common and private areas, and important items such as the first-aid kit and emergency contact list at home. Point out places of interest in the neighbourhood. Introduce digital apps to facilitate daily tasks, such as Google Translate and Google Maps.

Get the worker settled into their accommodation

Make sure the worker has everything they need. If possible, provide internet access.

Go over the general house rules

Provide a written list in order to avoid confusion. Take this opportunity to talk about your family culture, values and lifestyle.

Go through the onboarding plan and schedule

Clarify the immediate learning priorities as well as what training will look like during the first couple of weeks of employment.

Review agreed-upon practical arrangements

Go over practical arrangements including weekly rest day, monthly salary and food arrangement. Make sure to share information about the worker's [insurance plan](#), and provide the worker with an opportunity to ask practical questions.

Verify agency placement fees

Ask the worker if they were charged any [illegal agency recruitment fees](#). Verify that they have their passport and a copy of the original employment contract. Make sure to reimburse relevant expenses to the worker, and [schedule a Hong Kong ID appointment](#) at the Immigration Department, if relevant.

COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS

Clarity is kindness

The onboarding process is the perfect opportunity for you to [set clear expectations with the worker.](#)

Set clear expectations and boundaries

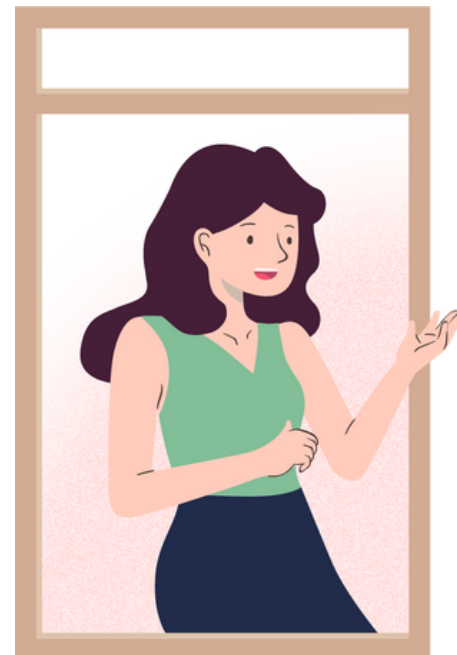
Discuss roles, behaviours and responsibilities and make sure to provide expectations and boundaries on these in writing. Combine this with schedules, check-lists, house rules, meal plans and calendars to make work tasks and responsibilities more clear.

Define communication channels

Clarify what your preferred communication channels are for urgent questions and set up a time for a regular check-in meeting with the worker every week.

Ensure the worker knows what to do in an emergency

Discuss what the worker is expected to do in an emergency situation such as injuries, medical emergencies, etc. Write these instructions down.



COMMUNICATING INSTRUCTIONS

Provide instructions effectively

Once you have outlined your expectations, sustain good performance by [being effective with your instructions.](#)

Consider the worker's working style

Consider whether the worker is able to work more independently or if they may work more effectively with more detailed instruction. Take into account whether the worker prefers more autonomy and flexibility when carrying out her work.

Check for understanding frequently

Most workers will not feel comfortable asking their employer to repeat an instruction or provide additional information. Ask the worker to repeat instructions to make sure they understand the information provided. This might feel strange at first, but will help avoid misunderstandings when done in a constructive manner.

Expect a transition period

With new tasks, don't expect workers to get it perfectly right on the first try. Explain the issue, provide feedback and give the worker a chance to resolve it. Emphasise that asking for clarification is good.



3.4 Communicating feedback

COMMUNICATING FEEDBACK

Effective feedback is key to lasting working relationships

[Providing regular and constructive feedback](#) is the most effective management tool to improve performance and ensure expectations are met. Remember to [ask for feedback too](#).

Make sure to be clear and specific with your feedback.

Provide a recent example, explain what the issue is, and provide context about its wider consequences. Avoid vague words such as 'more' or 'less' to describe expected changes and improvements.

Ensure that the worker understands the feedback.

Ask the worker to summarise their takeaways from the conversation. Make sure to encourage and open up for feedback from the worker to build trust. Keep in mind that most workers will not feel comfortable doing this due to cultural differences.

Don't forget to provide positive feedback too!



4. MANAGING



BASIC MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Let's start with the fundamentals!

Salary & Bonus

- Pay the worker's [salary](#) on time every month, not only for maintaining trust, but also recognising the financial responsibilities on the worker to send money back home.
- Provide the worker with written records, receipts for wages, food allowance, and medical expenses, and keep a copy yourself.
- Encourage using [a bank account](#) as a good way to keep records and for good financial management.
- [Be thoughtful about using bonuses](#) to show appreciation, incentivise and reward good performance.
- [Check you are fulfilling legal requirements for salary entitlements.](#)

Rest Days & Statutory Holidays

- Provide the [mandatory days off and leave entitlements](#) as laid out in the employment contract. Remember that [rest is an important aspect of sustaining good work performance](#) and working relationships.
- Allow for the worker to plan for regular rest days in order to rest and attend to personal matters.
- [Keep track of leave entitlements \(home, sick and annual\)](#) with written and signed records. Find support if you are unsure of the entitlement details.



Insurance

- [In Hong Kong, employers are required to purchase Employees' Compensation Insurance](#) for every domestic worker employed by them.
- This insurance covers the employer's liability should the employee get sick or injured while working.
- More extensive insurance plans provide more protection and can cover benefits such as health, personal accident, dental insurance, etc. Compare different insurance policies to find the policy which best fits your needs and budget.

PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT

Setting up priority tasks and schedules

A clear [work schedule](#) is key for the worker to be able to fulfil and prioritise among their tasks and responsibilities. Create a schedule that works for both you and the worker.

Think through how tasks should be prioritised

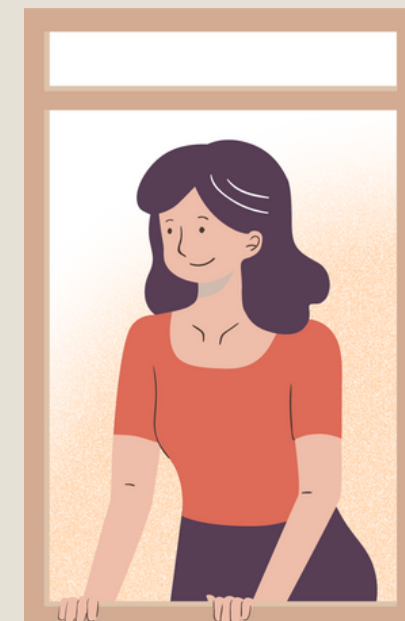
What are the most important priorities today, this week, this month? Should focus be put on caregiving or on household chores?

Make sure the worker understands the tasks and emphasise priorities. Expect for additional tasks to come up and explain how these can be incorporated into the existing schedule and what to do when.

Utilise a schedule for clarity and accountability

Write up a schedule including daily, weekly and monthly tasks for the worker to go by, with priorities clearly indicated. Keep a printed copy of the schedule easily accessible in the home.

Make sure to discuss the schedule during your regular check-ins with the worker. Discuss what works and what doesn't. Be open to make changes and explore different options to improve routines.



PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT

Explain your preferences with specifics

When it comes to management, discard the idea of "common sense" and make sure to be specific with your [instructions](#) and [expectations](#). Each family has their own preferences and you should be as clear as possible about yours in order to set the worker up for success.



Hygiene expectations and duties

- Identify hygiene requirements for your family, including general-, food-, laundry- and personal hygiene.
- Explain when, how, and why items should be cleaned and stored.
- Explain appliances, products, and labels, and provide written instructions if necessary.

Cooking & grocery shopping

- Explain food restrictions and preferences clearly.
- Give constructive feedback and provide training where necessary.
- Utilise meal plans, grocery lists and schedules.
- Provide the worker with [training opportunities](#).

Caregiving

- Be clear about chain of command, division of duties, do's and don'ts, tasks and expectations.
- Be aware of cultural, preference and experience differences.
- Provide training where necessary. You can also sign the worker up for [childcare](#) and [eldercare](#) courses.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Addressing performance issues

It is always uncomfortable to face performance issues, but remember that most cases can be worked through! When things seem to be going off track, it is important that you as the employer address them as soon as possible.



Identifying the source of the issue

This allows you to understand how to best address the issue. Try to discern whether the issue is related to skills, working style, communication, attitude, cultural differences, personality fit, or external factors.

Address the issue head on

Have an honest conversation with the worker. Ask for their input and understand if they are facing any barriers you can help them through.

Find common ground

Resolve the issue together and make sure that the needs of both sides are understood and met. Be open to compromise and come up with a clear action plan, including an agreed upon outcome, practical actions, as well as expected timeline and follow-up.

Expect more conversations

Continue to check in and encourage the worker to share their perspective as well in order to improve results and well-being.

Review priorities and expectations

What are the most important tasks? How can they be fulfilled with the worker's current capabilities? Think through how you can best strengthen the worker's capabilities with relevant training and support the development of new habits to achieve tasks.

Continually evaluate!

Adjust and improve your management approach. Work in partnership with the domestic worker. Through efforts on both sides, you will be able to build trust and a strong foundation for a long-term working relationship.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Addressing other important situations

Aside from performance issues, be prepared for other situations potentially arising. These could include anything from communication-related issues, to personal matters such as financial difficulties, homesickness, family issues, and medical complications. Read more on these issues and make sure to ask for support when these situations arise.



Financial issues

[Many domestic workers are charged illegal recruitment fees by their employment agencies](#) and training centres, leading them to take out high-interest loans with informal loan companies which take them months to repay. Unfortunately, harassment by loan sharks and financial stressors affecting worker's wellbeing and performance are all too common.

Pregnancy and maternity leave

While pregnancy is natural and cause for celebration, due to the unique working arrangements of domestic workers, there are some points that workers and their employers need to carefully consider and work through together. Good communication between the employer and domestic worker is key to achieving legal, safe, and practical arrangements for both parties during this time.

Medical illness and injuries at work

Illness, accidents, injuries at work, and other medical issues can unfortunately happen to anyone, anytime. It is very important that employers know what their responsibilities are in the case of a work injury or occupational disease.

5. PARTING WAYS



5.1 Parting ways

PARTING WAYS

Settle all items before parting ways

Employers and workers may part ways due to finishing a contract or because the contract needed to be prematurely terminated. In both cases, there are [important points to take into consideration when parting ways](#).

For performance issues, write a warning letter

You are recommended to provide a warning letter to the worker listing out the relevant performance or conduct issues, underlining the required improved action, and specifying the consequences if the expected improvements are not met.

Contact the agency

Before you get started with the necessary termination documents and calculations, [make it your first step to contact the agency](#) and inform them about the termination. The agency will be able to assist you with any questions you might have, and will make sure to report the termination to the relevant authorities.

Get familiarised on legal obligations

Your legal obligations as an employer will vary depending on the contract termination reason. Make sure to familiarise yourself and comply with the relevant legal requirements.



Inform the worker of the notice period or last working day

Provide this information as soon as possible. If there are any changes, make sure you communicate this to the worker and always make sure to put down any amendments in writing.

Before the last working day

In order to have everything in order before parting ways, settle termination entitlements and documents in advance. Make sure to provide a copy of all the termination documents to the worker, and note that the worker has the right to refuse to sign any documents that they either disagree with or do not understand.

In the case of any disagreement

You may both contact your agency as well as the relevant Consulate and the Labour Department. They can help you verify both termination documents and the entitlement calculation in order to get this important part of the process right.

NEED MORE INFO?

Get answers at
www.fairagency.org/answers

Check out the Fair Employment Agency Get Answers portal which is regularly updated with guides and information relevant to hiring and managing.



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