

Chapter One

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Why Have a Corporate Running Team?

If you are already a true believer and know you want to get a running program started in your company, skip this chapter and go on to the next chapter, Learning about Corporate Running Activities in Your Area. On the other hand, if you can't see the natural link between sweaty running gear and the business of your organization (or you need some strong rationale for convincing some decision-makers), read on:

"We know from our own experience that if we feel well, we do a better job than if we feel poorly. And if employees are sick, they will cost you a lot of money."

Theodore Brophy
Retired Chairman and CEO, GTE.

The question of "Why have a Corporate Running Team?" can be broadened to ask, "Why have a healthy company?" A Corporate Running Team, or really any wellness program, represents a commitment from the company to the employees. Corporate sponsorship for fitness activities and wellness programs are statements of support for employee health and recognition of the impact the physical and mental health of its employees have on the health of the company. In short, healthy people make healthy companies.

In this section we will consider the impact of wellness, organized fitness activities, and, specifically, Corporate Running on an organization and the reasons why a company should entertain the adoption of a wellness perspective and consider organizing a Corporate Running Team.

What is a Healthy Company?

A trend started a while back and has been quietly growing. No longer are people willing to work just for money, benefits, perks, and status. Employees are placing a greater importance on personal health and fitness, increased family time, and job satisfaction. At the same time, corporations are beginning to recognize the impact of unhealthy employees on the bottom line. According to the Washington Business Group on Health, "In 1990 health care costs were rising so rapidly that if unchecked,

Corporate Executives Speak Out on Employee Fitness

"I know that good health is high on everyone's list of personal priorities. It is also a business priority because a healthy, growing, and competitive enterprise depends on the health, vitality, and energy of individuals."

Robert Allen
President and CEO, AT&T.

"The health of our company is greatly influenced by the health of our people, and employee health is something we value."

H.W. Burlingame
Senior Vice-President, AT&T.

"If my employees are healthier than yours, I'm going to whip you. It's as simple as that."

Dick Wardrop
Director of Health Cost Containment, Alcoa.

they would eliminate in 10 years all profits for the average Fortune 500 company." Companies are recognizing the impact that wellness and preventive medical programs can have on an organization. In fact, some companies are starting to implement programs which reward employees for healthy lifestyles such as not smoking or controlling their weight. Many of these companies are the ones who partner with their employees in fitness or wellness matters.

So what can be said about a healthy company? Aspects of a healthy company, from an employer perspective,

A Corporate Running Team Makes Sense

- It supports the wellness principles which employees and employers are adopting.
- Running, as a sport, is inexpensive, versatile, effective, and popular.
- Corporate Running fosters company spirit and increases employee morale.
- It encourages participation from all corporate levels, ages, and both sexes.
- It requires very little investment to support.
- Running events raise the profile of the company in the community when team uniforms are worn by participants.
- And, finally, healthy employees are an asset and important part of a healthy company.

certainly include:

- The recognition that employees value balanced lives and personal health as much as money, status, benefits, and perks. Creating an atmosphere that supports a balanced and healthy lifestyle helps a corporation recruit and retain quality employees.
- The recognition of the impact that personal employee health can have on company costs and the subsequent establishment of programs to encourage and support increasing the health of employees. The age-old adage, "An ounce of prevention..." applies to health as much as anything else.



- The increased recognition that satisfaction and happiness in the work environment have a significant impact on employee productivity and morale. Healthy companies place a significant emphasis on programs which create and maintain a healthy atmosphere.

Companies have historically had programs which provide opportunities for employees to participate in nonwork-related activities. These have included activities such as bowling leagues, softball tournaments, company picnics, etc. Although these programs were directed at fostering teamwork and increasing morale, they did not necessarily encourage a healthy employee lifestyle. Now, as individuals are pursuing healthier activities, companies are sponsoring and incorporating programs focusing on fitness in their benefit offerings. In fact, many companies

either directly contribute to employee fitness club memberships or provide their own fitness facilities. Running is a popular form of a fitness activity, and organized Corporate Running provides an opportunity to combine employee fitness with company programs.

How Does the Company Benefit?

In the past, the company that offered the best compensation package "won" the best employees. In the future, the companies that include in that compensation package options for enhancing health will attract the best employees. Comprehensive plans will include provisions for nutrition, mental health, wellness, child care, and fitness. A healthy environment will be viewed by the employee as critical for job satisfaction and longevity of employment.

Corporate Running can be an integral component of a complete wellness program. Running is still one of the most popular, inexpensive, and effective forms of fitness practiced. It is one of the best fitness activities for cardiovascular conditioning and weight control. Corporate Running fosters teamwork and camaraderie among employees, provides support for fitness activity, and has an added affect of supporting friendly intercompany competition.

How Does the Employee Benefit?

Support for fitness in general, and Corporate Running in particular, impacts the employee in a variety of ways. Employees feel better as a result of better health (mental and physical). They are more productive because of a higher energy level. They feel better about the company, which supports their individual pursuits,

and they are better able to handle stress to which they are exposed. Staff members form bonds of friendship with others whom they may not have even met otherwise. Meets and road races become targets that motivate the kind of long-term training efforts that really pay off in terms of fitness gains. The friendly competition that surrounds the running events creates a team spirit that continues well after the event is over. (Many companies have retirees that continue to participate for years after they have stopped working at the company.)

Why Doesn't Every Corporation Have a Running Team?

If fitness programs, and specifically Corporate Running programs, make sense, why doesn't every corporation offer these benefits to its employees? In general, fitness programs require not only a tacit commitment from the company but active organized support. Depending upon the type of program, a company may develop its own and build supporting facilities, or it may contract with a local fitness group such as the YMCA. A Corporate Running Program may be a relatively easy and inexpensive way to get an employee fitness program started. What is needed is a few committed runners willing to do a bit of organizing and some active encouragement from the company (and maybe a few dollars to offset the cost of uniforms and entry fees).

If there is already a fitness program in place, the Corporate Running program can be managed by the departments that support the wellness, bowling, softball, or similar activities. In addition, a team organizer or organizing committee, acting as an interface to the running community and the company runners, is invaluable. The program will really start to take off as it gets participation from throughout the entire company and, especially, from company executives.

Shall We Go For It?

Convinced? Willing to take the initiative to get a running program started in your company? Then read on to learn how to proceed from some of the folks who have organized major running programs at their companies. And good luck! We hope to see you and your team soon at the Corporate National Championships.

