

CREATIVE CRAFTSMEN

Creative Craftsmen, a custom metal fabrication company in Evansville, Indiana, makes parts for a range of products, including reclining chairs, lawn mowers and automobile assembly lines. It has operated as a small business since Eisenhower was president.

One key to the company's longevity has been its skilled workforce. Keeping this workforce healthy is crucial to its continued success.

Most of the company's 18 employees are middle-aged males — the average age is a little over 50. According to Melody Waggoner, the company's human resources manager, about two-thirds of these workers are either obese or overweight.

Like many smaller companies, Creative Craftsmen does not have a large staff or budget for human resources or health care. It is a family-owned business, and Waggoner, who is the daughter of one of the owners, wears several hats, including human resources manager and accountant.

In 2007 Creative Craftsmen started a wellness program to help employees exercise more, eat healthier foods and stop smoking. The company hired a local health care provider, Deaconess Hospital, to set up and run the program. By taking this step, Creative Craftsmen is rather unique: according to a 2011 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, just 12 percent of small businesses set up their own wellness programs. The rest have programs that are provided by their health plan.³¹²

Waggoner said the company started the program because its owners believe that healthier, happier employees are more productive. Again, this puts the company in the minority: the Kaiser survey also found that one-quarter of small employers offered a wellness program to improve employees' health, while 9 percent offered it to improve morale and productivity. Nearly half said they offered a wellness program because it was part of their health plan.³¹³

Currently, the company, whose annual sales range between \$2.5 million and \$3.5 million, spends about \$4,000 a year on its wellness program. Through 2011, Creative Craftsmen was reimbursed for half the cost of its program

thanks to an Indiana tax credit that helped defray companies' wellness program costs. However, that credit was suspended for 2012.³¹⁴

The program is managed by Emily Boyd, a health coach at Deaconess. With her help, the company now has a solid program.

One key piece of the effort is an annual screening program that checks employees' BMI and body fat levels, and tests for diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Waggoner said that 90 percent of employees participate in the screenings. Through the screenings and conversations with employees, Boyd found that a significant number of Creative Craftsmen's employees needed to manage their weight, exercise more and improve their diet.

She helped them develop plans to improve on areas that fell into the risky category, and regularly checks in on the participants' progress. Spouses are also eligible for the screenings, as well as a free flu shot.

In some cases, the screenings have had a significant impact. For instance, two years ago, tests revealed that the company's owner and founder, Tom Pfender, had diabetes. At the time, Pfender (who is Waggoner's father) had no idea that he had the disease. Since then, he has begun exercising and is eating healthier. As a result of these changes, and the medication he now takes, his diabetes is under control.

Boyd said that employees at Creative Craftsmen are sometimes set in their ways, and can be reluctant to alter their behavior. In 2012, she is trying a new, incentive-based approach to make it easier for them to make healthier choices.

She said that some of the company's employees have quit smoking or lost a significant amount of weight. In some cases, however, they have started smoking again or regained the lost weight. But Boyd remains optimistic about their long-term success. "[The backsliding] usually has to do with stress," she said. "I want to help them figure out how to make more lasting changes." This year, she has focused especially on working with employees who continue to use tobacco.

Every year, the company holds wellness contests, with varying rules and goals. Some have focused on losing weight and decreasing body fat, while others have focused on increasing time spent exercising. One competition awarded contestants points for every 15 minutes they spent exercising; for every serving of fruits or vegetables they ate; for every 8 ounces of water they consumed; and for every driving trip they took while wearing a seat belt. Points were also awarded for not eating red meat. Some contests involve teams, while others are individual. Prizes have included gift cards and up to \$100 in cash.

This year, the company is holding a contest that runs from April to September. Every month, workers are eligible to earn entries into two separate drawings. One awards relatively small prizes such as gift cards. The other will give out a single, larger prize: an extra personal day. Boyd structured the contest so that every employee can participate.

In April, as part of the contest, Boyd tested entrants on a range of strength and flexibility measures, including grip and biceps strength. Because

metalwork involves a fair amount of upper body manual labor, workers at Creative Craftsmen generally scored high on strength measures. But the tests showed that many workers lacked flexibility. Afterwards, Boyd showed workers how to stretch. In September she will retest them to see whether they improved.

In addition to these contests, the company has a standing offer: a \$100 bonus to any overweight or obese worker who loses weight and keeps it off for three months — or to any employee who quits smoking for six months.

This year, Boyd also set up “lunch and learn” sessions, in which a speaker talks to employees about a wellness topic. Recently she brought in a physical therapist to explain the importance of stretching to prevent injuries — both on the job and during leisure time.

Boyd firmly believes in the value of company wellness programs. “At a lot of companies I’ve worked with, insurance claims go down,” she said. “Employees’ health can really improve through these programs. And the companies save money.”

