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English help for retail staff

Training for service personnel is the focus of this year's Speak Good English Movement

KENNY CHEE

RETAIL and service staff will be the focus of the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) this year.

The movement, in its ninth year, aims to encourage Singaporeans to speak good, standard English.

One major initiative is an English training programme for retail professionals. The Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) is working with SGEM to launch it in October, said Mr Goh Eck Kheng, chairman of SGEM, at a media briefing yesterday.

The new programme aims to help frontline retail staff raise their level of spoken English and gain confidence in speaking the language with customers.

Ms Lau Chuen Wei, executive director of SRA, said that being confident in speaking standard English can help sales staff better communicate a shop's products to customers, and this would benefit the shop's bottom line eventually.

Retailer Metro has taken further steps by offering service staff, who excelled in English speech courses, monetary rewards or a chance to lunch with senior management.

SGEM and its partners are also promoting good spoken English in the workplace.

For instance, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) has partnered the National Library Board and SGEM to allow Singaporeans to determine their English-language proficiency at four public libraries later this month.

Individuals can, thereafter, sign up for WDA's workplace English-proficiency courses at the four libraries, if they wish to further improve their English.

Attaining intermediate-level proficiency in WDA's workplace English courses is recognised as an alternative to the GCE 'N' or 'O' level certification for English by over 300 companies and training institutions, including Metro, Isetan and the Institute of Technical Education.

Meanwhile, the SGEM is also targeting parents and teachers, as they are critical in teaching and promoting good spoken English to students.

Overall, Mr Goh said SGEM is taking a more focused approach this year, by targeting mainly Singaporeans who are unable to speak standard English but are open to improving themselves.

kennyc@sph.com.sg