



The single most powerful element in selling more healthy groceries to your customers starts with empowering your employees with good health.

All's Wellness

By Barbara Ruhs

Inspiring Healthy Habits

Grocers can encourage employee wellness through competitive spirit.

As I dialed my mom's phone number, I realized that it was after 10 p.m. on the East Coast. Surprisingly, she picked up the phone and reported that she had just come in from a 3.5-mile walk.

When I asked why she'd been out so late, she explained that she needed to log some more "miles" on her Fitbit to maintain her lead in a group of walkers in the neighborhood, all engaged in a virtual walk-a-thon. A Fitbit is a tiny device that can be clasped to your waist or bra strap, or worn as a wristband, to conveniently track daily steps, distance, stairs climbed and calories burned. It syncs to your iPad or smartphone with the Fitbit app, while linking you to your contacts' Fitbits.

As her daughter and a dietitian, I wanted to be supportive, but this sounded crazy — walking in the dark to amass more steps? After a thorough interrogation, I came to the conclusion that she was simply in some sort of Fitbit "trance," and while it lasted, I would support her walking mania. In fact, after our conversation, Mom e-mailed me a hilarious *New Yorker* article, "Stepping Out," which chronicled humorist David Sedaris' own Fitbit-fueled walking obsession. Not only did I go out and buy one of my own, but it got me thinking about how to inspire individuals to adopt healthy habits.

Employee Wellness Advocates

When I was a corporate supermarket dietitian, each year around New Year's, I'd kick off an eight-week walking challenge for employees. The goal was two-fold: First, to help my colleagues take simple, healthy steps toward healthier behaviors, and second, to increase their awareness of my role as a health expert for the company. In my experience, folks that start moving more tend to feel better and make healthier food choices. As participants notice personal health improvements, including weight loss and lower blood pressure and blood sugar, they also become health advocates for the company and help with its mission

to promote health to customers.

Planning for an annual health screening before or after (or both) such a program can be valuable by providing motivation and reinforcement to start and maintain healthy habits. Increasing awareness of potential health risks is also cost-effective in lowering employee health care costs in the long term.

Participants were required to form teams of 10 (that could include up to five spouses) and come up with creative team names. By doing this, employees and family members could motivate each other throughout the program. During and after the competition, employee parking lots and store aisles quickly become walking destinations during break times. Throughout the competition, steps were converted to miles each week so that teams could track the virtual distance walked between stores on a map of Arizona, using them as goal destinations and starting the competition from the Mexican border up to the north rim of the Grand Canyon.

Healthy competition was encouraged by providing incentives and prizes throughout the program, including VIP coupons, better-for-you product samples, T-shirts, and a grand prize of \$100 worth of fitness gear from a local vendor, awarded to each member of the team that walked the most steps.

Reinforcing Healthy Habits

In these types of initiatives, focusing on weight loss as the definition of success often creates more disordered behaviors and fails to recognize that everyone, regardless of weight, can improve his or her health, whether it's by increasing physical activity, eating more fruits and vegetables, reducing sugar-sweetened beverage intake, or eating a healthier breakfast. All of these healthy behaviors can be reinforced by a well-organized employee wellness program without focusing solely on weight loss.

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