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Promoting health at the work place

Dear Sir or Madam,

Promoting health in companies has gained a growing importance, as increasing time and performance pressure require an ever-increasing ability by employees to cope with pressure. The aim of such measures is generally a reduction in sickness levels, a reduction of accidents at the workplace and thus, seen from a strictly corporate viewpoint, cost reduction through a decline in sick leave. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg – promoting health brings added benefits!

Companies also have a corporate social responsibility, and they use measures promoting health to improve their image. Anyone offering this to employees will gain positive public recognition. This way companies increase their attractiveness on the job market for new applicants. And this image does not just have an external effect, either. Feeling “well looked after” raises employees’ motivation and performance. After all, who does not like to work at a modern workplace that really offers something in return for employees and has a high level of public recognition? This particular motivation, to help increase productivity, has an immeasurable value for companies. At the same time companies reduce staff turnover. Learning the ropes in a new job obviously requires time and money, and efficiency suffers. Anyone planning long-term will certainly benefit. Thus even making provisions against postural damage caused by one-sided stress at work will be a benefit to the company.

Investments in the health of employees will pay off – and not just for staff members, but for the company as well. Previous experiences have shown that such measures have a positive influence on economic factors. The problem that companies are initially confronted with at the start of such (health promoting) measures is the cost factor. From a purely economic point of view, it is not easy to evaluate how much this can actually pay off. Hence, many companies only see the cost side, and anyone calculating short-term will not be pleased at all. Savings made by health-promoting measures can only be calculated retrospectively. However, these are then significant.

Companies that have introduced workplace health promotion for their employees generally stick with them, a fact which speaks for itself.

Several institutions have developed a range of approaches to cover the need for "promoting health at the workplace".

For example, Dr. med. Thomas Läubli and Christian Müller carried out a [survey](#) about the correlations between "Work Conditions and Musculoskeletal Disorders" and consequently about "the estimated economic costs for Switzerland". This survey is based on 1,040 personal interviews. A remarkable feature of this survey was the finding that 18% of all people in employment in Switzerland suffer from back problems caused or partially caused by work and that 26% of all absences due to illness had been caused by musculoskeletal disorders.

A survey by SECO shows absenteeism costs CHF 0.97bn per year. Anyone afflicted who continues to work despite pain is reduces productivity. This decline in production output is estimated at CHF 3.3bn per year. Not only does optimising the work situation improve health, it also contributes to considerably increased efficiency gains during operations (CHF 5.5bn per year). The following examples of workload are responsible for 40% or more of musculoskeletal disorders caused or partially caused by work.

- *Painful or tiring body posture at the workplace*
- *Carrying persons or moving heavy goods (+)*
- *A bad work-life balance due to adverse working hours (+)*
- *Dissatisfaction with working conditions (+)*
- *Bullying*

Those factors marked with a (+) possess a high statistical significance to the following work-stresses:

- *Vibrations caused by tools*
- *Disturbing interruptions at the work place*
- *Lack of support by superior(s)*
- *Working speed determined by pre-defined production or performance targets*
- *No freedom of choice about holiday periods*

At 11%, illnesses caused (or partially caused) by musculoskeletal disorders are one the most common reasons for sick leave by employees. Just one day of an employee's absence from work caused by illness costs businesses CHF 600 per day.

This is just a small segment of a comprehensive survey as an example. Common sense applies here in the end as well. If you consider how much time a person spends at the work place per day it is fairly obvious that any effects on health cannot be denied. If your body is exposed to "one-sided" or "excessive" strain or pressure for several hours, five days a week every week, your health will certainly be affected. On the other hand. Any measure promoting health at the work place will have a particularly beneficial effect for these same specific reasons. Under the same workload, just one health measure which positively affects a person for several hours per day has a higher benefit for this person's health than, for example, a one-hour massage twice a month.

About the author:

For several years now Judith Baumann has been dealing with the issue of "health promotion" in companies. Having been active in the past with topics like nutritional and exercise programmes, she is now committed to make health promotion attractive and profitable for small and medium-sized companies. Thanks to her in-depth knowledge in biomechanics, she has now become a specialist in body statics. Thus she can help recognise and analyse poor posture at an early stage and provide individual treatment.

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