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## **Mika Yamanokawa Helps NGOs through CSR Activities**

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The aspect of allowing us to arrange opportunities to mutually support each other is the good aspect.



It's a large company, therefore it has a broad network performing CSR through its business activities. For example, more retired employees join NPOs to improve the level of their operations. The fact is, social contribution activities resemble a "go-between."

It is now generally understood that international aid is not something carried out by a select group; it is an activity done by the entire population of Japan. One reason why this has occurred is probably that companies encourage and implement volunteer activities under the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Japanese have low community consciousness, but many seek a sense of belonging at the workplace. This means that a corporation is itself a community. Activities conducted by a community uniting to provide people, goods and money provide strength not only to their beneficiaries, but to the NGOs that supply the opportunities. Mika Yamanokawa is a CSR pioneer who began CSR activities—giving guidance to employees concerning wisdom and opportunities related to international aid—in the early 1990s.

### **Giving information and wisdom to employees throughout Japan**

Ms. Yamanokawa is now the Assistant Manager of the Advertising Department/Social Contribution Section and the Assistant Manager of the Business Planning Department, CSR Promotion Section at Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Co., Ltd. Through an intranet linking its nationwide branch offices, its head office and its overseas offices, she brings together all employees interested in being volunteers and provides

approximately ¥14 million per year to fund activities by NPOs throughout Japan. Ms. Yamanokawa plays a key role in the flow of information. When someone says, “I want to do something, but what can I do?”, she shows them a menu called, “You can do things like this” and teaches them how to hold an event, or tells them about NPOs in their region that are suitable as recipients of contributions. Matching supply with demand by determining what is needed where, who can perform a task, how it will be performed, and if it is necessary for the information to be coordinated — that is the role played by Ms. Yamanokawa.

As proposed by Ms. Yamanokawa, the Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Group established, “As a member of regional society and of international society, contribute to their sustained development and support social contribution activities by our employees and by our representative offices.” as the guiding principle of its social contribution activities. This is realized in two ways: by aggressively launching efforts as a company and by supporting the activities of individual employees and representative offices. The former refers to activities performed through its main insurance business, and includes the contribution of capital and goods. A noteworthy example of the latter is the matching gift system: the company doubles the contributions when a disaster occurs by providing an amount of money equal to the contributions. Then there is the Smile Heart Club, whose members contribute money in units of ¥100 or less from their salaries to support social contribution activities. It now has about 4,100 members. For example, pictures drawn by children in Croatia are printed on Christmas cards that are then sold and the money earned is used for activities to support children. Wool is purchased and knitters recruited from among employees, and the completed sweaters are sent to evacuees and refugees. Recently, money earned from Christmas cards was contributed to an NGO that helps children who were victims of the Sumatra Island earthquake and tsunami. Ms. Yamanokawa says, “We are sending the message that we have not forgotten those who face difficult circumstances.”

I, who interpret CSR as “a company pushing on with its main business along with social responsibility” asked, “Isn’t it overdoing it for the company to even support activities of individual employees?” Ms. Yamanokawa answered, “Responsibility to regional society and to international society is one of the commitments which our company pledges to the seven categories of stakeholders. The goal is to become human beings with depth and breadth. An action that considers somebody nourishes imaginative power, improving employee quality. A company where good quality

employees work improves quality. Therefore, social contribution activities are necessary.”

In fact, it is said that branches and representative offices that contribute to society have extremely good internal atmospheres. Employees make positive efforts to perform company work. This is the significance for a company of pursuing social contribution activities as a part of CSR.



Preparing to send sweaters knitted by volunteers. Their distribution is contracted to an NGO that is able to handle high volume shipments.

## Beginning of social contribution activities

Ms. Yamanokawa has been involved in social contribution activities since 1991. After graduating in 1984, she joined Sumitomo Insurance where she worked in the business operations section of the President’s Office, then in November 1991, she was put in charge of social contribution. Her job title at that time was Director of the Business Operations Bureau of the Social Contribution Activities Office. Because 1993 was the 100th anniversary of the company, she joined the 100th Anniversary Project Promotion Team in March 1991 and took charge of social contribution activities incorporated into anniversary projects in response to a proposal by a young employee that, “employees should take part in social contribution activities.” But general understanding was not advanced, so she reports that, “At first not clearly understanding what had been done, I asked people at other companies and I studied methods.” Through a process of repeated trial and error, she expanded the menu: preparing and selling valentine cards instead of chocolates, constructing a sweater knitting network and contributing surplus furniture.



Speaking at a panel discussion. She participates actively in outside seminars while expanding her network inside and outside the company.

## Understanding the corporate culture through company business

In 2006, as a result of the industry's unpaid insurance problem, it was said that "we had become a company that could not talk about CSR", but "when the suspension of business period ended, we expanded our activities beyond their previous level." Where do you suppose Ms. Yamanokawa has set the goal of social contribution activities? Her answer was, " I think it should be directed at beginners. People who develop further by taking this as a starting point should take part in regional activities or individual activities. We are only counting on ripple effects inside and outside of the company."

It is extremely interesting how she activated the 20,000 employees of the entire group. Actually, its foundation appears to be that she learned basic knowledge about the company's organization and work when she was working in the President's Office after graduation. For example, she entered the collected work authority regulations into a computer. Thanks to this, she was able to learn which departments were in charge of which business activities. Therefore, in her work in the Social Contribution Activity Work Bureau that she started alone, she could target suitable departments to ask for cooperation inside the company. This helped her start the club.

Ms. Yamanokawa responded coolly to a female student who said, "When I join a company, I want to be in charge of social contribution activities." Social contribution management is coordination work. Only by understanding the company business and learning about the characteristics of its employees and about its corporate culture, is it possible to discover social contributions suitable to that company.

A company's social contribution activities give sufficient courage to the support activities of a pro, because a coherent group of people can express the desires of many more people. And cooperating NPOs can also feel the joy of providing a company with the opportunity to contribute to society. The good aspect is that it allows us to arrange opportunities to mutually support each other.