TRENDS & Ideas

PREVENTION

Businesses Win Wellness Awards

The Wellness Councils of America, a not-for-profit group based in Omaha, annually gives its Gold Well Workplace Award to companies that strongly encourage healthy behavior in their employees. Award-winning firms tend to follow seven practices, writes David Hunnicutt, PhD, in *Business & Health*. Such companies have:

Support at the Top Ray Townsend, the founder of Townsend Engineering, Des Moines, IA, has backed wellness activities for workers since 1978; he has even built them a 30,000-square foot wellness facility.

A Wellness Team Highsmith Inc., an educational catalog marketer in Fort Atkinson, WI, has a team whose members match the diversity of the firm's workforce. The team has built a mini-university offering courses on medical self-care, stress management, alternative medicine, and dozens of other subjects.

Relevant Data Award-winning firms routinely monitor and analyze employee health risk appraisals, medical claims utilization, absenteeism, and disability costs. Union Pacific Railroad, based in Omaha, has in this way helped bring about a 5 percent reduction in healthcare costs related to lifestyle.

An Operating Plan Award winners devote as much care to health promotion as they do to any other strategic business proposition.

Purposeful Programming Miami Valley Hospital, Dayton, OH, employs a variety of media--including personal counseling, the Internet, group communication, and self-study materials--in promoting wellness. In only a year, it dramatically reduced health risk factors among employees.

A Supportive Environment In 1994 the commander of Offut Air Force Base, Omaha, turned an airplane hangar into a wellness center with an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a soccer field, and courts for basketball, tennis, volleyball, and racquetball.

Careful Outcomes Evaluations Award-winning companies evaluate outcomes consistently, keeping score of program participation, satisfaction levels, progress in behavior change, and other measures. From such evaluations, Lincoln Plating, Lincoln, NE, estimates that it has seen an $800,000 return on an $85,000 investment in employee wellness over five years, most of it realized in lower insurance premiums.

Lincoln Plating has also cut injuries and compensation costs.

LABOR

Disabled Entering the Workforce

The current labor shortage is creating an opportunity for the disabled to enter the workforce in record numbers, writes Michelle Conlin in *Business Week*. Their influx into corporate America will be supported by new technologies that will enable disabled people to perform tasks hitherto impossible for them.

Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was passed in 1990, only 25 percent of the country's disabled who are also of working age are employed. Of the 75 percent who aren't working, Harris Polls indicate that two-thirds of them wish they could be.

They may be soon. Employers, desperate for workers, are realizing that it makes economic sense to invest in workers by making accommodations for them. "We can use new technologies to contribute to society in ways that weren't really possible when I started 25 years ago," says Michael Coleman, IBM's vice president for global operations. Coleman, IBM's top-ranking disabled worker, lost both his hands in Vietnam when he was trying to defuse a bomb.

New technology is enabling disabled people to better see a computer screen, hear a telephone call, talk to others when they lack speech, and do word processing when they cannot type. One-third of all Americans will have a disability—defined by the ADA as having a physical or mental impairment that limits life's major activities—at some point in their adult lives, and as aging baby boomers stay in the workforce longer they will benefit from today's innovations. And in addition to advanced technology, the development of sophisticated mechanical body parts, will enable the disabled to function in many jobs that they previously could not consider.

Illustrations by Sim Gellman

HEALTH INFORMATION

Online Pharmacies Are Flourishing

In 1999, 70 million consumers turned to the Internet in their search for health information, according to a Harris Poll. They spent $93 million on over-the-counter (OTC) drugs alone. No wonder then, writes Alison Stein Wellner in *American Demographics*, that healthcare advertisers are flocking online too.

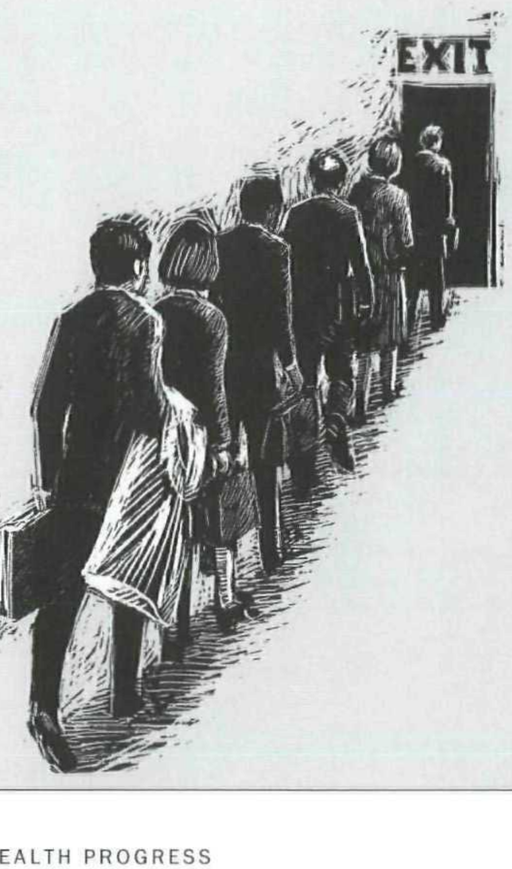
Web pharmacies such as DrugEmporium.com, Drugstore.com, and FamilyMeds.com are currently the big online pharmacies. They tend to specialize in prescription medications for serious illnesses like depression, hypertension, and cancer. They have done relatively little marketing of OTC drugs so far.

To attract consumers to their Web pages, the big online pharmacies buy space for "banner" advertisements on better-known sites. High-income mothers are the consumers most avidly sought. FamilyMeds.com is planning to launch banners on ParentTime.com, a site popular with young mothers. DrugEmporium.com has signed marketing agreements with CNN.com, Snap.com, and Dr.Koop.com.

Older people are the second most-wanted kind of consumer sought by online drugstores. On one hand, the elderly are less likely to be Web surfers than other people; they are also the population segment hardest to please, according to a study conducted by Greenfield Online. On the other hand, older people are more likely than others to have medical needs.

To attract elderly consumers, FamilyMeds.com is forging a partnership with The Senior Network, a national Web site that helps local senior centers create their own sites. FamilyMeds.com is also planning banners for AARP.org and other sites that older people are beginning to turn to for health information.

But the online marketing of medications is still in an early stage of evolution. DrugEmporium.com is currently negotiating directly with pharmaceutical manufacturers. In such an arrangement, the online pharmacy and the manufacturers of, for example, Tylenol, would have linked Web sites.



MANAGEMENT

Vacant Executive Suites

Although the job of CEO has never been so well-paid, executives in the top spot are resigning, retiring, or getting fired at a record pace, writes Del Jones in *USA Today*. In the past six months, CEOs have departed at an average of three per business day, a rate that jumped to five per day in January, according to outplacement firm Challenger Gray & Christmas. Citigroup co-CEO John Reed stepped down in April, and co-CEO Sanford Weill says he will follow in a year or two. In February Richard Huber, CEO of Aetna, was let go, and in January Jill Barad was ousted as CEO of Mattel.

Despite the soaring economy, today's business pace is so frantic that the job of CEO is becoming more and more difficult to do well. Boards, under pressure from shareholders, are unforgiving of mistakes and rarely give CEOs the time to fix them, instead hoping a quick change of leadership will produce better results.

Factors contributing to the rapid turnover include:

- Rapid new technology, which means new products are soon obsolete
- The Internet, which has hastened the pace of every aspect of business, from hiring to firing and from buying to selling
- Rapid change in the marketplace, which makes long-term planning difficult
- The long-running bull market, which raises shareholders' expectations for returns
- The end of the Cold War, which has led to an explosion of global trade and competition
- The tight labor market, which increases the difficulty of hiring the most talented workers