



Veronica Marsden is President of Tri Fit Inc., located in Oakville, ON. She has over 30 years experience in workplace health promotion, and has spoken and been published internationally.

STARTING AND SUSTAINING A Healthy Workplace

Many case studies in North America tout the return on investment (ROI) of workplace health programs. This is good news for employers, who gain from lower absenteeism and health care cost increases, improved productivity, and greater employee focus. It simply makes sense that healthy, happy employees are sick or hurt less often and more engaged in their work.

However, few Canadian organizations have a comprehensive approach to ensure strategic alignment and maximum ROI. Whether you have 50 or 500 employees, thorough and thoughtful planning ensures success and sustainability.

Typically, Human Resources is tasked with organizing a health strategy. A key HR responsibility is to inform and educate the leadership team about how a wellness initiative will drive business strategy. That team must then walk the talk, encourage participation, recognize accomplishments, and provide adequate resources.

Visa Canada, a Toronto-based firm with 100 employees, decided in 2006 to implement a wellness program. A new wellness committee surveyed employees to assess their needs and interests. An external organizational health audit helped evaluate their workplace culture and environment to identify opportunities and barriers. These exercises helped Visa understand the health impact of existing programs and services, their physical environment, and policies and procedures. This formed the foundation of their wellness strategy, which is supported by their Mission: "Visa Canada is committed to promoting a culture that supports employees in leading a healthy and balanced lifestyle."

INTRIA Items Inc., located in Mississauga Ontario, provides a great example of a successful program. With 4,000 employees across Canada, their wellness program was launched in 2004. Initially the program was simple - a national stretch program was needed to address the rising incidence of repetitive strain

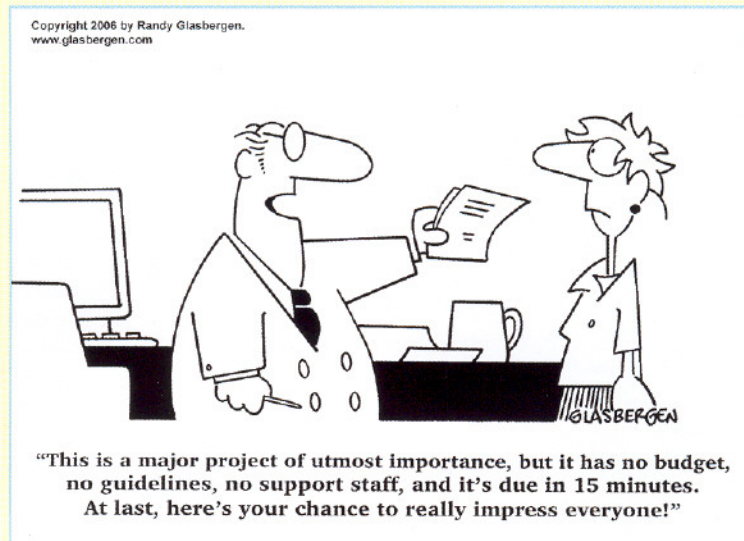
injuries. In each of their 17 processing centres, employees were trained to lead daily stretch breaks. The program is led by a dedicated team of 200 employee volunteers. Intria's wellness program has since expanded to include health fairs, regular wellness bulletins, nutrition education, and a walking club.

A MODEL OF SUCCESS

Your strategy will identify key drivers (success factors) for the program, specify employee and organizational needs, state the program mission, include three or four goals and strategies tied in with each

goal, and list necessary resources.

Right from the outset, decide how success will be measured. Choose metrics that are important to the organization, valid and reliable, and readily available. Analyze health and EAP benefit utilization and cost increases, rates of absence and disability, employee turnover, or simply participation levels. Consider recent changes in the company that would affect costs or morale. Use results from an employee engagement or satisfaction survey.



THREE STARTING POINTS

In 1999, Christie Canada successfully introduced an on-site fitness centre and wellness program for their head office employees in Kitchener, Ontario. Their comprehensive program was linked to attracting and retaining young engineers and the launch of the new Christie brand - "Christie Cares about You". It's clear the program works: it is highly valued, benefit renewal costs are far below industry standards, and employee turnover is less than 3% a year.

bh IN BRIEF

To assure success and longevity, any healthy workplace strategy must align with business objectives. But more Canadian organizations need to invest the time in careful planning and internal communication to meet this fundamental tenet.

Three corporate examples of good starts and sustained efforts are shared. The key success factors common to virtually all worksite health initiatives are outlined, and the value of volunteer involvement as a proxy for good planning is made clear. George Cuthbert's *Commentary* emphasizes the role and benefits of strong leadership.

TRY THIS

Tri Fit's Organizational Health Audit™ helps organizations identify key factors that create a healthy work environment. It is available free at www.trifit.com.

This process helps to target areas that can be positively impacted by a health strategy and provides a baseline for evaluating change.

Recruiting employee volunteers can help link planning with implementation, ensure good internal marketing, and help coordinate activities like health fairs and workshops. This also helps lower operational costs, although training will probably be needed. Getting and keeping volunteers is a good bellwether of having the right program. If employees commit their time to something they feel is worthwhile, that probably means other things are in place, like management support, good supervision, and adequate training.

SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE HEALTH PROGRAMS HAVE SEVERAL COMMON FACTORS:

- Executive support is evident.
 - Health needs are formally surveyed and investigated.
 - Health goals are aligned with business strategies.
 - Employees are involved every step of the way, with good balance between paid advice and volunteer participation.
 - Timelines are set to track progress.
 - Programs reflect the unique needs of the organization.
 - Regular measurement and evaluation occur, with findings communicated to executives and employees alike.
- Small successes are recognized.

Planning for a healthier workplace is like training for an athletic event. Start slowly and build momentum. Keep your goals in plain view, evaluate your progress, and rely on your team for support.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

DIMENSION	MEASURES
1. Process	Program implementation
2. Reaction	Participant satisfaction
3. Learning	Changes in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge
4. Application	Changes in individual behaviours or actions
5. Impact	Changes in work and health outcomes
6. Return on Investment	Program benefits and costs

Source: John Yardley, Ph.D., Brock University and Metrics@Work, adapted from Philips et. al, 2001.

Bottom Line Commentary

by George Cuthbert, CA, ACMA



There is nothing to add to the Christie Canada, Visa Canada and INTRIA initiatives, experiences and results other than to say: Amen! Amen! Amen!

However, I would like to stress the key interconnectivity between the role of leadership and creating a healthy workplace. Danielle Pratt in her book "The Healthy Scorecard" states it well: "Good Health is Good Leadership is Great Business."

The "Model of Success" cites the factor "Executive Support is Evident". I respectfully but strongly believe this is seriously understated. "Executive Support", a.k.a. *leadership*, must be visionary, committed, participatory, fair, and demanding in the use of metrics. "What gets measured gets done, and what gets measured gets improved."

A healthy workplace strategy and wellness programming strongly displays a "caring" attitude by business leaders for their employees. Feeling cared for is a powerful emotion. Good leaders work at an emotional level and generate:

- Confidence in people who were uncertain.
- Action where there was hesitation.
- Teamwork where there was a lack of cooperation.
- Optimism where there was cynicism.

THE BOTTOM LINE is that leaders must lead! And it is much easier to attract followers if they feel healthy, energized, and cared about.