

Office Depot workers shed pounds for money

BY MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS
Staff writer

Competing with peers and risking a little money can be powerful motivators to lose weight, several Office Depot employees say.

The office supply retailer's Boca Raton headquarters participated in HealthyWage's weight-loss challenge, a "Biggest Loser"-type competition with other companies that offered a top prize of \$10,000 for the winning team.

They didn't win the big pot, but many employees — who combined to lose 1,867 pounds — met their weight-loss goals and earned financial rewards. Office Depot plans to compete again this spring.

"My motivation to sign up was definitely the money. We all had that \$10,000 spent," said Cindy Mayo, a benefits manager for Office Depot.

HealthyWage, a firm that works with companies to offer incentives for weight loss, maintains that participants who put their own money at risk are more than 10 times as likely to get more fit and healthy.

"If you're paid to do something, you're going to do it," said David Roddenberry, co-founder of HealthyWage. He said with the cash incentive, three to five times more participants reach their weight-loss goals.

Participants risk at least losing their \$75 registration fee for the program, but some risk more.

The firm's "BMI Challenge" pays \$1,000 to those who invest \$300 to participate and improve from an "obese" body mass index of greater than 30 to a normal BMI of less than 25, over a year's time. HealthyWage also offers a "10 percent" challenge to workers to double their money of \$150 if they lose 10 percent of their starting body weight within six months.

For team efforts, HealthyWage sponsors a \$10,000 weight-loss competition every two weeks. Employees compete in teams of five for the greatest percentage of weight loss during a three-month period.

In 2012, Office Depot, Zales, 7-Eleven, Phillips 66 and Joy Global were among the companies that participated. In South

Florida, Florida Atlantic University also has participated in the team competition.

Participants in HealthyWage's \$10,000 team challenges have realized median

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weight loss of 4.6 percent and more than 40 percent of participants have lost more than five percent of their body weight, according to the company.

Of the 224 Office Depot employees in Boca Raton who participated, 65 lost more than 5 percent of their weight and the top losers lost more than 13 percent.

Both the money and competition with peers kept many Office Depot employees on the right track.

"We had meetings every Monday morning. We pumped up each other during the week by exercising as a group and emailing each other," said Mayo, 56, who lost about 25 pounds during the competition and then another 10-to-15 pounds in the months afterward.

Information technology engineer Gary Brown, 56, lost 15 percent of his starting weight, or 33 pounds, in the competition. While he admits he put a few pounds back on during the holidays, Brown kept the weight off for six months, doubling the \$100 he invested in the competition.

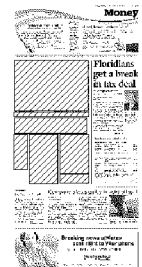
Caresse Friedman, 34, captain of her weight-loss team, said team members had to get over knowing each other's business. During group meetings "we called people out" if they gained weight. If they needed help, Friedman set them up with an exercise buddy.

"Some people never exercised a day in their lives. I tried to help them figure out what exercise to do," said Friedman, who does regular bicycling, weight training and cardiovascular exercise.

While she has always been an athlete, Friedman had gained weight after a knee injury. She lost 20 pounds during the

three-month competition and another 10 since then.

Former Marine Carlos Morgan, 30, also was trying to lose weight after an injury from serving overseas. He had



three herniated disks that required surgery on his lower back.

Now working as a recruiter at Office Depot, he set out to lose weight by working out five days a week and eating healthy. "Salads, chicken - high in protein, and lots of water," he said.

He also was the captain of his weight-loss team, which was a challenge at times because many of his team members have children and limited time to exercise.

"They weren't able to commit as much as the others," he said.

Those interested in learning about HealthyWage can visit HealthyWage.com.

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David Roddenberry,
HealthyWage
co-founder



CARLINE JEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Former Marine Carlos Morgan, now a recruiter with Office Depot, participated in the challenge to lose weight after sustaining an injury overseas. He worked out five days a week and ate healthy to shed the pounds.