

# Corporate “wellness” programs are missing crucial element.



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**Food Choices.** Studies show that up to 80% of the cost of healthcare in the United States is driven by our food choices. For most businesses (and other large organizations), disease and the cost of healthcare are huge problems. Not only does “disease care” cost \$trillions, it also takes a mighty toll on employee productivity, creativity, absenteeism and morale.

The numbers are staggering. A 2014 Towers Watson survey of 595 American corporations put the average total health expenditures per employee in 2013 at \$11,938. So for an organization of 1,000 people, that’s an annual medical bill of roughly \$12 million (mostly paid by the company). In a company with 10,000 employees, the employer portion approaches \$100 million.

**Traditional corporate wellness programs don’t work.** Virtually all of the 595 companies in the survey already had a wellness program in place—yet the cost of healthcare for employers keeps going up. That’s because those programs are missing the single most important ingredient—The **FOOD**.

By simply helping employees and their families adopt a true, health-promoting way of eating, those medical bills can be cut in half. We estimate that, for any organization, the cost of healthcare can be cut by 20% to 50% or more. Why the wide range in the estimate?

**It’s Leadership.** That’s the big variable—*How important will this*

*health promotion initiative be in your organization?*

The degree of success for this type of project is directly proportional to the strength of *leadership* from the top executive in the organization—the CEO, the president, the mayor or the governor. If this program is not important to the CEO, it will not be important to the other senior officers and, therefore, will not work very well.

**But will the employees actually change?** Yes! When they become educated about the “big picture” impact of their food choices, many of them will voluntarily change—for any number of reasons. But, by offering an opportunity to participate in an organized, CEO led, corporate program, the odds of that positive change rise sharply. **Five reasons:**

1. **Leadership.** With a CEO and executive team that truly “get it” about food, they are equipped to greatly influence behavior in a group setting—by making food-based wellness an integral part of the company culture.
2. **Education.** The enterprise can organize and conduct training at the place of business—during working hours. Employee cafeterias can become huge assets during this process.
3. **Peer support.** By organizing program participants into groups or teams, each employee will have the benefit of receiving support and encouragement from their teammates—and they will all be accountable to each other.
4. **Green Initiatives.** Most corporations already have *green* initiatives but are missing the single biggest opportunity to truly make a difference—while enhancing their public image in the marketplace.
5. **\$incentives.** The CEO can authorize financial incentives tied to participation and level of success: discounts on company products, lower employee’s share of health insurance,

discounts in company cafeteria, extra vacation and even cash bonuses.

**More good news.** Certainly, the opportunity for a medium to large organization (10,000 employees) to save \$40 or \$50 million a year on health care costs would be fantastic! But there’s more.

Other benefits from such a program might very well be more important to the long-term success of the enterprise than just saving money:

*Less absenteeism, better morale, higher productivity, less employee turnover and enhanced public image such as: most admired, best place to work, greenest company & the nation’s healthiest workforce.*



**Strategic advantage.** Saving the best for last. As the first wave of pioneering CEOs begin to take advantage of the many benefits that come from a healthier workforce, companies who don’t undertake similar initiatives will have trouble competing with those who do.

**The Bottom Line:** Truly promoting health improves the ability of an enterprise to gain market share; a POWERFUL reason why it must be sponsored and led by the CEO.

Sincerely,

*Jim Hicks*

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