

To Each His Own

Worksite Wellness Isn't One-Size-Fits-All

By Charlee Beasor

A little variety never hurt anyone. In fact, according to 18th century poet William Cowper, variety is one way to live life to the fullest: "Variety's the very spice of life that gives it all its flavour," he wrote.

The same approach goes for instituting a worksite wellness program at organizations of various sizes, industries and philosophies. What works for one employee base may not work for another – and in many cases it may hinder wellness, either because the programs are inconvenient for employees or the initiatives prove too costly for the employer.

We've compiled approaches from two Hoosier companies about how they institute worksite wellness, as well as a national example of rewarding employees for participating.

Mission-based planning

You've heard it before: Instituting a worksite wellness program has proven benefits of healthier employees, lower absenteeism, increased productivity and higher morale. And when you have a centralized location for all of your employees, you can easily advertise for a lunchtime walking club or offer healthy vending options.

So what do you do when your employee base of nearly 500 is spread out over a majority of rural Indiana and southern Illinois? If you're electric cooperative Hoosier Energy, you take a very strategic approach and tie it directly to your company's mission.

"Our company's mission is very simple: to provide reliable energy at a competitive price in a safe and environmentally-acceptable manner," offers Hoosier Energy Wellness Coordinator Fredna Holmgren.

"To do that, we have to have a healthy workforce. Our wellness program mission is basically to help our employees and their families improve and sustain their health and well-being by creating a workplace culture that encourages that (healthy) lifestyle. That's the link. Employees are our first and biggest asset in order to achieve the mission. Our wellness program is designed to address our employees' health so they can be the best they can be for Hoosier Energy and for their quality of life."

Hoosier Energy created an employee wellness committee with about 30 members, with one member of every employee group in the company. Holmgren refers to it as a "grassroots-type program."

Now in the third year of its wellness efforts, the company offers biometric screenings for which employees have one-on-one consultations with a health coach two weeks after the initial tests. Other aspects of the program include health education sessions and videos and a Maintain Don't Gain initiative during the holidays.

"It is about cost. Obviously, healthy employees will help us keep our health care costs at a sustainable level. But it's not just about minimizing health care costs, it's also about the health and well-being of employees; that's just as important," she declares.

"I think that pretty much anything you do in a business, you do need to tie it to your mission at some level. We always have Hoosier Energy's mission in mind when we plan and deliver wellness programs."

Data driving wellness decisions

Numbers don't lie. When a company has a large percentage of its population with high-risk factors (obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol) for serious diseases (diabetes, stroke, cancer and heart ailments), it's time to take action for the

Carmel-based CNO Financial analyzes aggregate health data to determine how its worksite wellness program is influencing employees. It offers new programs based on the results.



sake of the employees and the organization's bottom line.

Companies that use aggregate data from biometric and health screenings of employees and then implement wellness initiatives and educational programs targeting those numbers can evaluate the effectiveness of their worksite wellness efforts.

At Carmel's CNO Financial Group, every piece of health data is analyzed, communicated and acted upon, offers Grace Brothers, vice president of benefits.

"We've seen year-over-year improvements, measures ranging from 10% to 28% improvement (of associates) getting into the healthy range. We're controlling our costs and by seeing the overall health of the population, we can see that the wellness program is working," she affirms.

CNO Financial Group, which has about 1,600 associates in Carmel and 3,700 team members company-wide, has on-site health clinics, pedometer-based programs, wellness challenges, health fairs and much more as part of the overall wellness culture, including a "robust menu of wellness incentives," Brothers adds.

One of the company's keys to building successful wellness participation, she says, is the use of health champions, who meet with company CEO Ed Bonach and other senior executives to give feedback on what associates want to do as part of the wellness program.

Empirical stories back up the analysis, Brothers emphasizes: "I hear it from associates, 'This has given me the encouragement to do the things I know I should have been doing.' That's great to hear."

As for privacy concerns with collecting and analyzing employee health data, she stresses that employees know and are continually reminded that the company is not doing anything with individual health data.

"We've seen the results that have helped us lower our health care costs, improving the health of our employee population and productivity and engagement level, as well as stories and feedback from employees. We have high satisfaction from our wellness program. People really like what we're doing there," she concludes.

Prizes for participation

That old idiom, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" could be especially true with workplace wellness.

While you might have heard the lesson as a child when learning about playground friendships or dealing with conflict, the same holds true for convincing employees to adopt a healthy path.

This idea of incentive-based wellness isn't new. For years,



Keeping employees healthy allows Hoosier Energy to continue its mission of providing safe, reliable, competitively-priced and environmentally-friendly energy to its customers.

companies have offered lowered health care premiums for participating in wellness initiatives.

But there are new ways to incentivize healthy employee behaviors at work and at home. Online Rewards is a Texas- and Cincinnati-based company that facilitates online wellness programs, as well as programs for sales, employee recognition, customer loyalty, safety incentives and more.

Online Rewards President Michael Levy and two co-founders, Marcus Flagle and John Knodel, started the company in 2002. Levy shares that he was surprised that his wife was "fascinated" by loyalty programs with which she could earn points. The three decided they could use that same tactic to influence other areas of business.

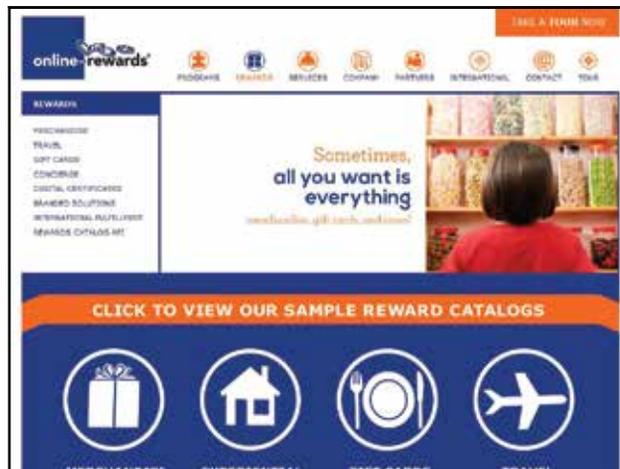
Companies can hire Online Rewards to set up a custom site for wellness programs and can offer points for doing things

like cooking at home, exercising, being smoke-free or getting a flu shot. The incentives run the gamut from employees earning half-days or days off from work, to a huge inventory of prizes, travel incentive rewards, gift cards, concierge services and more.

"You would think a good, healthy life is enough reward, but that doesn't always work out. The lesson is not that everybody should be bought by retailer A, B or C. That's not the lesson we believe," Levy maintains. "But what we're seeing is when you incorporate this (getting healthy) into some type of gamification where we're communicating to

people, telling people it's fun and a good thing to do and there's a prize at the end, that causes a change in the mentality of the recipient of the message."

There's a specific demographic in the workplace that these



Online wellness incentive programs encourage workers to take care of their health at the office and at home by rewarding prizes or time off work.

incentive programs target, Levy says: those who are filing claims against the company's health insurance and are "moderately to extremely unhealthy."

"These are the populations (in which) many have given up on themselves on the ability to be leading a healthier lifestyle. Now, we as a society, or as an employer, how are we going to influence these people?" he asks. "We're not going to be successful negatively. It's going to have to provide sufficient incentive, tangible or otherwise, and first be open to what it takes to change behavior."

Small, achievable goals will make the incentive program more impactful, Levy adds.

We're all in this together

It literally "takes a village" to achieve the Indiana Healthy Community recognition from the Wellness Council of Indiana.

The award is given to Indiana cities, towns and counties that have achieved two criteria: the number of employers participating in the AchieveWELL workplace wellness recognition program, as well as the percentage of employees that work for individual award-winning companies in a specific geographic region.

It's focused on healthy workplaces for a reason. Indiana is an attractive place to do business, but Hoosier health care costs are some of the highest in the nation and prudent business leaders are locating in communities that are already

concentrating on getting healthy and being active.

Right now, Muncie-Delaware County is a pilot community for the Indiana Healthy Community recognition and boasts a few tactics to improve its health, including a comprehensive smoking ordinance and rails to trails system, bicycle trails and bicycle lanes.

Later this year, the Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce in Hammond will take on the task of becoming an Indiana Healthy Community. The Wellness Council of Indiana started in Northwest Indiana in the late 1980s. Lake County cities Hammond and Hobart had pursued healthy community status, but efforts faded over the years.

The healthy workplace initiatives are just a piece of the overall picture. Healthy communities also give weight to having nutritious food options, as well as safe traffic flow initiatives for automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists. Tobacco-free policies and citizen engagement are also analyzed.

More information about how to become an Indiana Healthy Community is available by contacting the Wellness Council of Indiana at www.wellnessindiana.org.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Fredna Holmgren, Hoosier Energy, at www.hepn.com

Grace Brothers, CNO Financial Group, at www.cnoinc.com

Michael Levy, Online Rewards, at www.online-rewards.com



CNO Financial Group supports wellness in the workplace.

"Investing in wellness at CNO is important. We win or lose with our employees."

—Ed Bonach, CEO

CNO's employees are just like the people we serve. They share the same values of honesty and hard work. We're proud of what we do, and we are committed to helping our family and yours.



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