

Inspire - Nicor's Creative Approach to Personal and Career Development for Professional Women

Successful Practice Challenge: Career and personal growth is often significantly enhanced through group interaction. Kiwanis, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, college alumnae, professional societies and other groups are out there, but few have direct insights into the energy industry. How can a utility company encourage professional growth in ways that enhance careers and support the success of the company without setting apart specific groups in ways that may negatively affect the organization?

Successful Practice Solution: Nicor Gas has created Inspire, a professional group for women in the company. The group offers professional women in the company fresh and unique perspectives on personal and career development, and creates an open forum for idea exchange, Inspire also helps to improve the success of Nicor by providing insight into the company's direction and thereby strengthening the link between the company, its business objectives, employees and communities.

Inspire membership is voluntary, and there is a nominal annual fee of \$20. The idea to create the group was a grassroots effort given momentum after a few women of Nicor attended an MEA Energetic Women's conference and became *inspired* to launch a group at their company.

Inspire is focused on providing professional and personal guidance to its members under the following three pillars:

1. **Learn** - programs provide opportunities for all members to learn more about Nicor and peer companies, how to better balance work/life experiences and foster mentorship where women can be encouraged to grow in their personal and professional lives.
2. **Lead** - events cultivate the members' leadership capabilities by developing their social and professional communication skills, exploring generational differences in life and career experiences and offering strategies for expanding leadership competencies.
3. **Leap** - provides a forum for career development within Nicor by increasing members' skills in setting personal career goals; dressing for success; learning how to identify, prepare for and compete for job opportunities; and delivering effective communications on projects that add value to Nicor.

Activities include:

- Panel discussions with executives on career development
- Networking with external and internal groups
- Membership drives
- Charity events
- Book discussions on leadership
- Roundtables
- Webinars

For more information on Inspire, contact Sharon Grove, Chairwoman at Nicor. Her email is sgrove@nicor.com.