

## Firms find good health is bottom line

**Michelle Magnan**

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It's "Wellness Wednesday" at Aon Reed Stenhouse, an insurance broker and risk management provider in Calgary, and a lunchtime seminar is about to begin.

Just before noon, about 35 employees file into a meeting room. They're here for a Lunch 'n' Learn seminar offered by Random Acts of Fitness (RAF), a corporate health and wellness provider.

Jeff Funnekotter, a personal trainer and RAF's owner, is on hand, as is Danielle Macfarland, a holistic nutritionist. As the two set up their presentation, the Aon employees pick up wraps, fruit, cheese and crackers to munch on.

"Where are the brownies?" quips one person.

"Brownies -- in this seminar?" says another. Giggles ensue.

They know Funnekotter and Macfarland are here to talk about weight management. It's not the first time they've been to a RAF seminar.

"In 2006 we really started to focus on health and wellness," says Tracy Nihill, an Aon regional training specialist.

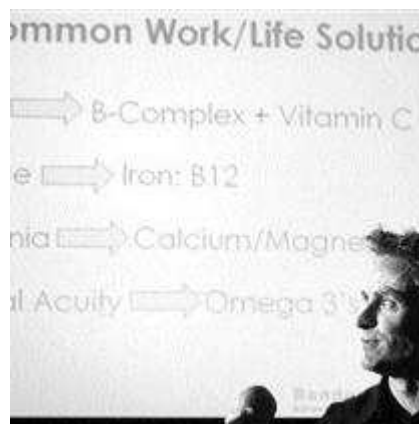
She'll bring Funnekotter back for five more Wellness Wednesdays this year. He'll cover topics such as essential exercises and stress reduction .

"(It's) very important to us as employers," Nihill says. "Also, in this marketplace, we need to keep up on it to remain competitive."

Aon's commitment to employee wellness is just one example of a growing trend. Many Calgary companies are working hard to provide employees with healthy workplaces. They say it's good for their employees, and good for business, too.

"We know a healthy workplace has a positive impact on how engaged employees are. They're more productive and they're happier. At the end of the day, that has an impact on a business's bottom line," says Michelle Malfait, the volunteer chair of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce's healthy workplaces committee and the director of human resources at Direct Energy. "It truly will be a competitive advantage in our tight labour market."

To encourage Calgary companies in their quest to be healthy, the Malfait and her committee started handing out H.E.A.L.T.H. awards (Helping Employees Achieve Lifetime



CREDIT: Leah Hannel, Calgary Herald

Jeff Funnekotter, owner of Random Acts of Fitness, says he sees an obvious difference between companies that promote wellness and those that don't.

Health) in 2005.

The yearly award ceremony recognizes organizations for excellence in providing healthy workplaces, and is split into three categories --small, medium and large businesses -- with awards in each.

Last year, Telus Communications and Enmax were recognized in the large business category, Chevron Canada in the medium and Mercer Human Resource Consulting and Associated Engineering Alberta in the small business category.

The deadline for this year's applications is June 30. Applications will be available at [www.calgarychamber.com](http://www.calgarychamber.com).

Whether it's in the form of providing great fitness subsidies, partnering with local gyms or bringing in companies like RAF, businesses are getting more creative in how they promote healthy living.

"The Calgary business community is awakening to the need to create a policy for healthy workplaces," says Heather Douglas, president and CEO of the chamber. "And not just to create the policy, but to create the conditions, as well."

Kate Joslyn, CEO of Cognera Corp., says it seems health and wellness at work is a hot topic.

"The other CEOs I network with have a lot of discussion around encouraging people to quit smoking," says Joslyn.

She has brought Funnekotter in for many lunchtime seminars, and has worked with him to develop a corporate health and wellness plan for the year, which highlights different health themes every month. To help educate staff, fact sheets are put up around the office. She's hoping to improve absenteeism and reduce stress levels.

"There's a lot of talk around obesity now, too. We're very conscious that we can contribute to that (problem) by the food we bring into the office. We try to make sure we have a good, healthy focus," says Joslyn.

The story is the same at PrimeWest Energy Trust. "We'd like to distinguish ourselves from our competitors," says Tannis Harper, a human resources adviser who has also worked with RAF.

She says that after one of Funnekotter's first sessions, an employee took to running the stairs at lunch for exercise. Others checked out a vitamin store.

"We're trying to create a better work environment and a healthier staff," she says. "We hope that it can act as a retention tool and it can keep them motivated while they're here."

For his part, Funnekotter says he notices a big difference between companies that strive for healthy workplaces and those that don't. So far, though, he thinks it's a minority group of organizations that place a premium on wellness, "but those who are, you can actually see it-- the attitude is better, the reception is better when you speak to an audience."

Back in the Aon seminar, Funnekotter and Macfarland are covering topics such as weight facts, diet myths and label reading. It's an entertaining presentation with plenty of laughs. ("Unless you're a boxer or a piece of fruit, it doesn't matter what you weigh," says Funnekotter, as he encourages people to stop weighing themselves daily. Once every couple of months is sufficient, he says.)

People take notes, and there are lots of questions from the crowd. When it's all over, employees leave with a collection of goodies: a list of helpful resources, discount coupons for Helia Sports and Vitamins First, free two-week passes to World Health Club, and Sun-Rype FruitSource bars.

Perhaps the most valuable goodie is the information they've collected.

Shaylee Nowicki, an Aon broker, feels motivated.

"The first thing I'm going to do tomorrow is replace coffee with green tea," she says. "There are a lot of things I'm going to incorporate. Whether I lose the weight or not, hey, it's going to get me healthier, right?"

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Today, in the first of a five-part special report on health on the job, we look at how some Calgary companies are keeping their employees fit.

To come:

- Tuesday: The healthy CEO
- Wednesday: Better dining out
- Thursday: Anatomy of a healthy cubicle
- Friday: Small steps add up

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