



Rewarding Healthy Behaviors:

A Step-by-Step Guide to Workplace Incentives for Tobacco Cessation

PRESENTED BY:





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Executive Summary

What is the Role of an Employer in Behavior Change?

Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the United States and costs employers an estimated excess cost of \$21 per smoker, per day, or \$7,874 per year. As state smoking laws tighten and more employers offer tobacco cessation programs to their employees, what was once a debate is now an accepted fact: employers must take an active role in helping their tobacco users quit successfully.

Healthier workforces mean better productivity and fewer medical expenses, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an evidence-based tobacco cessation program is one of the only employer benefits with a proven ROI. If you already have a tobacco cessation program in place at your organization, you may wonder how to effectively drive participation. Will offering incentives discriminate against nonsmoking employees, reward smokers for unhealthy behaviors, or negate the ROI for the program?

Alere Wellbeing has found that employers successfully increase participation in wellness programs when they reward healthy behaviors throughout the course of the program rather than focusing on the end result. By implementing an approach that includes an evidence-based program, is supported by a positive environment, and is led by a team that anticipates the future, you will find that offering incentives can promote positive behavior change, positively impact your bottom line, and improve your employee relations.



What Motivates People to Change?

People are innately motivated by the possibility of rewards, and a person's motivation increases with confidence in his or her ability to perform the task at hand. Most smokers say they want to quit, but many who have tried to quit in the past have not succeeded. This leads to a lack of confidence and a decrease in motivation to try again. In order to promote lasting behavior change, you must provide the kind of environment that encourages and rewards healthy choices rather than punishes those caught in an addictive cycle.

- **Increase motivation with knowledge.** Tobacco use is an addiction that hits a smoker on three fronts – he is addicted physically, behaviorally, and emotionally. Helping smokers understand the kind of battle they are up against – and offering the tools to help them face each part of this battle – will give smokers more confidence in their ability to quit successfully. Nonsmokers will benefit from reminders that tobacco use is an addiction and that smokers should be encouraged rather than vilified.
- **Build confidence through practice.** Practicing new behaviors in situations that used to involve tobacco builds confidence in a smoker's ability to change.
- **Reframe destructive thoughts by developing cognitive skills.** Developing new ways of thinking about tobacco use by reframing incongruous thoughts prepares smokers to make rational choices rather than giving way to addictive behaviors.
- **Emphasize tangible and intangible rewards.** Smokers who quit will experience tangible rewards such as better health and financial gain. Through an effective program, they may also experience intangible benefits such as happiness, positive competition, and reduced stress. Remind your employees of the benefits they will receive—those they will acquire from you as well as those they will achieve for themselves.



The Comprehensive Approach

You want to reward smokers for quitting tobacco, but how can you be sure that they will enroll and participate? The most successful employers take a comprehensive approach in which incentives are tied to step-by-step engagement with an evidence-based tobacco cessation program, supported by a leadership team that anticipates future improvements.

Offer an Evidence-Based Program

Because tobacco use is a powerful addiction, it requires a clinically proven combination of physical, psychological, and behavioral strategies to overcome. An evidence-based tobacco cessation program will provide participants with counseling and social support, and also provide decision support to participants who are interested in nicotine replacement therapy and prescription medications. An effective program will include the following:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy:** Programs that are based in cognitive behavioral therapy provide participants with knowledge and teach them how to overcome destructive thinking that has driven them to use tobacco in the past. This method will help them develop new ways of thinking that will lead them to develop healthier behaviors that will last for life.
- **Integrated modalities:** Effective programs offer services and support through the integration of coaching, supplemental education, and social support. An evidence-based program will offer dedicated, specially trained coaches who teach tobacco users how to overcome physical cravings with the correct use of medications, teach new ways of thinking about tobacco to control the emotional and psychological responses to withdrawal, and show how to develop behavioral strategies for overcoming triggers in everyday situations that used to involve tobacco. Supplemental educational pieces such as printed materials or online learning tools can help keep program participants engaged in the quitting process between counseling sessions. Finally, social support, whether offered by the coaches, through an online community, or a combination of the two, will help build participants' confidence and remind them they are not alone in their quit.
- **Access to medication at no cost to the employee:** According to the United States Public Health Service's 2008 Clinical Practice Guideline update, *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence*, the most effective, evidence-based method for treating tobacco dependence is a combination of counseling and medication. Offering full coverage for employees and dependents removes a barrier that often keeps people from enrolling.
- **Capacity to allow multiple quit attempts:** Because tobacco use is a powerful addiction, smokers may need to attempt to quit several times before they are quit for life. Smokers often struggle with a fear of failure, so allowing employees to enroll and re-enroll provides them with a safety net and reduces additional stress.



Provide a Positive Incentives Program

A positive incentives program has intuitive appeal, is fairly easy to administer, and sends a positive and decisive message about tobacco use. Yet any compensation program or rewards program can have perversity built in if it isn't planned carefully. In order to prevent pitfalls, you should make sure your program:

- **Ties rewards to engagement in the program.** While rewarding enrollment and successful completion of the program has its benefits, you will see higher quit rates if you tie incentives to the act of completing calls or participating in web activity. Encouraging this kind of engagement will ensure a participant's long-term commitment to the program.
- **Establishes clear policies.** Your management team should communicate its expectations of participants clearly and effectively from the time a tobacco cessation program is launched. Affidavits that declare an employee's tobacco use status can help employers identify smokers and hold employees accountable.
- **Offers enrollment year round.** Because tobacco use is an addictive behavior, you must remember that many people who try to quit are not successful the first (or second, or third) time. Smokers benefit from a program that offers open enrollment and provides them with limitless opportunities to engage.
- **Sets up systems for the delivery of incentives.** Planning a schedule for the delivery of incentives will help your management team remain timely and execute what you have promised to employees.
- **Allows integration with other vendors.** Determine how you will administer and require your tobacco cessation vendor to track, communicate, and integrate with your other wellness programs.
- **Emphasizes behavior change, not smoking status.** A positive program will focus on supporting smokers on their journey to better health rather than calling attention to their status as smokers. Nonsmokers will also respond better to positive incentive programs than to linear rewards systems that alienate those with good health.



Monitor, Track, and Plan for the Future

Once you have your incentive plan in place, make sure to monitor and track its progress so you can make improvements for the coming year. Determine which data you will be tracking and how to report your findings to the leadership team. Listen to the feedback of your employees and ask yourself whether the program achieved what you set out to accomplish. It may benefit you to track the following so you can revamp your program accordingly:

- **Monitor participation levels.** Determine whether you have seen an increase in employee enrollment since launching the incentives program.
- **Track engagement achieved.** Utilize data feeds and reporting to determine how engaged participants are in the program. Are they completing calls and accessing the web on a regular basis? Does your tobacco cessation vendor support engagement and proactively encourage participants to be active in the program?
- **Calculate return on investment.** Calculate the return on investment including the cost of the tobacco cessation program and the cost of incentives. An incentives program offering premium differentials should help pay for the tobacco cessation program, and therefore be, at the very least, a cost-neutral solution. Even without premium differentials, an effective incentives program will drive program participation and increase the savings an organization would be spending on excess healthcare costs.
- **Collect responses of nonsmokers.** Do your nonsmoking employees feel as though they are being discriminated against? If so, you may need to re-examine the focus of the program: are you promoting the program with the focus on behavior change or on temporary gain such as monetary rewards?
- **Identify cases of cheating.** Some employers find that tobacco users may deny tobacco use on their affidavits or indicate they are in a program in order to participate in a reward-driven competition. Work with your vendor to verify enrollment in the program if this is part of the requirement for premium differential or incentive. If you learn that employees have been falsifying documents, ensure that there are appropriate consequences.



The Economics of Incentives

Why Pay for Two Programs?

Given our current economy, it may seem counter-intuitive to ask your organization to fund an incentives program after you have already invested in a tobacco cessation program. However, employers annually spend an estimated \$7,874 per tobacco user in excess medical costs and productivity losses; when an employee quits [tobacco], the return on investment is substantial. This long-term goal helps many employers know that the additional investment in an incentives program will help to drive participation and ultimately lead to greater savings.

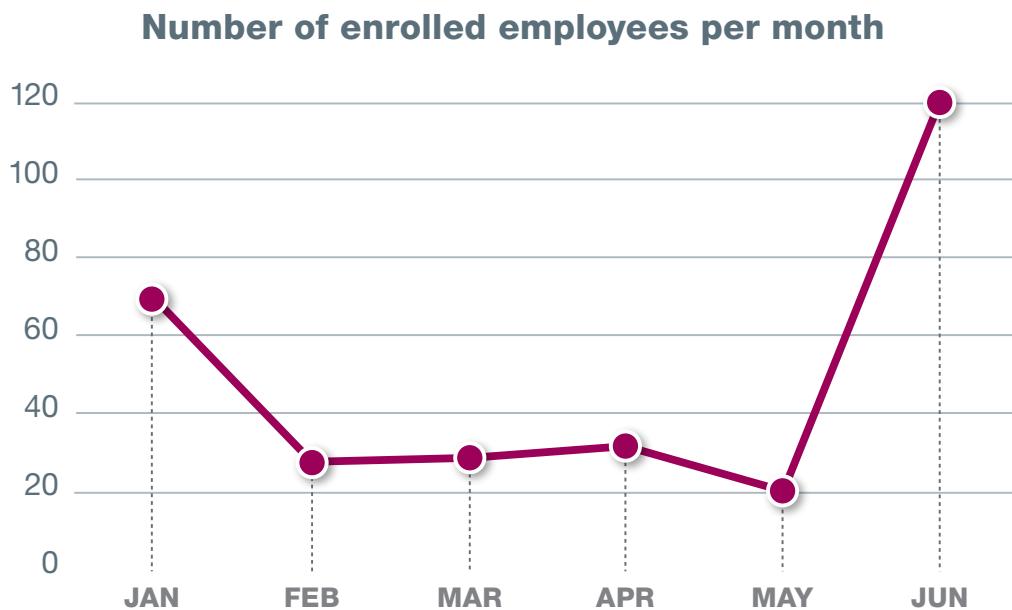
Here's why you should pay for two programs:

- **Smokers may need external motivation.** Smokers know tobacco use is not good for their health, but they have an addiction and sometimes need outside motivators to move them towards action. It is important to drive participation and engagement with the program to achieve a positive return on investment.
- **Premium differentials can be a cost-neutral solution.** When implemented successfully, a positive incentives program is actually an excellent vehicle for financing a tobacco cessation program, and can potentially be cost-neutral. Many employers find that charging smokers a premium differential or surcharge can help pay for the healthcare costs of non-tobacco users as well as fund the program for those who are trying to quit.



Why Co-Payments Don't Work: UMP Case Study

Asking an employee to put some “skin in the game” and supplement your funds with a small co-payment may seem like a fair solution. Yet our experience and a study in conjunction with our client, United Medical Health Plan (UMP) showed that such requirements are not effective for people who suffer from tobacco addiction. In fact, even asking employees to pay a ten-dollar co-pay will negatively impact program participation. UMP launched the tobacco cessation program in January and experienced a decline in participation that hit a plateau until June, when the leadership team decided to remove the nominal ten dollars. In the graph below you can see the significant increase in participation starting in the month of June.



This phenomenon seems to defy the very notion of responsibility. Yet a financial barrier, whether great or small, is still an obstacle to a tobacco user seeking help. An effective tobacco cessation program will help teach tobacco users how to take responsibility for the addiction, but until then it is the employer's responsibility to make sure there are as few barriers as possible.



Lessons Learned

Advice from Our Experienced Clients

- **Promote your tobacco cessation program.** Clearly communicate enrollment details to your employees and provide reminders of how your incentive program is set up. Send communications to participants to remind them of program offerings and encourage them to complete their calls.
- **Structure incentives for discreet activities.** Incentives should reward the type of behavior the employer is encouraging. An incentive program that provides money or points for enrollment is not always enough as it incents enrollment but not ongoing behavior. A one-time incentive or gift maybe appropriate when it is a single activity but behavior change takes a plan and practice.
- **Establish clear policies and enforce them.** Incentives should have clear “rules of engagement” and should be backed by solid policies. You need clear communication including the requirement that employees report changes in tobacco use status. Dishonesty and noncompliance should be monitored and met with the appropriate consequences
- **Make sure monetary incentives target the appropriate demographic.** Employees with larger salaries will not be affected by a ten-dollar co-pay; employees with smaller salaries will pay more attention to that extra ten dollars.
- **Incentives should be offered year-round.** Motivations for quitting will ebb and flow for each tobacco user at different times. Providing year-round access improves the likelihood of success. Alere Wellbeing supports engagement reporting back to our clients for ease of monitoring and fulfilling incentives and/or processing premium differentials.
- **Build in time for legal and compensation review.** Ensure that the proper associates at your organization are given the opportunity to review the structure of your premium differentials program so that every party can rest at ease.



Conclusion

The most effective way to encourage participation in a tobacco cessation or wellness program is to incent engagement in the program and reward healthy behaviors along the continuum of program completion. Incentives that are tied to short-term goals such as logging onto a web program or completing a call will help you support activities and behaviors that you want to encourage. Incenting employees to merely enroll in a program will not guarantee longevity; instead, you should reward the small steps your employees are taking to change their behaviors.

It is important to prepare for the possibility of perversity and establish clear policies for noncompliance with the incentive program's "rules of engagement." Clearly defining and communicating these policies in simple language will help you develop trust and accountability among your workforce.

Fighting tobacco addiction is a journey that can be discouraging and embarrassing, and many smokers make many quit attempts before finally reaching success. By providing your employees with a positive environment and encouraging them to tackle their addiction step by step, you will help equip them with coping skills that will last them for life.

Disclaimer: This white paper is a discussion of best practices and should not be considered legal advice. Federal, state and local laws will vary and should be taken into consideration in conjunction with advice from legal counsel.



About Us

Alere Wellbeing

Alere Wellbeing's mission is to provide products and services that identify and measurably improve sub-optimal health conditions and behaviors that lead to chronic disease and premature death. Alere Wellbeing's evidence-based programs address modifiable health risks that contribute to chronic disease: tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and stress. Alere Wellbeing is known and respected for its intense focus on scalable service quality, dedicated account management, continuous program improvement, and transparent reporting of measurable outcomes. Alere Wellbeing has contributed to more than 100 published research studies and maintains a collaborative partnership with the American Cancer Society® and an active research program funded by the Centers for Disease Control, American Legacy Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health. More information about Alere Wellbeing can be found at www.alerewellbeing.com.

The Quit For Life® Program

Offered in collaboration with the American Cancer Society, the Quit For Life Program has been the nation's leading evidence-based tobacco cessation program for more than 25 years. The Quit For Life Program employs an evidence-based combination of physical, psychological and behavioral strategies to enable participants to take responsibility for and overcome their addiction to tobacco use.

For more information on best practices, tobacco cessation programs, or Alere Wellbeing, please email us at wellbeingsales@alere.com or call us at 866-434-9750.



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