

February is Healthy Heart Month. It is a good time to think about healthy workplaces which can support healthy hearts and contribute to productive employees. This month the focus is on what a supervisor can do to support a healthy work environment.

We are interested in your feedback. Email your questions and comments to *LifeSolutions* at askeap@eapsolutions.com

“I’ve been working at changing my eating and exercise habits and have been thinking about work life balance too. I would like to support my staff to take care of themselves as well, but I don’t want to push or tread on personal decisions. I’m stuck...any ideas?”

Let’s start with *Congratulations* to you for investing in your own health. Starting with personal change is the best way to begin any change process. And, it’s not unusual that once any of us begins to focus on lifestyle change we look across all parts of life to see what else we need to bring into balance.

Looking to make the workplace healthier makes good sense. Wellsource, a workplace research group on health, provides this support.

- Approximately 129 million U.S. adults are overweight or obese, costing anywhere from \$69 to \$117 billion per year.
- In year 2000, approximately 17 million people had diabetes. Workers with diabetes lost 8 more work days than average totaling 14 million disability days.
- Sixty percent (60%) of women do not get the recommended amount of physical activity and 25% do not engage in physical activity during free time according to the Surgeon General. This contributes to high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.
- Dr. Ken Goldberg, Founder, Male Health Center, reports that American men, on average, live sicker and die younger than American women.

The good news is that this picture can change. Making the modifications in diet and exercise you indicated helps to manage risk factors and in many cases these changes result in a return to health. So, what can you do as a supervisor? Here are some ideas.

1. Support Your Company’s Wellness Committee

This committee is made up of interested employees. Their task is creating fun and effective ways of raising awareness and engaging employees in healthy activities to achieve personal goals.

- Find out about the program from your Human Resources or Medical Department.
- Get involved in the committee. The more you know and personally demonstrate, the easier for staff to follow.
- Encourage your staff to participate in activities of their choice.

2. Incorporate Workplace Health into Your Staff Activities

- Having a celebration involving food? Discuss ahead of time healthy and tasty choices. Having each person bring a personal favorite with the recipe is one good idea.
- Remind people to drink water throughout the day.
- Encourage staff to take the steps instead of the elevator and do so yourself. For some there will be a need to build up the ability to go all the way, which is fine. Even one flight of steps before heading to the elevator begins the journey to health. And the steps needed to get to the elevator count also.
- Remind staff members of the resource information on line they can turn to. The Wellness Committee and Human Resources can help in this regard. Finding articles yourself on stress and other relevant topics and making them available in your office and on bulletin boards will also work. Your EAP quarterly employee newsletter should be included in this array.

3. Support Work Life Balance

Given the ‘do more with less’ workplace environment of today, some ask if ‘balance’ is possible. Here are some ideas which can be managed.

- Encourage your employees to take breaks. Balance begins by recognizing the importance of pausing periodically to refresh.
- For those who are at computers or engaging in other sedentary jobs, suggest they get up every hour or so and stretch. There are many stretches for fingers, hands, legs and back which can support health and prevent issues like carpal tunnel syndrome. Just a minute or two provides ongoing relief.
- Take a breath when your mind is cluttered or frustration sets in and encourage others to do the same. The December 2008 issue of the *Successful Supervisor* describes how in detail. Breathing is a stress reliever as it gives oxygen to the body and brain.
- Commit yourself to seeking ways your department can work ‘smarter’, not ‘harder’. Building in idea-sharing at meetings can keep staff engaged and part of the process.
- Accept that work means different things to different people and what constitutes balance will vary. Supporting each staff member individually is important.

Remember *LifeSolutions* is here to support you and a healthy workplace. Give us a call.