

City Telecom firm believer in passion

With an ambitious 10-year vision of becoming the largest internet protocol (IP) provider in Hong Kong by 2016, local telecommunications firm, City Telecom (HK), has developed a Survivor-like management trainee programme to build leaders.

The programme, refined over the past decade at the 16-year-old company, received 700 applicants from local and overseas graduates last year. Titled "CXO of the Future", the programme aims to nurture potential chief executives for the company, such as CEOs, chief financial officers and chief information officers.

Lai Ni Quiaque, chief financial officer and head of the staff engagement department, said some of the existing directors were graduates of the same programme. Last year, the company hired five management trainees.

"Passion is [the] number one [requirement]," said Mr Lai. "Passionate people will get better by themselves. A perfect CXO is someone who can adapt to the business environment as we do not know what the business environment will be like in 20 years. So, our objective is to build adaptable people who are passionate about our common goal."

The company is looking for creative people from a non-business stream who excelled academically.

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Chief financial officer and head of staff engagement department
City Telecom

interviews. Finalists will meet the co-founders, Ricky Wong Wai-kay and Paul Cheung Chi-kin, the chief operations officer, and Mr Lai during the panel interview.

To provide an overview of the company for the future leaders, during the 18-month training period trainees will be attached to all of the company's major departments in the first year, gaining hands-on experiences in different projects and visiting world-class companies to learn best practices from different industries.

Each trainee will be assigned a CXO as personal senior mentor and paired with an experienced middle manager to refer to as big brother or big sister. To strengthen their business foundation, passing the Chartered Financial Analyst Exam during the training programme is an important evaluation criteria.

Trainees must read 12 classic management books in the first six months and do a book review every two weeks. The books include Jim Collins' *From Good to Great*, Jack Welch and Suzy Welch's *Winning*, and Spencer Johnson's *The Present*.

"There must be a large experience gap between the current generation of CXOs and graduates," Mr Lai said. "Our objective is to narrow this as soon as possible and train them to think independently and know how to debate and challenge, so that they can work with the CXOs."

The pressure is extremely high as even after their acceptance on to the programme, anyone can be eliminated at any time during the training if they fail to excel. Trainees also need to carry out an in-house job search to secure a permanent staff position upon graduation from the programme.

Trainee Winnie Lam Sin-man, who majored in psychology at the University of Hong Kong, said she picked City Telecom because of the company culture and the model of the programme.

Another trainee LurLee Leung Lee-nam, an information engineering graduate from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said the opportunity to work in every department in the company was an added bonus.

Ms Lam advised applicants to read through the company's annual reports and information on the website.

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Management trainees Winnie Lam (left) and LurLee Leung flank City Telecom's Lai Ni Quiaque. Photo: Jonathan Wong