



BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS: Why Owners Should Care

Many Americans are killing themselves, one pizza slice at a time. A recent survey by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) determined that 68 percent of Americans are overweight. Why should this concern companies? Even a few pounds of excess weight, accumulated slowly over many years, can lead to Type 2 diabetes. If diabetes is untreated or poorly controlled, it can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, amputation or even death. There is no employer I know of who wants any of this for his or her employees.

Why not launch a wellness program that will not only make a positive impact in productivity, but also on the quality and length of your employees' lives? Your wellness program may even result in lower health insurance costs for your company.

Where to start? You, as the leader, will set the example. If you're already in great shape, fantastic. Share your tips and success stories to motivate your staff. If not, make today the day that you turn it around. Take the journey alongside your employees who may be in the same situation.

Getting employee buy-in is crucial. Invite your management team to join a Wellness Council to create a program that will help all employees regardless of their current fitness levels. As a working group, you'll want to consider the following guidelines:

Components of a Wellness Program

- Make your program inspiring for all employees—not just the healthy

ones. Introduce the idea in a way that doesn't intimidate or isolate employees who struggle with their weight. Encourage them to improve their health, regardless of where it may be at the moment.

- Provide assistance for employees to know and track their base metabolism, the mathematics of weight gain/loss, and how to figure out your own body mass index (BMI). A good resource is www.webmd.com/diet/healthtool-metabolism-calculator
- Have employees track their BMI, glucose level and blood pressure at least every year.
- Create opportunities for exercise at the company site and/or on company time.
- Ditch the junk food and set a baseline of knowledge on diet and healthy eating.
- Sponsor a confidential biometric screening for employees (and spouses as an added benefit).

Take the Lead

How do you motivate employees? Wellness programs fail when leaders don't set a high standard for themselves and others. The following tips can help:

Support Ideas

- Keep the program fresh by offering special incentive prizes each quarter.
- Track the cumulative weight of the company on a monthly basis. Create company weigh-in targets—but be sure to keep individual weight strictly confidential.
- Offer company-paid registration fees for employees (and their families) to 5K runs, bike races, marathons, etc.
- Try team-building sports such as soccer and softball.

- Create your own running event around the community, with the added benefit of some local PR.
- Develop, track and publish a 10,000 steps per day chart with a monthly prize for the employee who has walked the most steps the previous month.

Make it Simple for Everyone

- Allocate space in your office or shop for an exercise room with weight machines and/or ground space for classes.
- Provide clean, accessible shower areas.
- Encourage walking meetings and adjustable stand up desks.
- Hire a personal trainer to visit your company at least once a week. Have them lead group exercise and/or work individually with your employees. You can schedule this in between shifts so some employees can exercise immediately after their shifts and others can exercise immediately before their shifts (with enough time to shower and arrive to the job site).
- Use your smart phone as a personal pedometer. There are several free apps available, such as Accupedo, which will help everyone walk the recommended 10,000 steps each day.
- Set a company "Olympics" date with team-building activities.
- Provide company-paid snacks, adhering to the "Five-A-Day" motto (five fruits or vegetables per day).

A wellness program will allow your employees to meet the many challenges ahead as your company strives to be a "Best in Class" contractor. Why not take a brisk, one-hour walk today and be thinking about how to help your employees live a healthier, happier life? **BI**

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