

CHRR, Guide to Healthy Workplace,

April 19, 2004

## **You've built it, but will they come?**

***Even the best-designed, best-funded wellness programs will flop if employees don't embrace them***

By Rae Anne Jammer

Implementing a corporate wellness program can be tough. Getting senior management buy-in and making sure a program is well-designed poses a significant challenge.

Having sold the program to senior management, HR professionals need to ensure employees are motivated to participate. Without incentives for staff to stay in the program long term, even the best-designed and financed program will fail. And since the average return on investment of a corporate wellness program is three to five years, it's critical to secure employee participation for the long haul.

There are two basic ways to motivate employees to ensure the continued success of the program. One way is to develop an incentive program that provides a reward for participation. That reward could be monetary or it could be something like a T-shirt or movie passes. Some employers have developed a points system where employees can use points accumulated through participation for things like gifts or paid time.

Incentive programs are an effective way to encourage program interest and participation at the start of a program, but aren't always effective in securing long-term commitment. The best way to maintain commitment in a corporate wellness program is to motivate employees to change their internal attitudes. Employees who feel internally motivated are more likely to make the behavioural changes required to achieve optimal health and well-being and, in the process, ensure the wellness program achieves its financial targets.

Here are some tips to help employees feel internally motivated toward better health:

•**Give employees what they want:** Make sure the wellness program is designed and delivered based on health and wellness topics that employees want and need. Organizations can easily assess specific wants, needs and health risk areas by having each participating employee complete a confidential health and wellness assessment. The results of those assessments can form the foundation for a targeted program.

•**Keep goals realistic:** Unhealthy behaviours aren't formed overnight and changing them is going to take some time. There are no quick fixes for achieving optimal health and well-being so start gradually and set realistic goals. Doing too much at one time can be overwhelming for everyone involved.

•**Promote, promote, promote:** Promoting the wellness program through its entire lifespan is key. Highlight benefits first and overcome barriers second. Make sure the messages are targeted to the audience and maintain the promotion for the duration of the program. If the program falls off the corporate radar screen, it'll likely fall off the radar screen of employees as well.

•**Remember variety is the spice of life:** Everyone likes variety. The more variety an organization offers, the more employees it will hit, so ensure the program addresses all six dimensions of whole person health — physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and occupational.

•**Eliminate barriers to participation:** Make sure the program is convenient and flexible and offers support to employees. Otherwise staff could become disillusioned or discouraged and abandon it. Provide workshops, lunch and learn sessions and health events on-site, off-site and on different days and times. Ensure both front-line staff and management actively participate in programming, invite family members and offer flexible working hours to increase attendance.

•**Make it fun:** Fun is still the best way to improve internal motivation levels. If the program is fun and enjoyable, employees won't be able to resist participating.

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