

WV, Inc.
Wellness at Work
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The West Virginia Hospital Association, like all employers, is committed to doing everything necessary to ensure exemplary work habits including, just naming a few things, lower absenteeism rates, improved productivity, high morale, and reasonable turnover rates. Lofty goals indeed, but how to meet them? Many say the ability to meet such goals as these is enhanced by establishing a worksite wellness program.

To be successful, worksite wellness programs are systematic, integrated programs that include educational, motivational and practical activities in the areas of physical fitness, nutrition and stress management. The ultimate goal of worksite wellness programs is to create a culture which values and meets both individual and organizational needs for health improvement.

Wellness programs are designed to help employees make better lifestyle choices and to impact the organization in a positive manner. Today, according to the Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA), more than 81 percent of American businesses with 50 or more employees have some form of health promotion program — the most popular being exercise, smoking cessation classes, back care programs, and stress management. Many employers offer wellness programs simply because they believe the benefit exceeds the cost. Return on a company's investment is significant and has been well documented: every dollar an employer spends in a wellness program equals a savings of as much as three dollars in reduced healthcare costs.

It doesn't require a large business to conduct a successful wellness program; this is an important fact for West Virginia since about 55 percent of the state's businesses are considered small. In fact, some of the most successful programs in the country are run by small businesses conducted on small budgets with a lot of support from the employees and management.

"For small business owners who often measure profits in thousands, not millions, of dollars, the net effect of an employee wellness program could mean the difference between profit and loss," says William M. Kizer, Founding Chairman of WELCOA.

Well Workplace, a national program created by WELCOA and its local affiliate councils, helps employers develop results-oriented wellness programs. *Well*

Workplace offers a blueprint for successful wellness programs and a clear understanding of the necessary benchmarks to measure success based on the practices of employers nationwide. These benchmarks, which should be emulated when establishing a wellness program, are called the seven Cs: 1) Capturing Senior Level Support; 2) Creating a Cohesive Team; 3) Collecting Data; 4) Carefully Crafting an Operating Plan; 5) Choosing Appropriate Interventions; 6) Creating Supportive Environments; and 7) Consistently Evaluating Outcomes. *Well Workplace* also recognizes achievement and makes awards in four categories: bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

A good example of a successful small business wellness program, developed by the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA), is *Wellness Opportunities at Work* (WOW). Since its inception, WVHA's WOW program has been awarded the *Well Workplace Bronze Award* and the *Well Workplace Silver Award*.

Each wellness program should start with a mission statement. The WVHA mission statement was simple and concise: *To support employees in achieving a healthier lifestyle by promoting programs that will provide positive, healthy outcomes.*

WOW participants believe that a key factor in the success of the program was the strong support WVHA's president and CEO, Steven Summer. Without *top-down* commitment, the success of the program would not have been possible. Summer wholeheartedly supported the ideas and efforts of WOW, and allocated funds from the WVHA budget to plan and pay for WOW related events. Perhaps more importantly, Summer also presented a positive and visible example through his regular exercise routine and healthy eating habits. Without having the president as a positive role model and *cheerleader*, participants agree, the committee would have been unable to devote the time and effort needed to develop a well-run wellness program.

"WOW made a positive difference here at the WVHA and the commitment of the WOW committee members has been outstanding," Summer said. "They helped the staff develop a more health conscious attitude by providing educational activities that promote a healthy lifestyle. It's wonderful to have employees that care enough about their overall well-being and healthy to dedicate their time to providing and organizing such activities and programs."

WOW was built upon three unique strengths: motivation, empowerment and education. The wellness program offered employees strong motivational support,

including continuous communication and encouragement to each participant to enhance feelings of accomplishment and success. The WOW Committee focused significantly on exercise and an active approach for each participant to become more health conscious and confident. Motivation by nature extended outward to other participants and produced enthusiasm for the program. In conjunction with motivational strength, the WOW Committee focused upon building ownership of the program by the participants through surveys, meetings and planning sessions. This helped employees to develop feelings of empowerment through the program.

Each WOW program included an educational and health-wise foundation. During the *Lunch and Learn* hour, for example, participants heard presentations given by healthcare experts. One of WOW's most popular programs was drinking 32 ounces of water, eating five fruits and vegetables, and exercising 30 minutes each day. Participants felt they could best document their progress with this program and fit it into their daily schedules.

"WOW keeps me motivated to eat healthy, exercise and have fun," said Judy Lowe, the first WOW Committee Coordinator. "The program keeps me more aware of my health habits through the different activities offered, such as keeping a food journal, team competition and drinking my water every day."

There are thousands of worksite wellness programs throughout the country. Because each organization is unique, every wellness program must be specific to a particular work environment. An excellent source of information on setting up a wellness program is the Wellness Council of West Virginia Well Workplace University, www.wcww.org. The University features classroom lectures and presentations; experienced, qualified faculty; team activities; and resource materials vital to the development of a successful wellness program. Other resources include *101 Ways to Wellness* and *The Well Workplace Workbook: A guide to developing your Worksite Wellness Program*, both published by WELCOA. These publications are available for download at www.welcoa.org.