

This is an excerpt from *Saving The World At Work* by Tim Sanders

THE HEALING POWER OF CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAMS:

Wellness programs promote healthy living and are aimed at preventing illness. These programs can include free flu shots, education programs, workout facilities, diet consultations, and smoking cessation programs.

If your employer offers a wellness program, sign up to participate. Studies at office-furniture maker Steelcase Inc. and Pepsi Bottling found that such programs can dramatically decrease your chances of coming down with a serious illness due to lifestyle or diet, reducing your annual sick days and increasing your productivity.

Your participation in a wellness program will also set an example for your coworkers and help build a healthy culture at work. The directors of wellness programs I interviewed all agreed that wide participation signals to corporate that wellness is a popular and sound investment, which in turn helps to ensure such programs will be sustained and expanded.

But don't just sign up—take time to learn about the program's different elements and talk about the options with your coworkers. If you're a manager, make wellness programs a group endeavor. Instead of positioning the program as corporate, make it employee based.

According to Peter Kasiarz, vice president of compensation benefits and risk management at Pepsi Bottling, that clarification will dramatically increase participation by your group. Tie wellness to goodness. A group of employees at Pepsi Bottling's Knoxville location created a campus promotion in which they encouraged fitness through a Habitat for Humanity program. Dozens of employees worked up a sweat as they swung hammers and wielded saws to build homes. Along the way, the effort generated positive television coverage for the company.

If you don't have a wellness program at your company, meet with your boss and advocate for one, as did Diane Ball, a cardiac rehab nurse at Illinois' Delnor Community Hospital. In 1999, Ball attended a stress-reduction seminar conducted by Heartmath on behalf of her patients, who needed to manage stress to recover fully from cardiac illnesses. But she realized it was helping her, too.

At the time, the environment at Delnor was very intense; Ball's coworkers needed stress management as badly as recovering heart attack patients did. Because Ball had no authority and no direct reports, she approached her boss, a hospital vice president, and said that although she was considering leaving, she'd stay if he allowed her to bring Heartmath into Delnor.

Impressed, Ball's boss brought the issue to Tom Wright, the hospital's chief operating officer, and convinced him to fly to Heartmath's headquarters in California to attend a stress-management workshop. After attending, Wright realized that the program was exactly what Delnor needed to improve productivity and reduce staff turnover, which at the time was 28 percent, much higher than the national average.

The program, launched in 2001, led to a rapid change in the quality of life and services at the hospital; turnover fell by half. According to data compiled by the management consulting firm Sperduto, from 2002 to 2006 Delnor was rated number one nationally in the annual rankings in its category for employee satisfaction. The hospital was also honored three years in a row by the state of Illinois' annual Companies That Care awards.

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