



How to Start a Walking Program

Best Practices Guide

Okay, you've seen studies that tout the benefits of a fitness-oriented wellness program, and you have decided to start a program in your organization.

So, what's the best way to get started?

At Walker Tracker, we've worked with just about every type of organization:

Small business
Regional government
Multi-national corporations
U.S. Military
Cities and Municipalities
Clubs
Elementary Schools
Hospitals
Universities
International non-profit

Some organizations have launched incredibly successful programs with enthusiastic, long-term participants and great ROI, while others have languished with low participation rates and mediocre results. From our vantage point, we've been able to observe different techniques used by company administrators as they kick off their walking programs—some were successful, and some were not. Learning from these implementations, we compiled a list of “best practices” that will give your program the best chance of succeeding.

The following steps will help ensure the success of your walking program and will plant the seeds for systemic change within your organization.

1) Obtain executive sponsorship. This can make all the difference in the world. Employees will know if the executive team is committed to company wellness. Getting buy-in from the executive suite will reflect in the results.

2) Plan ahead. A successful walking program should be looked at as an integral component of a well thought out, adequately funded, comprehensive corporate wellness initiative. The walking program's goals and structure should be well defined and documented, including:

-Assign a program administrator. This should be someone that has the authority and responsibility for setting the administrative parameters and resolving issues.

-Set a firm start date—allow time to market the program to your employees.

-Define your participation goals, e.g. 30% of the employees, or, 50% of sales and marketing employees, etc. The participation goals should relate directly to the general health/wellness of your employee base. Companies with higher percentages of at-risk employees should aim for higher levels of participation.

-Define your ROI goals and establish ways to measure savings. Walking-oriented wellness programs have shown themselves to be very good investments, but in order to justify the program's continued existence it is necessary to document results with meaningful metrics.

Things you can track include:

Absenteeism

Presenteeism—this is a new term that refers to employees who show up to work, but are sick and non-productive.

Employee Productivity

Health Insurance Claims

Chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, etc.

-Finally, plan the walking program itself around a theme, challenge event, or competition. Walker Tracker enables you to set up many different types of challenges or competitions, so be creative and choose something that will engage employees' imaginations or competitive juices. Competitions should be relatively short—we've found 8 to 12 weeks to be a "sweet spot" of program duration—with new challenges scheduled regularly. This gives employees a way to wipe the slate clean and start over if they fall behind in the first challenge.

3) Reach out to employees well before the program is scheduled to begin. Let them know that you will be starting a walking program. Encourage employees to indicate their interest in participating—create a registration sheet with their name, email address, and an online screen name of their choosing. Promote the program's theme or initial challenge event to build excitement and encourage the forming of smaller groups or teams.

4) Use a good pedometer. We can't stress enough how important this is. We have found that the most successful programs use high-quality, accelerometer-based pedometers. Remember, the goal of the program is to measure total daily steps, so you

want to capture the extra effort in taking the stairs, or parking a bit further from the entrance. The lower quality pedometers simply don't do a good job of accurately measuring steps throughout the day—they work mainly on long walks with a steady gait). Other problems we've seen: the belt clips on low-cost pedometers break quickly, or employees don't wish to be seen wearing them on their belt (which is why an accelerometer-based pedometer that you can put in your pocket serves the widest audience). Rule of thumb, if it's under \$10, it is probably a relative low-quality pedometer. Plan to spend \$15-\$25 for a high quality device.

Many companies sponsor a portion or all of the pedometer's cost, but one good option is to have the employee kick in some money as well. This is a really good way to ensure that the employees are invested in the program's success. It's really surprising how much difference a \$10 employee contribution makes to overall diligence and enthusiasm.

It's a really good idea to standardize on a particular model, especially if you are conducting a competition or challenge event that involves incentives or awards. People can get pretty upset if they think someone else is benefitting from different or inferior technology, rather than actual effort.

Pedometer Tips

Make sure all participants use same pedometer model

Buy quality pedometers that won't break mid-competition

Look for accelerometer pedometers that can slip into an employee pocket or purse

5) Register as the program administrator on Walker Tracker.

Once you've got enough participants to make a good group, and pedometers are in hand, you can officially start the program through the simple sign-up process. The program administrator should register first, and then assign administrative rights to others as appropriate.

6) Customize the portal. The Walker Tracker portal is your own private website, one that you can customize with your organization's logo, graphics, and messaging. Walker Tracker also allows you to modify or create messages of encouragement and regular communication with program participants.

7) Register users. Once your portal is ready to accept new walkers, you can send out invitations via company email or perhaps hold an "all hands" meeting. Participants can go to your custom URL to register, or you can use one of the tools in the administration area to import large quantities of users. Individuals who miss the initial registration can always join the program later by registering on their own. If you have a large organization, you should allow 1-2 weeks for registration just to make sure you don't miss those that are on vacation or on sick leave.

8) Involve families. Several high-profile studies have indicated that having spousal participation in fitness programs can greatly increase their efficacy. Consider

opening your program to your employees' families. It's a great, low-cost way of encouraging your employees to take wellness home.

9) User set up. As administrator, you can customize the program options, eliminating many choices for users if you wish. It all depends on your company culture and guidelines. Once registered, employees can make modifications to their own profile. It's a really good idea to promote the creation of smaller groups—this really helps to spawn peer support.

10) Continually advertise the program's goals. Your corporate goals should not be a secret—articulating your goals can have a really positive impact on your employees' enthusiasm and participation. Publicize your goals widely throughout the organization to make everyone aware of them and let your employees know the organization's progress toward the goals.

11) Promote the challenge events. Think of this like any other major company initiative or product release—you need to do some internal marketing. Place posters in the break areas, send out regular emails announcing program updates or challenge leaders, and get the company leadership involved.

12) Most important: Make it fun!

Thanks for reading. Let's chat about your walking program:

info@walkertracker.com Or set yours up now: www.walkertracker.com

