

REPORT OF THE TEFON LADIES WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION:

It is critical that employers pay more attention to the health and wellbeing of their employees at work and outside of work. A little bit of effort in providing support for employees can significantly improve their mental wellbeing. This is a small investment that can return massive benefits in reduced absenteeism and increased productivity. A mentally and spiritually healthy employee brings with him/her to the workplace a sunny spirit and attitude that can create a workplace environment with less negativism, less accidents on duty and significantly improved performance. It is commonly accepted that “prevention is better than cure” and this axiom is certainly true to disease prevention as it is for employee wellbeing at work. Health and wellbeing has been proven to have a direct impact on the loyalty that employees feel towards their employer. An overwhelming majority of employees who feel that their employer really cares about their health and wellbeing consider themselves as very loyal. As with most relationships, including marriages, an employer's relationship with his employee requires a sense of mutual respect and trust to be successful. Demonstrating to employees that they care about their wellbeing is a key way for employers to show staff that they are valued. This demonstration of care must go beyond the employee and the workplace to include the “whole” of the employee – which is their families.

It is with this background that the TEFON Oilfield Services Company, in association with the TESHQ Foundation, developed a programme to impart life skills to the TEFON ladies (wives of employees and female workers) so they can build healthy relationships in their families. This, TEFON believes will enhance family values and assist with the prevention of mental stress as well as stress-related conditions like headaches, sleep disorders, restlessness, hypertension, gastritis etc. This workshop followed an assessment by the medical doctor who carried out annual medicals on the workers. She realized that many of the workers had vital signs(BP, temperature, blood sugar etc.) within normal range but often had difficult relationships with family members (spouses and teenage children) – a situation that often resulted in a poor state of mental health. As part of its Community Empowerment commitment, TEFON encouraged TEFON workers to invite and register their female friends, neighbors, mothers and sisters so they too could benefit from the workshop. Out of 105 ladies who were registered, 103 attended the one day workshop.



A poster for the workshop drawn by a teen who is a member of the TESH Youth wing.

Given the numbers involved, the workshop was structured in 3 parts tailored to accommodate separate groups of the ladies, the husbands and finally for the teenagers. Experience has shown that wives and teens will not talk freely in the presence of their husbands/ dads if they were to find themselves in a workshop together.

THE REPORT OF ACTIVITIES:

The workshop for the ladies took place on the 14th of February 2015 at Bonanjo with 103 participants and some 17 support staff and facilitators in attendance

The participants were welcomed by the GM of TEFON Oilfield Services Company and the first facilitator **Dr Tina FONGOD**, lecturer in the University of Buea took the floor to talk about attitudes of respect towards a husband and children.

Her presentation focused on the relationship that should exist between husband and wife. If the wife respects her husband, the children will just naturally learn to respect their dad. In a mutually satisfactory relationship between husband and wife, the wife respects her husband unconditionally and the husband loves his wife unconditionally in return. When they fail to meet each other's need for love and respect, the relationship spins out of control into chaos with quarrelling and fighting being the result. She gave several examples of how a woman can show disrespect towards her husband for example:

- Gossiping about him to a third party.
- Talking about him in a derogatory way to the children.
- Not keeping a healthy, attractive weight.
- Not dressing attractively.
- Doing some crazy hair-styles that he does not like especially if he had commented negatively about them to the wife's hearing.
- Talking to him rudely in public.
- Ordering him in public.

She then rounded up her talk with a summary of the qualities of a respectful wife and how she can cultivate these qualities.

The next module was on the relationship between parents and their children. This module was coordinated by the TESHU Youth Coordinator (TYC), **Mr Joel TAMUTAN** (a youth of 29years). It started with a TESHU drama presented in French by English-speaking teens of the Celestial Echoes choir of PC Bonamoussadi. The drama kicked off with a depiction of the unhealthy situation that exists in some homes where teens and their parents do not see eye to eye. In this drama, the ZACHU family made up of Mr and Mrs Zachu and their teenage daughter and son are in full blown conflict mode. The teens dress in their "crazy" teen regalia much to the annoyance of the parents. To worsen matters, the teens laugh at their father when he ineptly tries to talk to them about sexuality and HIV prevention. When the parents eavesdrop and learn that their teens have been drinking and smoking in secret, the mother faints and they realize that they need help. They take her to the hospital and the doctor confirms their worst fears –the family is in stress mode and they needed to make some drastic behavioural changes if they did not want to have other stress-related health complications. The doctor then gives them a course in TESHU living at the end of which the kids go on their knees to apologize to their parents. That is the beginning of TESHU living for the ZACHU family. These talented youths of Celestial Echoes then added the icing on the cake by thrilling the participants with the TESHU theme song and two other songs.

The TYC came back after the drama with how youths want their parents (in this case mothers) to relate to them. His presentation which he did in French was captioned the three Cs. I will try to render a translation in this report:

- ✓ C= Communication , right verbal and non-verbal communication with teens.
- ✓ C= Corrections, knowing when, where and how to correct a child. He said that in every child there is a king and in every king there is a child. If a mother scolds his child in front of his peers, the king in him will become angry and he will retaliate in a negative way to his mother's scolding.
- ✓ C= Conviviality, be a friend to your teen just by the choice of your words. He called out two participants; one English speaking and the other French speaking to carry out a smart demonstration on negative and positive aspects of interacting with a child to the applause of the other participants.



Applauding actors and actresses of the TESHU drama.

A mother who has brought up balanced children **Mrs MBIIMBE Mary** then took the floor to talk about stages of parenting. The participants were surprised to learn that mothers should talk to their babies in a loving way right from the womb so they can create this special relationship. In this relationship, they will be able to talk to their young kids and the kids will listen because they can recognize their mothers' voices as the ones they used to hear when they were in the womb. In the long run, these kids will come to their mothers when they have problems. Praying positively for a child was described as a huge factor in creating a healthy relationship with children. She reiterated the fact that a mother should never challenge the father when he disciplines the child. She cautioned the mothers with these words, "Work out with your husband as a team in child upbringing". She ended her presentation on this note: "When there is love, there is dialogue = peace = blessings = happiness = long life".

The participants then broke up into 4 subgroups to brainstorm on the following:

- 1) What wives want from husbands in order to be happy in their homes (2 groups).
- 2) What mothers want from their teens in order for these mothers to be happy (2 groups)



Mrs MBIIMBE MARY in action.

They were asked to hold on tight to their brainstorming lists while the TESHU CEO **Dr FON Elizabeth** gave them a 25 points run-down of the complaints their husbands had given her, collected during annual physicals and subsequent preparatory meetings prior to the present workshop. The 25 points complaint list included:

- Lack of respect from their wives.
- Wives do not call their husbands at work to see how they are doing.
- Wives answer the phone rudely even when they know it is their husbands calling.
- Give husbands the impression that they married them for their cheque book.
- Give their husbands the impression that they are still waiting for the perfect husband to come along before they can start acting as good wives.
- Take money with the left hand with no thanks.
- Take the side of the child against the dad when he tries to discipline the child – more frustrating to the husband if it is a child the wife brought into the marriage.
- The husband's coming home is a non-event; dirty house, dirty bed, unkempt children and unkempt wife.
- Talk without listening.
- Do not know how to apologize.
- Talk to their husbands' mothers rudely.
- Use sex like a whip.

- Suspect the husband that he is running around with other women at every turn when he is home. When he greets another woman or smiles at her, there is trouble. As a result, these husbands are stressed out, forcing many of them to keep late hours because they are afraid to come home.
- Does not inspire the husband to have that confidence he needs to have while offshore or on mission so he can believe that his wife is faithful to him.

The next module was based on what husbands want from their wives in order to have a healthy relationship. The facilitator, **Mr BESONG MBI** dwelled on those non-sexual actions and behaviours from a wife that make the husband to feel and look great. These include:

- ✓ Noticing him and congratulating him when he makes the effort to dress and look young even if he does not go “Yor Man” with torn jeans and two fingers in the air. In such cases, his wife should not hush him down and tell him he is an old man whose time is past.
- ✓ Talking with him about his dreams and seeing how she can help him achieve these dreams.
- ✓ Should not insult his mother in front of him when she knows very well that he is so fond of his mother.
- ✓ Men love agreeable surprises like cooking him a special meal or dressing up just for him when he least expects it.

Dr FON Elizabeth the TESH0 CEO then took the floor to talk about TLC. The participants knew that TLC is the acronym for Tender Loving Care but many of them did not know what constituted TLC for an African man. **Dr FON** then showed them pictures of the complicated jobs their husbands have to do offshore on petroleum platforms and aboard seagoing vessels. They were reminded that even if the wives were also working, their husbands carry the mental load of taking care of three families – their immediate family, their in-laws and their family of origin. After considering all of the above, they were advised to find a place in their hearts to be sorry for their husbands so they can give them some quality TLC. This TLC comprises of:

- ❖ Talking to him with respect.
- ❖ Welcoming him home like the family team captain that he is (they were reminded that spectators start applauding the team captain immediately he enters the football arena even before he has touched the ball).
- ❖ Offering to massage his sore muscles.
- ❖ Offering to massage his sore feet.
- ❖ Keeping a clean house and a clean bed especially on the day he comes home from work or from a journey.
- ❖ Avoid scolding the children or beating them on his first hour back home (he is not coming home to enter a war zone).

The last module for the day to be treated by **Dr FON Elizabeth** was TLS. Again the participants guessed TLS is the acronym for Tender Loving Sex. At this point, all the male participants were asked to move out because it was going to be strictly between us the women. TLS treated those verbal and non-verbal actions that compose TLS for a man according to what the husbands had expressed to **Dr FON** as their frustrations on the sexual sphere. The wives were advised that the warm-up period is very important to prepare the outcome of the “match”. If a husband forces his wife to play the “match” without good warm-up, the result is that “il n’y aura pas match”. When the women heard this, they roared with laughter and asked the doctor to tell their husbands about warm-up when she next meets with them. The doctor however warned the women that as great and versatile wives/coaches, they have to give their husbands/team captains the right input at the right time for a successful outcome of the warm-up period and the “match” proper.

The wives were exhorted to be active participants in the “match” with their team captains/husbands. During the period of analysis after the “match”, they were warned not to criticize their husbands’ sexual weaknesses in a mocking or negative way. This is because in a man’s mind, his sexuality and his manhood are intimately intertwined and are often one and the same thing to him. If his sexuality is criticized negatively, he will take it as a rejection of himself as a person by his wife. This may lead to unfaithfulness in a bid for the husband to prove his manhood and they may subsequently end up with HIV and/or divorce.



After the “entre nous Mesdames” the men marched back in to start distributing gifts and certificates of participation.

TESTIMONY AND SHARING TIME:

When the men came back in, it was time for testimonies, sharing experiences and contributions from participants. The participants who had attended the last TEFON LADIES workshop gave their testimonies of how applying the TESH0 skills had improved their family relationships to accompanying laughter from the others because these testimonies were so true to life.

One participant told the others how after the last TESH0 workshop, she had learned to banish the tight jeans she used to wear to bed when she was angry with her husband. She had been told that she should not use sex like a whip. She had noticed that instead of the refusal of sex getting her husband to do what she wanted, their conflicts only got worse. Then she started using the following phrases to her husband:

“You are my Eto’o Fils, my team captain”.

“You are the best”.

She then noticed that things really got better faster.

Another talked of how after the last workshop, she surrendered her hitherto hidden bank savings book to her husband and in the process gained renewed trust from him. He trusted her so much that he gave her more money to put into her savings account for use by the family on a rainy day.

The last lady talked about how she had found it difficult to humble herself in front of her husband to sincerely thank him when he gave her anything. However she remembered that the first time she brought herself to humble herself enough to thank her husband the TESH0 way for food money, her husband was so surprised and happy. She noticed that on that day he must have called her about five times from work just to see how she was doing.

There was thunderous applause when the TESH0 CEO announced the end of the workshop. It was a participative bilingual (French/English) workshop that was a new and exhilarating experience for the participants.

The GM of TEFON was invited to come and hand over the certificates of participation to the ladies. The certificate of participation carried the following message,

“TEFON/TESHO: BUILDING TEAM SPIRIT IN THE HOME FOR SAFETY AT WORK”.

Since it was practically difficult to herd out over 100 women for a group picture, the participants were asked to raise up their certificates of participation for a snapshot. Next they received family-oriented gifts offered by the TEFON oilfield Services Company from the GM and the other

facilitators.



TEFON presents to each of the 103 participants made up of TEFON ladies and their female friends.

The first ten participants to arrive at the venue of the workshop were surprised with a special “early bird” prize from the TEFON GM. These gifts were rechargeable electric lamps. The significance of this gift was that in the case of a power outage, the TEFON homes will be islands of welcoming light. These lamps will also subtly remind the women to cultivate the habit of keeping time because being on time always pays. This special “early bird” gift reminded those who were late to try to be on time henceforth because one never can tell. The icing on the cake was the distribution of envelopes containing their transport fare.

All who participated in the planning and catering for this workshop received hearty thanks from the TEFON GM and TESHO CEO because we all worked as a team to carry off this successful one of its kind work.



TEFON LADIES Oyeeh!

CONCLUSION:

The TEFON Oilfield Services Company believes that real safety at work starts from home in a healthy relationship with family members. Stress from home gets transported to work and a stressed worker is a work place accident waiting to happen. A sumptuous lunch ended the one day workshop offered to the ladies by the TEFON oilfield Services to fulfill their company vision of **“TEFON, a FAMILY –FRIENDLY Company with a HEART”**.

FACILTATORS:

- Dr TINA FONGOD
- Mr FON THADDEUS
- Mr BESONG MBI
- Mr JOEL TAMUTAN
- Mrs MBIIMBE MARY
- Dr FON ELIZABETH

The next workshop will be for husbands giving them a feedback from their wives, helping them learn those life skills that will lead to healthier relationships with their wives and children. The third one will be for teens of our workers with the final one being a combined workshop for husbands and wives.

Report culled from the presentations by:

DR FON FONONG ELIZABETH

TESHO CEO