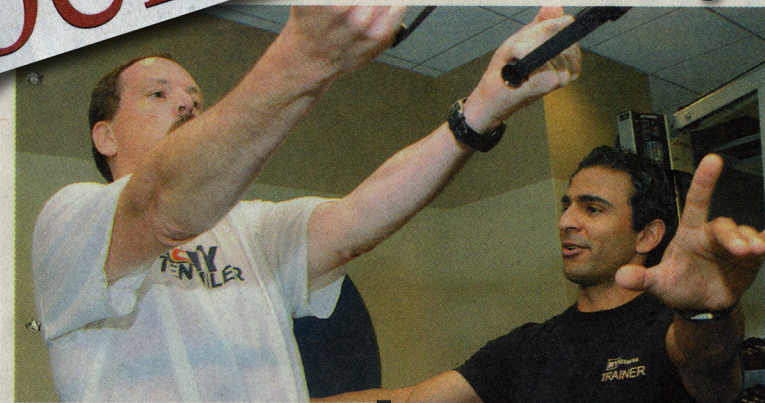


of the news and trends shaping one of the region's most significant industries

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## Fit your idea of an office?



[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42] ways going to win out over the munchies. Sometimes, the trail mix is just not going to cut it when that craving for M&M's calls.

In a truly perfect workplace world, McGovern would also like to see more nutritional education available at work. Something as easy as a lunch-and-learn session with a local dietitian can get people thinking about their food and drink choices.

### PSYCHOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

Almost all of our experts espoused the benefits of assessing the situation at your workplace before diving into any aspect of a corporate wellness program.

Workplace psychologist Beverly Smallwood, the owner of Magnetic Workplaces in Hattiesburg, Miss., says begin those assessments by talking with your employees. Listen to their wants and needs.

There's no reason for leaders to spend time agonizing over ways to reduce health benefit co-pays when that's on the bottom of the priority list for most employees. Think of it this way: No employee decides to stay or leave based on the amount of the health insurance deductible.

In happy, healthy workplaces, workers feel like their work is not only appreciated but also is making a difference. Managers should call meetings to celebrate achievements and the specific contributions of individuals or groups. Those meetings don't need to be formal or large.

Also, have conversations with the staff about things they are doing right. Holding those talks frequently helps eliminate the feeling of a trip to the principal's office each time a boss calls people in.

Another hallmark of a healthy workplace is effective conflict management. Conflict in the workplace is inevitable, but in a healthy culture, it is handled constructively and respectfully. The problem is attacked, not the person.

Just as destructive as conflict is conflict avoidance. If managers don't address conflict, it will haunt them later by eroding a good atmosphere. Openly dealing with conflicts helps to solve the problem and build solid relationships with the staff.

Finally, remember that a healthy psychological environment really does start at the top. Smallwood sums it up in one question: **If everyone in the organization behaved as you do and had the same values as you do, how successful would the company be?**

### GET IN LINE

When companies need to get their staff in line, they call Sue Evans and Hilary O'Donnell.

The president and executive vice president of Fairfax-based Evans Incorporated specialize in helping companies improve their ergonomic environments.

They do so holistically, explaining that no ergonomic improvements work in a vacuum. The changes must be integrated into an overall corporate wellness strategy, one that begins with an assessment and has

measured points of progress.

Ergonomics is not just expensive desk chairs and lower-lumbar cushions. It's about blending person, environment and task. In a perfect workplace, the furniture has been selected to fit not only the employees themselves but also the tasks they do and the environment in which they do them.

The biggest mistake companies make in ergonomics, Evans says, is "to assume one size fits all."

For example, in a shift environment, such as a call center where desks and chairs are shared, workstations ideally would be adjustable and customizable to each person who has a shift at that station.

You'll need training to truly make the customization work. If you're going to invest in better environments, be sure to invest in the training so employees can learn how to make the furniture work for them.

Finally, a reminder again about all aspects of corporate wellness: Look at the whole. New office furniture does not itself make a wholly healthier environment.

The most successful companies start with a comprehensive health strategy, says Helen Darling, president of the National Business Group on Health in Washington. It doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive, but the pieces do need to work together.

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