

From Motor Renewals to Running Clubs.

Echo-U based in the heartland of Newcastle is a leading provider of services to many insurance companies and banks across the UK. The service centre is predominately staffed by graduates who attended the local universities and loved the social scene that much that they never left.

With absence at less than 2% and staff engagement and retention probably in the top percentile of any contact centre, the following case study looks into the benefits they have achieved from running their employee health and wellbeing programme.

David Blakey, Echo-U's Commercial Director commented, "We have always prided ourselves on the service we offer to the insurance sector. They have really high standards, low margins and have to count every penny and customer service is critical to them. With more and more customers seeking competitive motor insurance quotes on the web, we need to make sure our staff are fully energised to speak to every customer but that also means that time is precious - we can't afford for people not to be speaking to customers when they do call or email us."

Echo-U engaged Let's Get Healthy to support the design of their health and wellbeing programme. All staff were given the opportunity to complete an online lifestyle questionnaire and have a health consultation. The health diagnostic demonstrated to the HR team where to best direct their efforts and budget throughout 2011. The key headings were;

- 100% of the staff wanted to be healthier
- 27 was the average age
- The average BMI was 25
- 37% felt they lacked motivation to make lifestyle changes
- 41% of the team wanted to increase their energy levels
- 57% felt tired in the morning when they woke up
- 54% never had a full night sleep
- 50% of the team were smokers
- 73% of the team were dehydrated

The results enabled Echo-U and Let's Get Healthy to design a programme called "Energy for Performance". David continues, "We recruited champions from the teams and to be honest, when they saw the results they ran with the ideas we gave them, it really is critical to get champions involved as they know best how to engage staff and encourage everybody to join in".

The programme included;

- A pedometer challenge where all teams 'walked' to each and every Echo-U client - not bad when one of their clients is a bank based in Hyderabad in India!
- A walking club which also produced a map of the city where healthy snacks and sandwiches could be bought
- A running club which also lead to runners entering the Great North Run (and they all finished)
- Water bottles were given to all staff and water stations throughout the offices were set-up
- Smoking Cessation programme was provided by the local NHS
- Fresh fruit was delivered to the office every week
- Installation of a table tennis table and music in the rest areas
- Seminars ran by Let's Get Healthy on key subjects, attended in groups, lasting no more than 30 minutes

David continued, "The programme really increased the communication within our teams and we realised that our team leaders and managers weren't great when supporting staff who wanted to talk about their stress or anxieties. Rather than run an internal course, Let's Get Healthy arranged for our staff to attend training with their other clients. The Mind Matters training really opened up the eyes of our managers that there are lots of companies supporting staff in this way and it reinforced their confidence in the programme. All staff are now offered one-to-one support via Let's Get Healthy if they want a third party to speak to about their mental health."

The results show that the programme has more than paid for itself. Absence has reduced to an all-time low but more importantly Echo-U has gone from strength to strength and despite the recession has doubled in size.

Maria Bourke, Managing Director of Let's Get Healthy provides the following advice, "The financial services sector is a demanding work environment, I worked in it for 20 years so I know how challenging it can be. Programmes should be tailored to the needs of your employees and you should do your best to engage at least 90% of the team. Think practically, engage champions and treat the programme like you would any other HR project. The Echo-U programme worked because they understood where to direct their efforts and listened to their staff – open communication and reducing costs are always key outcomes of any health and wellbeing programme."

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