

10 Steps to Implementing a Workplace Wellness Program for Small Businesses



istock photo

Jackie

Nursing home manager
Employees: 50
Wellness and safety issues: Aging workforce, overweight and obese workers, back injuries, hand and knee injuries



Carl

Construction co. owner
Employees: 35
Wellness and safety issues: Overweight and obese workers, employees who smoke, back and knee injuries.

1. Gain support from senior-level management.

The greater the support your program has from the top, the greater its chances of success. If your CEO regularly works out or participates in “bike-a-thons,” for example, use him or her as a role model for all employees. Additionally, if your company encourages participation in health and wellness activities during company time, have senior management communicate this policy to employees as well as participate in the program. When senior management understands the business case for implementing a workplace wellness program, you’ve taken the first step to succeeding.

2. Identify a wellness champion or put together a wellness team or committee to lead the new program.

Your human resources and/or safety staff are ideal candidates to help coordinate and lead your company’s efforts in this area. Even better, invite someone from the CEO’s office or executive management to join your team. Personnel will have its finger on the pulse of the people in your organization, and those in Finance will be well informed about the company’s budgetary requirements or constraints. In addition, think about inviting an employee who currently smokes or does not exercise on a regular basis. These employees will provide a unique perspective on how to address specific health behaviors in conjunction with your overall wellness program.

3. Establish a budget for your wellness program.

A recent CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield study found that the most common wellness

programs offered by companies in the Baltimore area included discounted gym memberships and web-based resources for healthy living. Chances are, you, too, have some of these programs already in place. Make a list of the resources you already have, and work from there. A budget may allow you to offer in-house classes, healthy food options, and other incentives to encourage employees to participate.

4. Identify the mission and purpose of your wellness program.

Let employees know the company cares about their health and well being. Your wellness committee may even develop a long-term strategic plan that aligns with the mission statement and goals of your program. It is important to communicate the mission statement throughout your organization so employees understand the purpose of the program. Let employees know you encourage, but not mandate, their participation in your new wellness program.

5. Identify the needs of your employees and your company.

Do a workforce assessment where you look at hard data such as absenteeism, medical claims, prescription usage, demographics, etc. Conduct an employee satisfaction survey or focus group. Or, involve employees in informal conversations about the health and wellness topics most important to them.

6. Create a supportive environment – a culture of wellness – that promotes healthy and safe behaviors.

Many people need the support of others to help them change lifelong habits and establish new, healthier lifestyles.

Consider changing workplace behaviors as well:

- Offer healthy snacks and water or fruit juice at meetings instead of the usual cookies and soft drinks.
- Install water coolers on each floor to encourage employees to drink lots of water and keep themselves well hydrated.
- Stock your vending machines with healthy options instead of fat-laden ones.
- Establish a smoke-free workplace.
- Offer free or discounted health club memberships to employees.
- Remind employees to consult with their physician first before starting an exercise program.
- Allow employees to use company time to participate in an onsite wellness program.
- Ask your employees of other ways in which you can encourage healthy alternatives to your employees' usual workplace behaviors.

7. Partner with community wellness providers to provide programs for your employees.

Local hospitals often have outreach programs that may be willing to come to your office to educate your employees. Also, a new, niche area of business is the small, onsite health and wellness provider that provides onsite training and instruction at a company's workplace. One such company sends instructors to IWIF each week to offer exercise classes for employees during their lunch break.

Your local American Lung Association or American Heart Association may be willing to offer a smoking cessation program by way of "brown bag" or "lunch and learn" sessions. Contact Weight Watchers, or your local YMCA to see if they offer a weight-loss program either on- or offsite. Check local colleges and universities for such programs as well. Additionally, your area may have a non-profit community health organization to whom you can turn for help. Don't forget to encourage employees to team up for the next "walk-a-thon" or "fun run" in your area; employees can get some exercise while helping out a worthy cause.

8. Implement your new wellness program.

Communicate to your employees about your company's new health and wellness program. Generate as much excitement for it as you can. Schedule an all-employee meeting, or send out flyers or e-mails detailing the new and exciting ways employees can participate. Remember, the exercise program should target the general worker population. Most individuals will tolerate a gradual introduction to stretching and strengthening.

Also, educate your employees about the health and wellness benefits available to them that are in addition to the basic medical and/or dental benefits your company offers. Encourage your employees to take advantage of health risk assessments, for example. Likewise, preventative services, such as a cholesterol screenings may be covered under your insurance benefit plan.

9. Include employees' spouses in your wellness program.

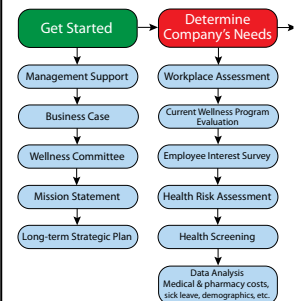
For a low-cost way to include spouses and families, consider sending home a wellness program announcement letter. Let the family know your organization cares about its employees and encourages a healthy lifestyle at home as well.

10. Measure the effectiveness of your workplace wellness program, and celebrate and reward your employees' success!

Talk to your employees about the wellness program. See how many signed up for – and attended – your program offerings. Which ones were most popular? What are folks saying about them? Monitor employee satisfaction levels and tweak your program accordingly.

Have the CEO personally congratulate those employees who have met a health milestone. Do a story on them in your employee newsletter. Even better, ask the editor to establish a regular "Health and Wellness Corner," and have someone on the Wellness Committee write regular reports on their efforts and activities.

Consider giving employees small monetary awards, gift cards, or gas cards as a reward. Find novel and exciting ways to celebrate and encourage employees' efforts at getting and staying fit and healthy. ■



Learn how to implement a basic wellness program strategy. See page 8 for details.

Do you have a successful workplace wellness program you are proud of? IWIF would love to tell your business success story.

Contact the IWIF Communications Dept. at 410-494-2023 or e-mail communications@iwif.com.

Special thanks to Meg Rothenstein, MPH, CHES, Health Promotion Specialist at CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, for her help in developing this information.