



How to Build Awareness of Your Drug-Free Workplace Program

FACT SHEET

Techniques in Social Marketing Can Be Used to Build Awareness of Your Drug-Free Workplace Program

Such techniques can take advantage of a workplace's current resources and processes, can adopt or adapt approaches from other successful programs, and can develop new multimedia methods of social marketing for the program.¹ They can increase corporate and union buy-in and thereby increase the chances that a program will be well advertised and well attended. Building awareness about a program in ways that make it a part of the workplace culture can be a major undertaking, but this can lead to better outcomes and returns on investment.

Various Vehicles and Resources, Many of Which Will Already Be Available in Your Organization, Can Help Implement the Social Marketing of Your Program

These include the following: employee handbooks, organization intranets, employee assistance program Internet sites, employee newsletters, health insurer newsletters, internal meetings (on safety, security, planning, and the like), new-hire orientations, union communication channels and representatives, employee health promotion and wellness programs, health fairs, electronic and paper bulletin boards, and special health and safety campaigns.

Before Choosing an Approach, It Can Be Helpful to Collect Information on the Habits, Activities, Likes, and Dislikes of Your Employees and Their Families, as Well as Their Experiences and Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction With Other Approaches to Building Awareness

This will allow you to pinpoint the best ways to promote the program. For example, if most employees do not read the organization's newsletter, it might not be the best place to announce a new program. And if people rarely visit the substance abuse booth at the health fair, it may be better to include drug-free workplace information in a health-and-wellness booth or have giveaways at a table.

Some of the best ways to spark and sustain interest in a drug-free workplace program are good public relations, contests with prizes, other entertainment formats, integrated multimedia approaches, and informal conversations with employees, managers, and union representatives.

In addition, consider doing the following:

- ✓ Decide which messages and other resources are most appropriate for the age, gender, first language, and culture of specific employees. Decide which messages and resources are appropriate for your industry, for the time of the year you introduce your program, and for the geographic location of the workplace. One wrong message can negate most, or even all, of the positive measures your program has taken or is intending to take. Test the messages ahead of time in small groups of employees who are representative of your organization. The Workplace Kit contains many messages that can be rewritten or adjusted for specific populations and needs. Who sends the message, or how the message is sent, can also be important. Depending on the workplace culture and environment, some messengers will be listened to more than others. For example, in a management/union shop, if the union has had difficulties with management, union members may want to hear the message from a fellow union member or a union official.
- ✓ Decide what awareness-promoting actions you will plan. For example, you might want to send a letter from the CEO detailing your policy. Place two articles about aspects of the drug-free workplace program (DFWP) on the intranet or in the newsletter. Arrange for DFWP materials to be distributed at the safety meeting. Integrate pertinent elements of the DFWP and substance abuse prevention content into stress classes.
- ✓ Devise a schedule for implementing each element of your plan.
- ✓ Remember to keep the focus of the program clear and consistent. Keep the tone of your communications positive. The drug-free workplace program is designed to promote the safety, health, and well-being of employees, their families, and the organization. To attract employees, the stigma of substance abuse must be reduced. Employees must understand that they will receive the help and attention they require, with their privacy and confidentiality protected.



- ✓ Set priorities for the actions in your social marketing effort, and follow each session or function with an evaluation that will allow you to keep track of costs, benefits, and outcomes. In a program or program component being introduced for the first time, for example, you may want to begin with a letter or email to all employees from the CEO introducing the program and policy.
- ✓ Keep awareness alive throughout the year by continuing to plan and implement the program through a variety of vehicles.

A few examples:

- Continue to make the connection between the drug-free workplace program and other health-related topics such as nutrition, parenting, weight management, stress management, and active lifestyle. Have your health promotion, wellness, and fitness director trained to integrate the content of the substance abuse prevention program with related health areas.
 - Send a letter or email from the CEO to all employees addressing the rationale, goals, and elements of the DFWP. A similar letter can be directed to new hires.
 - Hold a meeting with staff members or department heads to explain the organization's policy and the DFWP.
 - Distribute information about the organization's program and about alcohol and other drug abuse in pamphlets, flyers, home mailings, paycheck stuffers, free videos, and the like.
 - Hang posters and signs reminding employees that "yours is a drug-free workplace" and that your worksite promotes a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise, good nutrition, smoking cessation, and stress management.
 - Distribute DFWP materials at events such as health fairs, further linking with the drug free/healthy workplace idea.
 - Use safety meetings and other related events to build awareness of the DFWP and components such as an employee assistance program.
 - Arrange for union representatives to help communicate the program's purpose, procedures, and policies to the employees they represent.
- ✓ Actions speak louder than words. The organization and its leaders must be sure they "walk the talk" concerning the drug-free workplace program.

A few tips:

- Be a positive role model, consistent with your messages to your employees. Do not engage in illegal, unhealthy, or dangerous alcohol or other drug use. Host alcohol-free events, emphasizing the organization's commitment to preventing injury or death associated with drinking and driving, especially around the holidays.
 - Provide food and beverages in organization settings that encourage a healthy lifestyle.
 - Sponsor or help with prevention services in your community that would benefit your employees and their families.
 - Encourage employees and their family members to seek help for an alcohol or other drug problem. Continue to support them as they use this help. Treatment is more cost effective than incurring potential safety hazards and lost productivity caused by drug-related problems.
- ✓ Finally, it can be helpful to keep a running journal of all your efforts, in order to help identify and analyze what worked and what did not. You can often learn much from a failure and then go on to turn it into a success. You can also learn a great deal from surveys and short evaluation forms filled out by participants after events and activities. These will help you plan future activities in ways that may increase your benefits while decreasing your costs.

Reference

¹Nedra Kline Weinreich. 1999. *Hands-On Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.