

Hot trends toward wellness

Proactive plans lead to healthier employees and greater productivity.

You've heard the reports and you've read the headlines. Debilitating illnesses including heart disease and diabetes can cost companies tens of thousands of dollars in productivity, lost hours and efficiency. With staggering statistics on how devastating diseases like these can be, businesses throughout the country are doing more than taking notice — they're taking action.

Smart Business spoke with Andrew Goodman, an agent with Sapoznik Insurance, about the role of proactive wellness programs that encourage active lifestyles inside today's companies.

What is a corporate wellness program?

A wellness program is best defined as an organized company initiative to promote healthy changes in lifestyle or help maintain an already healthy lifestyle through a variety of activities. Programs often promote exercise, nutrition or some combination of both and encourage participation on a group basis. Oftentimes, the programs are incentive-driven or offer prizes for reaching certain achievement levels. Some of the hottest trends in wellness are activity-based programs that set up challenges among employees. Some of these programs feature the use of pedometers [to track the number of steps you take daily] while others track your progress through company-sponsored gym memberships. They can be as simple or as intense as your company wants them to be.

How can a company encourage participation?

The key to any activity program is keeping the interest levels up. Motivation is the key and few things motivate more than good, old-fashioned competition. In any given work environment, one will typically find that people are naturally competitive. Set up a platform for your employees to measure their level of activity compared to



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others within the company and watch what happens. Employees often find it helpful and more fun to work out in groups or teams. It's great to encourage some healthy competition by setting teams and then competing towards an objective. Set up flyers and posters to help encourage the use of stairs instead of elevators. Set up an area where employees can post their progress or compare workout results. All of these are great ways of generating participation while developing team-building throughout your organization.

Besides health benefits, are there other benefits to be gained?

Aside from outstanding health benefits that can be achieved or maintained over time, almost instantly, a company and its employees gain incredible amounts of camaraderie. Things can become so hectic over the course of a typical work schedule. Offering your employees a chance to improve interdepartmental relationships can be just what you need to boost productivity. Plus, statistics suggests that over time, a group of employees' improved

health could have a collective positive impact on employee benefits.

What are some benefits one can gain from a corporate wellness campaign?

It's been proven that combining a proper diet with adequate exercise can lead to improved blood pressure, better circulation and even help you reach your ideal body weight. The goal of the programs should be to get employees moving and make them aware of the options that exist to lead healthier lives. Frequently, employees are surprised of how much of a difference making only a few adjustments can have toward how you look and feel. The benefits of a corporate wellness campaign could include reduced absenteeism, reduced medical claims costs and, eventually, improved levels of productivity.

What does the future hold for company's on this progressive trend?

Companies are quickly learning how valuable a program like this can be toward their bottom line. Healthy employees are statistically more productive and, over time, cost companies thousands less in dollars spent towards medical claims. These savings include: decreases in new hire costs and insurance premiums. Experts feel that in light of the escalating costs of health care, progressive steps must be taken by each company to help counter the increases. The value of such a progressive trend reaches beyond total costs and into the realm of re-establishing a strong employer-employee relationship while cultivating positive morale among everyone within the organization.

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