

Company Wellness Programs makes ‘Dollars and Cents’

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Google has long been regarded as one of the nation’s best employers. The reputation is based largely on the concern the company has for its employees’ “wellness.”

But Kern County employers do not need to look to this technology giant for a role model. There are plenty of local companies providing superb employee wellness benefits.

Perhaps the “Cadillac” of these benefits is the recently announced partnering of Paramount Agricultural Companies and Kaiser Permanente. Paramount has established two worksite health care centers – Paramount Health Centers by Kaiser Permanente – at Paramount Farms pistachio and almond processing plant in Lost Hills

and another at the Paramount Citrus Cuties plant in Delano.

The centers are open to all regular full-time and part-time Paramount employees and their families. They do not have to be Kaiser plan members to receive care. The centers are funded completely by the company.

The centers are staffed by medical professionals and a health educator, giving employees access to help with controlling chronic ailments, such as diabetes. Weight loss and exercise programs are included.

“Paramount is committed to a culture of wellness. ... These centers take a different approach to health care – one that encourages preventative care,” explained Michael Wolfe, vice president of Roll Global’s human resources, in a recent news article about the program. Roll Global is Paramount’s parent company.

Paramount also established cafeterias at company worksites, including its two citrus packinghouses in Delano, that offer “healthy” menus for employees.

Not all companies can afford to provide these “Cadillac” benefits. But most companies can afford to create an effective wellness program. Some tips to consider:

- Determine company and worker needs. This should include surveying workers, managers, supervisors and owners. With the help of the company’s insurance and health care providers, a “risk assessment” can target specific needs.
- Create a plan. Depending on the survey results, the plan may include fitness classes, wellness workshops, health screenings and worksite assistance, such as flu shot clinics.
- Communicate. Notify employees that benefits are being provided.
- Encourage participation. Surveys indicate about 34 percent of workers do not participate in their companies’ wellness programs. Some ways to encourage participation include company contributions into health savings accounts or health reimbursement accounts; financial

incentives, such as gift certificates or discounts; and paid time off to participate in wellness events.

It's important too to remember that effective wellness programs can improve a company's employee retention and productivity.

"Principal Financial Well-Being Index: American Workers," recently reported that 45 percent of the employees surveyed said an employer-sponsored wellness program would encourage them to stay in their current jobs.

Nearly 60 percent of the surveyed employees credited their participation in wellness programs with giving them more energy to be productive at work and 43 percent said they missed fewer days at work because of their participation.

Corporate Wellness Magazine recently presented "dollars and cents" evidence that wellness programs are good investments. The magazine reported researchers' findings that every \$1 invested in these programs yields roughly \$4 in savings through reduced sick days, higher productivity and decreased overall health costs.....what a great ROI!

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