

HRD programme highlights role of housewives

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Housewives, or "homemakers" as modern wives call themselves, have a role to play not just in running a home but also in making their husbands more effective at work.

But wives have their own problems in creating the right environment when they are forced to live away from civilisation as it were, in self-contained company townships. A human resources development (HRD) programme, therefore, has to take care of this aspect also when it seeks to make the worker a more effective member of the organisation.

Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (IPCL), a public-sector firm, made a pioneering effort in this direction recently for its employees at the Maharashtra gas cracker complex at Nagothane,

about 120 km from Bombay in Raigad district.

The programme, planned by Ms Aneeta Madhok from the Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, was aimed at the wives of employees who, she felt, had a major role to play in their husbands' success. As she put it, "There is a woman behind an unsuccessful man, too".

She said she had been looking at the success-failure aspect of men in relationship to their wives for several years and she had found "a definite corelation between the personality of the wife and her impact on the effectiveness of her husband."

But wives, have their own problems. Those who attended the programme said they often suffered the stress their husbands experienced at the workplace and wanted to help them cope with it. But they wanted more openness

from their husbands on the problems they faced.

The wives had other suggestions to enable them to lead more enriching, satisfied lives in the rather secluded township located in sylvan surroundings, in a valley amidst hillocks just off the Bombay-Goa highway. They felt their husbands could help them in this area. Ms Madhok felt this needed a two-way effort, from the husband as well as the wife.

The Maharashtra gas cracker complex is the largest industrial complex in the region and employs 2,400 people, over 200 of them women. Just over 620 of the staff, whose average age is 29, are officers. Ninety-five per cent of the homemakers in the township are graduates.

The women take an active part in cultural activities, have a club of their own and run a nursery for

children. But they are keen to do something for those living in surrounding villages. Asked whether the wives felt isolated from society in the township, Ms Madhok said that the other side of this was that bonding in the township was much stronger than in Bombay where people had no time to meet their friends or relatives as often as they wanted to.

The IPCL management has provided a swimming pool, a well-equipped gymnasium, an indoor badminton court, and good educational and medical facilities. It now plans to expand the recreation facilities with a natural lake for boating, a new sports complex and a community hall.

But the management feels that apart from providing the infrastructure, it must pay to extend the role of HRD by looking at the psychological needs of its em-

ployees, addressing them as total persons, rather than just as workers. This extended role of HRD seeks to help couples achieve a better marital relationship and improve their functioning as parents, because this was found to put the workers in a more positive frame of mind when they came to work, Ms Madhok said.

IPCL took this step because it felt that in the changed competitive environment, the desired amount of synergy could not be attained for achieving the competitive edge needed today without integrating the family with the company's goals.

"We do not hire just a pair of hands but the whole family. Hence, the right inputs have to be given not just to the employees, but also the families," Mr C. S. Patel, executive director of the gas cracker complex told *The Times of India*.