

WELLNESS CASE STUDY

HighSmith, Inc., Wisconsin

Highsmith, a marketer of supplies and equipment to school libraries, encountered a 53% rise in the company's health-insurance premiums in one year. "We decided we would manage health care and not let it manage us," says Bill Herman, Vice President for human resources.

- The strategy has helped the company keep health-insurance costs down, with its premium rising just 3.1% in 2003 and 2.9% in 2002.
- Workers' compensation costs, Herman says, "haven't just slowed down, they've actually gone down. It's significantly less than what we were paying in the early '90s."

Experts urge adopting a plan that focuses on results rather than activities. Employee participation in a flu shot drive, a "smoke out" or fun run may boost short-term awareness of good health, but generally does not have a long-term impact. If you seek real improvement, you need to set goals and devise a reasonable strategy for achieving them.

One overweight business executive issued his employees what became known as "Jim's Challenge." He told them he was going to lose 50 pounds and invited them to join him in the effort, with anyone who lost more in a given week than he did winning a healthy lunch. He also made certain workers received information about healthy dieting.

Whatever you decide to do, it pays to remember this: The health and happiness of your employees has a direct impact on your company's financial health.