

The Corporate Health Challenge: Impact of Extracurricular Involvement on Behavioral Change and Positive Affect Toward Place of Employment

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INTRODUCTION

In the last 10 years there has been an increase in programs concerning worksite health promotion. Proponents argue that these programs can keep their employees healthy and productive on the long run. Most of the corporate health programs rely on the assumption that health risks are based on an individual's lifestyle and therefore, can be prevented (Aldana, 2001). Corporate health programs can represent a good investment because costs associated with health issues, such as absenteeism and lower motivation can be improved. Aldana (2001) calculates that the average of 13 health promotion programs in the U.S. returns to employers a savings of about \$4.5 per dollar invested.

Most studies focus on the employer's perspective of health programs. In this study, we examine health programs from the perspective of the employee. Specifically we are interested in examining attitudes and behaviors towards a community corporate health challenge. This represents a tantalizing opportunity for organizations because there is little cost for participation, other than promotion of the events. Any benefits realized can translate directly into profits for the organization, especially if employees who engage in healthier behaviors to prepare for competition in the health challenge persist in maintaining healthier behaviors after the challenge concludes.

STUDY DESIGN

We conducted a survey about 3 months after the local YMCA Corporate Cup health challenge concluded. All participants were invited to respond via Zoomerang, and 37 individuals completed the questionnaire. Most survey questions were posed as statements, and respondents were asked to select a level of agreement using a 6-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Agree a Little, Disagree a Little, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

We first ask respondents questions about their motivation for participating in the event. Responses can be internal, such as wanting to improve physical condition or enjoyment of competition, or external, such as receiving encouragement from peers, or to represent the organization. Next, we asked questions regarding health expectations resulting from participation in the corporate health challenge. Specific questions inquired about weight loss, reduction of smoking or drinking, improved physical condition, health care costs, and improved work productivity. We then posed a series of questions about their exercise and health regime prior to preparation for the corporate health challenge, their exercise and health habits during the challenge, and their exercise and health habits three months after the event concluded. We asked if participation in the corporate health challenge affected blood pressure (if known), physical condition, overall feelings of stress, attitude toward the job, and attitude towards coworkers. We also asked participants if they have maintained the exercise regime since the corporate health challenge ended. Finally, we asked for demographic information, including age, gender, type of job, hours worked per week, education level, and salary level.

RESULTS

Pre-challenge motivation:

Improve their health and physical condition: 60-75%

Support team spirit: 100%

Represent employer: 97%

Perception about exercise:

Exercise promotes health and reduces health care expense: 80+%

Pre-challenge preparation:

Increased level of activity: 46%

During challenge

Alcohol reduction: 8%

Smoking reduction: 5%

Little to moderate weight loss: 27%

Improved physical condition: 60%

Post-Challenge

Lower stress: 56%

Lower blood pressure: 19%

Enjoy work more: 58%

Have more positive feelings about coworkers: 59%

DISCUSSION

Promotion of local health care challenges is low-cost, but effective way to improve the overall health of workers. It appears an important side benefit is the positive affect that extracurricular team activities have on attitudes toward work and coworkers. This should be considered a pilot study that warrants additional investigation into how best to promote corporate health challenges and to maximize the benefits of participation in such challenges.

References Available Upon