

# Success Story - Medium Sized Business

## American State Bank

American State Bank, based in Lubbock, has provided banking services to West Texans for more than 50 years. In 2001, bank executives decided to embark on a worksite wellness campaign to curb rising health-care costs and to stay competitive in the market for new employees.

“We needed to do something about the cost of health insurance,” says Mike Epps, executive vice president and chief financial officer. “In the three years since we implemented our program, our health-care costs have been flat. The worksite wellness program we put in place more than pays for itself. In fact, I’d say everything we’ve expended has come back to us tenfold.”

American State Bank’s wellness program focused on attacking modifiable risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, tobacco use, and obesity. The bank provided health fairs, seminars, blood-pressure screenings, fitness-club memberships, pedometers, smoking-cessation support, and incentive-based wellness challenges.

“We probably avoided a million dollars in increased health-care premiums over the three and a half years of the program,” says Epps. “However, the benefits go beyond that. People who feel better are going to produce more. And when we all sweat together in an exercise class at the gym, we build camaraderie. We have less absenteeism. We have fewer workers’ comp claims because people who are in shape are less likely to slip and fall.”

The program pays two-thirds of the cost of a gym membership for employees who go a minimum of 10 times a month and two-thirds of the cost of a Weight Watchers program. Walkers are also paid. The incentive for reaching certain goals or maintaining activity levels is \$25 every quarter.



### Lessons Learned

Employees who feel better produce more

Modest incentives increase participation

Support from senior management is essential

“Giving employees something for being active increases participation. It doesn’t need to be much,” says Epps, who estimates that the bank provides 80 to 100 bonuses every quarter. “It’s not an insignificant amount of money, but a single heart attack costs a whole lot more.”

Epps believes that the support of senior management is important. “Without support from senior management, it won’t go,” he says. However, wellness is not a program that managers can easily support in the abstract. Epps believes that executives must walk the talk.

“I weighed 245 pounds and hadn’t exercised in years. My cholesterol was too high,” says Epps. “But I’ve lost 45 pounds. Now, I exercise every day. I feel great.”

Epps’ advice to other executives considering launching a worksite wellness program is straightforward. “Get started now. I wish we’d started earlier,” he says. “You’ll tinker and change some things as you go, but get started, and talk it up.”



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