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After CSR, India Inc starts Individual Social Responsibility

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KOLKATA: Going beyond the realm of corporate social responsibility (CSR), companies are now looking at the concept of 'Individual Social Responsibility' (ISR) wherein employees invest their skills towards community service.

The diversified conglomerate Apeejay Surrendra Group has introduced this unique concept, which unlike CSR where the company management invests in social causes, ISR puts the onus on employees to usher in the change.

Under the initiative, Apeejay is tying up with NGOs and CSR units of other companies where employees can volunteer for a cause and get rewarded during performance appraisals.

"The ISR program creates the corporate structure that makes it possible for employees to join in a cause, come up with an innovative idea for a social issue, get an effective platform to deliver it and often get the time to deliver within their working hours," Apeejay Group chairman Karan Paul told PTI.

He says that CSR running parallel to ISR could be an effective model.

After orientation and training sessions to understand volunteering ethics, employees are encouraged to work with NGOs with whom the company has tied-up with. Depending on their areas of interest and skills, employees choose their preferred type of community work.

Recently, Apeejay signed an MoU with e-commerce company mjunction under which their employees are imparting computer literacy skills to underprivileged youngsters.

In various cities including Kolkata, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, the employees work with NGOs and old-age homes to make a difference into the lives of those deprived.

The management allows the employee to devote even their office working hours to such initiatives under ISR.

Upon the initiative of company's CSR director Renu Kakkar, the idea started taking shape in 2007-08 as they started nurturing the spirit of volunteering among the employees through various initiatives.

After it became popular among employees and a trend-setter in the India Inc, the company has recently registered ISR as a trademark property.

"We treat the ability to volunteer as an added competency of an employee and its mapped into the performance appraisal system. If you are a good citizen, you will also be a good employee and if you are a good employee, you should also be a good citizen," says Kakkar.

ISR has been made a part of the company's HR department policy. In 2012, employees of the Apeejay Surrendra Group, which has interests in diverse verticals like tea, hospitality, shipping, retail, real estate, etc, devoted around 5000 hours altogether into volunteering.

Employees feel happy when they find that the company's HR is recognising the volunteering efforts by favouring them in annual performance appraisals.

"The ISR policy provides an opportunity to employees across the cities to extend themselves beyond their own personal goals, commitments and pressures and helped them align with the larger social realities that exist outside their individual spheres," says Kakkar.