

The way to wellness

Establish goals and measurements for your company's plan

BY **CONNIE ROETHEL**, for *SBT*

Persistently rising health care costs and well-documented returns on investment experienced by companies providing wellness programs are prompting more employers to provide wellness and healthy lifestyle programs in the workplace. The programs range from voluntary weight loss and physical activity challenges to mandatory participation in health risk appraisal surveys.

Unfortunately, many organizations that are addressing worksite wellness lack any kind of organized plan. A recent survey conducted by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion revealed that only 17 percent of U.S. worksites that offer health promotion activities had a formally articulated set of goals and objectives.

Closer to home, Heart Healthy Waukesha County, an alliance representing health care providers, educational institutions, businesses, government and community-based organizations, conducted a survey to understand what a typical wellness program actually looks like and to give employers information about how their workplace measures up.

The survey indicated that nearly half of Waukesha County's employers have started talking seriously to their employees about healthy lifestyle choices, but programs in the workplace vary in design and approach. According to the survey report, what is missing at most companies is a multi-faceted approach that integrates health education and self-management advice with workplace policies that support personal lifestyle change efforts and indi-

vidual accountability.

In simple terms, what is required for a successful program and what many companies lack is an operating plan. Without a structured operating plan, wellness budget dollars could be wasted.

Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA), an organization dedicated to promoting workplace wellness, includes Crafting an Operating Plan as one of the benchmarks of success of a workplace wellness program. The organization explains that a clearly defined plan forces the program team to look at the companies' needs and priorities, as well as validating and communicating the program to upper management. When there are changes in personnel, it assures continuity of the program, accountability and action on the part of the team. In addition, it serves as a means to

measure program effectiveness.

Heart Healthy Waukesha is working closely with the local WELCOA chapter, Wellness Council of Wisconsin and an advisory council of experts in occupational health from Aurora Health Care, Community Memorial Hospital, Pro-Health Care and Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare-Elm-brook to provide resources to help employers design, implement and maintain effective wellness programs.

Their efforts include the recent development of the Learning Circle on Workplace Wellness. Prompted by the results of the Heart Healthy survey, the Learning Circle will be part support group, part study circle and part leadership roundtable, and will provide accurate, up-to-date information about health behaviors and best practices in workplace wellness.

March Jacques, one of the staff members for Heart Healthy Waukesha and the ring leader for the Learning Circle says, "Every employer wants a wellness program that yields the highest impact with the least expenditure of resources. Starting a wellness program without an operating plan is like trying to implement any other best practice without determining whether it fits your business. It is a hit-and-miss proposition at best."

The Learning Circle, expected to launch in September, has enlisted an outstanding cadre of speakers who will help members ground their wellness action plans in evidence-based interventions. Additional information about the Learning Circle is available on the Heart Healthy Waukesha County Web site at www.healthywaukesha.com.

Companies that want to avoid wasting program dollars and assure program success can use the following seven elements identified by WELCOA as critical to an operating plan:

Vision statement

Your vision statement should articulate a clear, realistic picture of what you want to achieve with your program.

Goals

Program goals should be stated clearly, since they will be the landmark toward which you

direct your programming efforts.

Objectives

WELCOA recommends using the SMART formula for developing objectives ... Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Specific

Implementation timeline

The timeline should outline dates, months and times of specific programs and activities. The timeline should be reviewed regularly and updated during wellness team meetings.

Marketing and communications plan

The plan should outline how

you will get information about the program to employees. Newsletters, payroll stuffers, intranet messages and bulletin boards are all methods of getting the word out.

Program budget

You don't need a bankroll, but some investment will be necessary. You can start small and expand your budget from year to year as your program grows. If you are planning to start with Health Risk Appraisals with laboratory screenings, \$50 per employee is an average amount to budget.

Plan for evaluation

Most companies are expected

to provide some form of measurement for return on investment. Program evaluation can be measured in a variety of ways, including participation levels, employee satisfaction surveys and improvements in annual health risk appraisal progress reports.



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