

Feeling Over-Wellnessed?

No need. It is possible to develop a simple, grass roots, and inexpensive focus on workplace health and well-being that gets results. I know, because we did it.

Our initiative started with baby steps. We wanted to add a wellness program but had no budget approval. So, a few of us got together and came up with no-cost ideas. We switched to some healthier snacks in our snack machine, changed firm-supplied meals into healthier options, and also changed some of our social functions to be more health-oriented. We took advantage of Blue Cross' then-available two free health seminars. We started paying for flu shots – even without a budget line item.

The next year we asked for a budget of \$7,500 and learned that one of our most frugal Principals said he would have given us twice that much because he believed in the value of such efforts. With our newly created budget, we developed amazing initiatives, including sponsoring a contest to design a logo for our wellness communications; setting up an email address from the Wellness Team; and launching a monthly newsletter on health and well being. Goodbye baby steps; hello foothold. We then energized more of our employees through regular communications. We held a healthy bake-off which replaced our previous holiday sweets bake-off. We co-sponsored a Weight Watchers session by paying for 50 percent of the cost if individuals attended 75 percent of the sessions. Our folks collectively lost over 600 pounds. They asked for even more healthy choices in the snack machines. They got them. Additionally, they added a “points” chart to the machine and started a whole new vocabulary in the Firm.

We added filters to our water machines and offered more drink options, such as teas and juices instead of just soda and coffee. One of our staff members developed a Walking Challenge for the Firm. We bought pedometers (get the good ones – we learned the hard way!), added our logo to them and then asked everyone to report their daily steps. Tallies poured in and collectively we walked over 7 million

steps in one month. Five months later and to shake the winter sluggishness, we held a March Madness bracket challenge and created teams of participants who “played” each other each week by tallying number of activity hours. Nothing like a little competition in a law firm with a reward of bragging rights to get the

trash talk going—and the lawyers participating! We obtained a discounted corporate membership at the fitness center in our building, which was completely paid for by the individuals who attended. One perk was a free health seminar each month. We offered cholesterol testing, blood pressure screening, massages, workplace stretching, nutrition, exercise tips and a running clinic that we tied into participation in Race Judicata.

Feeling emboldened, we wrote a memo about our experiences and accomplishments, which our healthcare broker utilized in our health insurance premium rate negotiation. And while the carrier wouldn't identify the specific rate reduction, they did state that it was between 0.5 percent and 1.0 percent. This savings was greater than the money spent for the various efforts. More importantly, though, our employees consider us a friendlier and more caring



place to work. Many of them thought this before, but now they openly talk about it, which is a direct result of our wellness focus. We know for sure we have more “presenteeism.” We also have individuals informally supporting one another’s workout efforts.

So this year we are off and running by exploring biometric screenings and collection by a third party of health data to identify health issues within our

collective population, which will enable us to steer our education toward those issues. This will be a further attempt to impact the “trend curve” of our collective health. However, in the meantime, the grassroots engine is full-steam ahead with our folks just having walked over 8 million steps this past month and gearing up for a Wii Fitness contest in February. 



Michelle Schadler is the Chief Operating Officer at Chuhak & Tecson, P.C. She has over 15 years of financial, managerial and operational experience in professional services firms with 10 of those being in the legal industry. Her passion lies in bringing new ideas to fruition, coaching and developing others, and making valued contributions to improve culture and the “bottom line.” She holds a B.S. and M.A. in Economics and is a Certified Public Accountant. She serves on the board of Volunteers of America of Illinois, an organization dedicated to providing human service programs to those most in need including foster children, low-income elderly, people with disabilities, and homeless veterans.





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