

Sylvia Ann Hewlett Winning the Talent War

Promote Wellness for Better Performance

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Healthcare is all over the headlines these days, with conflicting agendas slugging it out in Congress, and senators getting shouted down at town hall meetings. Wellness is a serious issue in workplaces struggling through the tough economy: Are workers fit enough to perform at their peak?

"Last year I was managing 70 people, all located in New York," reported one participant in a survey conducted last December by the Center for Work-Life Policy. "This year, after layoffs, I manage 125 people in New York, London, Paris, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. The number of managers has been reduced, and I've had to take on additional groups around the world. Hours are crazy because of the global scope of my new responsibilities."

Reality bites hard in a recession, and can leave lasting scars not just in your wallet but your well-being. It's all too easy to neglect your health when you're focused on surviving the most brutal marketplace in modern memory. Study after study shows that high levels of stress, experienced day in and day out, are significantly detrimental to health, contributing to obesity, diabetes, heart disease and infertility. Yet only 28% of Americans say that they do a good job of managing stress.

Companies need to get involved. As research in my forthcoming book *Top Talent: Keeping Performance Up When Business Is Down* (Harvard Business School Press; October 2009) shows, by knee-capping employees' physical, mental and emotional resilience, stress undermines performance and productivity—and directly impacts a firm's bottom line.

Many companies already offer on-site gyms, wellness websites, free memberships to local health clubs, or periodic health fairs. But even though well-meaning memos might encourage employees to take advantage of these facilities, stressed-out survey participants say they're not enough to make them change health-sapping bad habits. Anyone who has ever set a fitness goal—whether it's to quit smoking, drop a dress size, or run a marathon—knows that it's easier to make the effort when you have a partner nudging you, encouraging you, and showing they care.

A proactive, personal approach is the hallmark of HealthRoads, PepsiCo's internal wellness initiative. One key element is to engage employees by arming them with information. Employees have private access to a customized, easy-to-understand overview of their entire health history created by third-party vendor WebMD, with technology that tracks employees' insurance claims and information that they choose to

self-report in an online personal health assessment. Based on that data, WebMD "pushes" personalized wellness information—such as monthly advice on prenatal care for a pregnant worker or advice about lowering high blood pressure to an employee diagnosed with hypertension.

Further personalizing the approach, the program gives employees free access to custom counseling by telephone or in person. For non-chronic health needs, people can call "coaches" who create and encourage specific wellness programs. An employee concerned about weight, diet, or exercise—the top three requests—might work with a coach to come up with a customized exercise program, including deciding how often the coach should check in with that all-important motivation call. Of the 50,000 employees who have participated in some form of telephone coaching, 31,000 have reduced or eliminated a health risk.

For PepsiCo workers with serious medical conditions, registered nurses and other trained health providers reach out to help them follow treatment plans, as well as prepare for doctor visits. More than 90 percent of employees who are invited to use this Care Management service stay with the program.

One of the most effective aspects of HealthRoads is a program that lets selected offices, plants, or warehouses customize the corporate wellness program to meet their specific needs. As of spring 2009, 15 locations were participating in the Local Worksite Wellness. These locations reported their workers' healthcare results, i.e., losing weight through a HealthRoads program, as two to four times greater than at other locations.

Organizations can also help employees keep in peak form through outside initiatives that target specific health concerns, such as stress management, smoking cessation or cancer screening. For example, The Maurer Foundation for Breast Health Education presents programs in the workplace that demystify breast cancer and champion early detection through mammography, clinical breast examination, and monthly self-examination. One female manager described the Maurer Foundation seminar as a "wake-up call" spurring her to perform a self-examination—and discover a small lump. The lump turned out to be cancerous, but because it was spotted early, the manager was successfully treated.

Helping employees take care of themselves is good for them, good for the way they feel about their company and good for business. "People who are healthier will be in emergency rooms less, have lower needs for prescription drugs, fewer accidents, greater life satisfaction overall and be more productive," says Ellen Exum, director of PepsiCo Wellness and Prevention. "In these economic times, that is a great benefit for the company."

Sounds like something that makes everyone feel better.

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