

## The Top 10 Mistakes Companies Make When Starting A Fitness Program By Dan Polimino

Ten years ago when I was speaking with corporate CEOs around the country about cultivating better health for their employees, they all smiled and thought it was a good idea ... for someone else. Today, they get it! Now these decision makers realize their profits are directly connected to employee health. In fact, U.S. businesses are spending upwards of 55 percent of after-tax profits on medical care for their employees.

To cut these medical care costs, their solution is to implement a program to make their employees healthy. Unfortunately it rarely works because making people feel better is not their core business. Corporations produce grommets, widgets and gadgets and in the process of implementing said fitness program often make the following mistakes:

- 1) **Implement a program with no expertise in the fitness field.** Someone from human resources usually gets the order to create a plan or proposal and buy some fitness equipment. Yet the real solution is to have the HR person research which company they should outsource the job to. Outsourcing to a reputable firm will prevent trial and error, thus saving time and money. But above all, people in the wellness business know what works and what doesn't. It's called maximizing effectiveness.
- 2) **Use outdated phrases.** For lack of a better term most companies still use the words "wellness program." The problem is that the 80s are long gone, and "wellness program" now carries negative connotations. Thoughts of health care, health management, or sitting through a video series on the effects of smoking turns people off. Be creative and name your program something like "A Better Bottom Line" or "Fitness That Works." (How's that for a play on words!)
- 3) **Failure to survey the field.** Administer a company survey with the goal of finding out how many people will participate in your program and what they are interested in. It would be a shame to construct a 3,000-square-foot facility for 50 people and buy 12 stair steppers if no one is interested in using them.
- 4) **No budget.** It'll cost to maintain this facility, and it's going to cost even more to get people involved and see results. Most businesses don't allocate money for educational and adherence programs, which is puzzling because these same companies would never launch a new product without a marketing budget. Moral of the story: Set aside enough capital to ensure your program's ongoing success.
- 5) **The "If We Build It, They Will Come" theory.** Buy some fitness equipment, stick it in a room and people will use it, right? There's a simple test to find out if this concept works. Ask family, friends and colleagues if they have a piece of fitness equipment in their basement with boxes on it or clothes hanging from it. More often than not the answer is they have a thigh master, an old bike or a treadmill that's been down there for years collecting dust. Having equipment accessible doesn't make a health promotion program, nor does it entice people to use it. People participate in *programs*, not fitness rooms. More on this shortly.
- 6) **Poor facility construction.** Too often, companies convert a storage closet into a gym. Please give your employees plenty of room to exercise, or don't bother

- building a workout room. There's nothing motivating about exercising in a cramped space with no view, no pictures and drab beige walls. Furthermore, companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars studying colors for Web sites that will capture people's attention, but they won't spend five minutes thinking about the role colors play with mood during exercise.
- 7) **Spending more time on the "E" than the "P."** Businesses get so fixated on the right equipment that they forget the programs are the most important part. As I mentioned above, no one joins a fitness room. They join a program. If they know what to do, when to do it, and have motivation or support from their colleagues then they'll get results. Simple strategies like team-building contests among departments and seasonal challenges are a great way to get the most out of your fitness program.
  - 8) **Failure to consider traffic flow.** Once you do build a gym and decide on the equipment, think about the flow inside the room. Did you design the space and place the equipment so it efficiently moves people through each work station? Is the cardiovascular equipment grouped together, and are the free weights and lifting machines grouped according to body part? Are the TVs in the right place, and have you given any thought to people who might want to run with an outside view?
  - 9) **No nutrition component.** Seventy-five percent of your results – whether you want to gain weight, lose weight or just tone up – come from the food you eat, not how much time you spend in the gym. Companies that allocate boat loads of money for equipment and exercise programs need to complement that with helping employees make healthy food choices. I've been to dozens of corporate gyms only to find the vending machines right outside the door. Not to mention the lack of healthy food choices in their cafeteria. Take notes from Google's headquarters – their cafeteria is like shopping at Whole Foods Market.
  - 10) **No support.** At the very least when you open your fitness facility, give your employees an orientation to the equipment. This will help them get started quicker and lessen the chance of injury. A better alternative is to staff it with a fitness professional for the high-traffic periods of morning, lunchtime and evening. You'll easily recoup your staffing cost if your employees are getting results from their fitness program. We estimate that around 75 to 80 percent of people don't know how to use a gym, and thus are simply spinning their wheels. There's nothing worse for a company's bottom line than an employee spending significant time in the facility with no results.

These are just the top 10 mistakes companies make. I could have easily come up with another 15. On the flipside, there are plenty of examples of corporations that are doing it right, like Google, Coors Brewing Company and Lucent Technologies. Now I know what you're thinking: "These are all big companies with big budgets." Perhaps, but an effective employee fitness program does not have to cost your company thousands of dollars. You can be successful, make a positive impact on your profit margin, and do it all within a sensible budget.

If you'd like to avoid these common pitfalls and get the most bang for your company's health and fitness buck, contact Dan Polimino at [support@paradigmfit.com](mailto:support@paradigmfit.com) or [www.bookdan.com](http://www.bookdan.com).