



*Interview with Melissa Sekin Meyer, DJS International Services, Inc.
DJS International Services, Inc. recently initiated the LoneStar Workplace Wellness Strategy*

Why did you decide to initiate a Workplace Wellness Program?

It was an evolution for us. We've watched helplessly as our insurance premiums skyrocketed during the last several years. We considered moving to a more consumer-driven health plan, versus the traditional insurance we currently have (and we may still eventually make that move), but it seemed a drastic and somewhat unfair move to make without at least providing our employees with more education about how to be healthier, as well as how to be better consumers of health care.

We started trying to promote wellness in small ways around the office. We offered financial incentives for smokers to quit smoking. We encouraged use of our insurance company's extensive online wellness offerings. We started a company wellness newsletter and began disseminating tidbits of health information, with references and links to more exhaustive resources. But we found that giving people information in print and website references just didn't work; the information was there, at their fingertips, but they weren't following up on it. They needed more. ***They needed a definitive action plan, and they needed some real, tangible incentives to motivate them to follow it.*** For many, it seemed that improved health was just too undefined, too lofty a goal to aim for without some kind of concrete steps to get there. But, the bottom line was that our employees — our most valued company asset — needed to become healthier, for their own sake and for the company's sake. And they needed to understand both **WHY** they needed to do it, and **HOW** to do it. Eventually, we realized we couldn't take on the task alone, and needed some type of outside wellness program in order to reach employees in a meaningful way.

Why did you choose LoneStar?

After a little research, LoneStar emerged as a clear common-sense approach. The grass-roots feel of the LoneStar philosophy paired well with what we'd been trying to get across to our employees: We have to take action for ourselves. Insurance rates are rising in large part because we are getting healthier. We need to make changes and stop waiting for the government, or the insurance companies, or anyone else to solve the problems — problems that we helped create by depending on health care to fix the conditions we've developed as a result of our own unhealthy lifestyles.

LoneStar's approach seems to have the perfect blend of encouraging that personal responsibility without laying blame; looking to the future without fretting over the past; and — through small but meaningful lifestyle changes — changing lives without turning them upside down. And with all this, it still has the key element of a little fun. The fun part of LoneStar for us is the team concept, and it's what really makes it work for us.



Furthermore, we loved the LoneStar concept that living a healthy lifestyle is not about suffering, starvation, deprivation, or even will power. ***It's about common sense, and outsmarting one's own bad habits with empowered knowledge and action.*** And it doesn't even require a degree in rocket science, or a fancy gym membership.

What do you hope to accomplish with this program?

We hope mainly to get people interested in — and active about — pursuing their own health and wellness. We want to take the mystery out of it, and eliminate myths that wellness is too hard, too expensive, or too time-consuming to maintain. We want to encourage our employees to see their health and their family's health as something that they have a great deal of control over (and accountability for). We want the pursuit of good health to be a priority for our employees, rather than a back-burner issue that can be put aside as long as there's a good prescription drug plan in place.

How are your expectations being met so far?

Our expectations have been exceeded so far. Every single employee joined the program when we kicked it off at DJS. And the changes can be seen everywhere. Opening our company refrigerator, you see fresh colorful foods where there used to be sodas and leftover pizza. You can usually catch a walker or two on our block at lunchtime. The scale now residing in my office gets daily use from people just stopping by to check in on their own progress. And the chatter in the office is fantastic...people are constantly sharing tips, successes, struggles, recipes, and best food brands. It's truly a communal effort, and even though teams are competing against each other for a monetary prize, everyone seems to realize we are working together toward common long-term goals of health and wellness. And it's not just new motivation we've discovered — for many of us, we really didn't know some of this information before, and now we are empowered with new knowledge. People are making the effort to learn what it means to eat a healthy diet, or to get their heart rate sufficiently elevated for 30 minutes a day. ***It has a lot to do with motivation, but the new sense of empowerment is significant too.***

What has been easiest? Most difficult?

The easiest thing (and biggest surprise) was getting employees signed up; how readily they joined the program. ***I thought it would be like pulling teeth to get people to participate, but this program seemed to cater to exactly what they all really wanted and needed, but had never verbalized a desire for. We just had to offer it.***

The most difficult part has just begun — getting through the holidays. Like many companies, we have lots of friendly vendors who love to feed us, and our office is generally overflowing with chocolates, cookies, and candy from Halloween to New Years. We're trying to plan ahead and prep ourselves to handle the swarm of sinful sweets responsibly. We'll see...



What recommendations would you make to other companies looking for workplace wellness solutions?

1. Know your employees. What are their biggest health needs and concerns: weight loss, heart health, smoking cessation, nutritional support, physical activity? Look for programs that will speak directly to the needs of your employees
2. Look for a program promoting lifestyle changes that are meaningful, yet manageable for ALL employees to make, regardless of income, hours worked, age, or current health status. And look for a program that provides support and expertise along the way. Written materials alone are not enough for most people.
3. Build interest first. The LoneStart program was well underway at DJS way before we officially kicked it off to employees. Building the interest without actually announcing the details really got people curious and interested. Health issues started to come to light for people when we used the promotional teasers LoneStart provided to us. Then, by the time we officially kicked it off, everyone was really primed and ready for the program.

Be honest with employees about why you need a wellness program, but consider using an outsider to sell it to them. The kick-off presentation from LoneStart co-founder Jay Seifert was the nudge our last few “maybe” employees needed to jump in and become real LoneStarters. Having an outsider present the program not only allowed for Jay’s expertise to be shared, but also ensured that the positive nature of the program was communicated clearly. ***It was important that our employees understood that we wanted them healthier for their own personal benefit, as well as for the good of the company, and that those were not mutually exclusive goals.*** I think having Jay there helped communicate our true intentions, and kept the program from being perceived as an insensitive employer-devised plan to force unhealthy employees into shape.

Are your employees having fun with the program or do they see this as something they “have” to do? Does it seem to be an opportunity they appreciate?

It was one of my biggest fears that employees would feel forced into it and then not really participate. But most of them truly seem grateful for the opportunity. They are excited about this for their own personal reasons. ***But, the team concept provides just the right amount of extra encouragement (and fun!) for people to commit genuinely to getting results, even if just in the name of being a good teammate. We’re not far enough along to see if that generalizes to lasting personal lifestyle changes, but my feeling is that it is beginning to do so already. You start out doing it for the team, but you see the results, and then hopefully you’ve established new behaviors that you want to continue practicing for yourself, long after the team competition has ended.***