

HEALTH IS REAL WEALTH, COMPANIES INITIATE WELLNESS PROGRAMS AT THE WORKPLACE



A survey released Monday by Willis North America's Human Capital Practice has revealed that companies are encouraging their employees to join wellness programs to get healthier and fitter. The essence of the wellness program is to motivate employees to discard harmful habits and adopt healthier lifestyles and to take measures aimed at 'preventing the worsening or onset of illnesses.' Some of the key findings of the survey are there are more companies offering wellness programs than last year. About 60 percent of the companies surveyed have wellness programs, an increase of 13 percent from 2010. Ironically, more than half of the companies, 52% have not allocated a budget to the wellness program. The report reveals that three areas of specific concentration for the wellness program are physical activity, tobacco cessation and weight management. Overweight workers have to pay higher premiums for health-insurance and now they are questioning, why, when they work equally hard, do their leaner colleagues have to pay less. Workers now understand that losing weight and getting fitter, will not only make them healthier but also reduce health insurance costs. Hiram Marrero, senior vice president of Willis, Miami, an employee benefits consulting firm says, "Health insurance is a big-ticket item, I think we're at a point in time where employees understand that." Most companies are desirous of having successful and effective wellness programs but find that getting employees to join and participate is an uphill struggle. Employees say that wellness programs "can spark culture change and boost morale — or they can break down trust and cause resentment." Jennifer C. Price A consultant for Willis Human Capital Practice advised, that, "a communication plan has to be at the top of the list." The study found that about "72 percent of the companies require biometric screenings or health assessments or health assessment participation to participate in the company health plan." Many companies prefer third parties to do the health screenings to avoid, charges of discrimination. Employee health premiums are based on health-assessment findings and could differ substantially for healthy and relatively less healthy employees. An employment attorney, Mark J. Neuberger said, "An employer's best defense is 'I didn't know,' " "I didn't fire him because he is a diabetic because I never saw the results." DHL Express's CEO Ian Clough says. "The biggest value has been around employee engagement," "They've been able to come up with imaginative solutions for becoming healthier and it's all coming from the front line." The wellness programs will certainly make for healthier more fitter employees, but what will make the bosses happier is that there will be lower levels of stress, workers will be more productive, and there will be lesser sick leaves.

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