

Take the Interview

[TTI Spotlight: At Marcum, Wellness Programs Bring Employees Together](#)

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MAY 17, 2017



Can you imagine a workplace where fitness is front and center?

Every summer, hundreds of employees across Long Island trade in their business attire for their finest fitness gear and compete in the [Marcum Workplace Challenge](#) — a 3.5-mile charity walk/run around Jones Beach State Park in Wantagh, New York. Now in its 12th year, it's one of the largest — if not the largest — corporate wellness event in the area, with more than 200 teams participating to promote health, wellness and philanthropy in the local business community.

May is [Employee Health and Fitness Month](#), and [Take the Interview](#) decided to sit down with organizers Mindy Davidson, of the [Greater Long Island Running Club](#), and Molly Crane, Human Resources Senior Manager at [Marcum LLP](#), to get their insights on how wellness programs impact company culture.

Why Wellness?

At Marcum, one of the largest accounting firms in the nation, wellness has always been a priority. But in 2011, the company turned their focus on promoting what Crane describes as a “robust wellness program” for all their employees.

“We want our employees to be healthy, we want them to be productive — you want to help your workforce. A healthier workforce is a happier workforce,” Crane said.

Since then, Marcum’s program has grown to include several initiatives, including seasonal Fitbit challenges — where participating employees work to complete fitness goals for a chance to win prizes — as well as smoking cessation programs and opportunities to receive discounts on healthcare for getting regular checkups and preventative care.

“Lunch-and-learns, healthy eating, exercise, stress-busters leading into busy season — there’s always something wellness-related going on around the firm,” Crane said.

When it comes to implementing wellness programs, Marcum isn’t alone. According to a 2016 study by the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), 83 percent of companies with 200 employees or more offer some type of wellness program to their employees, whether it be smoking cessation programs (74 percent) weight loss programs (68 percent) or lifestyle coaching (73 percent.)

For companies that offer workplace wellness programs, the benefits are clear for both the organization and its employees. [According to a report from the Harvard Business Review](#), 57 percent of people with high health risks that participated in a worksite cardiac rehabilitation program reached low-risk status upon completion. The study also suggests workplace wellness programs [help improve employee morale](#) and reduce turnover rates.

“I really think that fitness initiatives really help clear a person’s head — I think it makes them more focused,” Davidson said. “And if you feel better about yourself, you’ll certainly make a better presentation to the people that you’re dealing with.”

Awareness Starts From The Top

For Davidson, events like the Marcum Workplace Challenge are an opportunity for employees to practice team building and get to know other members of their company that they may not get to interact with on a regular basis.

“It’s really a team-building event where fitness is the focus,” Davidson said. “It’s a great way to gather employees together – employees of all different levels. You would never know who the CEO might be, who might be a first-line manager, someone might be a secretary. You’d never know because everyone is treated as part of the team.”

Crane attributes strong support from upper management as one of the driving factors behind Marcum’s success in company health initiatives.

“Our managing partner is definitely behind our wellness initiative,” Crane said. “He wears a Fitbit, he’s involved in the challenges, which I think kind of motivates employees when they see his name on a team or his name on the leaderboard.”

“The wellness culture definitely starts at the top, and then we carry it out through a majority of what we do,” Crane added. “So being that we have management support from the top we have the opportunity to do these things.”

An Evolving Culture

According to a [recent IBISWorld study](#), corporate wellness programs are a \$7.8 billion industry, and are projected to grow another 7.8 percent through the year 2021.

For businesses looking to implement wellness initiatives, Crane advises that it’s a practice that must be exercised regularly.

“It’s not something that a company can really implement overnight,” Crane said. “It’s really something that has to be worked on every day.”

But once a wellness program is in place, the health bug can be contagious.

“I think there’s definitely been a shift over the last couple of years,” Crane said. “Like anything, it take time for employees to really pay attention to it and get involved and really be engaged in the different things that we’re doing. But even the little things like healthy options at lunches, dinner – people are starting to expect that now.”