

# Practical Tips for Getting Your Employees Internally Motivated Toward Wellness

Motivating employees to participate in wellness programs consistently tops the list of problems for wellness professionals each year, according to our exclusive new surveys.

Nearly 42 percent of respondents to one **Wellness Program Management Advisor** survey cited motivation as the biggest obstacle they've found in initiating or operating a wellness program.

While some wellness managers said they are looking for increased employee participation in programs or boosts to current low participation rates, others said they are combating the problems of "apathy" and maintaining individuals' interest once they are enrolled in programs.

Several respondents, for example, said getting people to commit to their program - particularly a comprehensive, multi-session program - was a huge obstacle.

"Short-term, they participate (i.e., flu shots, etc.); long-term, fitness teams, they don't want to commit," one wellness manager explained.

"I think this phenomenon shows that time management is a wellness service we should invest in," said a program director with 15 years of experience in wellness program management. "I've been hearing about this same problem for at least a decade."

Although veterans acknowledge the task is difficult, you **can** help your program participants develop internal motivation.

Many wellness and health promotion programs seek to externally motivate individuals to participate - that is, the desire to participate is grounded in anticipation of some reward (e.g., financial incentives, T-shirts, and so on). However, if an individual is internally motivated - no external rewards involved - the likelihood of that person making long-term behavioral change is greater, some industry experts say.

Getting employees internally motivated is not an impossible ideal, according to Chip Gay, exercise physiologist with Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital/Mayo Health System, Mankato, Minn.

In fact, during a **Wellness Program Management Advisor**-sponsored conference, Gay related several key points that will assist you in helping employees and program participants develop internal motivation.

First, he said, you must develop programs based on what the individual or group wants, and **make it realistic**.

"If you tell people what to do, you immediately put up barriers - 'Who are you to tell me what to do?'" Gay explained.

Next is to start gradually. There are no quick fixes and doing too much can be overwhelming, he added.

Also:

- Act as a **guide**, not a director.
- Don't offer help unless asked. You want to encourage participants to ask questions. "If they're asking the questions, they're going to be more motivated," explained Gay.
- Listen to employees. You want to know not only what they want to do and what they are willing to do, but what they **can** do, he said.
- Show them that it is not difficult and does not require a huge time commitment.
- Let employees "do their own thing."
- Believe and act on what you teach and expect of others - as a worksite wellness coordinator and as a business.
- Knowledge is power. Increase your knowledge as well as the knowledge of participants.

You also want to help reduce individuals' stress - simply - by helping them improve their self-confidence, Gay said. One way to help build self-confidence is to help these individuals succeed. If they succeed at something they didn't think they could do, their self-confidence will increase, he said. Other effective stress-busters: don't judge other people; don't compare yourself to others; and delete the need to understand other people's behavior.

Fun is the best thing for improving internal motivation, Gay added.

"Make it fun and enjoyable and people will participate," he said. And, finally, variety is the spice of wellness.

"The bigger variety [of programs] you can offer, the more people you can hit," Gay said.

*This summary report has been developed by the editorial staff of **Wellness Program Management Letter**, a nationally circulated management newsletter serving wellness professionals since 1996. The trends and developments identified in this report have been culled from in-depth information reported in **Wellness Program Management***