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The first Arkansas Fitness Challenge was a huge success and exceeded expectations from the top levels of management to the frontline employees at both the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield. The timing and environment were excellent. There was a fitness movement nationwide and employees were eager to have a simple program to help them start exercising and keep them motivated to improve their health and well being.

This Employee Fitness Contest Kit should provide some valuable tools to use in structuring a contest for other companies planning a similar contest in their community or within their organizations, or those wanting to participate in future observances of the Arkansas Fitness Challenge.

There were several keys to success that surfaced during the contest. Here are a few:

- You cannot start planning too early.
- Personal commitments and high visibility among employees from the corporate champions, Fay Boozman, M.D., and Sharon Allen, were very motivational for both entities. This was evident in the post-contest evaluation results.
- Online registration made getting started easy and online logging served as a great personal progress report for employees, and gave them an immediate sense of accomplishment.
- Following a communication and promotions plan helped capitalize on media exposure as well as internal motivation.
- Prizes (of very nominal value) were an incentive, but we found employees were more interested in personal improvement and being part of a winning team, or helping their champion/company win.

Keys to Success

- Taking part in local charitable walks, runs and other participatory sporting events helped create team “exercise opportunities” for employees. Compiling a lengthy list of events scheduled during the Challenge timeframe and communicating those to employees helped make it easy for them to plan and participate.
- Recruiting creative and motivated regional champions helped carry the enthusiasm of the Challenge statewide — internally and externally.
- Both entities relied on the monthly data exchange and reporting structure.
- Internal monthly reporting revealed contest progress among departments, regions, etc., and provided a real boost in competitive spirit among employees.
- An evaluation tool is essential to determining the success of your employee contest and can serve as a basis for addressing health or fitness issues in the workplace throughout the year or when planning for the next year’s contest.

These are just a few key strategies in the first Arkansas Fitness Challenge. Most importantly, you know best how to reach your employees — what works and what doesn’t work well.

Go for it!

