

Psychologically Healthy Workplaces Rewarded With Positive Outcomes

Companies that continue to invest in their employees during tough economic times reap intrinsic and financial rewards, according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

At a recent Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards ceremony, five organizations were recognized by the APA for comprehensive efforts to promote employee health and well-being while enhancing organizational performance.

"While there is no denying that the current economic downturn may necessitate some belt-tightening, employers should be careful not to secure this quarter's financial returns at the expense of employee well-being or the organization's long-term success," said David Ballard, Psy.D., the APA's assistant executive director for corporate relations and business strategy.

The 2009 Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award winners are WR Systems, Ltd., Engineering Services Division, Virginia; Replacements, Ltd., North Carolina; Teledyne Brown Engineering, Huntsville Headquarters, Alabama; WorldatWork, Arizona; and Sandia Preparatory School, New Mexico.

These five organizations reported an average turnover rate of 11 percent in 2008. By comparison, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the national average turnover rate at 39 percent.

In other findings:

- 25 percent of employees in the award-winning companies reported experiencing chronic work stress, compared to 39 percent nationally.
- 85 percent of employees reported being satisfied with their jobs, compared to 61 percent nationally.
- 87 percent of employees said they would recommend their organizations to others as a good place

to work, compared to 44 percent nationally.

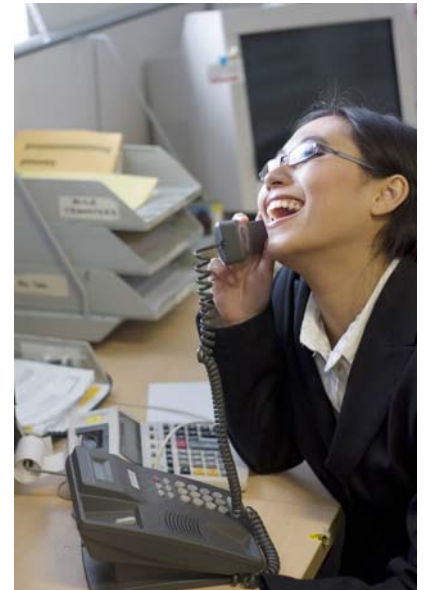
- 5 percent said they intend to seek employment elsewhere within the next year, compared to 32 percent nationally.

"The five award winners have implemented a comprehensive set of programs and policies designed to optimize outcomes for both employee and employer," Dr. Ballard said. "Their efforts demonstrate that any type of organization, large or small, has the power and the responsibility to create a psychologically healthy workplace."

Outcomes Reported

The APA has developed five categories for psychologically healthy workplace practices: employee involvement; health and safety; employee growth and development; work-life balance; and employee recognition.

Employee participation in decision making, skills training and leadership development, flexible work arrangements, and programs promoting healthy lifestyle and behavior choices are examples of practices found to contribute to a psychologically healthy workplace. By employing these and other related strategies, the award winners report the following outcomes:



Psychological health indicators are linked to company performance.

Poisoning Can Be Prevented

More than 2 million potential poison exposures are reported to the nation's 61 poison control centers every year, more than half of them involving children under 6, the American Association of Poison Control Centers reports. Poisoning most frequently involves medicines and household chemicals such as cleaning supplies and personal care products. Simple preventive steps include keeping poisonous materials in their original containers, placing them out of children's reach, following handling instructions and recommended dosages, and installing carbon monoxide detectors.

For more suggestions, visit www.aapcc.org.

Worried Americans Losing Sleep

One-third of Americans are losing sleep over the state of the U.S. economy and other personal financial concerns, according to the National Sleep Foundation's 2009 Sleep in America™ poll. The newly released findings reveal striking disparities in the sleep patterns, health habits and quality of life between healthy and unhealthy Americans: Those in good health are twice as likely than those in poor health to work efficiently, exercise or eat more healthy foods because they are getting enough sleep.

"It's easy to understand why so many people are concerned over the economy and jobs, but sacrificing sleep is the wrong solution," said David Cloud, CEO of the National Sleep Foundation. "Sleep is essential for productivity and alertness and is a vital sign for one's overall health."

Resource Directory

Imaging strategies for low-back pain: systematic review and meta-analysis; study shows routine imaging to assess acute or sub-acute low back pain holds no clinically relevant benefits for patient outcomes; R Chou et. al; The Lancet, Vol. 373, Issue 9662, February 2009.

Screening for Obstructive Sleep Apnea During Commercial Driver Medical Examinations; this study supports screening validity; P Parks, et. al; Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Vol. 51, Issue 3, March 2009.

Universal Patient Compact, a national effort to encourage collaboration among patients, families and their health care providers introduced by the National Patient Safety Foundation; www.npsf.org.

The NSF encourages Americans to maintain good sleep habits, exercise and eat nutritious foods to help combat anxiety and improve health and productivity. Visit www.sleepfoundation.org.

Smoking Linked to Lost Productivity

Cigarette smoking in the United States results in an estimated 443,000 premature deaths and \$193 billion in direct health-care expenditures and productivity losses each year, according to newly released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2007, nearly 20 percent of adults in the United States were current smokers. Among states, current smoking prevalence was highest in Kentucky, West Virginia and Oklahoma and lowest in Utah, California and Connecticut.



Violence Prevention

ASIS International, one of the world's largest organizations for security professionals, and the Society for Human Resource Management announced a partnership to develop a Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention American National Standard. The standard, based on an ASIS Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Guideline published in 2005, would provide an overview of policies, processes and protocols organizations can adopt to help prevent threatening behavior and violence affecting workers.

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Employee Health a Differentiator for High-Performing Companies

A focus on supporting and improving employee health distinguishes high-performing companies from low-performing ones, survey findings show.

In its 20th annual *Health Care Cost Survey – the Health Dividend: Capturing the Value of Employee Health*, Towers Perrin, a global professional services firm, compares results from 609 predominantly Fortune 1000 companies in terms of their relative health care expenditures and ability to achieve benefit objectives.

Understanding linkages between workforce health and well-being and business vitality has never been more essential: U.S. corporations will spend, on average, an estimated \$9,552 per employee for health benefits this year, an increase of 6 percent compared to 2008, according to the survey.

High performers commit to “rigorous and continuous management” of health plans and delivery processes and share cost savings with employees. Rather than focus on managing the cost of illness, these companies “balance affordability objectives with efforts to prevent illness and promote health,” the report states. “High performers make good health part of the organization’s fabric and identity.”

Results show that high-performing companies will pay, on average, 12 percent less in annual health care premiums in 2009 than low-performing companies. High-performing companies report a per-employee

How Do High Performers Get Results?

What do high-performing companies do to achieve superior results? According to Towers Perrin, they:

1. Demonstrate their interest in employee well-being.
2. Build linkages between workforce health and business results.
3. Ensure that key success factors such as leadership involvement are firmly in place.
4. Engage employees and promote a culture of health.
5. Invest in a broad range of existing and emerging health management programs.
6. Design and price “transparent” programs with appropriate incentives.
7. Measure program and vendor performance against goals.
8. Act on plans to address gaps and opportunities.
9. Are sensitive to affordability issues in the workforce.
10. Proactively profile employees’ health status and risk factors.

Source: www.towersperrin.com

cost of \$8,904, compared to \$10,104 among low-performing companies. High performers using account-based benefit plans and other consumer-driven approaches also will save more.

Healthy Companies, continued from Page 1

1. Teledyne Brown Engineering’s wellness program is associated with a 34 percent reduction in absenteeism. Employees who participate in the program use a third fewer sick days than those who do not.
2. WorldatWork attributes employees’ ability to decrease body mass, cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels to a healthy, supportive and flexible work environment.
3. Replacements, Ltd. cites an average tenure of longer than eight years. When surveyed, 93 percent of employees said they feel their jobs are important to the company and 91 percent care about the organization.



4. Sandia Preparatory School says psychological health reduces absenteeism, which in turn cuts costs because substitute teachers are not needed as often and fewer employees use up their sick time.
5. WR Systems reports that its programs contribute to low accident and injury rates and a high rate of employee retention.

Award History

Psychologically healthy company awards have been presented to organizations by state, provincial and territorial psychological associations in North America for the past decade. Award nominees are selected from a pool of local winners and evaluated on their workplace programs and policies. Awards are given to for-profit and not-for-profit organizations as well as government, military and educational institutions.

For more information, visit www.phwa.org.

E-Verify Program Continued

The budget signed by President Obama reauthorizes the E-Verify immigration database through Sept. 30. E-Verify is a web-based service for employers that compares information on I-9 forms with Homeland Security and Social Security Administration data to verify whether a worker is legally eligible to work in the U.S. Employer groups have filed a lawsuit to stop the rule on the grounds that it could expose employers to lawsuits filed by workers who feel they were discriminated against on the basis of race or national origin.

EEOC Reports Activity

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is seeking public comments on implementation of the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2008 (GINA). The commission is charged with issuing regulations by May 21 to implement Title II of GINA, which prohibits the use of genetic information in employment and imposes strict confidentiality requirements.

Meanwhile, workplace discrimination charges filed with the EEOC rose 15 percent (95,402 filings) in Fiscal Year 2008. Charges based on age and retaliation had the most significant percentage increases, while allegations based on race, sex and retaliation continued as the most frequently filed charges. For enforcement and litigation statistics, visit www.eeoc.gov.

Free Choice Act

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) has been introduced in both houses of Congress amid threats of strong opposition from business leaders. The legislation is intended to remove barriers to union representation and collective bargaining agreements. Alternative legislation, the Secret Ballot Protection Act, also has been introduced in both houses.

Job Funding

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor will invest major funding in programs to help Americans get back to work through a national network of One-Stop Career Centers. Target populations include low-income, low-skilled Americans and youth seeking summer employment. Visit www.servicelocator.org and <http://careeronestop.org>.

Labor Department Actions: Popcorn Lung & Whistleblowers

Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis withdrew an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for occupational exposure to food flavorings containing diacetyl. The withdrawal is intended to facilitate more timely development of an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standard to protect workers from exposures that can lead to a potentially fatal lung disease commonly referred to as popcorn lung.



Meanwhile, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has advised Solis to take steps to “ensure the quality and consistency of the whistleblower program,” which is intended to protect workers who report prohibited workplace practices. According to a GAO report, OSHA “does not have an effective mechanism to ensure that data are accurately recorded in its database.” As a result, the Labor Department “lacks reliable information on processing times and...cannot accurately report how long it takes to investigate and close a case or decide on certain appeals.”

Protective Policies Promoted

Occupational, environmental and other health specialists from the U.S. and abroad are joining forces in an attempt to persuade Congress to adopt more rigorous protective policies on workplace and environmental hazards. Many groups have sent white papers to Washington in support of “placing the needs of the public above those of special interest contributors when it comes to health,” said Kathleen Burns, Ph.D., director, Sciencecorps, Lexington, Mass.

Respiratory Protection Targeted

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has proposed quality assurance and control requirements for manufacturers of respirators approved under 42 CFR Part 84: *Approval of Respiratory Protective Devices*. Visit www.cdc.gov/niosh/docket.