

Advisers find onsite fitness fits employers' needs

With so many intricate wellness strategies out there, advisers and their clients are trying to think differently. They're also trying to keep it simple by having health and fitness experts visit their worksites to get employees moving.

Corporate wellness is much more than random actions aimed to improve employee behaviors. Wellness efforts have become a strategic, unified and branded effort to measure where the health of an employee population is and where it needs to be to improve a company's bottom line.

But is true wellness more simplistic than that? Could bringing in a health nut to talk to employees and lead them in exercise be enough to see improved health outcomes?

Neil Simons thinks so. He's the president of Rockville, Md.-based Independent Benefit Services and a client of Rick Bradley. As an adviser and business owner, Simons has Bradley's company — Rick's Quick Fit, which includes a book, workout program and consulting/training operation — visit his office to

help his staff get active. Bradley typically works with indi-

viduals and employers, but the pair's relationship has an innovative element.

"We pay [Bradley] a retainer every month to have him do so many seminars a month. So, we call him in to do the kickoffs for our clients' fitness and wellness programs," says Simons. "About a dozen of our clients use this service. Some of the smaller companies don't see the value in it, but with the bigger guys it's been really good."

And Rick's Quick Fit certainly serves some "big guys." Companies like Lockheed Martin, National Institutes of Health, Home Depot and Exxon Mobil have all sought his services. Bradley says his plan is popular because it combines cardio, strength, endurance and flexibility activities into an easy routine that can fit into anyone's day.

"Many studies now show if people walk just 10 minutes a day it lowers their chance of cardiovascular disease," says Bradley. "You can have diet and stress management all you want, but getting people to walk is really important."

Lou Boland, owner of Boland Services, a commercial air-conditioning and service business in Rockville, Md. says his 300 employees think having a real live person motivate and guide fitness is important. Since the company began using Rick's Quick Fit three years ago they've seen such an improvement in health care costs they haven't needed to implement any other wellness plans.

"We can tell its paying off.



Health

We've been able to help guys who were heart attacks waiting to happen," says Boland. "I mean we could have invested in a gym and done a bunch of other crazy things, but I think this approach of his has been much more helpful for us."

Boland says having someone come to the worksite who is athletic and passionate about healthy lifestyles means more to his employees than having a fancy on-site gym.

"I think that's what happens with most corporate fitness programs, they think the fancy room and the showers and saunas are going to do it for them, but I think it's more people-oriented than machine-oriented," says Boland.

Simons agrees. The high-touch approach yields the best results.

"Having that interaction with a coach keeps them accountable to somebody," says Simons. "The online programs aren't going to reach out of your computer and make you drop that snickers bar."

As a benefit adviser, implementing wellness programs is just a sliver of Simons' business, but the fitness coach element he adds to the plans is what

themselves. Her business does a variety of coaching, from health, wellness and disease management to work/life balance and stress relief consultations. Often stress and lack of balance cause people to engage in unhealthy behaviors, affecting the physical health of the workforce, says Levine.

She serves employers directly and also has several contracts with benefit consultants.

Although she typically serves larger clients, in the past three months she's had 16 companies with 100 employees or less knock on her door. Levine believes employers of all sizes are beginning to see how coaches enhance a wellness program.



▷ Rick Bradley demonstrates exercises in his Quick Fit Deck of exercise cards, designed to guide employees through their 15 minute workout.

yoga and wellness activities to work. The company works largely with brokers and aims to improve the physical and mental health of a workforce while eliminating the drive time, gym memberships and boring classes. The company has had success helping employers improve their bottom line health care costs, reduce workers' comp and slow employee turnover.

"It's right there on-site for employees. The employer

can cover it completely or it can be split between employer and employee as a voluntary program. So, the employees know someone is looking out for their health, so it's a great way to get people excited about fitness and reduce health care costs," says Krista Hintz, marketing coordinator at Guru To You.

Guru To You has a staff including yoga, tai chi and Pilates instructors, as well as dietitians and massage therapists available to come to the worksite to provide consultation and instruction. The company even offers a program called "Desktop Yoga." The class teaches employees how to prevent the most common workers' comp claim: carpal tunnel syndrome. The hands-on class teaches employees an ergonomic work style, which in turn produces a healthier more productive workplace.

"It's high-touch. There's someone right there in front of them, motivating them to keep going. While if it's just wellness support over the phone you don't get that personal attention," says Hintz. **EBA**

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makes that offering stand out to employers. Many health coaches are leaving the gyms, the athletic sidelines and the hospitals to work directly on the worksite — sometimes brought in by employers and other times by advisers, like Simons.

Terri Levine, known as the "Guru of Coaching" and president of CoachInstitute.com is an onsite wellness coach who's company provides worksite consulting and trains other people to become wellness coaches

"This is a growing segment in the coaching industry," says Levine. "There's a lot of evidence that the coaching model works. It's high-touch, there's lots of accountability and there's a low dropout rate."

Just as coaches like Levine are looking at the behavioral health side of wellness and how it relates to physical fitness, there are some alternative worksite wellness coaches. Chicago-based Guru To You, was founded by an HR professional who wanted to bring