



The Path to Wellness is a Marathon, Not a Sprint

In the long run, a healthy workplace is about finding what works for each individual employee and encouraging them to take the first steps.

Most people wouldn't know this by looking, but I have high cholesterol. Very high. The first time I discovered this was five years ago during an employee-sponsored wellness event.

I never thought about it before since I've always had a normal BMI and was never particularly concerned about my health. Being young, fit (from the looks of it) and just out of college, my physical well-being was the last thing on my mind. However, when the nurse gawked at my score of 250, I realized something needed to change. This was my triggering moment.

A report from the CDC on cardiovascular health stats by industry demonstrates the importance of workplace wellness programs. According to the American Heart Association, fewer than 2 percent of U.S. adults meet all seven of the organization's Cardiovascular Health Metrics.

The seven factors including in AHA's metrics include not smoking, being physically active, having normal blood pressure, having normal blood glucose, being of normal weight, having normal cholesterol levels and eating a healthy diet.

To put it into the workplace perspective, the report states cardiovascular issues result in \$120 billion in lost productivity annually, which makes an effective health and wellness program especially crucial to an employer.

What event or incident is going to trigger someone to want to improve from a health standpoint? Is it gym access, a weight-loss program or nutrition education? It differs on an individual basis. For me, it was a drive to get healthy while I'm young enough to prevent health problems later on in life.

I tried eating healthy and exercising with minimal satisfaction. Fast forward to my first 5K race in 2013. This time something clicked. Embarrassed with my performance, I set a goal to beat my record the following year.

The running community, the challenge and, most importantly, the health benefits of running were enough to make me motivated to succeed. I joined a local running club, began tracking my progress and took pride as seconds came off the clock.

It all culminated this past June when I ran one of Weather Channel's 15 Toughest Marathons: the Hatfield McCoy Marathon. After four months of training, trial and error and countless miles on my feet, I knew I could do it.

I struggled throughout the event in 90-degree heat, something for which I did not prepare. In fact, I almost quit halfway through. At that point, the heat and humidity had fully



set-in and I was feeling sluggish.

I stood at mile 13 for close to five minutes, thinking about how much work I had put into it, how far I had come and how much I had accomplished since that first 5K. I knew I could finish. I pushed on, and, when I crossed the finish line, I smiled.

Each employee will have a something that triggers them to take the first steps. Just like a marathon, an effective wellness program is about taking the first steps and building up to a set of goals each employee has in mind.

Everyone is motivated by something different, and it's about getting them to that triggering moment that will lead them on the path to a healthier lifestyle. Encouraging employees to stick to their goals and acknowledging how far they've come will help employees through a slump.

It's not going to be a walk in the park and it's going to take time and effort. But, in the long run, everyone will make it to the finish line with a smile.

EHS

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