

Crafting a Successful Wellness Program

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As a consultant, I help organizations understand the financial, operational, and facility-related challenges they may face when embarking on health and wellness initiatives. As a (mostly) healthy person with a demanding career, I am likewise familiar with the hurdles employees face when trying to live and work healthfully. Corporate health and wellness programs are worthwhile endeavors, with proven impacts on employee morale, healthcare costs, and productivity. Yet like any worthy goal, implementing these programs can be challenging. Below are some of the lessons I've learned about crafting a successful wellness program, based on both my consulting experience and my own attempts to work/live healthfully:



- There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Your wellness program should be specifically tailored to your company. Frequent employee travel and a nose-to-the-grindstone workplace culture can be obstacles to implementing a balanced lifestyle. Personal preferences also come into play – employees may choose to skip lunch in order to leave earlier. Depending on your unique environment, consider implementing baby steps instead of a complete overhaul. For example, start placing healthier items in prominent cafeteria locations or your vending machines’ most visible shelves. Or make elements of your program customizable to fit employee lifestyles, such as providing information about eating healthy on the road.
- Ideally, the health and wellness message should come from the very top. It sends a message to employees at all levels that wellness is important and they are encouraged to take actions to assure their personal well-being. However, companies sometimes run into issues with division leadership or middle management not endorsing wellness programs due to concerns about money or productivity losses. When starting your program, make sure you communicate the many tangible benefits leadership should expect with regards to productivity, absenteeism, insurance costs, etc.
- Work with your dining staff or contract operator to offer employees simple solutions to addressing their health. The easier it is, the more likely employees will be to use it. Many dining programs have successfully collaborated with mobile phone apps like MyFitnessPal, or find that employees appreciate web-accessible nutritional information. Others utilize portion-control serving utensils or a red-yellow-green labeling system to take the guesswork out of making healthy meal choices.
- The most successful programs utilize incentives to encourage initial participation and spur continued employee interest. For example, your program may consider implementing a “buy 9, get the 10th free” rewards program for qualifying healthy entrees.
- To support your company’s continued wellness efforts, you must track results. For example, measurable outcomes could include decreased insurance costs, improved employee satisfaction, greater productivity, and declined absenteeism. Companies that have engaged in long-term wellness efforts and tracked relevant metrics have been able to present clear results, justifying costs and demonstrating the quality of life improvements to firm leadership.
- Finally, remember - a successful corporate wellness program must be holistic. Foodservice is an important component, but your company should also involve its health clinics, fitness centers, and/or human resources departments. Improving employee health and quality of life requires a multi-faceted approach.

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