

# The Fitness Friendly Workplace

By Robert L. Selders, Jr.

In a previous article, we looked at strategies for small businesses seeking to control health care costs in their operations. One of these strategies includes creating a health-minded culture in the workplace. By providing employees with opportunities to improve fitness, nutrition, stress levels and work/life balance, small business owners can also see marked improvements in productivity, reduced sick days, fewer illnesses and hospital visits. Not to mention happier and more loyal employees.

The next question is: What specific actions can you take to create a healthy work environment? Increasing numbers of small businesses are encouraging their employees to lead more active lifestyles by offering free or discounted gym members, forming running or cycling groups, participating in fitness events such as 5K and 10K runs as a team, or hosting team-building events centered around a physical activity such as obstacle courses or rock-wall climbing. Having employees engaged in fitness activities together promotes not only a healthier staff, but also collaboration and communication.

Other small businesses are bringing fitness to the workplace, making it more convenient for employees to incorporate exercise and movement into their work days. Having a licensed massage therapist onsite once a month to provide 15 minute neck and shoulder massages can go a long way to reducing stress levels and rewarding employees. Other employers bring yoga instructors, Pilates and CrossFit instructors onsite to lead fitness classes during lunch or after working hours.

Employers can also take steps to make their physical environments more conducive to health. For example, some small businesses offer employees the option of having a standing desk to prevent the health perils of sitting for eight hours or longer. Others conduct “walking meetings” where employees move and talk rather than sit stationary around a conference table.

Stocking the refrigerator and counters with healthy snacks, as opposed to candy bars and junk food goes a long way to helping employees improve their nutrition, energy levels and overall health. Some businesses even host monthly potlucks and ask employees to bring in healthy dishes, or sponsor “Biggest Loser” style team-based workplace competitions.

There’s no doubt that creating a healthy culture in the workplace benefits employees, business owners and the bottom line. Not only do employees feel and work better, but they also appreciate the employer who values their health and wellbeing.

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