



Health Matters

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Get Well at Work:

How to Build Enthusiasm for Workplace Wellness

Improving the health of your employees is always smart business, but to really turn a profit you'll need plenty of buzz.

Across the country, employers are embracing the latest trend in health care by launching wellness programs on-site that help reduce costs by building a healthier, more productive work force. Conducting health risk assessments and health screenings are an important step in determining how many employees may be at risk for disease and what can be done to help them.

But the road to wellness must be paved with more than good intentions. One of the most important strategies for building a successful activity, weight loss, or smoking cessation program is to assemble a diverse wellness committee that is supported by management and committed to transforming your company's culture.

How to Get Started

Recruit the fit and the unfit, smokers and nonsmokers, human resources managers, employee health representatives, and marketing experts. An assorted cast is critical for whipping up enthusiasm in all corners of the office, developing incentives and spreading the word throughout the company.

According to recent news reports, corporate leaders of clothing company L.L. Bean, Inc., shut down their manufacturing line three times a day for mandatory five-minute stretches, designed to prevent common work-related injuries. And T-shirt manufacturer American Apparel provides loaner bikes, locks, and helmets to encourage cycling. In other workplaces, employees gather weekly for "Tuesday Treks" on routes around their office buildings, sign up for fitness classes offered on-site, and attend lunchtime lectures by health coaches on healthy living topics.

Ensuring Your Programs Will Resonate

Will your staff really get up from their desks for a midday yoga class or skip the elevator and use the stairs? A wellness committee can help you overcome any institutional inertia

by gathering information on what types of programs are needed and what incentives make sense.

You may not be able to create a café in the same vein as the enviably hip (and free) Google café, but you can restock your vending machines with healthier fare and work with your food service to incorporate leaner meals. You could follow the lead of some American companies and institute a "Twinkie tax" on fatty foods, using the money to help pay for healthier dishes, or set up a challenge program and award points for healthy behaviors.

Whatever the initiative, rewarding your participants is critical to engaging them for the long term. If you set up a weight race among employees, be sure to award the winning team with a day off, discounts to local retailers, or even free plane tickets.

The excitement will spread, your programs will make a difference, and your business will grow healthier along with the people you care about most. ★

Learn from Companies that Walk the Walk

Need ideas on how to create a little excitement for your health promotion programs? Consider these:

- A healthy behavior incentive for filling out a health risk assessment and a corresponding health action plan.
- Reimbursement of entry fees of local run/walk events to encourage participation in healthy community initiatives.
- A discount on health coverage to participants in your wellness program.

For more information about how to establish a health promotion program in your company, contact Michael Taylor at 412/454-7534 or visit www.upmchealthplan.com.