

Why fitness at work = productive staff at B2B firms

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More and more B2B firms are adding fitness or sports programs to their workplace, discovering that output and productivity benefit as a result.



What are the pros and cons, the process, the costs to such fitness programs? What are the tangible benefits, if any? B2B NN investigates this important phenomenon.

Fitness consultant and mobility specialist Moshe Schwartz of Toronto's [Epic Health and Fitness](#) had offered [Talent Employment Inc.](#) high intensity training workout, "bootcamp-style", as well as yoga-style breathing relaxation.



Moshe Schwartz (right) working with an employee (Photo courtesy Maya Nadel)

“I noticed a happier and productive workforce...You’re thinking more clearly, able to focus better. People are taking fewer sick days,” he says.

He says the benefits of exercise to workers included avoiding poor posture, joint pains (hip, back, knee, or neck) and migraines.

A [study](#) presented to the [American College of Sports Medicine](#), concurred, finding that workers who spent between 30 to 60 minutes at the office exercising reported an average performance boost of 15 percent. Six out of ten employees said their time management skills, mood and mental performance improved on the days they exercised.

A [2011 study](#) published in the [Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine](#) showed that two and a half hours a week of exercise during the work day resulted in “noticeable reduction in absences.”

Toronto-area fitness expert [Jennifer Ettinger](#) assisted Michigan’s [Tennant Floor Cleaning Equipment](#) in health and wellness training.

“They wanted to cultivate a healthier lifestyle within the company,” she says.

The company bought – with a budget of about \$1,000 – more gym equipment, medicine balls, stability weights and cardio DVDs, with her guidance. Ettinger taught employees lunges, lifts, squats, for “functional training” that assisted in various practical improvements, including how to properly lift and carry boxes.

“I tried to teach as much as possible in as little time, so they could be accountable on their own,” she says.

Ettinger advises employers that employees be pre-screened for any health issues, to avoid any potential issues. As well, the employer should screen the fitness trainers for proper certification.

Overall, the programs she led had a positive effect.

“You saw more productivity, confidence and morale in their employees; anxiety and depression reduced.”

Sara Ackermann of CorSynergy Studio in the Toronto-area, teaches Pilates once a week to MegaComfort, focusing on strength building, posture awareness and restorative therapy exercises.

“When you’re sitting at a desk all day, and you open up your structure and relax your muscles, you increase the general relaxation throughout the body.”

MegaComfort purchased yoga mats, small and large fitness balls, encouraging employees to pick up over the course of the day, or to take home and try.

“Basically we decided as a health and wellness company, we wanted to lead by example and offer this program to our team to make them more health consciousness, even in their work environment,” explained Barbara Orvitz owner, [MegaComfort](#), who produces ergonomic anti-fatigue insoles and orthotics.

“It is a very small investment with a great return on the investment: I believe it shows we care, creates a healthy working environment and awareness, that I believe ultimately affects everyone’s overall health: less absenteeism or health issues, increases in productivity.”

A recent report from the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in collaboration with Transamerica Center for Health Studies (TCHS) outlines the correlation between fitness at work, and increased output.

The report, “[From Evidence to Practice](#): Workplace Wellness that Works” provides insights into the best practices that are driving the most successful workplace wellness programs in the country.

“Employers know that keeping employees healthy is good for both the employees themselves and for the productivity and profitability of the business,” says the report. It also suggests office incentive programs to encourage healthy activity.

Nearly all of [Allegacy Federal Credit Union's](#) employee participate in its holistic workplace wellness program, the study notes, causing decreased health risks by 50 percent since the program started. Furthermore, Allegacy had zero increases to its medical premiums for a three-year period from 2011 to 2013.

Two years ago, [UHY Advisors in Michigan](#) began their health and wellness program with a softball team. Since that time they have expanded to basketball, bowling, cycling, football, running club, softball and volleyball teams, according to Krystina Borrocci, Marketing Director and Leader of the Health and Fitness Committee.

“It promotes team building,” she says, of the 300 accountants in their employ. “It gives employees a chance to relieve some stress and promotes overall health.”

One of their most successful programs launched is their “Fitbit Step Challenge”. Each January they roll the health and fitness initiatives directly into orientation.

They also include a monthly health and fitness newsletter to keep employees up to date on current programs, upcoming programs and offer healthy eating and lifestyle tips. They host “crunch and learns” where professionals from various areas of fitness educate employees on healthy living and exercise.

“One of the biggest challenges is coming up with fresh new ideas and incentives to keep everyone interested,” Borrocci adds.

One such idea is the treadmill desk, which *B2B NN* [reviewed](#) several months ago. In the review, David Silverberg wrote: “I can confidently reassure naysayers that treadmill desks are a simple way to help fighting the muscle tightness and antsy feelings we desk workers often face.”



David Silverberg using a LifeSpan treadmill desk

Massachusetts-based [Granite Telecommunications](#), a company with more than 1,500 employees in several U.S. cities, recently expanded its own fitness program with a 10,000 sq. ft. area that included treadmills, stationary bikes, ellipticals, and weight lifting gear.

They also have a free Weight Watchers service, a golf team, hockey team, rugby team, soccer team, tennis matches and roughly 20 intramural sports, as well as a wellness letter.

“It is important that our teammates are healthy. Fitness is important and our wellness program has always been a focal point at Granite,” says Rob Hale, CEO.

“Moreover, healthy and fit employees promote a better work environment which, in turn, produces better work and improves what Granite can do for our customers.”

These programs won the company Boston Business Journal Healthiest Employer three out of four years (2015, 2014, 2012).

Chicago IT consulting firm [SWC Technology Partners](#) offers a comprehensive formal wellness program run by employees, which activities such as dodgeball, lunchtime yoga, chair massages, intramural sports teams, open gym days, kick boxing, and Zumba.

This program, according to Content Marketer Amanda McQueen, has earned them recognition by Crain’s Chicago Business as a top 10 best places to work, and one of Chicago’s “coolest places to work”.

[Andrea Hammer](#) is a certified fitness instructor, women’s self defense instructor, and nutrition counsellor who says that, “more companies are seeing the immense benefits of having healthier and happier employees.”

Usual fees, Hammer says, are about \$100 an hour for personal coaches.

“Corporate health and well-being programs are good not only for the general health of the company, but they create greater company morale, improved productivity, and lower insurance claims and costs.”

She is the fitness coach for Florida-based [Team Horner](#) – the largest privately owned swimming pool and spa distributor in the world, with some 500 employees.

The have walking challenges, health screenings, fitness coaching, yoga, ball game challenges, and women’s’ self-defense seminars.

As a result, they won an American Psychological Association award for overall mental and physical health of their employees.

At e-discovery platform [kCura](#) in Chicago, they offer free weekly yoga and boot camp classes, fresh fruit baskets throughout the office, free CPR classes, free biometric wellness screenings, several free massage sessions.

kCura develops “e-discovery software”, Relativity, for managing large volumes of electronic evidence during litigation or investigations.

The “500 Stair Climb” has become a yearly tradition, when employees climb 500 stairs between the bottom of the building to the top.

“It is not only about getting your job done effectively, but also having more energy and vigor to give to your family and friends when you get home,” notes Dorie Blesoff, Chief People Officer.

“We strongly believe that the health and happiness of our team members have a direct impact on the success of the company.”

A healthy body can, indeed, give us a healthy mind.