



SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESSES WITH WORKPLACE WELLNESS: MICHAELS ENERGY

La Crosse WI

Michaels Energy employs a diverse group of 60 engineers that work in offices in La Crosse, Cedar Rapids, Madison, Minneapolis, and the Green Bay area. Offering energy efficiency consulting, Michaels employees also provide engineering services such as design and building-related sciences advice to building owners and managers.

Background

At Michaels Energy, CEO David Waffenschmidt began to support workplace wellness initiatives in 1998, simply because he thought it was the right thing to do. While Michaels Energy understands that investing in employee wellness may yield positive returns on investment for the business, senior management hasn't focused on tracking wellness spending to determine if it is correlated with a positive return on investment. Instead, in the view of Michaels Energy leaders, improving employees' health and wellbeing is a strong enough incentive to make its wellness program worthwhile.



Health Plan Design & Wellness Programs

Michaels works directly with Health Traditions, a health insurance provider, to offer free wellness resources such as annual biometric screenings to all of its employees. In addition, the wellness committee at Michaels establishes a two-year plan of onsite wellness activities. Annual biometric and ergonomic screenings are offered along with a Weight Watchers cost share program, and physical activity programs such as

Barriers

Since engineers have very busy schedules, some employees just don't participate. Michaels has five offices and struggles to find the best way to engage employees who are traveling. Staff have used a live camera so people off-site can participate in yoga, with limited success. While there are certain aspects of the wellness program that employees who travel cannot participate in, however Michaels reports that most employees seem to understand this issue.

Shoe Crew and Minutes in Motion provided by Gundersen Health System. The Shoe Crew program encourages employees to exercise regularly and to make healthy choices by providing incentives to participants, whereas Minutes in Motion is a six-week community physical activity program. Additional programs include lunch and learn sessions about diet, exercise, and stress management, as well as a bike to work week. "If people participate, we see that as success," said Jill Hulst, HR Manager at Michaels Energy. Michaels has intentionally paired wellness with energy conservation efforts; employees who bike or walk to work earn two dollars per day since they are exercising and saving energy.

Employee Involvement

Michaels distributed a survey to its employees to learn about their specific health and wellness interests. Results from the survey indicated that employees wanted to work with a personal wellness coach. "Out of 60 people, 15 were interested in learning more about the personal coach which I thought was a really good response," noted HR Manager Jill Hulst. "I try not to have unrealistic expectations about participation, however we do provide a variety of programs so we can touch every employee and make people want to participate. The gym isn't for everyone and we realize that and provide other opportunities for employees to be healthy."

Beginning in 2014, Michaels is providing employees a chance to meet with a personal health coach. This service is being provided by Health Traditions and will be offered for thirteen weeks. Not only will the health coach provide wellness ideas, tools and resources to help employees meet their individual wellness goals, but the coach will also help employees stay accountable.

Looking Ahead

Michaels Energy wellness leaders are committed to continuing their comprehensive wellness program. The dedication of upper management at Michaels has been the driving force behind the success and duration of the wellness program. From the beginning, the wellness program has been driven by the CEO's belief that workplace wellness is the right thing to do for employees.

Profile prepared by Kayla Brenner. UW PHI, MPH/MPA Candidate. October 2014.

Advice for Small Businesses

- 1. Starting small is obvious but really important because you will be disappointed if you go for it all at once.*
- 2. Plan ahead. CEO Dave Waffenschmidt suggests maintaining momentum by planning wellness activities two years at a time and then following the plan.*