

# HR

## MANAGEMENT

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## TOY STORY

It hasn't always been fun and games at Mattel. Alan Kaye explains why people are at the heart of the company's latest chapter

## FINAL WORD

Invest in the **best**

**John Buckley** explains the necessity behind investing in the strength and security of your employees, despite tough times.



**C**orporations need to re-invest in their employees' health and wellbeing during these tough economic times. Many corporations have cut their employee health and wellness programs, believing they were slashing discretionary spending. Unfortunately for them, good employees are not discretionary and should not be treated that way. In reality, these corporations are cutting the actual programs that are needed the most to guide them through these uncertain times.

Stress levels at corporations have hit historic levels. It does not matter if your company has directly experienced layoffs, pay freezes or spending cuts as many employees have family, friends or neighbors who have been negatively affected by the economy. One only needs to turn on the news to become uncertain about their economic future.

The anxiety is real. We all feel it and our job performances are being negatively affected by it. Employees cannot focus on the tasks at hand if they are worrying about the stability of their jobs or the financial difficulties that they have at home. Stress leads to poor job performance, which leads to backlogs, missed deadlines and even more stress. Stress also leads to more illnesses and accidents.

The solution is to offer your employees more knowledge so they have the information they need to make smarter decisions. During economic downturns three industries historically do very well; alcohol, tobacco and cosmetic. This tells you that many of your employees will be turning to ways to avoid their stress by drinking, to escape their stress by taking more smoking 'breaks' or to cover up their stress with a more pleasant appearance. Other quick fixes, such as pharmaceuticals, are equally as ineffective because they do not help your employees to develop new coping skills that help them rise to their current challenges.

To help your company make it through, you need to give your employees the tools that they need to actually handle their stress. Encourage your employees to become part of the solution. To become part of a focused, dedicated and hard working team who is determined to make the most of the opportunities that recessions offer.

While other corporations are mired down in the doom and gloom of the recession, your company could be expanding, taking on a larger percentage of market and becoming stronger. The only guarantee of future success and stability during tough economic times is with a healthy and focused workforce that is working toward a brighter future. Stress, worry and anxiety are not part of a successful corporation. Healthy, motivated, dedicated and focused employees are.

Health and wellness events, such as health fairs, stress down days and employee pampering days are the most economical ways to show your employees that, despite the tough times, their company is committed to their success. They offer a level of stability and peace of mind that cannot be created any other way.

Some of the corporations that we have been working with have commented that they are hesitant to run health and wellness events because they do not want their employees to think that they are spending money on frivolous activities when they have just had layoffs. This consideration is quickly dismissed when you see that the majority of your employees will be appreciative that their employer still cares enough to invest in their health and wellbeing. After all, your employees are your most valuable asset and you should do everything you can to make them feel appreciated.

Give your employees something positive to focus on. Give them potential solutions to their problems. Reduce their stress and encourage them to become proactive. Corporate Health Fairs have a 20-year track record of creating positive return on investment. It may seem counterintuitive, but spending more money on the health and wellbeing of your employees is the best investment you can make during tough economic times. ■

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**John Buckley** is the CEO and co-owner of Health Fairs Direct (HFD), a division of OpenHouse Direct Inc. HFD is a Full Service National Corporate Health & Wellness Fair Coordination Company. Buckley has been working to educate corporations and bring much needed reforms to the health fair industry.