

## Resolve to Create a Healthy Workforce in 2013

By Holly Culhane



The New Year will soon dawn as will our “regrets” from this past year and resolutions to do better in the coming year. Likely we ate too much at holiday gatherings, fell off our exercise routines and failed to give up some of our “bad habits.” We vow 2013 will be different. We will lose weight, exercise more and stop those bad habits, such as smoking.

Sound familiar? Yes, we have all heard these words before and some of them have come out of our own mouths.

Businesses also embrace New Year’s resolutions. And some of them focus on the well-being, or “wellness” of workers. January is a fresh start month; a popular time for businesses to re-tool their employee wellness programs.

Many companies provide wellness programs because they sincerely care about their employees. But these programs also can affect a company’s bottom line.

A 2010 report produced by Harvard University economists revealed that for every dollar spent on an employee wellness program, medical costs decreased by about \$3.27 and costs related to employee absenteeism dropped by \$2.73.

Researchers concluded that nearly 25 percent of all employer-employee medical costs are related to issues that can be addressed by employer-based wellness programs. Among the top issues were body weight (above or below normal), high blood pressure, high blood sugar levels and depression. Often an employee struggles with more than one of these issues, compounding the costs.

Creating an effective employer-based wellness program requires more than just sending out a flyer and making services “available.” Influencing employees’ motivation to participate is key.

Some “structural” aspects can be imposed and a “supportive environment” created. Elements can include a smoke-free policy that applies beyond buildings’ interiors to an entire facility; on-site healthy food sources, including catering services; quiet, or stress-free break rooms; and on-site medical clinics for such things as flu vaccines and wellness check-ups.

An effective wellness program will help workers identify health risks and provide on-site resources, such as education and employee assistance-related mental health and crisis intervention programs, to help them reduce health risks.

Of course, employee buy-in is critical. To enhance success, a company’s leaders must show support – both by their personal involvement and financial backing.

Employees also must feel empowered. A program that is imposed from above can be a turn-off, while one that is created as a result of a “team effort” is more likely to succeed. Wellness needs and programs can be identified through employee surveys, focus groups or a wellness advisory team.

Other ways to encourage participation include:

- Financial incentives – by providing a small reward, in the range of \$40 to \$60 a month, for some degree of participation.
- Rewarding success – for reaching a wellness milestone. Give a reward, which could be financial, such as a bonus or reduced health insurance deductibles; or some company benefit, such as an extra day off.
- Publicly recognizing success by developing a special employee recognition award.

Creating a healthy work environment and enhancing employee health requires a comprehensive approach that balances education, risk identification, interventions and a supportive environment. And as those employers who have walked this road will tell you, the end result is well worth the effort.

***This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Tuesday, December 25, 2012. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website [www.pasassociates.com](http://www.pasassociates.com) and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.***

***P•A•S Associates has expertise in human resources and other areas involving employment issues. P•A•S Associates, in providing this website, does not represent that it is acting as an attorney or that it is giving any form of legal advice or legal opinion. P•A•S Associates recommends that before making any decision pertaining to human resource issues or employment issues, including the utilization of information contained on this website, the advice of legal counsel to determine the legal ramifications of the use of any such information be obtained.***