

Our 'bottom line' in big need of trimming



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On Business

The corporate battle over the bottom line is taking on new meaning. Companies are getting more aggressive in coaxing and sometimes pushing employees to shed weight and trim waistlines.

At Michelin North America Inc., male employees with waists measuring 40 inches or more (and women with waists 35 inches or more) may have to pay an additional \$1,000 for health care coverage starting next year. And at drugstore giant CVS Caremark, workers who don't disclose personal health details in a company-paid "wellness review" will have to pay an annual \$600 penalty.

A recent survey of 800 employers by human resource consulting firm Aon Hewitt finds that companies increasingly are rewarding some workers and penalizing others as part of their employee wellness programs. Overall, the survey found 79 percent offered rewards to participate in wellness programs, 5 percent use penalties, and 16 percent use both penalties and rewards.

But a whopping 58 percent of the companies said they are planning to impose penalties on workers who do not take actions to improve their health.

In Tampa Bay, major corporations like St. Petersburg's Jabil Circuit and Seffner's Rooms To Go are experimenting with

fresh ways to motivate their workers to drop pounds, get more fit, feel better and boost productivity. Eventually, these and many other companies

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hope, a fitter workforce will also mean less stress on overtaxed health care plans that tend to spend heavily on diabetes and the ills of overweight and obese workers.

Specialty businesses also are cropping up with some innovative ways to motivate people to lose weight. A company called HealthyWage boasts an unusual weight-loss strategy: betting. You can literally place a wager on your ability to shed a specific number of pounds. Succeed and your bet pays off. Fail to lose enough weight and you also lose your bet. HealthyWage also sponsors weight-loss tournaments akin to the *Biggest Loser* TV show, pitting teams at different corporations who compete for as much as \$10,000 in prizes for the biggest weight loss.

HealthyWage says it offers weight-loss programs used by various Florida firms and organizations. They include furniture retail giant Rooms To Go, as well as Office Depot, Sarasota County, Carrier Florida, the St. Lucie School District and Florida Atlantic University.

So far, Tampa Bay companies offer more carrots than sticks. But that may change if American workers can't get a grip on the obesity epidemic.

Jabil Circuit, a global electronics manufacturing company, decided last year to raise funds for its adopted American Heart Association and its local Heart Walk by holding a vol-

untary weight-shedding competition. Of Jabil's 1,600 local staffers, 62 employees found sponsors, took on playful team names like Phat Boys and last summer shed a total of 745 pounds. On average, that's about 12 pounds per person, representing 5.1 percent of total body weight. The fundraiser brought in \$143,000, almost double the \$75,000 goal.

Jabil headquarters offers a gym plus a range of exercise options, from lunchtime yoga to an after-work, parking lot boot camp workout run by Tampa fitness firm Camp Gladiator. Jabil left it to participating employees to choose their own weight-loss strategies.

Toni Jones, Jabil's senior manager of employee engagement, says the weight-loss competition is purely for fun and raising funds for community service. "It's another way to engage our workers," says Jones, who describes Jabil employees as "extremely competitive."

But she acknowledges that Jabil's health care benefits are self-funded by a company in a low-margin industry. And a healthier workforce means lower health care costs.

(Jabil happens to be one of this year's *Tampa Bay Times* 2013 Top Workplace winners, an achievement Jones thinks was won in part by the company's fresh focus on health options for its workers. Full details about the *Times*' Top Workplaces winners appear in next Sunday's newspaper.)

Another company expanding quickly in Tampa just wrapped up its 2013 weight-loss challenge more than 2,000 pounds lighter and 292 inches trimmer.

Cincinnati-based Total Quality Logistics holds an annual weight-loss competition. This year's event, which finished last month, had a record 250 of its 2,000 employees participate from 17 of its 18 offices.

TQL opened a small Tampa



office in 2010 that already employs more than 100. Sixteen Tampa employees participated in TQL's weight-loss competition this year.

Just like Jabil, TQL employees are a competitive crew, company spokeswoman Kristine Glenn says. In fact, Tampa's TQL office once again is entering the annual America II Corporate SportsFest competition of races, beach volleyball, tug-of-war and other events next Saturday on

Clearwater Beach. The annual event typically attracts thousands of participants on nearly 200 teams from bay area companies.

I'm guessing some pounds will be shed.

Maybe more of us should get out there. Before we get charged extra for those expanding waistlines.

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