

POKEMON AS A WAY TO LOSE WEIGHT AT WORK?

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Story by Stef Schwalb

Wellness in the workplace has been a hot topic when it comes to industry trends. Its evolution has moved past discounted gym memberships into an entirely new realm of rewards.

One company on the forefront of this new frontier is HealthyWage, a top supplier of corporate and team-based weight loss challenges and financially induced diet contests for individuals. The company provides cash incentives, social and expert-based support, tools and resources, plus goal setting and tracking technologies to take on the obesity epidemic in the U.S. and improve its collective health. Through the development of its challenges, HealthyWage has worked with more than 90 Fortune 500 and other companies, health systems, hospitals, insurers, municipal governments, school systems and organizations stateside. Its programs also have been run in a less formal manner at more than 3,000 companies and organizations.

Wellness Challenges with Cash Prizes

Make a personal weight loss bet, get your friends together for a team weight loss challenge, or compete in a corporate wellness program.

Win Big, Real Cash Prizes for Weight Loss

Make a Personal Challenge

Show Me My Prize!

Looking For Your Company's Corporate Challenge?

Tons of prizes! Tons of fun!



TAKE "TEAM PLAYER" TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL! AND CASH IN FOR LOSING WEIGHT!

WANT TO SET UP AN AWESOME CORPORATE CHALLENGE? IT'S EASY.

LEARN MORE

Join the Next Team Challenge!

Win up to \$10,000!



YES, TELL ME MORE! SOUNDS LIKE A TON OF FUN!

So what inspired the company's creation? "I studied health care policy and was working in finance. I saw a study in JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association) showing that financial incentives can more than triple the effectiveness of weight loss programs," says company co-developer David Roddenberry. "The idea really resonated with me that we could make people more successful at losing weight by rewarding them when they are, so we formed HealthyWage to commercialize this idea and identify the most effective way to use incentives to drive behavior change."

The latest "pay for pounds" program from HealthyWage — Summertime Stepping Chal-

lenge — involves the ever-popular app Pokémon GO. While participants are trying to catch 'em all, they are also cashing in. The program uses monetary awards to promote fitness and reward players who take more steps as they get their game on, whether during appropriate office hours or on their own time. Players pay \$30 to participate, which is pooled in a collective "pot." During registration, they connect their fitness tracker to get a baseline step count. The goal was to increase baseline steps by 20 percent during the challenge, which ran Aug. 1-30. Each participant who hit their 20 percent goal is a winner and receives an equal share split of the money collected (minus the 25 percent that

HealthyWage retains for administering the contest). A prize is also awarded to the top coach — the one with the most team members. Throughout the experience, participants also got support and motivational tips from former contestants of NBC's "The Biggest Loser."



While this particular challenge is a newsworthy one, it's also just one of many that HealthyWage has pioneered in weight-loss wagering. They offer several other programs designed with fitness in mind. "Our step challenges are one of four current challenge types we offer," Roddenberry says. "Our three weight loss models have a long and proven track record of success. These include: the HealthyWager, the Team Challenge and the Jackpot Challenge."

The HealthyWager is an individual weight loss challenge where participants select their weight loss goal, decide on how long they want to take to lose the weight and how much they want to bet on their success, and then win if they successfully reach their goal. The Team Challenge is the most frequent corporate model. This challenge involves teams of five competing to lose weight. The team that loses the most, on average, wins \$10,000. "We don't count any weight loss over 16.59 percent to encourage healthy weight loss methodologies and sustainable lifestyle changes," Roddenberry says.

For the Jackpot Challenge, participants form or join a team, with the team size varying on a per-game basis, and then compete to lose weight for 12 weeks. At the end of that time period, all of the teams that have successfully lost an average of 6 percent or more win an equal share of the jackpot.

HealthyWage attributes its success to leveraging the power of social norms feedback and other key behavioral economics principles. "All of our challenges are grounded in the science of behavioral economics, and we apply these principles to maximize behavior change," Roddenberry says. They include:

- **Loss aversion.** "The tendency is to be 2-3 times more motivated by losing something than winning something of equal value," Roddenberry says. "We have participants commit some of their own



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money to challenge and win the money back if they are successful. The threat of losing their money helps them stick with their goals.”

- **The power of a large prize.** “Participants are particularly motivated by a large prize and focus on the size of the prize rather than their likelihood of achieving it,” Roddenberry says.

- **The influence of social networks on your health.** The health habits of your friends can impact your health habits.

Targeting companies is a shrewd move as so many businesses are searching for unique benefits for their employees’ health and wellness. The businesses HealthyWage works with come from a variety of industries, and there’s a reason why such a diverse group is attracted to these programs. “Quite simply, because weight is a universal problem and because the approach works,” Roddenberry says. “Companies of all sizes and from all industries recognize the value of incentivizing their employees to lead healthier, more active lifestyles. We provide a simple, streamlined and fun way for them to do it, and we handle all of the legwork so that a HealthyWage Challenge is rolled out seamlessly with a company’s employees.”

One of the key ways to engage with desirable de-

mographics in the workplace is to stay in tune with the interests and trends that attract those workers. In the case of incorporating Pokémon GO, it makes an effective strategy for connecting with Gen Y. “Given the latest stats that show Pokémon GO’s popularity is actually strongest among millennials, we definitely view this as an opportunity to expand and grow within that market,” Roddenberry says. “As a demographic, millennials show a greater propensity for healthier living and fitness than other generations, so it makes sense that they’ll embrace our challenges as they become more familiar with them.”

The innovation to inspire motivation continues to move at a rapid pace for HealthyWage with the development of future programs on the horizon for upcoming fall and winter seasons. “We hold a few weight maintenance challenges, called the ‘Maintain, Don’t Gain Challenge,’” Roddenberry says. “This model works similarly to the Jackpot Challenge, except the successful teams are those that manage to lose or maintain their weight throughout the 12-week challenge. It is designed to give participants a level of accountability throughout the holiday season when many people regularly pack on the pounds.” **WPM**