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March 27, 2007 — Rockford Acromatic Products is into serious competition. Not only is the company a player in the auto parts industry, its 80 employees are kicking butt on the fitness front too.

The company initiated a health and wellness program aimed at helping — and rewarding — staffers lose weight and exercise more. The benefits included shrinking waistlines and some padding in their bank accounts. The company says it spends about \$12,000 a year on a fitness regimen, which covers administrative costs and the rewards they've paid to successful participants.

In addition to savings in health insurance coverage and lost productivity on sick days, perhaps the biggest benefit Rockford has realized from this investment is an increase in productivity and morale. Risk manager Jim Knutsen says there's a new energy and excitement among employees about going to work every day and that does wonders for any workplace.

Even though in some cases, senior management leads the mission on health, the reality is anyone can be the catalyst for change within an organization.

Assess Colleagues' Interests

Start today by talking to your colleagues. Figure out what matters most to them. In addition to the obvious target of losing weight, for some it may be other health goals such as quitting smoking, exercising more, or cutting out bad eating habits.

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We've seen on "Good Morning America" that couples and families that diet together succeed together; the same is true in the office. Colleagues who focus on a common goal can achieve some pretty powerful results.

Yet, keep in mind that for many people, dieting and other health concerns are personal issues that they have no desire sharing with co-workers. Respect those wishes and avoid forcing their hands. Instead, studies show that the enthusiasm and success of participating employees will lead to increased participation by others.

Start a Healthy Competition

Pardon the pun, but creating a healthy sense of competition really works. People respond to competition and rewards —

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(Page 2 of 3)

that's where you hook them. Propose a plan to the boss that focuses on pay for performance. It's a concept that everyone can relate to in the workplace — from the cleaning crew to the CEO.

When you tout the benefits of healthy competition, improved mental and physical health, greater teamwork and camaraderie, strong morale and a loyalty and appreciation that your employer cares about you — there's a very good chance that the boss will agree to supporting such an effort.

Establish Rewards

In some companies — depending on size and budget — an employer may offer \$1 to \$5 per lost pound. Or it could be 50 cents for every mile run or 10 cents for every minute of exercise logged. So an hour of exercise earns \$6. I talked to some employers that offer prizes, instead of cash, and they say that's very popular with staffers too.

Prizes certainly worked at my company — at the beginning of this year, the women in my office decided they wanted to get healthy for handbags. Everyone established their own goals losing weight, avoiding a 4pm cupcake craving, exercising more and the harder they work at achieving them, the nicer the handbag I'm on the hook for buying them. And it's a small price to pay for healthier, happier, more energized employees. The best motivation and reward from this effort for me is a group of "fitness witnesses" at the office to help me stay on track.

Find Your Own Fitness Witnesses

You can form partnerships and buddy groups and administer a program on your own. Or there are various

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formal programs you can tap into. Rockford used the services of [Tangerine Wellness](#), which sets up and administers the whole program for a fee.

[The American Cancer Society](#) offers a free program for any employer to use. It's called Active For Life Online and it's a flexible, 10-week program that uses individual and group strategies to encourage people to be more active. Participants self-report their daily activity using an online tool and points are awarded. Then it's up to the employer to establish how they recognize and reward points. So this is an affordable option for any size organization —

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(Page 3 of 3)

and one you can get started with this week.

You can be the one who brings about healthy change — whether you work in a teeny two-person office or a 2,000-person factory. Select a goal and stick to it — and your success will encourage others to jump on board too.

Tory Johnson is the Workplace Contributor on Good Morning America and the CEO of [Women For Hire](#).

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