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Special Feature: Insights and Observations on Worksite Health Promotion
William B. Baun Award

Alberto Ogata, M.D. discusses the future of worksite health promotion

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An Interview with Alberto Ogata, M.D.

stimulate the connection between health promotion researches in the workplace as well day-to-day practice. IAWHP plays an important role in this field.

WH: As a physician, what attracted you to worksite health promotion?

Taking care of people’s health brings me much satisfaction and fulfillment and therefore I have always found my work as a physician to be very stimulating. In my practice I realized that people become ill because they do not take care of their lifestyle and the health system is inefficient and fragmented. From then I became interested in health promotion. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes as well as 40% of cancer can be eliminated by engaging in healthy lifestyles (like exercising regularly, eating well, not smoking, drinking alcohol with moderation and managing stress). It is well known that health promotion programs at workplace can help employees and their families to lower risks and improve their state of health. But considering the population as a whole we have seen only modest results and it is important to embrace a more comprehensive approach, not just focusing on physical health but also other dimensions of well-being and encompassing different genders, races, levels of income and education, as means to lower the inequalities in the target group. We learned with Dee Edelton that “to support healthy employees we need an approach that encourages organizations to modify their health-related environments, cultures and climates. At the end of the day, no matter how good is a program if employees cannot realize their full potential of health in an unhealthy workplace or in unhealthy families and communities”. In this context, we must face the whole spectrum of care integrating each step and stakeholder. The employers need to include all parties to embrace health and wellness programs at workplace aiming at keeping healthy people healthy, reducing NCD risk factors and facilitating early and effective interventions and treatment.

WH: You have been very active in the concept of Total Worker Health. Briefly, what’s the basic model, its rationale and how IAWHP members incorporate program elements within their respective organizations?

In my opinion, it is very important for worksite health promotion practitioners to embrace logical models and frameworks as the foundation of their programs. The project “Total Worker Health – TWH” from NIOSH is important because it integrates health promotion and occupational health to advance worker well-being. Until now, we were seeing many programs working in silos with weak integration and poor outcomes. In this context, TWH is a holistic approach and it acknowledges risk factors related to work that contributes to health problems previously considered unrelated to work. Moreover we can include the WHO healthy workplace model, a comprehensive way of thinking and acting that addresses: (1) work-related physical and psychosocial risks (2) promotion and support of healthy behaviors (3) broader social and environmental determinants. The WHO model encompasses five keys for healthy workplaces, which includes leadership commitment and engagement, workers involvement, business ethics and legality, use of systematic and comprehensive process and program sustainability and integration.

WH: Over the past year, IAWHP has established a strategic relationship with the Global Centre for Healthy Workplaces. What’s the structure of this relationship and how does it benefit IAWHP?

The Global Centre of Healthy Workplaces (GCHW) has been founded and is co-directed by IAWHP Past-President, World Kaiser Foundation. It supports the advancement of workplace health and well-being through a series of initiatives designed to enhance shared learning, recognition and replication. In this context, there is a strong connection with IAWHP mission and values. Among other initiatives, GCHW promotes the Global Health Workplace Awards which is the first global awards program recognizing healthy workplaces with participants and judges from different continents. In recent years, Summits have been promoted in London (2013), Shanghai (2014), Floranopolis (2015), Washington, DC (2016), Singapore (2017) and Bergamo (2018). A program in partnership with IAWHP is yet to be released during the 7th Global Healthy Workplace Awards & Summit in Melbourne (Australia) from October, 30th to November 1st, 2019.

WH: Unfortunately, the Brazilian economy has taken a downturn over the past few years. Has it impacted worksite health promotion efforts within your country and if so, how have organizations such as ABQV taken a leadership position in reinforcing the business case?

Any economic crisis creates opportunities for creativity, better use of resources and prioritizing. It is essential to work with SME companies while aiming at inequalities reduction and keeping priorities in sight due to budget constraints. Working in connection with other stakeholders like the government, unions, universities, NGOs and health plans is key to having success in situations of this sort.

WH: From your perspective what better are some major trends that worksite health practitioners should be aware of and if applicable, assimilate to their practice?

We can think about trends using the acronym “PIPE” impact metric which became popular among us by Nico Pronk. In my opinion, we only can reach a good “penetration” using digital resources like apps, social media, wears devices and smartphones. The “implementation” must be evidence-based with strong senior support and tailored for each audience. The “participation” of each group must include other stakeholders, like the health plan, the occupational & safety team and HR area in an integrated strategy to avoid dropouts and maximize incentive effects during the process. Finally, the evaluation will need data science resources, like big data, mining and artificial intelligence to analyze structured and non-structured data and help the decision makers. We need to learn to work with other areas like sustainability and corporate social responsibility. For example, a special issue of Lancet in January, 2019, stressed that obesity is not just an individual responsibility resulting from wrong choices and motivations. It will require a wider view rethinking the business models, food systems, civil society involvement and national and international governance to address the problem. It is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations with a broad agenda including the Goal 3 to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.”
A Brief History of Worksite Health Promotion

George J Pfeiffer, MSE

The following timeline is an annotated overview of the evolution of worksite health promotion. Note: employee health programs date back hundreds of years, but the acceleration of programs among businesses began in the late 1960s and have grown and evolved due to a number of factors such as the "executive heart attack" in the 1960s; the fitness boom of the 1970s; escalating healthcare costs in the 1980s; emerging technologies in data mining, behavioral modeling, online applications, and the cultural dynamics of "healthy" and successful organizations.

1960
The book "Aerobics," by Kenneth Cooper, MD is published. The book fuels the aerobic fitness movement.

1968
"Running" by James Fix acts as a catalyst for the running boom that many corporate programs embrace.

1969
The American Association of Fitness Directors in Business and Industry (AAFDBI) is founded.

1970
The Wellness Councils of America is created.

1974
The National Wellness Institute is created using a six dimensional wellness model.

1977
The Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) is developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and acts as a template for commercial adaptations and research.

1978
The Health Management Research Center is founded.

1979

1980
The Wellness Councils of America is created.

1982
Roy Shephard, PhD, University of Toronto, publishes one of the first papers on the economic value of worksite fitness programs. (Can J Public Health)

1983
AAFDBI changed to Association for Fitness in Business (AFB).

1986
The Ottowa Charter for Health Promotion recognizes the setting as a workplace.

1987
University of Michigan Health Management Research Center is founded.

1988
American Journal of Health Promotion is founded.

1989
The Wellness Councils of America is created.

1990
AFB changed to Association for Worksite Health Promotion (AWHP).

1991
Pelletier publishes the first of seven reviews of clinical and cost-effective studies of comprehensive health promotion and disease prevention programs (Am. J Health Promotion and JOEM)

1992
Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) publishes landmark study on relationship between modifiable health risks and health care costs. (JOEM)

1993
The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is established.

1996
The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion recognizes the setting as a workplace.

1997
The Wellness Councils of America is created.

1998
Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) publishes landmark study on relationship between modifiable health risks and health care costs. (JOEM)

1999
Burton, Edington, et al. publish one of the first papers regarding job impairment (presenteeism) and health risks among call center employees.

2000
The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is established.

2001
Aldana publishes a comprehensive review of health promotion programs and their financial impact (Am. J Health Promotion)

2003
Chapman publishes extensive meta-evaluation of worksite health studies and economic return (Act of Health Promotion)

2004
The National Wellness Institute is created using a six dimensional wellness model.

2005

2006
The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is established.

2007
The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is established.

2008
As an affiliate organization of ACSM, AWHP changed to International Association for Worksite Health Promotion (IAWHP).

2009

2010

2011
NIOSH creates the "Total Worker Health®" program.

2012
The HERO Scorecard is developed.

2013
Global Healthy Workplace Awards created. First global recognition program that's aligned with the WHO Model

2014
The CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard is developed.

2015
Global Healthy Workplace Awards created. First global recognition program that's aligned with the WHO Model

2016

Preseent
Employee health and wellbeing are becoming associated with Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria for long-term corporate performance and investment.
In commemorating the ten-year anniversary of IAWHP, we asked members of the IAWHP Board of Directors to share some of their own insights and observations regarding their personal journeys in worksite health promotion.

**What got you interested in worksite health promotion?**

**Charles Estey, MS**

Being unfamiliar with the field, I was attracted to the opportunity to attend an AFB Conference. Through this experience, I met a number of new colleagues (many of whom I remain connected to today), attended a number of educational presentations and listened to speakers who actually run employ-ee health and fitness programs. I also learned about resources through their exhibit hall and overall energy among the attendees and many social events.

I was an Accounting major at Ithaca College and while “killing time” one evening in the library, I came across a magazine article featuring Dr. Richard Keeder, former Program Director for the PCPS, and he was discussing the merits of exercise on health and productivity. He referenced Japan’s business belief that exercise was good for its employees. The article went on to illustrate how NASA began conducting stress testing on Astronauts (in the 1960s) as a way of identifying who may be at risk for MI/CVD (prior to launching into space). I believe on Astronauts (in the 1960s) as a way of identifying who may be at risk for MI/CVD (prior to launching into space). I believe this work was the original “health risk identification” protocol and health assessment process that continues in many worksite wellness programs today.

**Stephen Chemiaik, MS**

I was always athletically-inclined which led me to an initial undergraduate degree in Physical Education. After a couple years teaching in different school settings, a re-location brought me to a city where the teaching positions in Physical Education were very limited. That served as my impetus to get my graduate degree in Sports Medicine with an internship and then a subsequent post-grad job offer in a corporate fitness program. I enjoyed it. I liked the challenge in improving the physical health of each employee and experiencing the tangible results that come with a regular exercise routine. So, as the desire and need for new job opportunities arose, my goal was to stay in the corporate fitness/wellness environment. I’ve been able to achieve that goal throughout my career.

**Reed Engel, PhD**

After degrees in business, I took a chance to go back to school in the field I’m most passionate about – health and wellness. To balance all the education, I did three different kinds of internships to see what part of the field I liked the best and gain some hands-on experience. Worksite Health was the perfect fit. Turns out you can do what you love, love what you do, and get paid to do it!

**Robert Karch, PhD**

In the Fall of 1977 and Spring of 1978, I gathered selected information from 219 institutions of higher education and wrote my Doctoral Dissertation “A Study of Selected Educational, Professional, and Personal Characteristics, and Attitudes of Directors of Athletics at Certain Institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Associations.” By that time I had been a faculty member in the Department of Physical Education and Athletics and Head Wrestling Coach for ten years - 2 years at Catholic University followed by 8 years at American University. One of my dissertation objectives was to gain a better understanding of the educational and experiential path that Athletic directors followed prior to their current appointments and another was to gain a deeper insight into the critical skills that they believed to be necessary to successfully carry out their position. One of my personal objectives was to explore the possibility of development of a Master of Science Program for Athletic Administration at American University. However, given my interest in Exercise Science, Human Performance, and Business Administration, I was also closely watching the very early development of Worksite Health Promotion Programs in leading companies in the US. And it was then, in fall of 1978 that I shifted my academic interests to developing an academic course of study to prepare masters level professionals who were interested in careers in Worksite Health Promotion.

**Wolf Kirsten, MS**

My interest in health and sports goes back a long way and my undergraduate studies at UAB (University of Alabama Birmingham) got me curious about the workplace as a setting. My first internship at BMC Health focused on WHP and was a great experience that wanted me to stay involved. Then my Master’s degree at American University and Bob Karch’s mentorship got me fully hooked.

**Brenda Loube, MS**

My first job was as a physical education teacher, then gym supervisor at the Jewish Community Center in Rockville, MD, and later a program manager at a private health club. Somewhere between those jobs and working also close to rehabilitation at Georgetown University, I realized the opportunities in the health and fitness industry were narrowly focused. Preventative health practices were almost non-existent, and something we still face today with chronic disease and the traditional medical model. I knew back then and feel even stronger today, that the opportunities to shift the health paradigm are extensive in the corporate wellness and fitness industry.

**Dee Hill-Mey, PhD**

I graduated from Springfield College in the mid 70’s where I majored in Physical Education, Health and Science, my plan was to be a PE teacher. I returned to my home town of Newport RI and substitute taught for one year as no full-time positions were open and, teaching job openings were very limited. I relocated to San Francisco CA the next year with the restaurant chain I had been working for while in college and continued to pursue teaching and other fitness opportunities. I was teaching 14+ exercises a week at the YMCA and other facilities, when I read an article about a woman who was offering fitness programs and classes at Esprit de Corp, a small clothing company headquartered in San Francisco and was working on offering similar services at other business in the city. This really sparked my interest so I contacted her and she welcomed the opportunity to meet with me and shortly thereafter we began working together. Teaching exercise classes at Esprit de Corp was my first “worksite” experience however shortly after, I learned of a potential opportunity at Levi Strauss & Co. through a personal friend who worked there. Levi’s was moving its headquarters to the Levi’s Plaza, a brand new 5 building complex which was to house a “fitness center”. I was offered this job and that is where my career in worksite wellness launched.

I was fortunate to work for a company and CEO with a vision for keeping employees healthy and engaged. There was no template or book outlining how to start or run this type of program so I had the opportunity to create a program from scratch using the support of my peers, senior management and my intuition as to how to structure our services. I discovered AAFDBI shortly after starting this program and became involved. This organization and the peer support it provided was an integral part of the evolution of my career.

**George Pfieffer, MSE**

While studying exercise science at SUNY Cortland, I had the opportunity to do a graduate internship at Xerox Corporation under W. Brent Arnold who managed the Executive Fitness Program in Rochester, NY. Based on this experience, I was hooked about working with adults within a business environment and was fortunate to be hired to replace Brent when he was promoted.

**Mary Ellen Rose, PhD**

After working in the field of health science in a number of different capacities for over two decades, I had an opportunity to meld together my health education and social science backgrounds into a new program that was being rolled out at American University… AU was merging their Education Department with Bob Karch’s Worksite Health Promotion department, and AU’s International Institute of Health Promotion. It was a fascinating introduction into the global worksite health promotion world that touched upon a truly comprehensive approach to issues corporations around the world were facing. Working from a worksite HP perspective that was relevant to my experiences and interests, I conducted an exhaustive literature review of how global health promotion was developing as a field in its own right and then proposed a model of global health promotion that could be used for research, practices, and policy development moving forward. By the time I had earned my PhD in Health Promotion, I was hooked! My last consulting role as the Wellness Coordinator for the U.S. Dept. of State provided me with the most interesting experience to date. By applying the knowledge I gained through education, consulting, and serving as an active member in industry organizations like IAWHP, I was able to help introduce health promotion best practices to the international population working within the Dept of State, as well as to the employees at our embassies all over the world.

**Barry Roa, MA**
What has been your career arc?

Charles Estey, MS

My career evolved from health and fitness to worksite health promotion and then a broader focus on global health and wellbeing practices. It was through the continued evolution of AFB, AWHP and IAWHP and their leadership responding to key trends, that I was able to steer my career on a similar path.

My career evolved as a Health/Fitness Specialist for Xerox and then was hired by Campbell Soup to be their Manager for their Turnaround Health & Fitness Center. Later, I was recruited to become the Program Director for the Travelers Taking Care Center (48,000 SF wellness facility complete with indoor pool and kitchen for healthy cooking classes, and wellness champion network that leveraged video/print educational tools serving 90 field offices). I eventually joined Fitness Systems (acquired by HealthFitness) and was responsible for consulting, sales and operations in the Eastern Region. When Health Solutions was awarded a contract to lead the UAW General Motors Lifessteps Program (the largest employee wellness program at the time serving 1.6 million employees, retirees and dependents). I was hired to lead the execution of this comprehensive wellness initiative focused on on-site staffing, biometric health screenings and wellness program management. Over the course of 15 years, Dr. Dee Edington and the University of Michigan published over 20 studies on its program impact and received the 2004 C. Everett Koop Award.

In 2012, I was promoted to serve as President of Health Solutions and, collectively, led our team building the company from the original 4 clients to over 400, when we were acquired by Interactive Health, Inc. in 2014. Following the successful integration of our two companies, I moved on to join Asset Health, Inc., a mission-driven health and wellness management and technology firm. We leverage cognitive and behavioral determinants to deliver a highly personalized approach, empowering individuals through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to take active ownership of their “most valuable asset” – their health, with a special focus on the employee-patient-physician relationship.

Stephen Cherniak, MS

The jobs I’ve held certainly have commonalities that link them together; but it’s been a career path that I did not plan or could have imagined from the outset. My first jobs were as a physical education teacher in a couple of different school settings (1978 – 1980). After a move to a different part of the U.S., I found very limited teaching positions available. This provided the impetus to go and get my graduate degree in Sports Science. The graduate program included an internship and later job offer with an oil company to assist with their corporate fitness program (1981 – 1983). It was a great job in which I could market out to an unexciting company. I was laid-off just prior to their bankruptcy filing and the job search lasted six months. As the job search progressed, my only requirement was to be in the fitness-business. I ended up accepting a director position in a community fitness center that required a move of 1,000 miles (1984). While I found the position worthwhile and challenging, I continued a part-time job search for a corporate fitness position. This led to a position and move to a Fortune 50 company as their in-house fitness director and later health promotion manager (1985 – 2007: a move of 220 miles). It was a job I had no intention of leaving, but the decline of the manufacturing industry led once-again to the issue of looming lay-offs. After considering many factors (family obligations, preferences, etc.), I formally retired from the company and began a job-search to either teach or consult. Using by now what had become a strong personal network of professional colleagues, I was referred to a consulting opportunity and I accepted a health management consulting position with a large employee-benefits firm (2007 – present: a move of 770 miles). Here, I put my experience and skills to work to build unique program designs for each of our clients.
Hans Holdhaus, MSc

I started as young sport scientist working with elite athletes. I found it very interesting to transfer and apply the knowledge and practices from high performance sport to the work setting under the umbrella of health promotion. This approach took me almost 20 years to build an understanding and value among employees and management by linking physical performance and health to organizational performance and success.

Robert Karch, PhD

During my 50 years at American University I have been very fortunate to have been given extensive freedom to develop several BS and MS academic degrees related to Physical Education and Health Promotion as well as numerous courses, and programmatic activities for the undergraduate students who attended the University. Further, much of my academic program development work during my many years at American was greatly assisted by fellow faculty members but never more so than in 1979 when numerous professors from other academic units at American University (such as Psychology, Chemistry, Sociology, Bio-Chemistry, Business Administration and Management, Accounting, and Finance) joined with me in developing the 44 hour Master of Science Degree in Health and Fitness Management (which several years later was changed to its current title “Health Promotion Management”). This unique MS Program of Study was jointly offered by the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business Administration and we enrolled the first class of 15 Graduate students in January of 1979. To date there has been more that 600 unique graduates from the MS program, many of whom came from and returned to many countries throughout the world to carry out their respective careers.

In 1980 we also established the National Center for Health and Fitness (NCHF) at American University that has undertaken many millions of dollars of leading-edge Health Promotion research and programmatic activities while at the same time providing invaluable hands on work site experience for hundreds of our MS Graduate Students. And finally, in 1996 we established the International National Institute for Health Promotion (IHIP) which brought together dozens of Health Promotion thought leaders from throughout the world to form a collaborative body to share and advance best practices in Worksite Health Promotion from a global perspective. That collaboration is best illustrated in “Global Perspectives in Worksite Health Promotion”, a coauthored book with Wolf Kirsten who is considered to be one of, if not the most informed professional on this topic in the world! And I might also proudly add a Graduate of our MS Program!

Wolf Kirsten, MS

I pretty soon found out that I love to work independently with a lot of freedom so working in a large corporation / organization didn’t appeal to me. My first full position at American University to establish and lead the International Institute for Health Promotion (IHIP) was perfect as I was granted a lot of freedom and also fulfilled my desire for international work. Next up was the jump into entrepreneurship as a global wellness consultant and I have never looked back. In addition, 7 years ago, I fulfilled my dream of working in the NFL as a sport scientist and consultant to large corporations. I had worked with General Health for a little over one year when I was recruited by Fitness Systems to oversee the construction and management of a brand-new facility for Gannett Co Inc. This was my dream job. Gannett was investing in a 20,000 square foot facility and I had the opportunity to use my expertise in the design, layout and equipment purchase. Again, I had a very high level of support from senior management and it showed with over 75% participation rates year over year. Leaving Gannett in 1998 was very tough but again, I supported my husband in a reassignment to Salt Lake City to head up security planning for the 2002 Olympic games. It was a great move for us but put my career path in a slightly different direction. I became a certified Wellness Coach and started my own business along with developing a very successful business in recruiting High Tech HRIS Sales people. After several years of running my successful business and living internationally, Worksite wellness and health promotion has always been my passion so I decided to reenter the field first by pursuing a PhD in this area. I was headed down towards this goal … I studied, wrote, taught undergraduate level classes and completed this process in 4 years. I must admit, teaching at the college level and helping to develop the next generation of health promotion professionals was a wonderful opportunity.

Nico Pronk, PhD

I started out with research projects while in graduate school, moved on to larger research projects as a post-doc, then into practical work combined with research in a health system’s setting. For the past 25 years, in the same health system setting, I have been active in connecting practice with research with a focus on bringing evidence-based and evidence-informed solutions into the real world.

Philip Smeltzer, PhD

Initially I was in marketing and became an internal consultant on mass blood chemistry screenings. This was in the late 1980s and work site health promotion was beginning to blossom. My highlight then was a mass screening in Central Park NY, NY when we had more than 700 individuals in line at one time. I later worked in corporate fitness and fitness centers and then in corporate health and wellness offering opportunities to support an advocacy agency in Buffalo NY for Wellness across school work and community sites was rewarding. I moved into a corporate setting and have enjoyed some responsibility for employer-based health promotion while working for BlueCross BluShield, Humana and Optum. I have interacted with employers in Buffalo NY, the Midwest and South and then national Fortune 100 companies coast to coast. I relocated to Charleston SC 3 years ago and help manage patient populations at the academic medical center. Fortunately, I met my wife who was a counterpart at BCBS of Montana in the middle of Michigan Avenue in Chicago years ago, I have been blessed to enjoy such a wide lens of experiences and work with an incredible group of professionals. My work site health promotion career path obviously crossed with my wife and the rest is history. Community health has been established in many forms and as related to public health has a history since the early 1900s. The access to workers and the benefits to both workers and employers with an emphasis on the cost benefits was enthralling to me. Through my career I have been fortunate to maintain a close relationship to employers as clients and ultimately improve the health of the employee population.

Talya Williams, MS

I’ve always been interested in the healthcare field to improve the quality of life for all those who are willing to receive assistance. However, I wanted to be in a position where I could build relationships and provide ongoing support. We spend a lot of time in the workplace, and often times we don’t realize how much our jobs impact our quality of life. This career allows me to take a holistic approach to support one’s quality of life and well-being.

From there, I ventured on my own creating my own consulting firm Health Improvement Solutions in 2005. Over the years I have consulted with UPRR on numerous projects, the Wellness Councils of America, and a number of Fortune 500 companies.

Dee Hill-Mey, PhD

After a wonderful 3 years with Levi Strauss & Co in San Francisco where I had the opportunity to create and manage an award-winning program and serve as western regional president of AFR, I relocated to Washington DC area to accompany my spouse for his new position with the FBI. While at Levi's, I also completed my master's degree in exercise physiology. My first job in the DC area worked at HAPI (Health Authority of Private Industry) dedicated to providing health and consulting services to large corporations. I had worked with General Health for a little over one year when I was recruited by Fitness Systems to oversee the construction and management of a brand-new facility for Gannett Co Inc. This was my dream job. Gannett was investing in a 20,000 square foot facility and I had the opportunity to use my expertise in the design, layout and equipment purchase. Again, I had a very high level of support from senior management and it showed with over 75% participation rates year over year. Leaving Gannett in 1998 was very tough but again, I supported my husband in a reassignment to Salt Lake City to head up security planning for the 2002 Olympic games. It was a great move for us but put my career path in a slightly different direction. I became a certified Wellness Coach and started my own business along with developing a very successful business in recruiting High Tech HRIS Sales people. After several years of running my successful business and living internationally, Worksite wellness and health promotion has always been my passion so I decided to reenter the field first by pursuing a PhD in this area. I was headed down towards this goal … I studied, wrote, taught undergraduate level classes and completed this process in 4 years. I must admit, teaching at the college level and helping to develop the next generation of health promotion professionals was a wonderful opportunity.

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My interest in health and sports goes back a long way and my undergraduate studies at UAB (University of Alabama Birmingham) got me curious about the workplace as a setting. My first internship at BMC Health focused on WHF and was a great experience that wanted me to stay involved. Then my Master's degree at American University and Bob Karch's mentorship got me fully hooked.

Joseph Leutzinger, PhD

I first interned at the Wellness Councils of Michigan (WELCOM) – which was the first wellness council in the country in 1988. From there I was a Graduate Assistant at the University Nebraska Omaha where I performed hours at Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) instead of the university. I was the first graduate student to do hours as part of my graduate assistantship away from the university. Based on this experience, I became a full-time contractor at UPRR and eventually was hired as a supervisor and rose through the ranks as a manager, and finally director.
What have been your most memorable experiences within your career to date?

Stephen Cherniak, MS

I was always athletically-inclined which led me to an initial undergraduate degree in Physical Education. After a couple years teaching in different school settings, a re-location brought me to a city where the teaching positions in PE were very limited. That served as my impetus to get my graduate degree in Sports Medicine with an internship and then a subsequent post-grad job offer in a corporate fitness program. I enjoyed it. I liked the challenge in improving the physical health of each employee and experiencing the tangible results that come with a regular exercise routine. So, as the desire and need for new job opportunities arose, my goal was to stay in the corporate fitness/wellness environment. I’ve been able to achieve that goal throughout my career.

Charles Estey, MS

I have fond memories working collaboratively with team members to create effective engagement strategies. Early on I helped devise a campaign to engage truck drivers (“Are you in as good as shape as your tractor trailer?”) which was featured in Newsweek magazine. Later, with a goal to engage manufacturing employees in Michigan, our team re-packaged yoga, tai chi and pre-diabetes educational information as a Fit to Hunt (Deer Hunting Conditioning) campaign addressing pre-hunting season walking programs, exercises to strengthen your back and hips as well as tips to prepare your venison. We brought in speakers from Field & Stream and proved to be a unique way to get the attention of a population that otherwise may have shown little interest in our health assessment and biometric screening services. When our program evolved and we needed to engage spouses, we implemented a Healthy Hair wellness initiative that involved training community hairstylists who to encourage their customers to talk about their “blood sugar” and invite both employee and spouses to attend glucose testing and diabetes prevention events - held in over 20 different African American churches throughout the county. We gave each stylist a brochure holder and promotional literature. This strategy proved more effective than distributing flyers or general email …which typically would not make it home to the spouses. This program also had a direct tie-in with community health initiatives aligning profit and non-profit organizations to impact the health of the entire community.

My involvement with AFB, AWHP and IAWHP has been remarkable collaborating with fellow wellness practitioners, researchers and thought leaders. Through my role with IAWHP, I was invited to present at conferences in Spain and Brazil – which really opened my eyes to different cultures, perceived barriers to participation and new engagement strategies.

Hans Holdhaus, MSc

It is very satisfying and confirming when people come back months or even years later telling you that YOU were the key for their changes in regards to their health and well-being.

Robert Karch, PhD

For me answering this question is both very easy and at the same time very difficult. First, it is easy because I have been blessed to have had so many wonderful opportunities and memorable experiences in traveling throughout the world, meeting so many outstanding individuals and in many cases also meeting their families, and of course having the privilege of teaching and working with so many outstanding undergraduate and graduate students at American University over these past 50 years. So, given the good fortune of having many wonderful experiences, I found it a bit difficult to identify which have been “most memorable” but here are a select few.

I quite frequently pinch myself when I think of my “life journey” to date from 1963 at the age of 17 when I left a beautiful small community in central Pennsylvania to attend the University of Maryland and then on to my many years in Higher Education in the Nation’s Capital. And it has been from that setting that I have had the opportunity to meet outstanding educators, National and International leaders, Presidents and Kings and Queens from many parts of the world both here in Washington, D.C. and in my travels to many other countries. I also have many fond memories of my dose relationships with members of the Professional Asso-
George Pfeiffer, MSE

Worksite health and my involvement with AAFDI, AFB, AWHP, and now IAWHP has afforded me very memorable experiences throughout the years and through my travel opportunities. Some experiences that stick out include being selected as one of ten Healthy American Fitness Leaders by the President’s Council for Physical Fitness and Sports and the US Jaycees for my contributions to worksite health and fitness (Dr. Robert Karch and Lauve Metcalfe are also recipients!).

As part of the yearlong Scandinavia Today celebration in Minneapolis, I presented on behalf of Xerox as the only American company represented and met King Olav of Norway at a State Dinner. Also, I was honored to present at the last Board meeting of the President’s Council for Physical Fitness and Sports presided by Arnold Schwarzenegger. But, perhaps my most memorable experience was at a going away party when I was promoted from being the manager of the executive fitness program at Xerox’s corporate headquarters to establishing the national program back in Rochester. At a local restaurant most of my participants attended and to my surprise the President/CEO, David Kearns. He presented me with a plaque with the names of all the executives I coached (12) to run their first marathon—priceless!

Nico Pronk, PhD

Clearly, 2009 was a good year…as it comes to worksite health promotion, serving as the first president for IAWHP was both an honor and a privilege. I had served on the Board of the former AWHP and helped facilitate the move over to ACSM where members could find a home in the newly established special interest group for worksite health promotion. It took us about 9 years to recreate a sufficiently large team of interested folks to resurrect as the International Association for Worksite Health Promotion in 2009. Another memorable experience was the introduction of the textbook “ACSM’s Worksite Health Handbook, 2nd Edition,” which I edited in 2009.

Philip Smeltzer, PhD

A common thread has been the interpersonal relationships with peers and professionals over the years. Our field allows interaction with world renowned scientific researchers, nationally prominent seasoned professionals, the entry level practitioner and students. We all have a common thread and similar personalities. We love people and want everyone to be as healthy as possible. As a rule, we’re not always so good at administrative skills in my opinion. Specifically, one of my most memorable experiences was about nine years into my career. An economic impact conference as held near Niagara Falls NY. I had my B.A. in Physical Education and supported a team of authors drafting a book and consensus statement. In those days, we still used overhead transparencies, no laptops, no cell phones. Anyway, I sat at the table with eight elite researchers and health promotion experts. I was treated as an equal and learned more in two days in that room, then I learned in 20 years through any other means. It was incredible! They were as interested in my intervention plans in Buffalo, NY, as I was in their research and findings. I have dozens of similar memories of the comradery and respect among members of our profession.

Who have been the most influential individuals in shaping your career?

Stephen Cherniak, MS

Dr. Dee Edington has been most influential in my career. He takes his career seriously in a forward-thinking way. He is always questioning what we’re doing in the industry and offering suggestions/guidance on how to become more effective and impactful.

Through his direction of the University of Michigan Health Enhancement Research Center, Dee was one of the first to conduct an annual conference for the health and wellness industry. He used his rich database of HRA information to identify trends in crucial areas of: patient-physician relationship.

Reed Engel, PhD

Bill Baun – He was so passionate about health and wellness, Bill was the practitioner’s practitioner. He always made time for fellow professionals, modeled health at every turn, was not afraid to share his thoughts in a constructive way, and left a lasting legacy for the rest of us and those to come.

Charlie Estey – One of my first internships was with Charlie at The Travelers back in the late ’80’s. Charlie was always willing to entertain new ideas, demonstrated that you could have fun while you worked hard, and told incredible stories that brought home the point he was sharing.

Charles Estey, MS

Lauve Metcalfe, Campbell Soup Company – taught me about “passion” and its impact on my attitude, intentions and capabilities. She motivated me to reach out and connect with people well before “engagement” became a buzzword.

George Pfeiffer, The Travelers Center for Corporate Health Promotion – “For the love of the (wellness) game” and desire to “crave creativity” and its potential to impact people and organizations - resulting in high levels of participation and program outcomes.

Bill Horton, Founder of Fitness Systems (now HealthFitness) – The importance of shared values, service and remembering the clients comes first.

Bill and Kevin Clair, Health Solutions – How to approach work and life embracing fun as the common denominator and never losing sight of our professional standards and focus on our internal culture and teamwork.

David Wilson, Asset Health – continues to help shape my career helping employers, hospitals and health systems fully engage with employees and communities, and create a culture of success and wellbeing, centered on the whole person, and the employee-patient-physician relationship.

Hans Holdhaus, MSc

I would say most importantly my colleagues and friends from outside of Austria because it is always motivating for me meeting and interacting with them. I always go back with new ideas I like to work on! This is the best for me. I enjoy looking over the edge and seeing what opportunities arise by trying something new and perhaps risky.

Robert Karch, PhD

Putting aside for the moment the many blessings I have had and continue to have in my personal life with my family, extended family, and many friends, without question what is most memorable and meaningful to me has been the good fortune that I have had in meeting and getting to know hundreds if not thousands of wonderful people throughout the world who share my passion for Worksite Health Promotion. And many of those people have greatly helped me in “shaping” my values, philosophy, knowledge, and love for the professional work that I have had the privilege of doing over the past many years. However, as I started to list the many individuals who have been so instrumental in my long career it became very obvious to me that Dr. Pfeiffer would have no choice but to exercise his “editorial prerogative” and cut/edit what would be my very, very long reply to this question! As such I will simply share that I have been truly blessed with the assistance, support, sage advice, and encouragement, of many great mentors throughout my educational career as well as my personal life. And at this time in my life I have been taking every opportunity I have to personally tell each of them “Thank You” and how much it has truly meant to me!

Wolf Kirsten, MS

This is an easy one. No doubt has Bob Karch influenced me the most and I owe him so much with regard to my professional and personal development. He sent me to Beijing for the earlier mentioned internship, encouraged me to be an entrepreneur, urged me to go out into the world to learn, and, likely most important, provided a great role model for professionalism, kindness, and generosity. And the best thing is he still does to this present day so I am quite fortunate and immensely grateful to have such a mentor and friend.
Joseph Leutzinger, PhD

I met or been in meeting with I believe every Surgeon General since C. Everett Koop. No specific order — John Harris, Bill Whitmer, Richard Kersh, James Prochaska, Dennis Richling, Rob Rager, David Chenoweth, Ron Goetzel, Larry Chapman, Jack Bas-table, Bill Baun, Colleen Reilley, Kathy Knudson, Kerry Juhl, and Kevin Pronk.

Laure Metcalfe, MS

I initially got involved in the association through the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and specifically Dr. Richard Keelor. Dr. Keelor was responsible for the federal/state relations for the President's Council and he spent a great deal of his time and energy in encouraging corporations and state Governor's councils to invest in employee health. Once I was exposed to the high energy trailblazers in the Association, especially George Pfeiffer, Jim Post, and Peter Brown, being involved in a leadership role was an easy decision. I deeply value creating professional connections and IAWHP has provided that opportunity throughout my 40+ years in the health promotion/wellness field.

Dee Hill-Mey, PhD

This is a tough question to answer as there have been so many influential people, mentors and supporters in my career. At Levi’s, I was mostly on my own until connecting with AAFDBI where I connected with Michael O’Donnell. His insights and support were very helpful.

Over the years, others who were pioneers and part of the AAFDBI/AFB organization back then, George Pfeiffer, Bill Baun…educators – Bob Karch and Dee Edington. My peers – Charlie Estey, Jim Narum, Laure Metcalfe and Reed Engel, all have had a huge impact on my success in this field. And, of course, Bill Horton, president and founder of Fitness Systems.

George Pfeiffer, MSE

I have been very blessed throughout my career in finding professional support and friendship. My first mentor was William Tomik, PhD at SUNY Cortland who arranged that I do an internship at Xerox Corporation. Perhaps the most influential business leader was David Kearns, CEO at Xerox who gave me so much attention and support and was the main reason that I remained at Xerox and develop the national program for 65,000 employees. From a philosophical perspective, I would say that the late Donald Vickery, MD had significant influence on my approach to health management communications, self-care, and informed deci- sion-making. Colleagues who have influenced and supported me are many, but the most notable are William Baun, Dee Edington, Laure Metcalfe, Elin Silvouus, Catalina Meschesney, W Brent Arnold, Jim Post, Bill and Kevin Clair, Bob Karch, and Charlie Estey.

Mary Ellen Rose, PhD

Bob Karch would lead my list. As an academic and international worksite health promotion advisor, Bob has been a passionate and tireless leader in promoting global health promotion. Dr. Karch introduced an innovative WHP model through his Internation- al Institute for Health Promotion at American University and constantly sought opportunities to collaborate efforts, build ideas, and utilize networking opportunities within his membership which represented over 85 nations. He also built a department for Master’s Degree students interested in WHP and provided the students with internship opportunities that launched dozens of careers into a growing industry.

Philip Smeitzer, PhD

Wow, that’s a tough one. There are many, and I’ll single one out to be brief. I have been very active in health risk appraisal engagement, design and research over the years. I was working with an intern and evaluating HRA data at Humana. I told the intern to get all the articles he could on this author named Musich. Dr. Musich worked at the University of Michigan with Dr. Dee Edington. Most of the insightful literature was authored by Dr. Musich around HRA data and guided the intern to seek those articles. When I left Humana, I interviewed and later worked with Dr.'s Orzinskiowski and Musich on an almost daily basis. Shirley Musich had so many insights on data analytics, cost studies and practical application in applied settings. Shirley helped shape my use of research and data insights to inform evidence-based programs. Yet, this was only a few years ago just 30 years in the field. Proves we are never too old or too experienced to learn things.

Talya Williams, MS

In the early part of my career, I acquired a mentor who was in a senior leadership position. Our conversations taught me how to be a leader, strategic thinker, and effective communicator. Although I still have that mentor, that relationship encouraged me to seek out other mentors who could provide additional perspectives to ensure I continue to be a well-rounded professional.

What trends in worksite health promotion do you feel will significantly impact the field over the next five to ten years?

Stephen Chemick, MS

As usual it’s not a trend specific to worksite health promotion that will impact the field, but a medical trend. Since we live in a “Fix me, Heal me” society, our field has always been looked upon as a nice thing to talk about; but it isn’t given the power/impact/ attention to change health as it deserves — since the medical community and society address health improvement through pharma- cological and treatment procedures. And, this won’t change anytime soon. So, the trend of genotyping our health and identifying the biomarkers affecting our lifestyle will take over as the treatment provided by the medical community. The health promotion field will need to figure out its place in this environment (our genes determine our “fate”). Biometric screening will be replaced by genetic profiling of our health and illness prevalence. This will begin a new aspect of the nature vs. nurture debate as the power of behavior change will have to find its place in this new environment.

Reed Engel, PhD

I think emotional and mental health will continue to rise as a priority for our field over time. The trends toward greater stress, compounded by sedentary lifestyles, poor nutrition, increasing screen time, decreases in sleep, financial distress, and decreasing use of vacation time are all indications that emotional well-being will be a hot topic going forward.

Charles Estey, MS

Unfortunately, inactivity and obesity are impacting both adults and today’s youth. While this will continue to affect individual health and health care costs, Musculo-skeletal disorders will continue to escalate as a top three health care cost area. Wellness prac- titioners have a great opportunity to collaborate and support preventive measures which not only can impact injuries and workers’ compensation — individuals will learn to prevent pain and become more physically active on a regular basis. Finally, with increased attention to mental, emotional and financial health, we must address the elephant in the room and offer tools to help supervisors, employees and family members understand and cope with anxiety. Combined, the health, human capital, EAP, Safety and wellbe- ing experiences will increase employee appreciation for their company resulting in increased talent acquisition and retention and enhanced productivity.

Hans Holdhaus, MSc

Digital health in all aspects — what’s available now and into the future.
Robert Karch, PhD

One trend that has been developing over the past few years that clearly will not only continue but perhaps even accelerate in the near term and that I believe will have a profound effect in the out years will be the continued and rather rapid dispersion of workers from what has been a typically communal workplace setting to one of somewhat social isolation within one’s home or remote office. Current data may support such cost-effective management systems but my concern has been and will continue to be the unknown or known interface effects of social isolation and with that the lack of peer support for many health-related management practices. As such, I believe that future worksite health promotion professionals must be and will be equipped to effectively and successfully reach such workers through proven communication strategies that will educate and motivate them so as to engage and sustain a healthy lifestyle. And future professionals must be and will be able to do so perhaps without ever having any or at best very little real face to face consultation with such workers.

A second trend is the somewhat decrease in what has historically been the “Long Term Employee”. As such, successful future worksite health promotional will be the ones who will be able to engage employees, and perhaps their families as well, sooner and at a more meaningful level than historically has been the case. For such a strategy will prove to be a very key factor in not only the recruitment and retention of high value employees, but also in the long-term management of their health care needs.

Wolf Kirsten

Next to the obvious one with the growing role of technology I think a broader approach to what affects health and wellbeing of individuals at work will become more significant. We are already seeing this with the increased focus on employee wellbeing and experience in HR, but I think it will grow exponentially and the influence of work and psychosocial factors on health and wellbeing will better be analyzed and managed.

Joseph Leutzinger, PhD

AI Technology and its application.

Brenda Loubé, MS

From where I sit, the future of corporate wellness and fitness is bright and exciting. Organizations are beginning to understand what it takes to create a truly thriving culture; where employees can bring their best selves to work – and home – each day. My prediction is that we’ll see more focus on wellbeing initiatives that serve people holistically and attend to more than physical health. I also think we’ll see wellbeing further integrated into other cultural transformation and employee experience initiatives. I have always said that, without your health, you have no wealth. If your employees are not bringing their best selves to work, they are not performing at the top of their game and the company is missing out.

Dee Hill-Mey, PhD

The focus of this field has become and needs to continue to be more diversified. We have, over the years, recognized all the elements that contribute to wellbeing, spiritual, emotional, mental, community, financial, in addition to activity and diet/nutrition. Technology continues to improve and offer ways to engage remote workers as well as track and motivate employees however I believe we need to be careful not to lose the personal touch… a connection with our employees – those we serve. We need to find a better balance between carrot and stick incentives and develop a way to help employees make lasting behavior change through intrinsic motivation – perhaps in offering more individualized and group coaching opportunities.

We also need to recognize the diversity of our workforce. Baby boomers are staying in the workforce for a longer period of time and the needs of this aging population should be recognized and, since we are all aging, we need to emphasize to all, how to age healthfully. Mental health across all demographics is of concern and positive, noninvasive strategies need to be incorporated in our programs. Balance in life at work and at home also seem to be buzz topics in today’s work world. Companies are looking for ways to facilitate this balance and I believe our programs can play a significant role in these efforts. In our programming we are now spending more and better tools for evaluation.

Nico Pronk, PhD

While technology will continue to be very powerful in terms of its impact on this field, I believe the workplace will become one of the most important places for public health to see health and well-being outcomes emerge. For a long time, public health has seen the workplace as one of the settings where it can exert its influence, however, with the increasing recognition that the workplace influences health far beyond its walls, impacts will also be seen at the other level such as communities, neighborhoods, and nationally. In addition, the impacts will be beneficial to people as well as the companies, and the environment.

Mary Ellen Rose, PhD

WHP has cranked out dozens of trends in the short lifespan of its field’s development...few of which are as important as the current trend of creating a holistic culture of health in the worksite. WHP is about so much more than implementing fitness programs and nutritional awareness…and corporations are starting to see that need for moving beyond the traditional approach to health.

Philip Smeltzer, PhD

My forecast is that personal and tailored data will drive employer interaction with employees across multiple domains. Benefit packages, compensation plans, work-life accommodations, responsibilities will migrate from the more common vanilla envelope for all to individualized prescriptive worksite environment based on needs and desires of the employee.

For someone considering worksite health promotion as a career, what advice would you give them?

Stephen Cherniak, MS

- Careers can start and develop through unexpected circumstances, so be flexible with your consideration of job opportunities and where it’s located.
- Work hard! Hard work never goes unrecognized and it certainly is the main driver for better opportunities.
- There are three steps to becoming a great employee: 1) Deliver what’s requested. 2) Deliver more that’s requested. 3) Deliver additional or better than what was requested.
- Time teaching mindfulness and meditation as a way to help manage the increasing demands in our lives. This along with integrative services such as massage are also being introduced in worksite health promotion centers.
- Additionally, we are modifying our measurement and an evaluation strategy as health care cost containment is not only tough to measure, it requires longer terms of employment with one company than we are seeing in today’s workforce. We need to develop more and better tools for evaluation.

Charles Estey, MS

With increasing conversations being had on the topic of employee health and wellbeing, leaders are now expecting managers to support the wellbeing of team members. Therefore, wellness practitioners are about to experience tremendous opportunities beyond “wellness programming” and ways to impact - the entire organization. Those who are proactive and embrace individual and organizational communication and leadership skills, digital marketing strategies and data analytics, can lead designed alliances (i.e. HR, Benefits, EAP, Safety, Food Services, etc.) who work together to create healthy organizations and eventually healthy communities. Moreover, recognizing the Social Determinants of Health is a must for any current and future wellness practitioner.

Hans Holdhaus, MSc

- Go for it because it is right time!!! This field will continue over the next 30 years!
Robert Karch, PhD

I would suggest the following things.

- Learn as much as you can about the profession. You can do so by reading about the industry, getting a certification that is related to the profession, and, if possible, visit a Worksite Health Promotion program in your area and talk with a Professional in the Field of Health Promotion Management.
- Enroll in a College or University that offers an academic degree program in the field.
- And my last and most important piece of advice is — make sure you truly care about the Health and Well-being of people – all people! For absent that personal and deeply held quality you may find yourself in the wrong profession.

Wolf Kirsten, MS

I would tell him they have chosen a noble cause and a great field to work in. With hard work they will have a very rewarding experience and meet many incredibly talented and nice individuals. And I would encourage them to keep learning and honing skills, not to focus on one issue/area too narrowly as it is a broad and complex field.

Joseph Leutzinger, PhD

- Have them talk to multiple professionals in the field to ensure it is what they truly want to do.

Brenda Loubè, MS

Stay true to your core values. Make these values the environment you want for yourself and your team. When making key decisions, maintain your focus on the true purpose of your business. When we started our business in 1988, my partner Sheila Drohan and I focused on growing our business, improving the lives of others, and creating new jobs for health and fitness professionals. Every significant business decision we ever made, led us back to that purpose. Never lose sight of your greatest asset – your teammates (employees). Hire your team for the position. Honor and trust them to move the needle and grow the company.

Dee Hill-Mey, PhD

My peers have said it all… I recommend finding the right academic program to prepare for the field. Make as many contacts as you can – talk to people in the field to learn more. Be passionate about this work. Learn how to evaluate and do research. Do an internship or two. Practice what you preach!

George Pfeiffer, MSE

- Find your passion, embrace it, perfect what you love, and stay the course!

Mary Ellen Rose, PhD

Get a degree in Human Resources (HR). Your job is to support employees… and companies are still hard-wired to look to their HR dept for implementing initiatives designed to help those employees in a variety of ways. You absolutely need to have a health science background, but, more importantly, you need to understand the work of HR’s overarching responsibility for employees.

Phillip Smeltzer, PhD

If you have a passion to improve the lives of others and at least some interest in business, this can be your field of dreams. A second trait is enjoying a variety of experiences and roles. Few of the members in this field have done the same thing for very many years. And those that have their own company or academic role have changed their role and programs frequently as well. The passion for health and helping others is key. Follow your passion, and joy and happiness will follow.

Brenda Loubè, MS

- Be passionate about this work.

Brenda Loubè, MS

- Make as many contacts as you can – talk to people in the field to learn more.

Brenda Loubè, MS

- Be passionate about this work.

Barry Roa, MA

There are three pieces of advice for anyone considering a career in worksite health promotion: Find passion, intensely study that passion for 4-5 years, ask the universe for permission.

- “Find a job you love. You’ll never work a day in your life”. Find a way to make a living where compensation comes with enjoyment. For some, helping people is the primary focus. Helping people get closer to their true health potential is very rewarding.

- “The information is out there, all you have to do is let it in”. Becoming a subject matter expert normally takes intense study at a campus of higher learning. But, not always. Sometimes an undergraduate degree is enough of a foundation if adding work experience along with having relationships with successful mentors. Read everything. Mold yourself into the one that employers will seek. Employers make and sell widgets, they are not trained in worksite health. Worksite health promotion professionals help the work force stay healthy and can provide the business with a positive ROI/VOI through their program investments.

- “You don’t know it yet, but you need me”. Cold call a business. Ask the business if you can help them plan and implement a worksite health program. If they have one, but don’t have a dedicated person, ask for the job because you have the knowledge and energy to bring it to the next level. If worksite health promotion is your passion, ask for it. If you do not ask, you do not get.

Talya Williams, MS

Make connections with your peers and experts in the industry! Attending professional conferences will enable you to network with people to build those relationships. These powerful interactions can often lead to best practice sharing, new opportunities (i.e. employment and/or special projects), and friends for a lifetime.
Monash University: Keeping Employees Healthy and Well Down Under

Wolf Kirsten, MSc

Who is Monash University?
- Location: Melbourne, Australia.
- Enterprise: Educational and research institution.
- Number of employees: 15,000
- Mission: "Monash University is committed to the highest quality in teaching, learning, research, and a wide range of professional and community activities."

Health in Business Strategy

Monash University is uniquely positioned to be proactive on important public health issues through engagement with thousands of students, staff, alumni and the wider Monash community. The University values, supports and promotes programs and policies that improve the physical and psychological health and well-being of employees, under the banner of the ‘Wellbeing at Monash.’ Senior management endorses staff wellbeing as a core value of the University to be included in performance development activities with wellbeing being a key performance indicator (KPI), reported quarterly to senior management. The University’s commitment to a healthy workplace is underpinned by the Wellbeing at Monash Program, delivered collaboratively across the University and supported by a comprehensive range of programs, services and policies including the OHS Policy, Health and Wellbeing at Monash Policy and Mental Health Policy.

It has allocated funds and is implemented by a skilled Occupational Health and Wellbeing team: a Wellbeing at Monash Coordinator, Wellbeing Assistant, an Occupational Health Physician and 2 Occupational Health Nurses. In addition, this team of professionals support a network of local University Wellbeing Champions. The communications strategy focuses on four key staff groups: managers and supervisors, staff, new staff and the Wellbeing Champion network.

A variety of print and electronic methods are used to promote the program across the complex University structure, including a monthly wellbeing newsletter with 15,500 subscribers per month.

The Wellbeing at Monash Program was developed with limited resources and a very small budget. Over the past 10 years the program model has evolved to meet the differing range of campuses with both small and large employee numbers and diverse cultures. The growing success of the program has encouraged budget allocation at both organizational and work area level.

Programs

The Wellbeing Program has been developed by assessing the health status, needs and expectations of staff and is underpinned by a comprehensive range of integrated preventative, targeted health and wellbeing programs and policies. This is supported by a work environment that encourages and fosters healthy behaviors and physical activity. Results revealed an average of 1.82 health risks per employee. Utilizing the organisational health risk profile together with the demographic profile of employees and employee needs and expectations derived from surveys, the Wellbeing at Monash program four core themes incorporating both physical and psychological objectives were derived: increasing the levels of physical activity in the workplace; improving psychological health; promoting healthy eating habits; and facilitating work-life balance and general health of the Monash workforce.

The successful Staff Wellbeing and Activity Program (SWAP) offers workplace based, low cost, time efficient physical activity and mental health program options for small and large staff groups of varying demographic age, gender and ability. For example, mental wellbeing programs include resilience building, mindfulness stress reduction training, mindful employer mental health training, employee assistance programs (EAP), Mental Health First Aid training, etc. The SWAP Mindfulness training is delivered through an online learning platform (Massive Open Online Course – MOOC) to more than 120,000 learners.

Monash engages with the boarder also goes into the community to promote healthy living, (e.g. RUOK) is a day to create a strong community, that de-stigmatizes mental health issues, raises awareness of suicide prevention and fosters resilience.

Progress / Success

The University strongly supports a culture of ongoing evaluation, utilizing data from the Wellbeing Participation KPI, organizational health risk profile, health checks, online portal, hazard and incident report trends, participant evaluation and satisfaction, employee engagement, staff demographics, absenteeism, voluntary turnover and early intervention and work injury statistics among others.

As a result of the program absenteeism is 0.4 days lower and voluntary turnover 1.88% lower compared to the Australian University HR Benchmark average, work injury claims have reduced by 56% over 7 years, a new online reporting system resulted in an 18% increase (in 12 months) in the number of hazard and incidents reported and a 50% increase in the number of near miss incidents reported, staff engagement levels have remained consistently high since 2007 and job satisfaction consistently high at 82% satisfaction. Improvements were also documented with regard to active transport and healthy and sustainable work environments with a 10% reduction in car use as the mode of transport to work and a sustained level of 17% using active transport to work.

Conclusion / Summary

The Wellbeing at Monash Program through its many programs, services and resources is replicable for both small and large organizations. This is because a cornerstone to the success of the program is the collaborative approach in the development and delivery of the program. Prioritizing program partners, stakeholder and senior management input and buy-in together with a proven communication and reporting system has ensured long-term sustainability and success of the program.
What Goes Around, Comes Around

George J Pfeiffer, MSE

Editor’s Note: Worksite health promotion is a great profession. But, it can be frustrating to practitioners when some stakeholders cite the latest study that refutes the efficacy of worksite health programs through colored lenses in my opinion. The following is a reprint of my Editor’s column for Worksite Health that I wrote 20 years ago. I believe it’s still relevant today and hopefully puts what we do in the right perspective. QJP

Reflections on the Movement

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of AWHP (1999), it’s an appropriate time to reflect on the progress of the worksite health promotion movement. In 1984, as president of what was then called the Association for Fitness in Business, I wrote the following piece concerning the association’s upcoming 10th anniversary:

“As a professional, I am most concerned that we may become obsolete. We need to preserve our uniqueness while understanding that we must adapt to a changing work environment. We must stay one step ahead in professional preparation and research. We need to be flexible in our thinking and in the ways we deliver our services. We need to be leaders first, with a gift for innovation. We need to demonstrate the benefits of services through traditional bottom line measures, but not ignore our primary customer, the employee.”

These words ring true today. In fact, I believe that — because of factors such as the changing landscape of health-care delivery through managed-care organizations, and the exponential explosion of information and support through the World Wide Web — health promotion services will become more consumer-directed rather than employee-directed.

Does this mean worksite health promotion services are a dying trend? Far from it. The following are some observations and challenges.

Focus on competitive advantage When planning, always consider how your programming can add value to the organization and promote business continuity. In other words, focus on the means to reduce risks, control costs, and enhance and protect the human capital of your organization. This approach is work promotion rather than health promotion.

Don’t be an island. The operative words are collaboration and cooperation. Cross-functionality — being able to perform and contribute within a team framework will be even more critical as companies further scrutinize human-resource functions for cost-effectiveness. Whenever you can, look for opportunities to integrate your services with other departments.

Coordinate and integrate. Don’t be intimidated by managed-care programs. Instead, act as the quality control arm of your benefits department when it comes to health enhancement and preventive services.

Contribute to the “M.E.,” or meaningful employment factor. Though focusing on competitive advantage is a professional requirement, this is only half the challenge. It’s also important to provide programming and inspiration that provides intrinsic value to the ultimate end user — the employee.

Expand your brand. If you manage an on-site fitness center, don’t just be a fitness center. Look for ways to change the perception and scope of your services. By being a full-service “personal effectiveness center,” you will expand your service reach and provide other human capital managers with an employee-friendly place to offer cross-functional services. In fact, how about creating a human resources “mall” designed to encourage collaboration and one-stop shopping?

Capitalize on communication technology. With the explosion of the World Wide Web and the expansion of corporate intranets, there are tremendous opportunities to expand your service delivery (e.g., household, dispersed work locations) and information and support services.

Continue to measure and promote your progress. Evaluation of the hard and soft sides of your programs will continue to be important. However, don’t reserve your results for some professional publication; promote the heck out of your progress to your participants and your management.

And, by the way, continue to provide some fun to your place.

Happy birthday, AWHP! (And IAWHP!)