

SMALL BIZ HOW TO / How to choose a corporate fitness program

Companies punch up profits with fitness programs

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Thanks to rising health-care costs, fitness programs are now big contenders in the corporate ring.

Once, corporate health care meant training employees who handled dangerous substances how to avoid injury. Now companies provide employee assistance programs that deal with everything from emotional problems to gym memberships.

According to Paul Walker of Club One, there's a dollars-and-cents value to corporate wellness programs.

"It's an investment on your behalf," he said. "If half of corporate profits are consumed by health-care costs, can you get it down to 10 percent? If so, you can save enough to pay for club memberships."

In addition to saving companies money, wellness programs can be an employee-retention benefit, he said. "And HR will use it to attract new employees."

A wellness program can also keep employees healthier if it encourages them to give up tobacco use or excessive drinking. The increasing use of technology has been a two-edged sword; long days at the computer lead to more repetitive-stress injuries and low back problems. Moreover, since many employees work long days, and have more stress as well, exercise is likely to reduce absenteeism and promote productivity.

There are many ways to provide a wellness plan. A few employers pay the whole cost of membership; most either subsidize part of the cost or negotiate a lower rate with the facility. Sometimes the employer will pay the initiation fee and let the worker pick up the monthly tab. If space allows, some employers will provide an in-house workout room.

For a corporate wellness program to succeed, Walker said, it needs more than a gym affiliation. If people



RESOURCES:

- **Health Club Directory.com** at healthclubdirectory.com/health_clubs/clubResults/CA/California/San%20Francisco
- **City Search** at sanfrancisco.citysearch.com/bestof/winners/health_club
- **SF Station** at sfstation.com/health-clubs/business-directory

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aren't using the facilities, the program won't work.

"We want to motivate people to come in regularly, and empower them," Walker said. "We have to take that approach ... if we turn off a member, they're not going to come back."

The club's assessment of new members includes information about any injuries. "That will dictate what you can safely do. Do you spend most of your day in front of a computer? The trainer can see muscular imbalances and recommend strength training. This will help you move toward your goal," Walker said.

Fitness is part of a lifestyle package, said Cindy Hom, owner of Apex Wellness in San Francisco, a personal

training facility with one-on-one service. People also need to incorporate nutrition into their daily lives, not just exercise.

Walker said Club One will manage space in a employer's building and, in effect, bring a program to the work site.

"It's important to set people up for success," he said, "and that's something I try to teach employers."

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