

[WORKPLACE WELL-BEING: DION KLEIN]

Healthier workers, happier outcomes

A corporate responsibility

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EMPLOYERS have a duty — yes, a duty — to take care of their employees and provide them the space and time to develop as people! It does not matter if the organisation is government or non-government, employers must invest in their employees to ensure the success of the organisation.

This may be a blatant statement, but it is also a fact. The truly successful companies appreciate their employees (and not just a “thank you” or pat on the back), and give the employees the opportunity to expand their own personal development — mentally, intellectually, emotionally, physically, financially and spiritually.

How many organisations can say that they actually “do right” by their staff? Could your employees yell out at the top of their lungs, “I work for the best company in Canberra! [or Australia]?”

One hundred of the best companies to work for in the United States were highlighted in a recent issue of *Fortune* magazine. Edward Jones, an investment company with more than 7500 employees, based in St Louis, Missouri, won top honours. “This stockbroker spends 3.8 per cent of its payroll on training annually, with an average of 146 hours for every employee,” the magazine says.

Other Top-100 companies offer full or partially subsidised amenities such as free yoga classes, a state-of-the-art-gym, a health clinic, on-site massages, and in-house intramural recreation activities.

Some companies offer incentives to their employees to develop themselves, but at the end of the day, if the employee is happier coming to work there will probably be more productivity and loyalty in the workplace. One company offers its employees the opportunity to take unused sick-leave time and convert it into cash or vacation.

Even smaller companies allow managers to negotiate benefits including fitness memberships and flexible schedules.

Another company promotes itself as family-friendly, offering a lactation room with breast pumps, and children of employees starting college are sent care packages from the company.

A Connecticut-based hospital has musicians and clowns stroll through patient units and dogs roam the halls as part of a pet visitation program.

While in the US, I attended a worksite wellness conference in Texas for the state departments. One of the key points of the conference was that if you change the environment of the organisation, you also change the state of being of the organisation and the individuals in it.

So how does an organisation change the environment of the organisation? First, it has to start at the top. Research has shown that for effective employee-wellness programs, the commitment must be made at the top, and this goes beyond the chief executive signing off approval of incorporating such a program.

The Commissioner of the Texas Department of Health was extremely active in the Commissioner’s Physical Fitness Day (aka National Employee Health and Fitness Day). He took time out of his busy schedule to be part of the walk, tug of war and other festivities throughout the day. That is leading by example!

Another example of rewarding employees for their commitment to their personal physical fitness was that those who participated in various programs were eligible to receive four hours off (compliments of the department). The theory was that the individual was going to be more productive at work as well as possibly have more loyalty to the organisation.

A second factor of successful programs is being able to offer variety, so that they cater to the demographics of the employees as well as the types of jobs within the workplace.

For example, if the job entails a lot of heavy lifting, it would be appropriate for the company to offer core strength-conditioning programs in order to possibly reduce the number of injuries. If there are many desk workers, on-site neck and shoulder massages have shown to assist in reducing the number of over-use syndromes.

A large Canberra government department has been instrumental in leading corporate wellness in the workplace. The Department of Urban Services recently won the Certificate of Recognition in the Independent Category and the Certificate of Excellence for the project entitled “Promoting a Healthy Workplace” which encouraged participation during working hours in health-

promoting strategies, with strong support from the organisation’s management.

The department also won the Most Active Workplace Aware in Fitness ACT’s Corporate Health and Fitness Challenge in 2001 and 2002. Fitness ACT is looking to host this event again in 2003 despite the lack of government funding and support, because it believes that fitness and health are instrumental to employees’ overall well-being as well as increased contribution to the workplace (including productivity).

Last year’s findings showed that the four-week event not only significantly increased participants’ overall well-being but also decreased stress. Aside from the mental/emotional benefits, many experienced physical benefits including decreases in weight and girth measurement.

As we get back into our work routine for 2003, upper management must take a serious look at how they are servicing not only their customers but also their employees.

Do they offer their employees programs or the time to participate in programs for personal development?

Do the employees feel a sense of belonging in the workplace or is it just a place to pick up the cheque? Would your organisation be on the Top 100 Companies to Work For in Canberra list?

The workplace of today and the future is changing — the place one works is also the place one can personally develop.

Dr Dion Klein is director of Balanced Concepts, a company specialising in corporate wellness programs for the public and private sector. If you think that you have the best company to work for in Canberra, contact him at drdionk@bigpond.com or go to <http://www.balancedconcepts.com.au>.

FROM THE TOP



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USEFUL SITES

Best Companies

<http://www.fortune.com/fortune/bestcompanies>

State Employees Health Fitness and Education Act of 1983

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/statutes/go/go0066400.html>

Healthpact Certificates of Recognition

<http://www.health.act.gov.au/healthpact/recognition2002.html>

Fitness ACT Corporate Health and Fitness Challenge

www.fitnessact.com.au

Balanced Concepts

www.balancedconcepts.com.au