

## Wellness Programs Help Companies Recruit and Retain Talent

*By Jennifer LeClaire*

More businesses are getting on the wellness bandwagon, and some are discovering the programs help recruit and retain workers.

There is no single interpretation of a wellness program. Some companies deem free gym memberships as wellness programs. Others offer comprehensive plans that include health screenings, weight- and stress-management and much more.

The companies that get proactive about implementing relevant wellness programs are the ones that are going to attract and retain the best talent, keep them healthy and productive and lower their overall health care costs.

A 2007 Hay Group study revealed more than 55 percent of companies either implemented wellness programs or enhanced existing wellness programs in recent years. A majority of these companies are now offering programs such as flu shots, education, smoking cessation, health risk assessments and health fairs.

For example, Philips Healthcare offers a variety of programs to its 2,200 employees, including an on-site fitness center, lunchtime seminars on stress management, an online wellness center that offers discounts on health resources, incentives for employees who bike or walk to work, and annual health screenings.

"Obviously, we are hoping this will impact our medical claims data and promote a culture of health and wellness," says Lisa Pyne, Philips' director of benefits. "I also think it's a good story when we try to recruit employees. It's showing up as a positive aspect of our benefits brochure."

**It's not just mega corporations that are pushing the wellness envelope.**

Revolution Partners, small technology investment firm, built new office space that features a gym. J.M. Coull, a construction firm in Maynard, rolled out a corporate membership to Thoreau Club Camp and Outdoor Center earlier this year. And Racepoint, a PR firm in Waltham, recently launched a program to give employees \$1,000 annual stipends for fitness initiatives.

Even colleges and nonprofits are getting in on the wellness trend. Bentley College offers on-campus Weight Watchers with partial fee reimbursement and an annual spring fitness challenge. Education Development Center, a nonprofit organization based in Newton, offers a range of health and wellness benefits, including on-site Weight Watchers, membership discounts at a nearby gym, flexible lunchtimes to encourage employees to go for a walk, stress management resources and flu shots in the winter.

**The million-dollar question is this: How are wellness programs paying off?**

Cornell University studied the issue, using Johnson & Johnson's wellness program as an example. Cornell discovered the program saves the company about \$8.55 million annually. That may not be realistic for most companies, but experts say even smaller organizations can save significant dollars by launching wellness programs.

**Recruiting is a less measured aspect of wellness programs, but could be the next big study.**

"We know people have increased job satisfaction and increased commitment to the organization," says Joanna Jones, human resources director at Education Development Center, a nonprofit research and development firm that employs 420 people. "We have tied our

wellness programs directly to retention rather than health care costs, and we are confident this has a significant impact. Lowering health care costs is not the reason we do this. We do it for the well-being of our employees."

Experts say the corporate wellness trend will continue to grow because of the two-way pressure. CEOs are putting downward pressure on benefits departments to lower insurance costs, and employees are putting upward pressure on companies to offer these types of benefits in a competitive hiring environment. The evolution of what a wellness program incorporates may evolve over time, Easley says, but the trend will only grow.

"The challenge for companies is to take a targeted approach to wellness programs, instead of a broad brushed approach," Easley says.

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