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TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2007

Help Employees Stay Fit and Healthy

Making a Clean Break

About Good Improvements

Health-care costs are rising, and businesses that don't prepare and adapt will be left in the dust. But this year, smart companies will start workplace wellness programs to help workers stay healthy and productive—and to lower health-care costs and employee absenteeism.

A recent survey of hundreds of companies found that 41 percent had already launched a health-related strategy. Statistics on bigger companies indicate that the savings can be almost \$5 for every dollar spent on making workers healthier. And while larger businesses can afford more formalized programs, even smaller companies are getting in on the act.

In talking to small-business owners for my book, *The Entrepreneur Diet*, I found that many were really creative in how they brought a healthy culture to their company. They're proof that you don't necessarily need a lot of extra capital lying around for a lavish workout facility to help employees stay fit.

Here are some low-cost ideas from *The Entrepreneur Diet* to make a wellness program a seamless part of your business plan for 2007:

- Make exercise a work goal. Entrepreneur Gini Dietrich, who owns a growing public relations firm with more than 20 clients, gives her staff an incentive to exercise by adding a billable job code for their workouts. "It counts toward their annual billable goals," she says. "I also offer a small gym membership reimbursement."
- Serve up the right snacks. Dan Santy, founder of Santy Advertising, keeps healthy snacks in the office lunchroom for both himself and his staff. "I firmly believe that the people who are the most active and fit, and who have good healthy diets," he says, "don't miss work."
- Give a health-related benefit. At Stacy's Pita Chip Company, business owners Stacy Madison and Mark Andrus give a \$500

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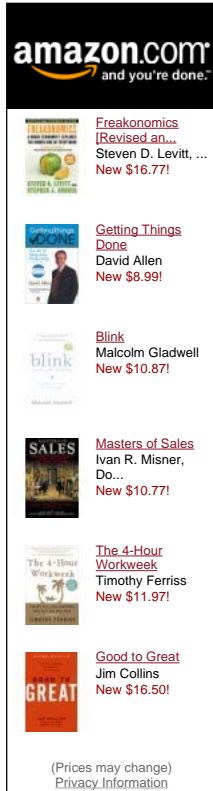
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annual benefit to be applied toward anything that is health and fitness related. "It's an incentive for people to start bringing some healthier aspects into their life," Madison says.

- **Communicate.** Newsletters and paycheck inserts can keep the idea of health and fitness regularly in the minds of employees, says the American Institute for Preventive Medicine, which works with health-care organizations and corporations to help implement health promotion strategies.
- **Map it out.** Other ideas from the Institute include posting a map in the office that measures out a short walking route around the neighborhood, placing some comfortable chairs in a quiet area so employees can take stress breaks, and having a local massage therapist come into the office once a week for inexpensive 15-minute massages, which employees pay for out of pocket.

Creating a healthy work environment can be done with a minimal budget. And it not only makes for fitter, more productive employees, it also encourages wonderful workplace camaraderie.

Tom Weede is a certified strength and conditioning specialist, a certified health and fitness instructor with the American College of Sports Medicine, and a former senior editor for Men's Fitness magazine. He recently authored [The Entrepreneur Diet](#), which provides a six-week menu plan and time-efficient exercises for anyone on a tight schedule.

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