

Worksite Health Promotion

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“Good health is important to all of us.
Good health is good business.”
-William C. Weldon, Chairman Board of
Directors and CEO, Johnson & Johnson

Helping Businesses See the Value of Employee Wellness Programs

In today's rollercoaster economy, companies are doing everything they can to get ahead and maximize their profits. Many are working hard just to stay in business. Needless to say, the health of their employees is not a primary concern to them. So how do we in health promotion offer wellness programs as a solution in such an economical climate?

Getting business leaders to buy into the idea of wellness is a daunting, but surmountable task. A close look at worksite wellness reveals that it is a means to bridge the gap between business and health. But how do health and wellness professionals convey this message to employers? Speak the language they understand: *money*.

There are four major reasons why a company should invest in a worksite wellness program:

1. Rising health care costs.

It is becoming more and more of a well-known fact that health care is becoming more and more expensive. One major factor contributing to this trend is increased healthcare utilization. With

employer contributions to health care costs on the rise, companies are increasingly becoming concerned. A study by Mercer HR Consulting showed that total health care benefit cost per employee doubled from \$3653 in 1994 to \$7089 in 2004.

2. Poor health affects productivity and profits.

It is not just sick leave (absenteeism) that tells the story. Employees who come to work ill (presenteeism) are not as productive. Other effects of poor health on overall productivity include medical leave, disability and employee turnover due to medical illness.

3. Significant economic return.

Employee wellness programs have been able to demonstrate significant economic return, averaging about \$3-6 for every \$1 invested in health cost savings. Other employer costs that can also benefit from wellness programs include reduced short and long term disability and workman's compensation claims.

4. Recruitment and retention.

When business leaders invest in a worksite wellness program, it demonstrates that they

are concerned about their employees. Employees in turn may feel a sense of commitment to the company. Wellness programs can not only improve the health of employees, but also increase employee morale. They can also help with recruitment efforts and increase retention/reduce turnover.

Worksite wellness is a health promotion approach to helping businesses do better business. Since healthier employees are more productive, the company stands to gain significantly in both cost savings and profit by implementing a wellness program. As health promoters and wellness professional, our role is to help businesses make the connection between health and business.



WELLNESS WATCH

More and more companies are adding employee assistance programs to the benefit offerings to employees. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, Bensinger, DuPont & Associates, a provider of EAP services, reported a 74 percent increase for short-term problem resolution in the first half of 2007 compared to the same period in 2006. To accommodate the growing need, early this year, Aetna added EAP to its list of products available to small businesses.

Making Wellness a Company Priority

Improving and maintaining the health of their employees should be a priority for all businesses. Though many companies may not openly declare that they are concerned about the health of their employees, concerns about health care costs and productivity reflect the underlying need to make wellness a priority. There are steps a company, irrespective of size, location or industry, can take to create work environments which foster and promote health.



Policies

Whether written or informal, policies are the rules governing an organization or jurisdiction. They tell us what is permissible or not, and generally have consequences attached to them. They indirectly speak of behaviors and actions that are acceptable in a society. In the same way, policies can be used to assess how strong a company's stance is on wellness. Some examples of such policies include:

- ◆ Healthy food policy requiring that only healthy foods that are low in fat, low in sodium, and high in fiber be served at meetings and company functions.
- ◆ Policy that allows for employer-subsidized gym memberships.

Environment

The physical plant of the worksite can also be modified to demonstrate that wellness is a company priority. Changes to building design to support healthy behavior need not be expensive or major overhauls to the building structure. Three simple examples are:

- ◆ Healthy snack options can be provided in vending machines and designated with color-coded stickers.

- ◆ Walking trails can either be built or marked off with stickers, ribbons, chalk, etc so employees can have a safe place to walk.
- ◆ Removing ashtrays completely off the worksite or away from building entrances to a designated smoking area.

Office Culture

The American Heritage Dictionary defines culture as “the predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.” A culture of wellness in a particular worksite would make healthy behaviors acceptable norms for all employees. Here are some ways a company can promote a culture of wellness:

- ◆ Fruit bowls instead of candy jars. Offer items like bananas, dried fruit and nuts.
- ◆ Incorporate stretch/fitness breaks into meetings, particularly those lasting more than 2 hours.
- ◆ Organize a “wear your sneakers at work day” to encourage employees to walk.

Company Resources

What better way to make employee wellness a priority than to invest company resources to encourage employees to be healthy. Money is the big one, but not the only resource.

Consider the following:

- ◆ A wellness budget that includes incentives for participation in wellness activities.
- ◆ Wellness staff to coordinate a program for employees.
- ◆ Putting together a wellness team and allowing employees the time to participate.

In order to have a profitable and competitive company, business leaders must address the health of their employees. It doesn't take exorbitant amounts of money to make a worksite a healthy one. The main key is leadership commitment to make wellness a company priority.



RESOURCE CORNER

What Is A Healthy Employee Worth?

Lynch WB. What is a healthy employee worth? *Absolute Advantage Magazine*, 2002. Available at: http://welcoa.org/freeresources/pdf/healthy_employee_2.pdf

This article helps to define the value of a healthy employee to a company in terms of lost productivity for employees that are not healthy. The author provides valuable insight into the many ways the cost of poor employee health is masked, particularly when attempting to calculate lost productivity. This article will prove valuable in educating business decision makers on the need to invest in worksite wellness.

Return On Investment

(ROI) This information can help determine the potential economic value of wellness programs. Here are links to two ROI calculators available online.

Smoking Cessation ROI Calculator

<http://www.businesscaseroi.org/roi/default.aspx>

Depression ROI Calculator

<http://www.depressioncalculator.com/Welcom.asp>



WORKSITE WELLNESS IN THE NEWS

One CEO's healthcare crusade – Businessweek, July 3, 2007

http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/jul2007/db2007072_343232.htm?chan=search

Bosses help workers beat the heat – USA Today, July 24, 2007

http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/2007-07-23-heat-work_N.htm

How to heal a sick office – Businessweek, August 20, 2007

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_34/b4047427.htm?chan=search