

A New Year's resolution: Pump up that wellness program

BY BETH TAYLOR

A new year is about new beginnings. In addition to taking a personal health inventory, now also is a good time to pump up your clients' wellness programs. Whether their programs lost steam or never got off the ground, you can help your clients plan for a jump-start in the new year with a few basic steps.

Brainstorm

Start by asking your client why their wellness program stalled or hasn't started. What is at the root of the problem? Is it not knowing where to start, a lack of senior support, too little money or not enough time? Or all of the above? Take a hard look. Too many times, it is far easier, although much less satisfying, to simply not deal with the issue. Help your clients get out of the blocks.

Tackle each obstacle separately, but don't try to do it alone. There is power in brainstorming with others who have the same challenges. People love to share their success stories. Perhaps you have clients or know employer groups in the community with thriving wellness programs. Connect them with your struggling client. Interacting with peers creates a dynamic synergy for new ideas.

Consider online wellness support groups and other online resources, such as the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, WELCOA or Mypyramid.gov. There is a wealth of information and support out there. Find the champions for your cause.

Make a plan

Don't let the momentum gained from brainstorming wither and die like so many New Year's resolutions. Create a

plan from the best ideas and start with what you know. Clients know far more than they think they do, but they need your help. Gather information such as:

- Employee demographics
- Employee survey results
- Wellness offerings from carriers
- EAP benefits
- Claims data

The data provide insight into employees' interests, habits and possible topics for education.

Establish a calendar of events or a timeline to serve as the framework throughout the year. A good place to start is by incorporating the national monthly observation calendar. You can download a copy from the U.S.

Department of Health & Human Services' Web site, healthfinder.gov. Events such as October's Breast Cancer Awareness and November's Great American Smoke Out receive a good deal of media attention. That attention helps reinforce your clients' worksite activities on wellness.

Start small

Starting and sustaining a wellness program is like running a marathon. The race begins with the first step, so start small. If it's a new wellness campaign, newsletters, brochures and "lunch and learns" on specific health topics are inexpensive, manageable first steps.

Marathon runners often experience problems along the way. Make sure your client is in it for the entire race. If the wellness program stalled along the way, determine why and suggest a remedy. For example, if committee meetings don't produce results, introduce some "new

blood." Take care of the small stumbles so you can help your client finish the race.

Whatever steps you take, measure your results. Know the topics discussed, the frequency of communication, the number of "hits" online or the number of attendees at an event. Use the results to adjust strategies to keep employees interested in the program. If you don't measure it, you can't manage it.

Measuring results alone, however, may not provide the whole picture. A successful program encourages feedback. In-

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clude "letters to the editor," evaluation forms or posts to an intranet. Surveys can help determine why "lunch and learns" do not have better attendance. Are employees unwilling

to sacrifice their lunch, or are the topics of no interest? Are there other topics more interesting to employees? Failing to ask is asking to fail.

Feedback and results enable you to take the pulse of your clients' efforts. Together, they build a strong base for future planning for a more robust and comprehensive wellness program.

Just do it

Some New Year's resolutions never make it out of the box. Help your client realize that it does not matter how small the step, doing something is better than doing nothing. There may be false starts or stumbles along the way, but they can't finish what they don't start. Make 2010 the year they pump up that wellness program. Just do it. **EBA**

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