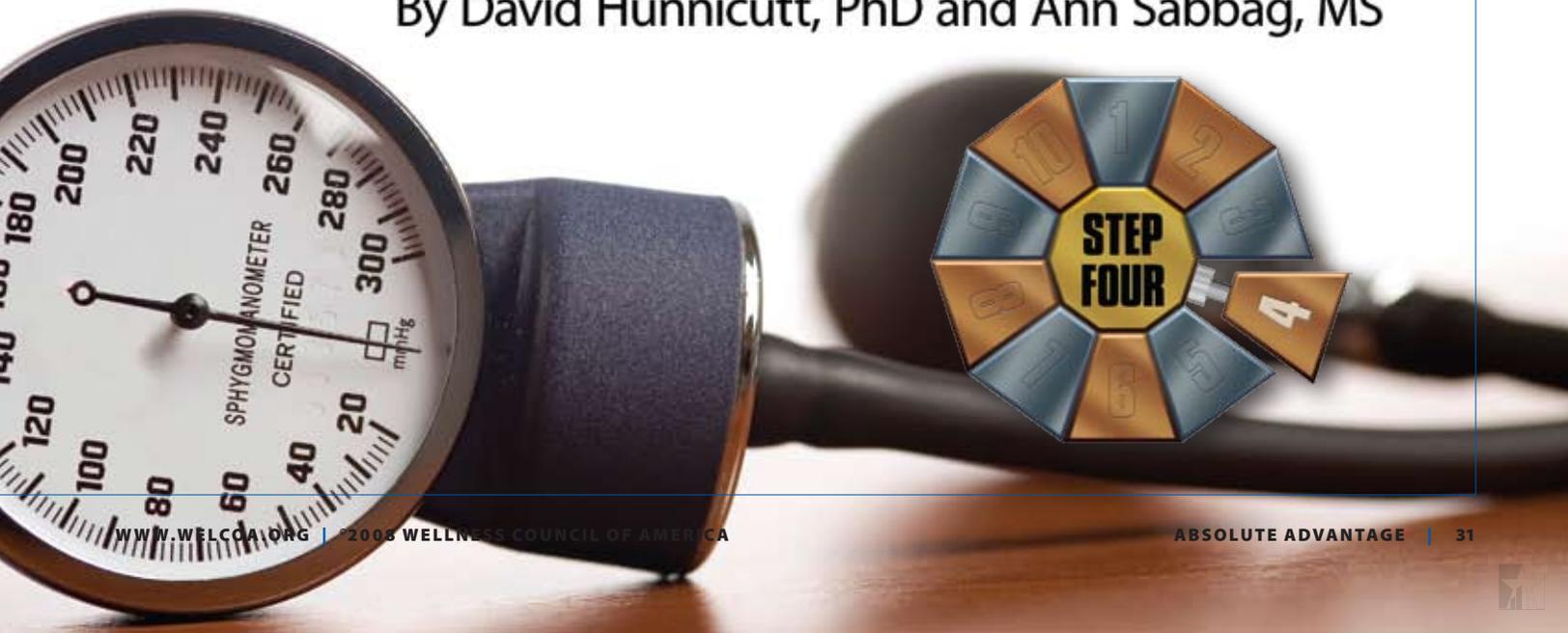


YOU CAN'T Change

WHAT YOU CAN'T Measure

The Importance of Providing an
Opportunity for Health Screening

By David Hunnicutt, PhD and Ann Sabbag, MS

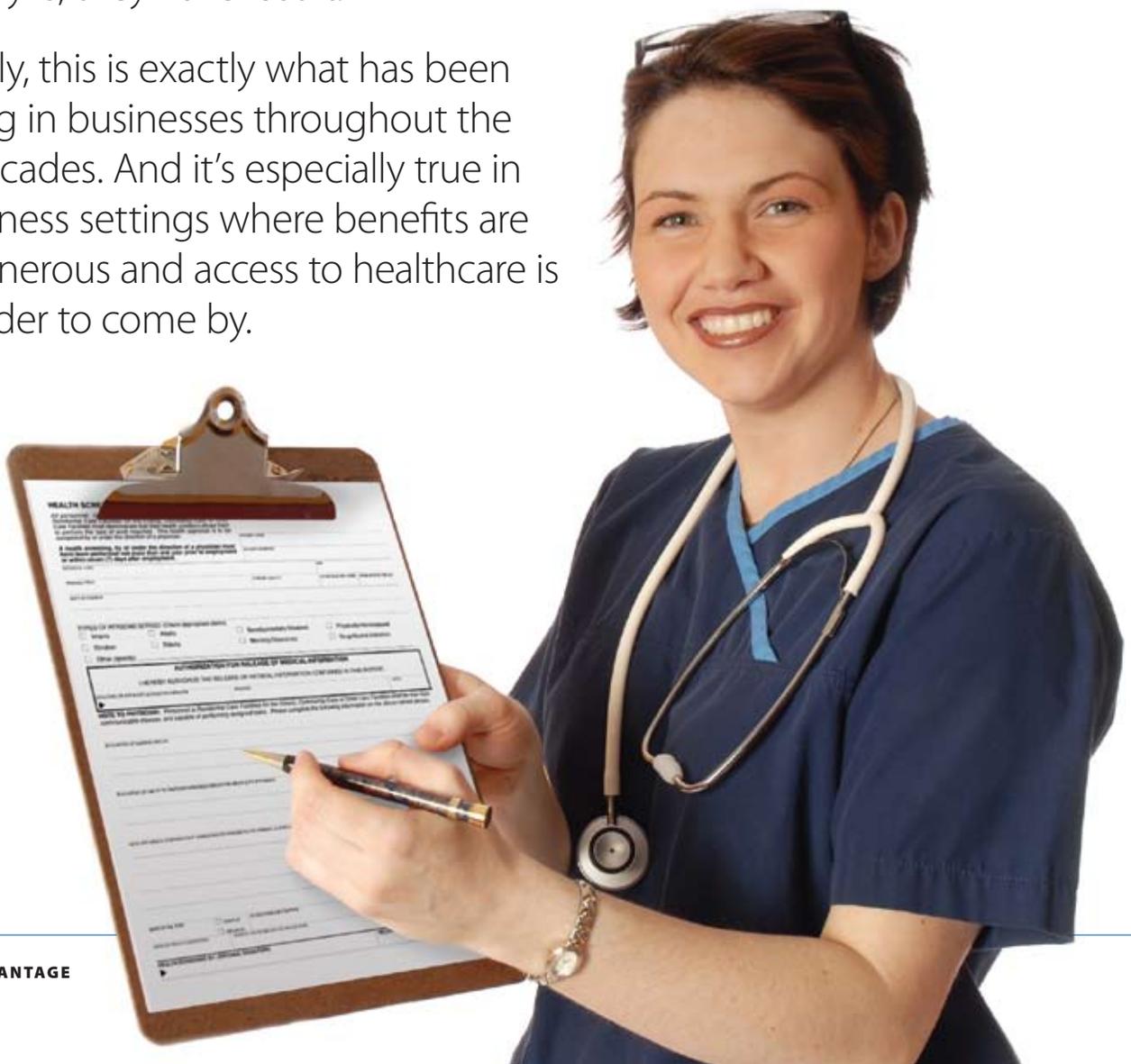


Isn't it interesting that when people enter the workforce, they are—for the most part—young, energetic, healthy, vibrant, and optimistic. But after having spent 30 or 40 years involved in the daily push and shove that the world of work demands, most people slowly begin to wear out. Having neglected the importance of protecting personal health status, their well-being and vitality slowly begin to deteriorate—and, as this happens, it takes a noticeable and serious toll on both organizational productivity and personal happiness.

Unfortunately, when this sequence of events is initiated, we know from experience that the spiral downward has begun and stopping this vicious descent is difficult—even for the most well-intentioned.

Tragically, by the time most people realize how valuable their health status really is, they have lost it.

Undeniably, this is exactly what has been happening in businesses throughout the U.S. for decades. And it's especially true in small business settings where benefits are far less generous and access to healthcare is much harder to come by.



The Importance of Conducting An Annual Health Screening

At the core of any exemplary small business wellness initiative is the notion of providing each and every employee with the opportunity to take part in a personal health screening. In fact, a personal health screening opportunity is such an important component that it is virtually impossible to establish any type of effective wellness program without it.

Indeed, over the last two decades, we've learned that if people (1) don't understand their present personal health status and (2) aren't able to objectively quantify it, it's highly unlikely that improvements will occur just due to the simple fact that employees have no idea if, when, and how much they need to change.

In this article, we'll further discuss the importance of providing regular health screenings for all employees and we'll reveal important information that will help you to design, deliver, and evaluate a screening initiative that will set your small business apart as an employer of choice.

“We Care About You”

As you begin to think about the importance of providing an annual health screening for all of your employees, it's critical that you examine your motivation for doing it in the first place.

And this is where things get interesting.

Having worked with numerous employers on this topic, we can tell you that the motivations range from increasing productivity to reducing healthcare costs to creating a healthier organizational culture in order to attract better and more qualified talent. And, as important and valid as all of these motivations are, they will all ring hollow in the ears of your employees unless you preface the entire undertaking with four words—“we care about you.”

Indeed, if you want health screening to take hold in your organization, the number one message that has to be overtly and sincerely communicated to each and every employee is a simple yet powerful one—“we care about you.”

When you communicate this message in truth and in fact, your employees will begin to understand that you, as their employer, recognize that health is truly the pearl of great price and serious and important steps have to be taken in order to protect it.

To some small business leaders, all this blatant sharing of care and concern seems a bit hokey. But to the astute and successful, this opening move is gospel.

Internal, External or Outsourced?

Having established and clearly articulated the motivation and rationale for conducting an annual health screening, it's time to get down to the basics. First, let's start by examining whether you should attempt to conduct a health screening internally, externally, or by contracting with an outside partner.

First, we need to share with you right up front that we think each of these options have merit. But we also need to let you know that we believe that one option in particular is far better than the others.

Internal

One potential option for delivering health screening to your employees is to allocate and dedicate internal staff time to get the job done. In this scenario, a small team of individuals within the organization take on the responsibility of researching how health screenings function and then set up an internally-driven process that works for the organization. In this approach, team members take on tasks like writing the communication pieces, developing and disseminating invitations, creating registration protocols, setting up the screening area, contracting with nurses to do the blood draws, establishing the incentives, etc., etc.

Certainly the most significant advantage to conducting a health screening in this manner is that you have total control over all of the details—which, by the way, is also the biggest drawback. To be sure, taking on a task such as this using internal staff is a lot of work—much of which will be new and, thus, require significant research and examination in order to do it successfully. As a result of all the obstacles that come with this approach, taking this task on internally is a potential option but it's obviously not the best one.

External

Another option in making health screening available for your employees is to do it externally. By external we mean rather than holding the health screening onsite, you'll contract with an outside entity (most often a local hospital) and arrange for your employees to get screened at that particular location. For many small businesses this



is a viable option and we believe that it is far superior to conducting a health screening event using internal staff. Not only is there a group of trained professionals who take charge of the entire process but doing it this way can also insulate you from potential liability. Still, there are several drawbacks to this method, the most significant being that your employees now need to travel to an offsite facility to get the tests they need. Not only is this inconvenient to both employers and employees, but for small businesses it is particularly expensive as having employees away from the job for several hours is quite costly.

Outsourcing

The third potential option for conducting an employee health screening is outsourcing. When we refer to outsourcing, we mean contracting with an outside firm that specializes in delivering high-quality health screening services for businesses and then letting them work their magic. In our experience, this is by far the best choice as you will have the luxury of being able to hold the health screening onsite and, at the same time, having skilled and competent professionals leading the charge.

Before proceeding, it's important that we let you know that we understand the realities and constraints of small businesses. Therefore, we believe that it's always prudent to think "good, better, best." In this case, using internal staff to put on a health screening is good; contracting to do it externally at an off-site location is better, and outsourcing it to a qualified and competent vendor is best.

For the rest of this article, we are going to proceed with information related to outsourcing it to a qualified and competent partner because we believe that this is by far the most superior approach to conducting health screenings in a small business setting.

What To Look For In A Health Screening Partner

Because health screening is one of the most important things your organization will ever do as it pertains to maintaining and/or enhancing the health status of your employees, we would recommend that you only use qualified and competent vendors. Here are some things to look for.

Core Competencies

One key qualification in finding a good health screening partner is whether or not health screening is a core competency of the organization. Specifically, we recommend that you assertively dig deep to find out

if, indeed, health screening is a core competency of the organization you are considering or if it's just one of a number of services that the vendor provides. Also, be sure to ask if the organization you will be contracting with is the one who is actually providing the services or if they will be sub-contracting with another "hidden" partner. For obvious reasons, we recommend that you select a partner that has developed health screening as a core competency of their organization.

Staff Qualifications

A second element that should be considered when choosing a health screening partner is how well-qualified the potential prospect is. In most circumstances, you will find that vendors fall into two basic "camps." The first is the healthcare and/or RN (registered nurse) camp. You'll be able to identify them easily because the provider will tout credentials and certifications that relate to the soundness of their screening techniques like blood draws and assessment of body composition—largely from a healthcare perspective. This is a very important qualification and should be taken seriously—the last thing that you want is someone who is not qualified in this area to be entrusted with the health and well-being of your employees. But—and here's the newsflash—it's not the only qualification that should be considered when choosing a partner and this leads us to the second camp of vendors.

Currently, there is an entirely new group of health screening partners that have recently emerged and—in keeping with the spirit of practicing radical honesty—contracting with them is highly-preferable to just working with a healthcare provider. Specifically, in this second camp, you'll find not only professionals who are qualified to conduct blood draws and assessments of body composition (just to mention a few), but you'll find a group of health educators who can assist you in a variety of other ways. First, they can help you plan your health screening event—including things like building set-up, employee recruitment, registration, and development of incentives right up front so that everything is taken care ahead of time. In addition, they'll not only conduct your biometric tests like blood draws etc., but they'll also provide an individualized coaching opportunity for each participant—which is critical to the behavior change process.

In an ideal world, we recommend that you identify and select a partner that falls into the second camp of health screening companies.



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Longevity and Experience

Obviously, the longer the company has been in business, the more reputable they'll be. Be sure to ask questions of potential partners concerning how long the organization has been in business and what the credentials and experience of the principals are. I would also be sure to inquire if there is any pending litigation against the firm.

Testimonials

Perhaps the best tests of potential partners are satisfied customers. Be sure to get the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other organizations who have used the services offered by the firm. And once you get the numbers, pick up the phone and make the call. Too many times, people get the names of references but fail to follow through in contacting them—do not make this mistake.

An Aerial View of The Health Screening Process

Having provided some essential information related to identifying and selecting a reputable health vendor, it's now time to turn our attention to reviewing how the health screening process actually works.

Initial Meeting

Indeed, the entire process begins with an initial meeting between representatives from your small business and the potential health screening vendor. In this meeting, you should share some basic information about your company including the number of employees and potential time frames for delivering the actual event. But the vast majority of this meeting should be spent trying to get a better understanding of the services, approaches and philosophy of the potential partner.

Formal Proposal

Having completed the initial meeting, you should request a formal proposal from the vendor. In this proposal you should expect to receive the scope of services, personnel responsible for overseeing the initiative, timeframes, and costs. This proposal should be received in written format.

Planning Meeting

If you choose to accept the vendor's proposal, the next step is to meet with the provider for the purposes of developing the plan that will guide the actual delivery of the health screening event itself. This planning process should have been included in the proposal received by the vendor so there shouldn't be any additional fees associated with this component. At the completion of the planning meeting

you should have in hand the document that will serve as the blueprint for the entire event—from beginning to end.

Communication and Recruitment

Once the plan is completed, it's time to begin executing the communications campaign. Again, this should be done with your vendor partner as they should be able to provide you with all of the communication forms/letters that you'll need to effectively communicate, recruit, and enroll your company's employees.

Event Day

By contracting with a partner who can guide you through all of the upfront strategy formulation, the day of the event should be fun and informative. On the day of the event you can expect that your vendor partner will orchestrate the action and professionally and successfully deliver your health screening with class and style.

Follow Up

Once the event has been completed, a reputable vendor should be able to provide you with some concrete follow up information—not least of which includes basic evaluations that capture employee's reactions and overall satisfaction levels. In addition to basic process evaluation information, a good vendor should also be able to provide your company's executives with aggregate information concerning the overall findings—this would include information like total critical values and perhaps even aggregate health statistics.

What Tests Should Be Performed?

If you are going to conduct health screening for your employees, it's essential that you make sure that you offer the right tests. At a minimum, you should offer your employees the opportunity to assess total cholesterol (good and bad both), blood pressure, blood sugar and body mass index. Using the latest technologies and tests, your vendor can easily and straightforwardly conduct these tests for your employees. What's more, as a benefit associated with breathtaking technological advancements, your employees will receive their results immediately.

Once the testing has been completed and your employees have their results in hand, it's highly recommended that your employees are given the opportunity to sit down and discuss the findings with a qualified and/or certified health coach. In this important encounter, the health coach will walk the individual through the results and make sure that there is a clear understanding as to what the results mean—and what steps need to be taken in order to maintain or improve individual health status.



What About A Health Risk Appraisal (HRA)?

Perhaps one of the biggest questions you'll have to face is whether or not you should offer your employees the opportunity to complete a health risk appraisal at the same time they are going through the screening process. Our advice is that if you can afford to do it, you should. A health risk appraisal is going to provide the health coach with just that much more information and, when all is said and done, the employee will have a very good snapshot of their total health profile.

Before closing out this section, it's again important to remind you that the key to this whole exercise is the coaching encounter that is inserted on the tail end of this experience. Specifically, after the employee has completed the appropriate biometric tests, and taken the HRA—if one is offered—it is critical to provide the employee the opportunity to sit down and discuss the results with a health coach. In this encounter orchestrated by your vendor, the health coach will sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the individual and walk them through their results line-by-line. This is of the utmost importance because, if you're like most organizations, you will have at least one employee who will present with a significant health issue—and the health coach will point them in the right direction.

How Much Does Health Screening Cost?

Although it depends on the region of the country in which you live, health screening will generally cost about \$25-\$70 per employee. The lower end of the scale applies if you are only doing the biometric testing and the higher end of the scale applies to the biometric testing, the HRA, and the personal lifestyle counseling experience.

Given the relatively low cost for such an important test, we encourage small business leaders to provide health screening opportunities annually or at least every two years.

How To Find a Health Screening Partner

There are several ways that you can find the perfect partner to help you deliver an exceptional health screening experience for your employees. First, it's always wise to check out the WELCOA website as we make it a point to promote and highlight premier providers. In addition, you can check with your local Chamber of Commerce or community healthcare coalition to find out who's providing

these services within your community. It's also a good idea to contact your HR broker—they'll be connected with firms who can provide these services. Finally, be sure to contact your local hospital or healthcare providers to find out if they make these services available to small businesses in your community.

Summary

Health screening is an essential undertaking if you want to build a quality wellness program within a small business setting. In this article, we've outlined the process and highlighted many of the details associated with providing health screening opportunities for your employees. As you move forward, remember that it's always a good idea to think "good, better, best." Remember, you don't have to be perfect right out of the gate, but it is essential that you get started and, over time, work toward building a program that sets you apart as an employer of choice in the small business community. ★

About David Hunnicutt, PhD



Dr. David Hunnicutt is the President of the Wellness Council of America. As a leader in the field of health promotion, his vision has led to the creation of numerous publications designed to link health promotion objectives to business outcomes.

About Ann Sabbag, MS



Ann Sabbag is the founder and President of Health Designs, a leader in worksite wellness specializing in health risk assessments, corporate health screenings and lifestyle coaching.

Ann and her team of enthusiastic health professionals work with diverse companies, in every major industry, throughout the country including Fortune 500 companies such as JPMorgan Chase, Duncan Aviation, Anheuser Busch, Hewitt and JM Family Toyota. Last year alone, her company provided wellness services at more than 200 different worksites.

Ann earned her Masters degree from the University of North Florida in Health Administration and her undergraduate degree in Health Education from Florida State University. She is a Health Educator certified in Intrinsic Coaching with extended studies in nutrition and behavior change. She is also an Advisory Member of the Wellness Council of America.

Her company is Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's wellness partner, providing health promotion services to Blue Cross's large corporate clients throughout Florida. In the Year 2000, Health Designs was awarded Business of the Year in Health Education by the American Association of Health Education.

Visit www.healthdesigns.net for more information.



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Suggested Citation: Hunnicutt, D. (2008). *You Can't Change What You Can't Measure*. WELCOA's *Absolute Advantage Magazine*, 7(2), 30-37.

