

Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

Leading by Example with My Healthy Bonus

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce advocates for improved health and wellness of Kentucky citizens, contained health care costs, and better employees overall. It has aligned its organizational practices with these strategic goals, thereby leading by example.

Company Overview

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce (the Kentucky Chamber) is a non-profit located in Frankfort, Kentucky. Formed in 1946, it supports the business climate in the Commonwealth of Kentucky by advocating for and providing information to its 2,700 member businesses. The Kentucky Chamber has 30 full-time employees.

Initiative Overview

In October 2008 the Kentucky Chamber started a wellness initiative by contracting with an external vendor, KC Wellness, to formalize practices already in place and help employees to maintain and improve their personal health and well-being. Through the wellness program, employees have the opportunity to participate in challenges and wellness activities, attend seminars, read a wellness newsletter, and participate in health risk assessments (HRA). The Kentucky Chamber ensures that healthy food choices are available at all sponsored events and incentivizes participation in the wellness program by allowing employees to earn up to \$500 in “wellness dollars” per year.

The Kentucky Chamber intentionally strived for a culture shift with the organization’s leadership deciding to focus on the health and wellness of employees. Aimee Hiller, Vice President of Administration, explains, “We serve the business community. Part of our strategic plan is focused on wellness policy and on educating employers about employee wellness and the return on investment. So we felt that our external plan translated well to an internal plan for our staff.” As a small business, the Kentucky Chamber wants to model the ways in which employers can easily implement a wellness program and provide some turnkey examples for employers. By aligning external and internal strategic goals related to wellness, using wellness activities to contain cost, and focusing on culture change, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce leads by example.

Implementation

Aligning Goals: Improving the Health of Kentucky’s Workforce

Kentucky has its share of challenges related to health and wellness. The Kentucky Chamber knows that employer-sponsored wellness programs can help to create significant changes in the health and wellness of employees and their families. Beyond modeling best practices, the Kentucky Chamber has published a free toolkit for employers that offers a step-by-step framework for starting a wellness program. By making the toolkit available as a free downloadable PDF on its website, the chamber provides support for its members and helps to advance on of it strategic goals.

Containing Costs

The Kentucky Chamber wanted a rich wellness program, but didn’t have a large budget to work with, so it hatched an idea and proposed it to its employees. In order to fund the wellness program—and illustrate the high cost of health insurance premiums to its workforce— it asked employees to pay 10% of their premiums to fund the incentive pool. Because participation in the wellness program enabled staff to earn much of this money back, employees agreed. Hiller acknowledges that “a lot of companies wouldn’t be in the position to be able to do that. We were very fortunate. But it is a good way to fund an incentive program and it goes over well with the employees.” Once the program was funded, the chamber also wanted to determine whether it was effective at keeping health insurance costs down. The chamber receives aggregate data on HRA results, and after the third year of the program concludes, the organization will analyze the data to ascertain how the program is reducing health costs.

Snapshot

Industry: Public Administration

Number of Employees: 30

Self-Insured: No

Age of Program: 3 years

Headquarters: Frankfort, Kentucky

Change in Culture

In the first year of the wellness initiative, Hiller wanted to “ensure that everyone understood that the culture was shifting a bit” in order to gain employee buy-in. Therefore, it created a wellness committee comprised of one representative from each of its four main departments. The committee has a budget and collaborates with the chamber’s wellness vendor to organize the challenges, choose the prizes, and essentially drive the program. This ensures that the program is relevant to the needs and interests of the employees. Membership in this committee can change each year.

Results

The Kentucky Chamber has some goals for its wellness program that are easy to quantify and some that are not. For example, in Year One of the program, it wanted 85% of employees to participate in the employer-sponsored health promotion activities and wanted to identify medical and lifestyle risk factors for 85% of employees through the participation in the HRA process. Both goals were met. Additionally, the chamber far exceeded goals related to wellness and fitness challenges. Employees who worked together on a weight-loss challenge collectively lost over 70 pounds.

One of its more elusive goals relates to its workplace culture, though the Kentucky Chamber also feels that this has been a success. According to Hiller, the focus on wellness at the Kentucky Chamber is pervasive and a part of employees’ day-to-day lives. Because the organization is small, and because employees are steeped in policy work related to health and wellness and cost containment, it was a smooth transition. This culture change has also led to a healthier workforce, and “a healthier workforce is a more efficient, effective, and affordable workforce” says Hiller.

By being more engaged, they are better able to help meet their strategic goals related to Kentucky’s overall health and wellness.

Over 2,500 Wellness Toolkits have been downloaded from the Kentucky Chamber’s website, providing evidence that Kentucky’s businesses are utilizing the resources made available by the chamber.

Next Steps

Going forward, the Kentucky Chamber is looking to expand its wellness initiative beyond physical health and wellness and, as Hiller explained, have “more of a nod toward total wellness.” To do so, the company is exploring ways to educate its employees on topics such as financial wellness and how to decrease stress in their lives.

Additionally, the Kentucky Chamber hopes to further align its internal and external strategic plans by developing a Wellness Council — wherein Kentucky Chamber member businesses will engage in an ongoing discussion related to the well-being of Kentucky’s workforce and how they, as members of the business community, can create positive change. In addition, the chamber plans to continue health-related advocacy and policy work with member businesses.

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