

Living on WELL Street Blog: **“Behavior Change Is No Easy Task!”**

By Michael White, Worksite Wellness Technical Assistant, We Choose Health

“The difference between ‘involvement’ and ‘commitment’ is like an eggs-and-ham breakfast: the chicken was ‘involved’ - the pig was ‘committed’.” – W.C. Fields

The quote from W.C. Fields is applicable to worksite wellness. Too often the only “committed” ones are those leading the effort. If 1/3 of the workforce is “involved” in some way, we consider it a success. The reason for this is obvious – changing people’s behaviors, let alone lifestyle, is a difficult task!

Creating health promotion activities for the workplace is not that hard. Making a wellness-related activity fun, engaging, and more than a one-and-done, is certainly more of a challenge. But, creating an activity that encourages lasting behavior change can be near impossible!

Over the past seven years, I have observed the focus of worksite wellness change from a health screening and intervention approach to creating a culture of health where the goal is to engage all employees in taking charge of their health and wellbeing. A healthy culture helps motivate and enable wholesome behaviors that lead to vibrant and disease-free lives. The authors of *Influencer – The Power To Change Anything* confirm this. They suggest that we have to help people answer two questions:

1. Is it worth it? Or, am I motivated to do it?
2. Can I do it? Or, am I able to do it?

Before people will change behavior, they have to want to do so and believe they can do so. It often requires a different way of thinking and then people have to care enough to act on it. Educating people on the dangers of an unhealthy lifestyle seldom makes a difference. However, focusing on a few critical behaviors and providing “experiences” – real or vicarious (through vivid storytelling) – that engage the emotions and provide hope will lead people to change. For example, one study demonstrated success in keeping lost weight off for over 6 years by focusing on 3 simple behaviors:

1. Exercise on equipment at home, i.e. treadmill
2. Eat breakfast
3. Measure weight daily

Instead of hosting silly biggest loser contests, focus your wellness efforts on motivating and enabling people to behave in ways that lead to real and lasting change. Personal experience is the great persuader. Provide experiences that allow change to happen!

Be WELL!

Michael