

Special  
**WELLNESS  
& SAFETY**  
Issue

# HR DIGEST

## The Quest for the Holy Grail: Best Practices in Employee Health Management

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Definitions of “The Holy Grail” vary considerably depending on the source, but all depict the grail as a highly coveted item; priceless in value. Novels and movies have sensationalized the quest for the grail. Indeed many characters have lost their lives in pursuit of this prize. Although it is unlikely any of you will sacrifice your lives

in the quest for a healthy workforce, undoubtedly there are times you can relate to the rigors and roadblocks of the journey. Fortunately many of the pioneers in worksite wellness have been willing to share their lessons learned and to work as an industry to develop best practices we can all apply to our programs. The following is a discussion of critical success factors that you can benchmark your program against. Utilizing these tried and true tenets can help your program become a best practice example of its own.

### Wellness Program Success Factors

- A supportive corporate culture and visible leadership commitment form the foundation of your wellness program. Company policies should advocate optimal health. Organizations serious about health improvement have extended incentives beyond the employee population to site-based goals tied to management performance reviews. When supervisors and managers have a personal financial stake in the goals of the wellness program amazing things start to happen.
- Strategic planning is essential. This involves a thorough needs assessment process, which leads to specific and measurable goals and objectives for the program. Ensure that key program components are available to all groups

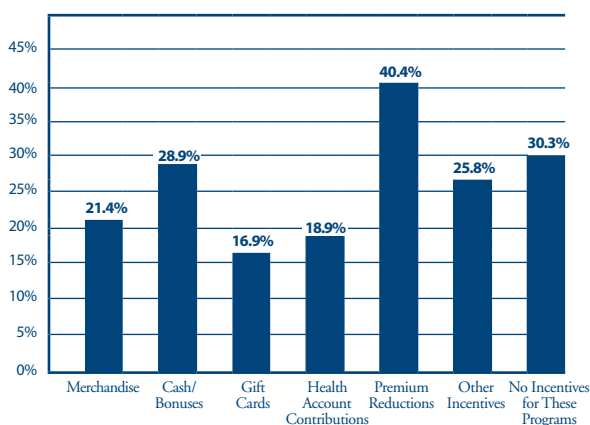
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## The Quest for the Holy Grail: Best Practices in Employee Health Management *(continued from cover page)*

and that something is available for everyone—the healthy and the health challenged. Like policies, health benefits should be designed to support optimal health. Have you done your homework?

- Just as branding is an important issue for your organization, your wellness program should have its own “brand identity.” Create a name and a logo and use them to identify and promote your program. Make sure senior management and employees receive regular status reports on program performance and outcomes. Many groups have adopted data dashboard reporting methods, sharing results monthly or quarterly. Employee success stories serve as inspiration and motivation to those working toward behavior change. Feature success stories in company publications.
- Thoughtful consideration should be given to selecting the best mix of program components. Worksite wellness is evolving into a more population-focused approach encompassing a wide range of programs and services. Will your population benefit most from health coaching or disease management? Health screenings or medical decision support? Are disability and absence problem areas and if so, what specific initiatives will address the root causes? How about your employee assistance program? Return on investment is maximized when the areas of greatest opportunity are targeted rather than the “program of the month.”
- Unfortunately, most populations require the use of incentives to engage employees in the program. This chart represents incentives utilized by 104 employers nationwide as reported in the “2007 Health, Wellness and Productivity Programs, Incentives and ROI Survey.”

Percent of programs with incentives, by type of incentive, for disease management, health management or general wellness programs (employers with incentives; n=104)



- Employers are becoming increasingly creative with their incentive strategies, expanding beyond participation to reward behavior change. In crafting your strategy, avoid unnecessarily high financial incentives that would be better used for programming.
- Program services need careful coordination and integration across the health status continuum. You will confuse and frustrate your employees if they receive phone calls from health coaches and disease management nurses independently, or if program communications and educational materials conflict or are redundant. Remember, participant consent is needed for data sharing between vendors.
- Last but not least, consider evaluation and outcomes. How will you define and measure success? You need to decide this on the front end or you risk not collecting the data you need to report on the back end. Risk migration and cohort analysis are essential evaluation metrics. What else does your organization need to know? If you don't know, find out.

Will you succeed in your quest for “The Holy Grail”? Time will tell. A well designed strategy will serve as the road map that guides your journey for a healthy workforce. ■

### Best Practice Checklist

- ✓ Supportive Corporate Culture
- ✓ Visible Leadership Commitment
- ✓ Thorough Needs Assessment
- ✓ Strategic Plan
- ✓ Brand Identity
- ✓ Comprehensive Communications
- ✓ Regular Stakeholder Status Reports
- ✓ Participant Success Stories
- ✓ Thoughtful Selection of Programs
- ✓ Meaningful Metrics
- ✓ Policies & Benefits Support Optimal Health
- ✓ Adequate Budget
- ✓ Outcomes Analysis
- ✓ Vendor Coordination & Integration
- ✓ Effective Incentives

*The source for the survey information: Employee Health & Productivity Management Programs: The Use of Incentives, A Survey of Major U.S. Employers, Katherine Capps, Health2 Resources, John B. Harkey, Jr., Ph.D., Harkey Research, June, 2007*