

# **21 Ways To Create Healthy, Happy and Motivated Employees!**

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*A Collection  
of Proven Strategies  
That Enhance  
Employee Productivity*

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by Mark Robinson

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Cover Art and Book Layout by Peter Kemp, who  
can be reached at 972-242-8802.

Universal Publishers / uPUBLISH.com  
2001 • USA

ISBN: 1-58112-690-5

[www.upublish.com/books/robinson.htm](http://www.upublish.com/books/robinson.htm)

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*“Any management that’s going to carry out its responsibilities to one – the shareholders and two – the employees, is going to have to have a health promotion program.*

*You don’t have any choice, it comes down to dollars and cents.”*

**T. Boone Pickens**

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife of 19 years and counting – Liz. She has always kept the faith through the many trials and tribulations in our journey together and has helped me see life from many different perspectives. Without her, I would be lost. Thank you Liz!

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Helping employees establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle has significant benefits to the individual and the organization. Healthy employees have lower health care costs, fewer workers' compensation claims, and reduced absenteeism. Additional intangible benefits include increased employee morale and reduced stress.

Given the amount of time and energy that individuals spend on the job, the workplace is likely to become one of the most influential settings in promoting healthier lifestyles for most adults. In addition, the workplace setting offers a number of important technical advantages that are often critical to ensuring health behavior change, including the ability to apply long-term interventions for health improvements; acquire health related data with relative ease; provide social support; and facilitate mass communication and individual information.

Currently, lifetime medical costs average \$224,000 per person in the United States. Annual health benefit costs have doubled in the past ten years and currently average \$3,741 per employee. Given that 70% of all illness is preventable, these cost increases are alarming. Employers, who are faced daily with lost productivity costs and health care bills, are well aware of the striking need to implement preventive strategies now. Helping employees live healthier lives will yield improvements in employee behavior, health status and performance. Employers are left to cope with determining which health promotion strategies will expeditiously affect employees' health and "bottom line" health care costs.

This book outlines 21 proven strategies that will help you create healthy, happy and motivated employees!

Enjoy!

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## Acknowledgements

Without a doubt, I could not have gotten this far without help. First of all, I would like to thank Workplace Vitality editor Polly Turner. We have worked together on articles for over 10 years and she is always right on target.

Special thanks also to David Hunnicutt, President of the Wellness Councils of America for providing copyrighted content and statistics for the first section of this book. They are a valuable resource for any manager or organization that is considering implementing a health promotion program. Please visit them at [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org).

Of course, this book would not be possible without the support of my family. My wife Liz has been my biggest supporter since the day we met, and my two sons — Jared and Justin, who have taught me that there is more to life than work!

# Making The Case For Healthy, Happy And Motivated Employees





# Six Reasons for Worksite Health Promotion

### **Reason # 1: Health Care Costs**

Let's start with the obvious. The first reason why the concept of health promotion is important to an organization is because health care costs continue to be an issue of major concern.

As you know, we spend over \$1 trillion dollars in this country alone on health care, far more than any other nation in the world. What's more, the average annual health care cost per person in the United States far exceeds \$3,000 – lifetime costs per person are somewhere in the neighborhood of \$225,000.

Sadly, despite these enormous expenditures, it is estimated that as many as 41 million Americans are without health care insurance. However, because much of these costs are linked to health habits, it is possible for employers to take aggressive action toward reducing health care utilization and containing costs by taking on a health promotion program.

### **Reason # 2: Most Illnesses Can Be Avoided**

The second reason why the concept of health promotion is important to businesses is that the leading causes of illness are largely preventable. Believe it or not, experts suggest preventable illnesses make up approximately 70% of the entire burden of illness and associated costs in the United States. Behind these illnesses are a whole host of preventable factors including such things as tobacco use, high-risk alcohol consumption, sedentary lifestyles, and poor nutritional habits.

Are you beginning to see the big picture here? By leveraging a health promotion initiative, employers can take important steps toward preventing unnecessary sickness and death. This is why so many business people are attracted to the idea of developing a health promotion program.

Clearly, it makes a lot of sense. After all, if you can reduce the burden of illness among your workforce by preventing the major causes of sickness, more of your employees will remain healthy and productive. What's more, you may even save some money in the process.

### **Reason # 3: The Work Week is Expanding**

The third reason why the concept of health promotion is important to businesses is the reality that the workweek is expanding.

According to Harvard economics professor Juliet Schor, people are working harder than they ever have before. Believe it or not, the typical American now works 47 hours a week – 164 more hours than only 20 years ago. And, if this present trend continues, Schor contends that average person would be on the job 60 hours a week – for an annual total of 3,000 hours a year.

Driven in large part by newly developed technology, modern conveniences like modems, laptops, personal pagers, faxes, cellular phones, voice and e-mail, have all but erased the traditional and sacred boundaries of work.

Without question, an ever-growing workweek poses a number of threats to the health and well-being of your employees. However, as a number of progressive employers have demonstrated, health promotion programs can help to alleviate some of these concerns.

### **Reason # 4: The Technology Revolution is On**

The fourth reason why the concept of health promotion is important to businesses relates to the fact that we are currently knee-deep in a revolution of technology. In fact, since 1983, American businesses have added some 25 million new computers to the nation's business operations.

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## Six Reasons for Worksite Health Promotion

To be sure, our increased reliance on technology has ushered in a whole host of new health concerns including things like repetitive stress injuries, low back problems, and compromised vision. Moreover, because almost one-third of the workforce now spends the lion's share of their day seated at their desks plugged into workstations, sedentary lifestyles have become a concern of epic proportion.

Left undressed, these issues can have a serious impact in terms of the health of your employees and your company checkbook. While not a panacea, a well-designed health promotion initiative can also help to address some of these concerns.

### **Reason # 5: Employee' Stress Levels are Increasing**

Not only are we living in a high tech era, we are also living in the midst of an information explosion. In fact, according to management guru, Dr. Price Pritchett, there has been more information produced in the last 30 years than during the previous 5,000. And, if that's not enough, experts estimate that the information supply available to us is doubling at the rate of every five years.

In addition to the challenge of information management, is the cold, harsh reality that the life span of our expensive computer hardware is now measured in days. Let's not sugarcoat it. Trying to harness technology within a business environment is both challenging and frustrating.

Inherent in the whole process is an increased level of stress for both you and your employees. In fact, in a recent nationwide poll, 78% of Americans describe their jobs as stressful. Moreover, the vast majority indicated that their stress levels have worsened over the past ten years.

One thing's for certain, if left unchecked, high levels of organizational stress will exact a very real toll on your business. From increased accidents, to reduced productivity, to unnecessary absenteeism, to increased medical care costs; stress is insidious in its nature and devastating in its impact.

Increasingly, more and more business leaders and health promotion practitioners are looking to health promotion programs as a means of reducing, managing, and in some instances, even eliminating harmful stressors. By implementing a comprehensive stress management intervention, it is possible for leaders of businesses to successfully combat prevalent stressors in the workplace.

For example, teaching your employees stress management skills, implementing flexible work schedules, increasing the quality and quantity of social interaction, and increasing participation in the company decision-making process can all have a significant impact.

### **Reason # 6: Increasing Diversity in the Workforce**

Perhaps one of the most exciting developments in the business environment is the increasing diversity of the workforce. However, with increasing diversity comes the need to address a variety of health and health promotion issues in order to keep one's employees healthy and productive.

For example, jobs generated by small firms are more likely to be filled by younger workers, older workers, and women. In fact, according to recent statistics obtained from the Small Business Administration, the number of women-owned firms and the firms owned by people of color have increased significantly. In fact, between 1987 and 1992, the number of women-owned businesses rose approximately 43%. Moreover, in 1996, nearly eight million

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## Six Reasons for Worksite Health Promotion

women-owned firms provided jobs for 18.5 million persons – more people than are employed in the Fortune 500 industrial firms!

Recent data on black-owned businesses revealed an increase of 46%. Hispanic-owned businesses proved to be one of the fastest growing segments, increasing 82.7% between 1987 and 1992. Finally, businesses owned by Asian Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Pacific Islanders increased 87.2% between 1987 and 1992.

Again, with increasing diversity comes the challenge of being responsive to a variety of additional health concerns. Because health promotion programs help to pinpoint the specific health issues of most concern, such initiatives can be used to seamlessly identify and address a variety of diverse health issues.

# The Benefits of Worksite Health Promotion

### **Benefit #1: Improved Morale**

As the organizational culture begins to change as a result of your health promotion efforts, you and your employees may actually begin to see and feel a new level of energy within the organization. Ultimately, one of the most ambitious goals of any comprehensive health promotion program is to attempt to influence the attitudes and actions of the organization's most valuable resource – its employees.

### **Benefit #2: Reduced Turnover**

As we all know, employee replacement costs can be quite high for any kind of business. The effort and expense associated with running employment ads, reading applications, checking references, interviewing qualified candidates and hiring, and training a new employee can be a serious burden on any business. In light of the challenges that high employee turnover poses, many businesses are looking to health promotion programs as an additional perk that can help to prevent employees from jumping ship.

### **Benefit #3: Increased Recruitment Potential**

In the midst of a very tight labor market, businesses are forced to pull out the stops in order to recruit new talent. In some instances, health promotion can prove to be a very valuable tool in sealing the deal.

### **Benefit #4: Reduced Absenteeism**

When an employee misses work in a business setting, the entire organization is forced to absorb their responsibilities. Even in the event of the occasional absence caused by things like colds and the flu, work can back-up and tensions can build.

Even worse is a long-term absence caused by a major health

event that requires hospitalization and/or rehabilitation. By preventing certain types of illness caused by poor lifestyle habits, health promotion programs can play an important role in reducing absenteeism.

### **Benefit #5: Health Care Cost Containment**

Most businesses don't start a health promotion program with cost containment in mind. However, cost containment for certain health problems should be considered a viable goal by many businesses.

### **Benefit #6: Improved Employee Health Status**

One of the greatest advantages of a well-designed health promotion initiative is the promise of improved health. While not conclusive, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that well-designed health promotion initiatives can successfully impact such behaviors as smoking, high-risk alcohol use, exercise, nutritional habits, seatbelt usage, and stress.



# Six Misconceptions About Health Promotion

### **Misconception #1: It Will Cost Too Much**

The first common misconception that keeps business employers from developing comprehensive health promotion initiatives is the notion that it will be too costly.

Certainly – and make no mistake about it – there will be some type of cost involved. However, the costs associated with addressing the consequences of employees' poor health habits will be far greater than any investment you'll ever make in the health promotion program. Moreover, depending upon the needs of the organization and the interests of your employees, the costs need not be excessive. In fact, for the majority of employers who adopt health promotion initiatives, the costs are quite reasonable.

For example, many employers have partnered with community health agencies to deliver quality programming at very affordable prices. Moreover, scores of employers have made subtle changes in organizational policies like restricting smoking and making seat-belts mandatory.

Still others have joined business coalitions and have capitalized on the economies of scale and purchasing power that these kind of entities possess. Although never easy, there are plenty of ways to do things – including health promotion – faster, better, and cheaper.

### **Misconception #2: It Takes Too Much Time**

In an age where time is arguably the most valuable commodity, a second common misconception held by business leaders is that health promotion takes too much time.

To be sure, this is a serious concern for all employers and, in earlier years, may have very well been the case. However, a lot has been learned over the course of the last two decades. In fact, there

are prepackaged, turnkey programs available today that significantly reduce the time it takes to deliver health promotion activities at the worksite. In addition, with the advent of self-study materials, home based curricula, and computer-facilitated interventions; employees now have the flexibility and freedom to access health promotion programs even while off site and away from the worksite.

Finally, because of the ever-increasing body of knowledge available, business leaders don't have to guess at what works and what doesn't when it comes to addressing health and safety issues at the worksite – thus reducing the time it takes to deliver effective health promotion programs.

### **Misconception #3: My Employees Won't Participate**

A third misconception that inhibits the development of a worksite health promotion initiative is the fear that people won't take part.

Certainly, at one time or another, we've all heard the horror stories of employers whose health promotion efforts have been snubbed by their employees. Although it's a legitimate concern, when you really look closely at the programs with low participation rates, you'll generally find poorly designed interventions.

For example, consider an employer who invests time and money in developing a walking program, only to prohibit employees from taking part during the workday (don't laugh, it happens more often than you think.)

Despite the fears of low participation, the reality is that when employers spend time listening to the needs of their employees, giving thoughtful consideration to program design, and making

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## Six Misconceptions About Health Promotion

a steadfast commitment to removing organizational barriers, people take part.

### **Misconception #4: It's None of My Business**

A fourth common misconception that impedes adoption is the mindset that “it’s really none of my business.”

Now, if you’re one that hides behind this excuse, you may want to take some time to rethink your position. In fact, if you provide health insurance coverage and foot the bill for any portion of it, you should be intimately concerned about the things that are influencing those rates.

Furthermore, it is your business if one of your employees is unnecessarily injured, disabled, or unable to work due to a preventable illness. Why not take advantage of the situation and make it your business? After all, isn’t a caring and concerned employer what every employee is looking for?

### **Misconception #5: We Don't Have a Health Promotion Coordinator**

Yet another misconception held by business decision-makers is the idea that, in order to offer a Health Promotion program, you need to have a health promotion professional on staff.

Not True! In fact, the majority of Health Promotion programs offered by businesses are currently coordinated by an existing employee(s) – human resource professionals, benefits managers, and safety coordinators are all logical choices.

Although some people believe otherwise, there’s no question that health promotion programming can be learned and embraced by people with all types of professional backgrounds. In addition, in the event that you need professional advice, a variety

of resources exist – conferences, books, training manuals, professional associations, and consultants can all provide important assistance.

### **Misconception #6: The Programs Don't Work**

Perhaps the most significant misconception that keeps businesses from taking on a Health Promotion initiative is the idea that there's no evidence to support the claim that such programs actually work.

While it's a commonly held belief, there's only one problem – it's just not true. In fact, numerous studies have been conducted over the course of the past several years and the findings suggest that carefully-designed and properly executed interventions can and do work.

What is true, however, is that most of the health promotion studies that have been undertaken have been conducted in larger company settings. However, rest assured – many of the findings may still hold true in small business settings as well.

After years of careful study, the results are in. From smoking cessation, to self-care interventions, to maternal health programs, properly designed and carefully executed health promotion interventions can and do work.



**Proof Positive!**

## **Behavior Change**

The City of Birmingham, Alabama reported that annual medical costs per employee decreased from \$2,097 to \$2,075 during 5 years when an integrated program for 4,000 employees and their dependents was implemented. Funded with a matching grant from the National Institutes of Health, the program also showed major reductions in all risk factors, occurrence of illness, and reductions in mortality.<sup>25, 26</sup>

Blue Shield of California indicated that a low-cost, mail-delivered health promotion program for California's active and retired public employees saved \$8 million in claim costs over 12 months for 54,902 participants.<sup>27</sup>

Four years after an arthritis self-management program was initiated, 5 California Counties estimated pain declined 20% and physician visits decreased 40%. The 4-year savings were \$648 per rheumatoid patient and \$189 per osteoarthritis patient.<sup>28</sup>

Two Georgia Pacific Corporation intervention programs helped employees reduce cholesterol 10% or more, even though about 1/3 of the group were borderline high-risk or high-risk. One program used a 1-month educational model plus incentives; the other used a 3-month educational model.<sup>29</sup>

Bank of America calculated that health promotion geared to retirees saved approximately \$4,298 per person per year. Even in a highly geographically dispersed group, risk assessment and mailed materials decreased total direct and indirect costs 11% – compared to a 6.3% increase for non-participants.<sup>30, 31</sup>

A 4-year study at General Motors demonstrated the value of counseling and follow-up, compared to screenings only, in a blood pressure program. At 3 intervention sites, costs of medical claims

for hypertensives were lower. Also, the costs were reduced \$1.89 to \$2.72 for every dollar spent on the program.<sup>32,33</sup>

The Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area determined that a 2-year worksite intervention program produced an average weight loss of 4.8 pounds and a smoking quit rate of 43%. Included in the program was a wide range of white- and blue-collar workers in 16 sites.<sup>34</sup>

Coors' voluntary, 8-week worksite program reduced multiple risk factors for cardiovascular disease: decreasing systolic blood pressure, total cholesterol, weight, physical activity, and risk of ischemia within 8 years as measured by the Framingham score. Cost was \$32 per employee participant.<sup>35</sup>

## **Reduced Health Care Costs**

The increasing cost of providing employee medical care has eroded profits in all sectors. In response,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of American businesses have introduced health promotion, a focus on prevention, for employees. Overwhelming evidence now relates the use of company-funded health care services to implementation of worksite health promotion programs. The results are conclusive: These programs reduce the need to utilize health care services.

Traveler's Insurance noted a marked effect of its worksite program on participants' health status and use of benefits services. In 1990 alone, savings were estimated to reach \$1,080,000.<sup>1</sup>

Mesa Petroleum reported that active program participants averaged only \$173 per year for health care services compared with \$390 for sedentary non-participants. Employee health care costs rose 4.8% compared with a national increase of 105% during the study period.<sup>2</sup>

Over a 3-year period, DuPont credited its fitness program with yearly health care cost savings of \$1.6 million, \$1.5 million and \$3 million. <sup>3</sup>

General Electric's 18-month study of fitness program members showed a 38% decrease in health care spending versus a 21% increase for nonmembers. Annual costs were \$757 for participants and \$941 for non-participants, saving the company an estimated \$1 million in medical expenses. <sup>4</sup>

A study of Tenneco employees reported 50% lower annual health care claims for program participants \$896 lower for women and \$442 lower for men. <sup>5</sup>

Adolph Coors' health promotion center, which opened in 1981, produced estimated health care cost savings of \$1.4 million over 6 years. <sup>6</sup>

Medical claims for Steelcase were 55% lower for employees who used fitness services. Costs over a 6-year period averaged \$478.61 for participants versus \$869.98 for non-participants. <sup>7</sup>

Scoular Grain – with only 600 employees – saved \$1 million since 1979 or approximately \$1,500 per employee, according to a study of their program. <sup>8</sup>

## **Increased Productivity**

A NASA study reported a 12.5% increase in productivity: Exercisers worked at full efficiency for the entire day, while average employees lost 50% efficiency for the final 2 hours. Participants also demonstrated increased stamina, performance, concentration and decision-making abilities. <sup>14</sup>

Job performance was strongly correlated to exercise adherence in a study of 3,231 white-collar workers. Those who received the

highest performance ratings from supervisors were most likely to adhere to exercise programs.<sup>15</sup>

According to 80% of those surveyed about a company-sponsored health and fitness program, exercise increased personal work productivity, relieved work-related tension, enhanced concentration, and improved co-worker relations. Even non-participants responded positively, citing the program as proof of the company's support for employees.<sup>16</sup>

Dallas Police noted a 39% increase in commendations after a fitness-lifestyle program was introduced to officers.<sup>17</sup>

In a 9-month analysis of decision-making capabilities, exercisers showed a distinct advantage-70% greater performance – over non-exercisers.<sup>18</sup>

As American business continues to streamline its resources and operations, worker productivity becomes a key success factor. Worksite health promotion programs enhance employee effectiveness, providing a strategic edge in a competitive marketplace.

## **Lower Absenteeism**

Fitness and health promotion programs are associated with reducing costly employee absenteeism. Fitter, healthier, more motivated workers spend a greater number of productive hours on the job each year, bringing significant economic benefits to the companies they serve.

A 2-year study at Mesa Petroleum evaluated the effect of an exercise-based program on absenteeism. In the first year \$156 per employee was saved, in the second year, \$303.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, a comprehensive worksite health promotion program produced remarkable savings. The attendance improvement of

2,546 participants resulted in a one-year savings of \$149,578. <sup>10</sup>

A study of several companies reported a correlation between fitness levels and absenteeism. Employees with “high” levels of cardiovascular fitness averaged 1.72 days absent per year, employees with “good” levels averaged 2.09 days, those with “fair” averaged 2.32, and those with “poor” averaged 2.72. <sup>11</sup>

DuPont reduced absenteeism by 47.5% over 6 years when 29,315 blue-collar employees enrolled in a fitness program at 4 sites. Participants used 14% fewer disability days, netting 11,726 fewer disability days for the company. <sup>12</sup>

General Mills calculated that a reduction in absenteeism resulted in a payback of \$3.10 to \$3.90 for each dollar spent on its health promotion program in 1985-1986. <sup>13</sup>

## **Cost Benefit**

Coors Brewing reports a return on investment from \$1.24 to \$8.33 for every dollar spent on its full-service health promotion program. In 1990, for example, a gain of \$6.15 was returned for every dollar spent. <sup>19</sup>

During a 4-year study, Kennecott Copper realized a \$5.78 return for each dollar funding its corporate fitness effort. <sup>20</sup>

Johnson & Johnson’s LIVE FOR LIFE health promotion programs delivered a 30% return on investment during a 12-year study. Both exercise and health education are components of the lifestyle improvement program. <sup>21</sup>

A 250% return on investment-\$2.50 for every dollar invested-was demonstrated at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Indiana in a 5-year analysis. <sup>22</sup>

Equitable Life noted a cost: benefit ratio of \$1: \$5.52 in the first-year analysis of its employee fitness programs.<sup>23</sup>

Control Data credited its health promotion program with savings of \$1.8 million in reduced medical claims and absenteeism.<sup>24</sup>