

Communication Is Key to Wellness Success

Initiative in Brief

Genesee Packaging, Inc.'s (GPI) wellness committee knew that getting employee input would be critical for a successful wellness program. Luella Sherman, Human Resource Manager said, "We knew that [employee input] would help guide the initiatives and show us if we were on the right track."

However, getting employee input proved to be a challenge. GPI was not able to use the online version of the *Michigan Steps Up* health risk appraisal (HRA), because 75 percent of its employees did not have access to a computer, at work or at home. The company owners, Willie and Veronica Artis, were fully supportive of the wellness initiative, and approved of "clearing the floor" for 40 minutes while employees completed the HRA and the employee interest survey. Each company division had a scheduled time to leave the line, and it was expected that employees would be available to participate.

The wellness committee was proactive and anticipated that some employees might be resistant to wellness, while others might view it too lightly. The committee identified employees that had exceptional communication skills to act as facilitators and guide employees through the completion process. Sherman noted that the effective facilitators had the following common characteristics: they were able to tailor the messages to the employees, had a positive attitude, and were supportive of wellness. Sherman added, "You really need to know who you are talking to. People and group dynamics are different, even within the worksite."

Effective communication and supportive management helped GPI achieve an 80 percent completion rate. However, Sherman gives the credit to the employees. "We have high participation because [employees] want to know more about how to be healthy."

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Benefits

Noted benefits of the program are:

- Received input from cross-section of employees. New ideas come from unexpected places.
- Increased morale of employees.
- Showed that the management was committed to wellness when employees were allowed to participate in activities during the workday.

"We work in a very fast-paced environment, and sometimes employees think we don't care about them personally. Having the plant managers allow employees to participate during the workday showed that executive management and plant managers care."

Luella Sherman, Manager
Human Resource

Lessons Learned

- Tailor messages and activities to accommodate the needs of the employees and/or groups.
- Use plain language when communicating to employees. Many are hearing wellness messages for the first time.
- Be proactive and prepare answers for difficult questions. Humor can be effective, if appropriate.

Cost: Incentive prizes and employee time

Risk Factor: Smoking, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, stress

Impact/Reach: 280+ employees

Business/Sector: Packaging/Manufacturing

