

Worth the Weight

Getting Paid to Lose



The free market is alive and well, at least in the milieu of the office weight-loss pool.

Several recent studies are confirming what Wharton School behavioral economist Kevin Volpp found in a 2008 paper: Cold cash can turbocharge dieting.

The latest study, which appeared last week in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, found that not only do cash awards inspire people to lose more weight than those dieting for the “fun” of it, but also that participants in such incentivized diets shed even more pounds when they compete against each other in groups. The research came soon after a Mayo Clinic paper showing that clinic employees who got cash for pounds were 62% more likely to stick with their diets than those who got no reward, and that those who got paid to lose showed a mean weight loss of 9.08 pounds, compared with just 2.34 pounds for the uncompensated group.

Fat Chance

Recent studies show that not only do cash awards help weight loss, but group challenges do even better.

Also, the Mayo study was done on a much larger group of dieters than previous studies, and for much longer—a year.

The cash awards apparently are having a salutary effect in the real-life office, where obesity is becoming an increasingly weighty problem.

Employees who have participated in “three-month challenges” designed by HealthyWage—which puts together dieting incentive programs for corporations—are losing an average of 5% of their body weight, says HealthyWage co-founder Jimmy Fleming. “Our company is expanding like gangbusters,” says Fleming, who got the idea four years ago after participating in—what else?—an office diet pool.

