

Healthy staff mean healthy profits

Health and wellbeing initiatives are becoming increasingly popular in businesses throughout the UK.

Companies large and small now realise that a healthy employee is a more productive employee.

Taking an active stance on health can help to improve staff retention, reduce absenteeism and promote a more effective working environment.

Employees in good health are 20% more productive than those in poor health, according to the Institute of Health and Productivity Management.

In today's unrelenting business world, more and more is expected from a company's biggest asset – its people.

Challenging environment

This challenging, high-intensity working environment can lead to problems for both bosses and staff, especially in a small business where the absence of just one person can throw a huge strain on the rest of the team.

Latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive suggest that at least one in five employees are stressed, and that the problem is costing the British economy nearly £5 billion a year.

The average level of absence per employee in the UK is 9.1 working days per year, and the average cost of absence is now £588 per employee per year, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Absenteeism, staff turnover and low productivity are big issues facing

companies today. In addition to these growing concerns, many companies also now face difficulties recruiting the best talent.

Wellness schemes are now being used as a tool to attract and retain both experienced individuals and graduates. Potential employees are attracted to companies that offer and promote health at work.

It therefore makes sound business sense to invest in keeping your employees healthy and energised whilst fighting the stresses of business life.

There are many ways in which you can take a pro-active approach to health at work; it can be as simple as providing fresh fruit and water each day to investing in health and wellbeing services such as health club membership, massage, nutritional advice and posture training.

Investing time and money in the health of your staff is no different from any other kind of investment; you need to see a positive return.

In saying this, measuring the impact of any kind of health initiative can be tricky, as measures such as staff sick days, staff retention and improvements in productivity can be affected by many

Your staff are probably the most important – and expensive – asset you have. Spending small amounts on health at work can mean a big boost in the bottom line, as Oliver Gray explains.



other factors. It is therefore important to look at the picture as a whole when measuring the impact.

What to measure

- Staff satisfaction;
- Staff retention;
- Overall staff morale;
- Productivity and focus;
- Health. Health surveys can help to give an overall picture of the health of your staff;
- Stress. There are basic stress tests that can be found on the Internet;
- Staff sick days.

Get feedback from staff on what they think are the challenges, as well as their suggestions on possible solutions.

Your team will often have a good idea of what is needed based on their own experience of the working environment. Individuals often know that they should eat more healthily and exercise more regularly, but all too often they don't get round to fitting it in – or don't know how to start.

Clarify the key problems your business needs to address. You need to be clear on your top priority – are you looking to boost morale and improve staff satisfaction and retention? Do you

have a problem with sick days and long-term absenteeism caused by stress, back problems, or repetitive strain injuries? Are you looking for new ways to improve the productivity and focus of your team?

Set out some specific objectives, and decide on when you want to see the results and how you plan to measure the impact.

Look at your options and decide on three to five that could give you the required results.

Then look at trialling a few of these options to find out what will have the most positive impact for your business.

To ensure the take-up is high, it is important to explain your thinking to your staff.

And don't forget that you are part of the team, too – in fact, you're probably even more a victim of stress than they are. Taking part in a fitness programme will reinvigorate you for the challenges ahead.

Finally, it is essential to keep obtaining staff feedback and to continually evolve your approach to staff health.

Solutions

Healthy food

Nutrition is an important part of modern life, and what you eat affects the way you perform in the workplace.

Snacking on fizzy drinks, coffee, crisps and chocolate can be a problem, leading to employees suffering from low energy levels.

Providing staff with fresh fruit, water and healthy snack bars will improve energy levels, which can then have an impact on sustained improvements in productivity whilst also reducing sick days at a very low cost.

Investment per employee per month approximately £8.

Nutritional advice

Providing nutritional seminars for staff is a great way to improve their knowledge of healthy eating.

An hour's seminar from a qualified nutritionist provides practical advice and tips on how staff can make healthier choices when deciding their breakfast, lunch and dinner options.

This advice can have a great impact given that problems such as high blood pressure, obesity, allergies and low energy levels are on the increase.

Providing a seminar for your team once a quarter is a great way to help staff

keep on track with a healthy balanced diet, giving them greater energy levels and greater levels of sustained productivity, whilst reducing sick days.

Investment per employee per month approximately £12.

On-site chair massage

This type of massage is designed to treat ailments common to the modern office environment, including muscular tension, backaches and stress. It is also a highly effective treatment for repetitive strain injuries (RSI).

The massage is non-invasive. The subject remains fully clothed throughout and no oils are used. The massage takes place in a specially designed chair, lasts around 20 minutes and leaves the employee feeling refreshed and re-energised.

You should ensure that those supplying the service are fully qualified and insured to provide the service.

In addition, finding a service provider with an online booking system can take away the administrative burden from the company, as well as providing the facility for usage reports to ensure you are gaining full use from the service.

Investment per employee per month approximately £25.

The Alexander Technique

Investing in the Alexander Technique is a great way to improve the productivity of your workforce while addressing the causes of back problems, upper neck and shoulder tension and repetitive strain injuries.

Learning the Alexander Technique can help to prevent or alleviate undue tension or poor posture, as well as help with muscular problems, breathing disorders and stress-related conditions.

With one lesson per month per employee, this technique can help employees learn to improve their posture, by unlearning all their bad habits such as sitting at their computer hunched over, head forward and feet crossed.

Investment per employee per month approximately £30.

Gym memberships

This can be a great way to help employees improve their overall health and fitness by setting up a group discount with your local gym, and possibly subsidising sessions.

The big challenge with this initiative is that is not controlled within the workplace, so it is therefore harder to

monitor if staff are making the most of the facility.

It is therefore essential that if you do provide this benefit you meet with your health club regularly to look at usage as well as discuss ways in which you can encourage your team to make use of the facility more regularly.

Investment per employee per month approximately £50.

Overall benefits

- Re-energises your people to improve focus and productivity;
- Increased staff motivation and commitment;
- Improved staff satisfaction and retention;
- Establishes your company as an employer of choice;
- Enhanced business image;
- Reduction in staff sick days;
- Reduction in stress;
- Reduction in back problems and repetitive strain injuries;
- Promotes a more effective work-life balance;
- Improved company performance and profits.

Investing in the health and wellbeing of your staff makes good business sense. The returns can be high, through reductions in sick days and improvements in productivity and staff retention – at a relatively low cost.

In busy times this can often be put to the bottom of your to-do list – however, by setting up the right initiative with the right support it can be easier than you think.

If your workforce is healthy, they will work at more optimum levels of performance – and that has to be good for business ❖

Infobank

Oliver Gray is Managing Director of energiseYou Ltd, a company that provides ways of improving the health and wellbeing of staff, and offers benefits to your bottom line from investing in employee health.

Oliver has over 12 years' experience in health and wellbeing and prior to setting up energiseYou managed 14 premier health clubs in the City and West End of London.

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