

Enabling the disabled

Sminu Jindal's single-minded dedication to the cause has given the right impetus to Swayam, her initiative

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The norms usually dictate that a meeting the managing director of a multinational has will be about the product of the company or about a corporate social responsibility programme.

But that is not the case with Sminu Jindal, young and dynamic managing director, Jindal Saw Limited (JSL). The first lady entrant in a male-dominated steel, oil and gas sector, she has been instrumental in bringing about an image make-over of JSL by engaging modern techniques and introducing professionalism at every level of operation.

When we talk about Swayam, an initiative by the SJ Charitable Trust, her enthusiasm is hard to contain. Swayam is an initiative that gives wings to people with reduced mobility. Her single-minded dedication to the cause has not only given it the right impetus, but also highlighted the tribulations of the physically challenged in government or corporate sectors.

Swayam started out as an



• Sminu Jindal has been responsible for image overhaul of her company.

information portal to make the disabled aware of their rights, and the government initiatives. The initiative gained success, but Sminu was not content with the idea of it being just an information portal. "It was necessary that we put words into action. We had to make people aware that it was more about rights, the number of people who would benefit from the services," Jindal

says. She adds Swayam wanted the disabled part of the society to have hope and independence, and 'curb the idea of being a burden on others'. She says these are more of enabling rights, but they are not limited to just the immobile. "The idea is empowering in itself. A simple ramp, for example, included in a building will have equal usage for the disabled, a pregnant woman, or

someone with a heavy bag and a suitcase to roll on. And all these can be added at no extra cost. It is simple that way," she adds.

Jindal, who does not rest on her laurels, says the transport system should be efficient enough to allow wheelchair-bound people to commute sans assistance.

The idea of accessibility shouldn't be a headache for those

SHE SAYS A RAMP COULD EASE PROBLEMS FOR THE DISABLED. ACCESSIBILITY SHOULD BE A PART OF URBAN PLANNING.

who may need assistance. She says most railway stations and other public places are still found lacking when it comes to being disabled-friendly services.

"Like I said, a ramp could ease problems for the disabled and aged. In fact, accessibility should be a mandatory part of urban planning. A few changes here and there would ensure that the disabled are brought into mainstream. Workplaces, starting with schools, college and public places should be brought under the purview of these changes," she adds.

She also talks about a few initiatives that Swayam undertook, in partnership with other agencies and the Government of India. One of them was to add the disabled into the Census. Called the 'be counted because you count' initiative, it was done on a partnership basis with the Government of India.

"A change in people's attitude is also necessary. 'Special schools' for disabled are sidelining from the mainstream society in a subtle manner. We should sensitise the children, right from school on these topics and make them aware. And the disabled should stop adjusting, because the squeaky wheel gets the grease," she says.