

Sweat Equity: Working Out Workout Programs at Work

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October 17, 2013

by Ladan Nikravan (<http://www.workforce.com/author/ladannikravan/>).

Veronica Salerno, second from left, was hired by HGGC to help get the company's employees in shape. Photo courtesy of Exercise ETC Inc.

When private equity firm HGGC prepared for its annual fitness challenge in early 2012, its office in the West Palm Beach, Florida, hired bikini fitness competitor and personal trainer Veronica Salerno to help coach the participants.

The competition ended that spring, and Salerno was contracted to lead workouts for small groups of employees twice a week in the on-site fitness center. But she soon discovered that HGGC employees often are on the road and couldn't attend the workouts.

“Our employees travel a lot, and their health isn’t always on their minds, but our company understands that health is important,” said Ashley Truett, administrative assistant and office manager for HGGC. “If you keep your employees healthy and happy, they’ll stay motivated, want to be at work and continue to do well for you. The problem is traditional training doesn’t work on today’s schedules.”

As it turned out, Salerno’s fitness training met the company’s mobile workforce, using a hybrid of traditional personal exercise and social media. She meets less frequently with clients in person, but can work them out virtually almost daily.

With workplace wellness programs becoming more widespread — pushed in part by federal health care reform — Salerno said an out-of-office component can help employees fully engage no matter where they are.

According to Automatic Data Processing Inc.’s 2012 HR/Benefits Pulse Survey on Wellness, 41 percent of midsize companies (those with 50-999 employees) and 53 percent of large companies (those with 1,000-plus workers) offer exercise programs as part of their overall employee wellness program.

“As health care costs continue to rise, many companies adopt employee wellness programs to motivate their employees to lead healthier lives,” said Jessica Saperstein, division vice president of strategy and business development for ADP. “Improving employee health and well-being is the ultimate goal, and healthier employees are often more satisfied and productive in their professional lives.”

This year, under federal rules, the maximum reward an employee could save through workplace health incentives is 20 percent of the worker’s health insurance premium. Most employers offer discounts of 3 percent to 11 percent, according to Stand Up for Health Care, part of the consumer group Families USA. Next year, under the Affordable Care Act, there will be a maximum reward of 30 percent.

Robert Matthews, national director of sales for well-being and productivity at HumanaVitality, said there are benefits for employers, too. If employees are engaged in the health plan, including exercise offerings, and enough of a percentage of workers sign up, the employer can see a premium discount coming from insurers.

Salerno, who moved to the United States from Ecuador, has created a Facebook page for her company, Home Fitness Trainers Inc., and has encouraged every HGGC client to add it. She posts recipes, exercise routines and motivational tips on the page daily to keep clients engaged. She also adds all clients on Skype and

pushes them to use MyFitnessPal, a free online calorie counter and diet plan. Clients “add” her on the website or app, and she monitors their progress. She checks in regularly through these portals to make sure her clients stay on track.

“Corporate training is often a group activity, but it’s all about individual goals,” Salerno said. “I give everyone their own speed, agility and strength training exercises and couple those with diets that meet their needs. Social media lets me maintain a one-on-one relationship and pushes clients to be more accountable.”

Guy Andrews, executive director of Exercise ETC Inc., a provider of continuing education programs for the fitness community, said that fitness coaching makes personal training services more accessible to more people.

“Some people either cannot devote a set number of hours per week to training, or do not have the luxury of a structured schedule to plan for training sessions in advance,” Andrews said. “For others, the price of regular, personal training sessions is not sustainable. Fitness coaching is making training affordable and accessible.”

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