

Walking Toward Higher Productivity

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For most manufacturers, healthcare costs rank second behind salaries as the biggest expense of doing business. Over 60 percent of Americans are overweight or obese (or worse), leading to a doubling of the prevalence of diabetes in the last quarter century.

Company bottom lines are hit with crippling sick leave costs, as well as, the costly delays caused by tardiness and absenteeism. Every manufacturer knows that to keep the trains running on time — our employees need to show up and get the job done. But for us, we knew we needed to help our employees along — one step at a time. Here's how we created and implemented a corporate walking program that helped moved the entire company forward.

We began by establishing a company wellness committee that includes nine volunteers from the ranks of hourly and salaried workforce. It got started in January 2011, just prior to our biometric health screenings and online health risk assessments. It is their motivation and enthusiasm that fuels the high acceptance rate by our teammates. We wanted each participant to feel like they could participate without undue pressure.

To make it social, it needed peer support with a sense of purpose. After all, the greater the participation at your company, the greater the program strength. Additionally, to keep with our corporate culture, which is the importance of employee families — we opened up the program (and its rewards) to spouses as well.

We instituted a corporate wellness program because of the facts: 89 percent of employers cite health and productivity programs as core to their organizational health strategy, and companies with effective health and productivity programs achieve significantly better business outcomes (2011 TowersWatson [Staying@Work](#) [1] survey).

We chose walking because it is a natural exercise that everyone can participate in at any speed or pace they want. Most importantly, it doesn't require an investment in equipment, hiring instructors or renting space.

[Walkingspree](#) [2] is the vendor we chose to manage our program because they service both large corporations as well as small businesses. Their program model using high-tech uploadable pedometers are nearly flawless, and they have a wellness portal that provides brand recognition for the company.

Most importantly, they offer a wellness program that is flexible and customizable to

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fit individual company needs. It's all based on steps, or in other words, walking. It is a moderate form of activity, so everyone can participate. The goal is to accomplish a certain number of steps daily and then, to increase that daily number of steps. And, as a corporate program, the variations are almost endless.

Everyone has fun creating their own unique screen names, setting up teams or clubs, inviting buddies and creating virtual walks. Right now, we have 10 teams with eight walkers on each team participating in a challenge virtually walking around Lake Michigan. That's 1,237 miles! We're also starting a Walkingspree company challenge in which our company will be racing against other companies on the map on a virtual walk Mayan Adventure.

We combine Walkingspree with annual online health risk assessments, on-site health screens and monthly Living Right mailings to our teammates. We consider it a win-win program that continues to create a lot of buzz in the workplace and promotes activity-based fun.

When all is said and done — having healthy employees is essential for every manufacturer. Whether your goal is to reduce healthcare costs, curb absenteeism, increase productivity, boost morale or a combination of all — providing wellness/walking as a voluntary but positive benefit is the only way to grow.

Five Tips for Success on Employee [Wellness/Walking Programs](#) [2]

1. Establish a company wellness committee among your senior execs. It is important to have their buy-in, so employees company-wide know this is worth participation, and they will get supervisor support.
2. Find the right engagement tools for your company culture, environment, geography and workforce demographics. If you have employees with young families — find ways to include them in the program. If you have a Gen Y workforce — make sure you incorporate social media. If you have lots of seniors — make sure the goals are practical for them, while being challenging for others.
3. Short- and long-term goals. Keep it interesting, exciting and purposeful. Set goals with incentives that are manageable. Structure challenges with short-term goals that act as breadcrumbs to reach the challenge's long-term goal.
4. Match the reward to the walk. No one wants to walk a marathon for a \$10 gift card. Behavioral economic research shows that the attraction of the *chance* of winning a big prize, like a dream vacation, effectively motivates employees. For example: All participants who walk one million steps in six months earn a raffle ticket for the grand prize.
5. Share success with all. Recognize winners, achievers and goal-milestones as they happen. Include their names and quotes in your company newsletter and company social media. Also consider separate walking-program communication to emphasize it as an important part of the company culture. Be creative in sharing success, like posting a leader board in public areas.

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