Large Public Sector Employer Achieves High Participation with Layered Rewards System

Alere client engages two-thirds of their 41,000 employees and achieves significant cost savings with an innovative rewards and recognition program.

Introduction

A long-time Alere client with 41,000 employees has seen exceptional participation in their program for two years running. More than two-thirds of the organization's employee population has participated in the program each year. And more importantly, there is evidence of improvement in the health risks of the population.

Among the nearly 28,000 participants who engaged in the program in both 2012 and 2013, the data demonstrates a favorable risk trend with more people moving to the low-risk category and a 2.9% reduction in the high-risk category. Members of the cohort population from 2012 to 2013 also improved their lifestyle risk factors**:** dietary fat intake, fruit/vegetable consumption, physical activity, seat belt usage and tobacco use and improved their medical risks: blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose and triglycerides.

Employee engagement in the organization's wellness and chronic care programs from 2012 to 2013 resulted in a cost savings of $5 million. The organization won an industry award in 2013 for their innovative rewards program.

How Did They Do It?

In partnership with Alere, the organization differentiated their evidence-based program with innovative methods of rewards and recognition as a way to inspire and motivate more interest among the more reluctant or uninterested employees. They implemented innovative communications practices to share employee successes and developed an extensive network of Wellness Champions as a way to use peer leadership and influence to affect healthy behavior change across the extensive population.

The organization made it a priority to follow a strategic plan in line with the following best practices:

- Supportive leadership with a reciprocal approach – using the influence of executive-level leaders as well as grassroots leadership from employee volunteers
- Meaningful incentives that reinforce healthy behaviors
- A comprehensive and integrated program with inclusive opportunities for all participants
- Effective and value-based communications with a social engagement design
- A culture influenced by leadership and aligned with a core philosophy across the organization

Layered Incentive Approach Key to Success

In 2011, the organization was only achieving 22% participation and knew they needed to come up with a way to motivate employees to take that first step. They knew that financial incentives are a proven tactic for jumpstarting engagement and participation, but they also believed that financial incentives are extrinsic motivators that may only last for a short period of time. The organization

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wanted to develop an incentive strategy that would deepen employee commitment and lead to intrinsic, personal motivators that do not need external reinforcement. As a result, the organization decided to develop what they referred to as a "layered approach" to lead employees on the path to better health over a period of time.

- **Layer 1 -** Because research has shown that financial incentives are effective in encouraging a relatively simple action for a clear reward, such as completion of a health risk assessment or participation in a biometric screening, the organization decided to use financial incentives as the first out of three layers of incentives. Employees were offered the opportunity to earn up to a $480 premium discount by earning credits for participating in various wellness activities throughout the year.

- **Layer 2 -** The next layer of the incentive was to provide the opportunity to receive peer and public recognition for positive successful behavior change experiences. Program administrators created multiple communication channels for employees to share their positive experiences, as a way provide positive reinforcement to those who achieved success while inspiring a desire in other employees to follow their peers and be recognized.

  With the help of the onsite health promotion manager, the communications strategy was expanded beyond email and newsletter communications to include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and a blog site to spread tips and information for health and wellness. Other innovative communication strategies included tweeting testimonial quotes by participants and inserting success stories in welcome packages mailed to new employees. Below is an example of a story shared in a welcome letter with new employees to convey one participant's positive experience with the program and hopefully encourage new employees to engage in the program as well.

  "I have been overweight my entire life and have never really been too concerned about my health until last year. I participated with the HealthQuest program, completed my At Home Health Screening and after receiving the results, I realized that things needed to change. So with those results at hand, my wife and I both began dieting, and eventually started exercising, and in time we really started seeing results. It was something that changed my life. I am continuing to improve my habits and constantly striving to improve my own personal physical condition, but it is a journey. Long story short, I participated in the HealthQuest program last year to receive my health insurance premium discount. This year I participate because it has changed my life."

- **Layer 3 -** The top layer of the program's reward design includes the promotion of healthy biometric values as an opportunity to earn credits within the program. This component was recently implemented within the current program as a method of reinforcement for individuals who already have healthy biometric values and to encourage participants to achieve these healthy values by making improvements to their health. This piece of the rewards strategy provides all participants with an additional goal to work toward and maintain within the program.

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Peer Leadership Organization

As a public sector organization, the wellness program must reach across a variety of separate state organizations – each with their own distinct leadership, operations, work environments and sub-cultures. To overcome the challenges that are common among this type of diverse population, the client cultivated a grassroots Wellness Champion Network. These volunteers actively promote the program, and contribute to the success of the layered incentives program.

Recruited on an ongoing basis, program administrators seek out employees who are top performers, leaders, or wellness-minded and who tend to be well-liked in their organizations, with the kind of positive qualities that make people want to follow them. They reach out and ask these individuals to become the wellness "advocates" in their organizations by spreading the word about the programs and coming up with unique and inspiring ways to encourage employee participation.

The organization views these volunteers as the true leaders of the program and as the ambassadors of the culture of health that the program strives to embody. Program administrators make every effort to empower the Wellness Champions to take initiative and be creative at their respective place of employment to promote health and wellness.

The organization devotes time and resources to provide leadership training. With the help of an onsite health promotion manager provided by Alere, they have implemented monthly training sessions in which the champions learn from experts and share their application of new ideas and concepts with each other to get feedback and improve their skills.

Feedback from Employers

The client also acknowledges that the input from employees and a consistent process of evaluation is necessary to evolve the program and continue to see high engagement and positive results. The organization employs many opportunities to gather feedback including a targeted survey for employees who either completed the incentive requirements or did not complete the incentive requirements in the previous year.

These surveys were used to understand the program experience from the participants' perspective and to identify specific barriers and opportunities to improve the program. This client has also taken advantage of Alere's strategic partnership with the Health Enhancement Research Organization to complete the scorecard to identify additional areas of both strength and opportunity within their program. Through continued evaluation, the client plans to evolve the program for success year-over-year.

This client uses best practices to guide their strategy, but they continue to go above and beyond to make the program their own through the use of strategically incorporated rewards and recognition that fit best with their population. They have invested considerable time and effort to maintain a valued, employee-focused program.

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White Paper Shares More Best Practices

Learn best practices for encouraging your employees to engage in healthy behaviors in this white paper: "Strategies for Investing in a Healthy Workforce".

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