

Health and Wellness In The Workplace



The American workforce continues to face a very serious issue: health and healthcare costs. As the number of chronic diseases increases so does the cost of health care. A recent study had shown that 45% of Americans have at least one chronic disease. Common diseases such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease are proven to decrease productivity in the workplace in addition to driving healthcare benefits costs. The good news is these diseases are both preventable and treatable. In recent years, trends have shown that three dollars of every four spent on healthcare are spent on treatment rather than preventative wellness. Wellness programs aim to turn this statistic around.

Surveys show a significant increase in the interest of wellness programs, as companies across the nation strive to stay competitive. A survey conducted by The United Benefit Advisor (May, 2007) shows that 10.5% of employers have implemented a wellness program into their employees' weekly routine. An additional 7.6% of employers were in the process of starting a wellness program. Compare this to a survey conducted a short seven months later that showed 53% of businesses participating in a wellness program and 36% intending to start one on the worksite in the near future. A staggering statistic indicating the growing popularity of wellness programs in the workplace as a solution to high healthcare costs.

History shows a greater participation rate in wellness programs from larger corporations. Wellness programs, however, have their place in every size business and may be tailored to the specific company. In many cases, the smaller the group of people, the easier it is to organize and monitor the progression of a program.

The variety of wellness programs available presents employers with choices that will fit best with the company culture. About 53% of businesses that administer wellness programs include health risk assessments. These assessments, such as cholesterol, body fat, or blood pressure measurements or risk factors such as smoking, give an insight on the overall health of the employee. Other programs may involve health coaches, on-site fitness and health clinics, web-based health and fitness tools, incentive programs for weight management or tobacco cessation programs.

Wellness programs can have a vast impact on a company and its healthcare plan. The longer the program is operational, the more beneficial it will become; these programs are a long-term investment, not an expense. Long-term programs have proven an average reduction of \$2.45 on medical claims for every \$1 spent on the wellness program.

Wellness programs need employer and employee buy-in for success. An effective wellness program has a measurable incentive that is significant enough to illicit a response from its participants. A popular way to measure progress is through the above mentioned health risk assessments. If an employee has high cholesterol, offer an incentive to lower it.

Incentives may include fitness program rebates, extra paid time off, raffle drawings for vacation packages or other high ticket items, and cash incentives. Consider boosting participation by giving the employee the ability to work out during office hours or on work premises. Making wise health choices, such as healthy eating or regular exercise, as easy as possible for employees will encourage health-conscience behavior.

A well-thought out and carefully executed wellness program with incentives will create a buzz in the office, boost employee morale and general health, and lower healthcare rates.

For more information, contact Tandem HR at 630.928.0510 or visit www.tandemhr.com. The staff at Tandem HR contributed to this article. It is intended as information only and is not a substitute for legal advice. Tandem HR is a professional employer organization specializing in strategic HR partnership with small and mid-sized businesses.

Copyright © 2010 Tandem HR. All rights reserved.