



Incentives grow for trim employees

Businesses encourage healthy workers in effort to combat rising health care expenses, increase morale.

Joyce M. Rosenberg / Associated Press

NEW YORK -- At PetSafe Inc., employees can earn points toward gift certificates by going to the gym and the doctor. And at Eastern Financial Florida Credit Union, staffers get \$100 toward their annual health club fees.

These and many other small businesses are offering perks known as wellness benefits in hopes of lowering their health care costs and promoting a happier and more productive work environment. And, in turn, making themselves more attractive to prospective employees.

PetSafe, a pet products company based in Knoxville, Tenn., has a program that awards points to workers who go to the doctor, donate blood, work out in a gym or take wellness classes. Laurie Macnair, whose title at PetSafe is director of talent development, said that at the end of each quarter, staffers can redeem their points for movie passes, lunches, even gift certificates of up to \$100.

PetSafe management believes the company will benefit from a healthier work force. "In order for the organization to be built to last, its employees have to be built to last," Macnair said.



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Cocoa sleeps as Nichole Gligor works at Petsafe in Knoxville, Tenn., where employees can earn gift certificates by going to the gym.

Wade Payne / Associated Press

The company is also looking to improve morale. In Michigan, small businesses also are taking steps to trim health care costs. Many companies are rewarding employees for healthy behavior, punishing them for unhealthy habits and asking them to cover higher co-pays and premiums. Clarkston-based Freedom One Financial Corp. has awarded all-expenses-paid tropical vacations to employees who meet weight loss goals.

At Paylocity, an Elk Grove Village, Ill.-based payroll processing company, employees can get a better rate on their health insurance if they take steps to keep themselves healthy, such as undergoing routine testing and meeting goals for conditions such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

President Steve Sarowitz, who's a believer in taking care of your health, said his company hopes to lower its health care costs. So Paylocity is contracting with a company that creates and administers employee wellness programs.

The company has also held smoking cessation and weight management classes onsite, and helps employees get discounted gym memberships. It also pays for them to enter a corporate challenge race and holds a party for those who take part. "We want to give them support in their efforts," Sarowitz said.

Rob Wilson, president of Employco, a Chicago-based human resources firm, says wellness benefits are becoming more popular, although he's not seeing any of his small business clients saving money on health care. But Wilson says there nonetheless is great value in offering such benefits to workers.

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