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Corporations Need to Invest in Employee Health and Wellness Programs, Now More Than Ever

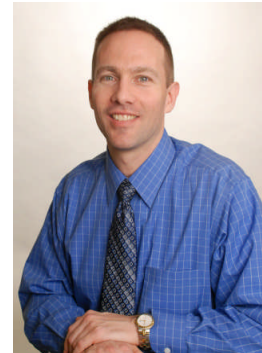
By Health Fairs Direct

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Corporate health & wellness programs have a 20-year track record of being a great investment for corporations. If run correctly, the return on investment (ROI) is hard to ignore.

According to the Partnership for Prevention; a meta-review of 42 published studies of worksite health promotion programs shows:

- Average \$5.93-to-\$1 savings-to-cost ratio
- Average 28% reduction in sick leave absenteeism
- Average 26% reduction in health costs
- Average 30% reduction in workers' compensation and disability management claims costs



With so much empirical evidence that health & wellness programs save companies money, why are so many corporations cutting back on these programs when they need them the most? The answer is simple, *if the company does not put aside funding for these programs they will not happen*. Many companies fund minor health & wellness programs out of their discretionary budgets so there is no firm commitment to the health of their employees, and it shows.

"This has been a fundamental flaw with many corporate health & wellness programs," says John Buckley, president of Health Fairs Direct, a 12 year old corporate health and wellness coordination company. "We routinely receive requests from corporations, large and small, that they want to 'Create a Culture of Health & Wellness'. When we ask them how they plan on accomplishing this and what their budget is we typically hear that they do not have a budget and were hoping to get a free health fair."

Some corporations have been led to believe that they can receive free health fairs and medical screenings from local doctor's offices. These out-of-network doctors invest their marketing dollars into offering enticing freebies to corporations as a trade off for getting access to corporate employees with good insurance. Some of the most common enticements are *free* total cholesterol and glucose screenings or even *free* lunch for the entire company.

John W. Buckley is the CEO and a co-owner of Health Fairs Direct, a division of OpenHouse Direct Inc. John purchased the company in 2000 and has grown it to a Full Service National Corporate Health & Wellness Fair Coordination Company. He has been working to educate corporations and bring much needed reforms to the health fair industry. For more information on how to create a positive ROI from your health fairs, visit www.healthfairsdirect.com or call 732-563-9749.

These enticements become hard to resist when there is no budget set aside to provide professional health fair services. But they come with very high back end costs to the corporation. For more information on these back end costs as well as the liability of working directly with local doctors, or doctors disguised as health fair companies visit:

<http://www.healthfairsdirect.com/CorporateBenefits/WOF/>

So what do corporations do when there is no money to work with a professional health fair coordination company? Where do they find the money to invest in the health and wellbeing of their employees? With the above statistical savings in investing in corporate health, the most logical corporate budget item to incorporate employee health and wellness programs into is the medical insurance budget.

A good rule of thumb is to put aside 2 to 4% of the corporation's overall medical insurance budget and reserve that for professionally run health & wellness programming. This will tie the funding into the area that will see the most dramatic and immediate ROI. This will also make sure that any size company is properly funded for their health & wellness initiatives as the budget is directly related to their specific number of employees.

Health & Wellness Programs in a Tough Economy

The tough economy is taking its toll on corporate health and wellness programs and corporations are going to be negatively affected as a result. It is understandable that corporations would tighten their belts and reduce their discretionary spending during tough economic conditions, but cutting their health and wellness programs will cost corporations much more in the long run.

The Effect of Cutting Flu Shot Programs

Are corporations headed for excessive losses due to a bad flu shot season? John Buckley, President of Health Fairs Direct, says "Possibly YES"! The reasons for this are easy to see, many corporations are cutting back on their health & wellness programs due to the economy. What they are overlooking is that a healthy and motivated workforce is essential for their survival during the economic downturn.

According to an article on www.cnnmoney.com, "With median weekly earnings of \$675 for all wage and salary workers, paid sick leave costs an employer \$135 per day per employee." Compare this to the average cost of a corporate flu shot program at only \$30 per employee and it becomes very easy to see how one employee staying out sick with a bad case of the flu for 2 weeks can cost the company more than it would have cost them to vaccinate over 45 employees. This does not take into account the additional losses caused by projects being backlogged, deadlines not being met, sales not being made and the risk of other employees becoming sick.

"One sick employee can easily spread the flu virus to 5% of your workforce," says John Buckley. "But without protecting your employees with flu vaccinations 10 to 15% is a more realistic number." With many corporations choosing to forgo their flu vaccination programs this year many more commuters are likely to become sick with the flu and spread it to other commuters. This increases the possibility of flu related losses at corporations.

"In today's economy," Buckley warns, "you can't afford for employees to be sick and/or unproductive for 2 to 3 weeks at a time. One employee who becomes sick with the flu loses a minimum of 2 weeks of work and has an additional 2 to 3 weeks of reduced production as they try to recover, as they handle their backlogged and often feel groggy for a few weeks as they try to catch up."

The Cost of Cutting Health Fairs Out of the Budget

Corporate Health & Wellness programs, mainly health fairs, have become the cornerstone of many employee productivity, motivation and retention strategies. Health Fairs are high profile events that need to be professionally run to guarantee positive results. They are relatively inexpensive to run and produce a lot of good will with employees.

Now, more than ever, corporations need a productive and motivated workforce. "In order to make it through these tough times corporations need to become more competitive," says Buckley. We need to do more with less and we are expecting our employees to step up and become more productive and pick up the slack for employees who have already been laid off. This added pressure to perform increases uncertainty and with uncertainty comes more stress for the employees. No corporation is immune; everyone is feeling the pressure and uncertainty of change.

So what do we do? Do we cut out the very programs that have proven to increase employee motivation and retention? Corporate Health & Wellness fairs are the best investment in the health, wellbeing and stability of your employees. They show that you care about their health and wellbeing, not just the bottom line. Investing in the health & wellbeing of your employees is the best investment that you can make for your organization and help to reassure your employees that their future is secure with your company. Now, more than ever, your employees need to know that their company cares about their wellbeing.

Additionally, corporate health & wellness fairs remind and encourage employees to reduce stress and look after their health. In these stressful economic times, employees need to focus on work-life balance and take care of themselves. Full Service Health Fairs do this in the following ways:

- Giving away health & wellness promotional items, such as pedometers, exercise bands, lip balm and antibacterial sprays, encourages more employees to participate in the health fair and give them some basic wellness items.
- Biometric Screenings, such as cholesterol, glucose, blood pressure and body fat screenings impinge on employees who do not have healthy numbers. For many employees this is the only time that they will take to have these essential screenings performed.
- Local health and wellness practitioners are there to offer solutions to problematic biometric screenings as well as healthy options that employees can take advantage of in their community. This is important as if you do not offer immediate solutions to employee health issues you tend to just increase the stress level of the already less-than-fit employees.

John Buckley adds: "Without these programs corporations will incur more costs as they pay for more employees on sick leave, incur increased insurance premiums as today's manageable condition becomes tomorrow's health crisis (today's high blood pressure to tomorrow's heart attack, for example) and losses from reduced productivity and motivation."

"You need a motivated, healthy and productive workforce during these tough economic times," Buckley continues. By reducing the number of sick days per employee and providing healthy solutions, Corporate Health & Wellness programs are proven to have a positive ROI, to reduce stress which increases employee motivation, production and retention. Now is the time to invest in the stability of your employees. In your bid to maintain a competitive force in your industry, make sure you do not short change your corporation's potential and invest in your employees by continuing with or expanding your health & wellness programs.

www.HealthFairsDirect.com

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