

## WOMEN AT WORK

# Building successful wellness programs

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Over the years, many companies have recognized the benefits of improving workers' health through a variety of approaches. There is, however, a big difference in the success of each company's health and wellness programs.

According to the Society of Human Resource Management, 86 percent of U.S. employers offer some form of Employee Wellness Programs (EWP) with an employee participation rate of only 15 percent. Since every dollar spent implementing an EWP yields four dollars in savings through reduced sick days, higher productivi-



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ty and decreased overall health costs (states *Corporate Wellness Magazine*) — it's imperative that your plan succeeds.

So how can you assure your EWP's success? The following are crucial factors:

» Determine the needs of your employees, as well as your needs as an employer. You can do the first part with a simple health risk assessment often available from insurance companies.

» Analyze the data

from these assessments to create a plan that combines *both* wellness education and physical activity. Remember that everyone is different so don't roll out a "one program fits all" EWP.

» Create a communication plan that spells out the EWP's framework as well as the different methods and times during the year to communicate that information to employees. This is critical to keeping the EWP top of mind.

» Rely on competition to create peer pressure, recognizing that getting fit is as rewarding as winning an event.

» Don't rely on self-reported data or the honor system. Instead, rely on

trackers to make sure activities are actually accomplished.

» Establish a sensible incentive plan to drive long term engagement. It takes time to break bad habits and form new, but better ones.

Healthy employees will help drive your company's bottom line — a healthy employee is a better employee; one who can focus better, be more productive and more creative. Instituting a successful EWP is a win-win.

*Heather Nichting is owner of Regain Physical Therapy. This column is written by members of the Rochester Women's Network (rwn.org).*