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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

OCTOBER 2017 VOL. 35 NO. 10 \$12.00

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.com

CORPORATE MEETING & INCUBATOR

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING PLANNERS

Hilton Anatole Sales Coordinator Amber Evetts helps groups participate in the Meet With Purpose Puppies & Ice Cream meeting break.

Wellness Meetings

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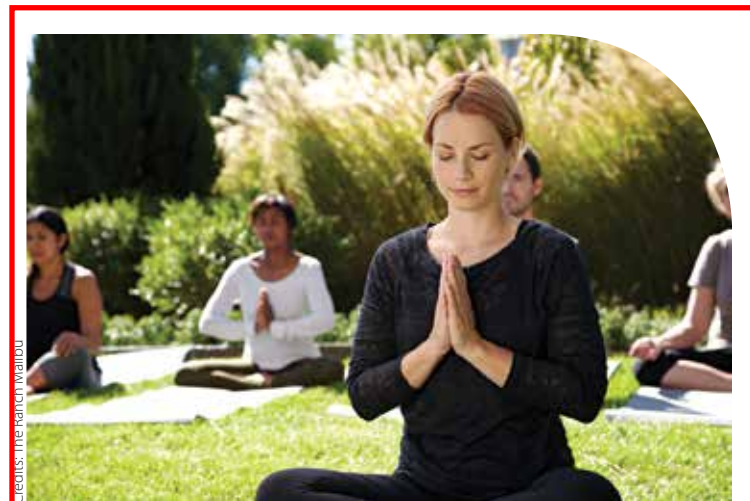
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**CLICK HERE TO
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TABLET VERSION**

Credit: Hilton

Bring Wellness to the Table



Yoga is offered during corporate retreats at The Ranch 4.0 in Malibu, California, where plenty of healthy meal choices are available.

Healthy, Happy Attendees Are More Engaged and Productive

By Shelley Seale

Companies, insurance providers and other organizations are taking steps to improve employee productivity, health, resilience and satisfaction. This not only results in healthier employees, but also happier ones — both of which are extremely beneficial to the organization.

The *American Journal of Health Promotion* conducted a review in 2012, which found that companies with wellness benefits had 25 percent lower sick leave, workers compensation claims, and health and disability insurance costs. Still, fewer than 10 percent of companies nationwide offer a formal, comprehensive wellness program.

A study by the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) found that with extra budgeting available, meeting planners are optimistic about their ability to transform meetings to be “very healthy”

A chance for relaxation: Hilton’s Meet with Purpose Puppies & Ice Cream event at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas.





Credits: Hilton

Hilton's Meet With Purpose Program, offered at 275 of its properties, provides meeting attendees options such as Puppies & Ice Cream for relaxation during breaks.

or “mostly healthy” — a considerable shift from their standard meetings. But while most companies report being invested in wellness and sustainability, with wellness programs in place for employees, that foundation is not translating to a similarly strong focus when it comes to meetings — either in design, policy or budgets.

While it might seem like a no-brainer to offer benefits that are a win-win situation for both employee and company, many firms simply don't know where to begin, or feel it is too complex or overwhelming to undertake.

A corporate retreat, team meeting or other offsite organizational event can be the perfect setting in which to incorporate such activities, and begin introducing employees to the overall human resources program. And, they are also a great way to break the ice among team members who work in silos; encourage relationship-building; ease the stress of a convention environment or sitting in presentations all day; and work to increase alertness, concentration and retention of the business at hand.

Part of the Corporate Culture

Fitbit is a brand closely identified with staying fit these days, so it's no surprise that the company itself incorporates wellness habits into every aspect of its culture — including team events.

“Wellness plays a part of Fitbit employees' everyday life,” says Amy McDonough, Fitbit's SVP of strategy and

operations. “So while wellness activities have of course been included in specific retreats and events, that is an extension of what we do every day.”

Some of the team events organized by Fitbit Health Solutions for its employees include fun runs and sports leagues. Staff members also are invited to help develop new products; for example, employees tested a new, guided breathing device called Relax prior to its launch.

Staying Fit on the Road

In fact, most people who attend meetings for work consider themselves active and healthy in their daily lives. Yet, all that changes when their normal routine goes out the window. According to a recent global survey by Hilton, more than half of meeting attendees admit that they don't maintain their exercise regimen or healthy eating habits when on the road for work events.

“The typical meeting attendee is eating healthier and exercising more frequently, and wants to maintain this lifestyle while traveling for business,” says Andrew Flack, vice president regional marketing and eCommerce Americas at Hilton.

To that end, more and more hotels, event spaces and meeting planners are incorporating these needs into the programs. At Hilton, for example, the “Meet With Purpose” program offers balanced meal menus for events at many of their hotels, paired with instructor-led exercise and activity breaks to spark

creativity, encourage attendee networking and give attendees that much-desired workout.

Some of these pairings include Yoga & Yogurt (an energizing morning yoga session followed by a yogurt breakfast); Flex Power (a 25-minute, gentle instructor-led workout routine with a healthful breakfast or midmorning snack); and Meditative Moment (a 10-minute meditation session focused on stress relief, with a lean protein meal and veggie or fruit smoothie).

“Expanding Meet With Purpose and offering health and wellness menus to 40-plus of our U.S. hotels reiterates our commitment to partnering with meeting professionals, to improving attendee satisfaction and making a real impact in the industry,” Flack added.

Resort Getaways

Retreats provide the perfect setting for companies to build in health-focused activities. One nonprofit organization booked The Ranch, a healthy lifestyle company operating two acclaimed fitness resorts in California, for back-to-back events for their team and top donors.

The nonprofit was a client of Ovation Travel, which planned the retreat. “They bonded over long hikes and strenuous workouts, to build stronger relationships and raise over \$1 million in additional donations,” says president Jack Ezon. He measures the positive impact of such experiences with the fact that

every group he has ever booked at the Ranch has rebooked the following year.

The two Ranch resorts, The Ranch Malibu and The Ranch 4.0 at Four Seasons Westlake Village, are sometimes billed as “luxury boot camps.” Their signature program, which includes hiking, rest, strength conditioning, massages and yoga, is customized for each corporate group. These are carefully designed to not only promote wellness and health, but also to build strong relationships between employees and their employers.

“I believe we have seen a marked interest from corporate and private groups because we offer a unique experience that naturally lends itself to teambuilding, camaraderie, and mental and physical detoxification,” says Alex Glasscock, CEO and founder of The Ranch Malibu. “We designed three custom group packages with the intention of promoting a healthy and balanced lifestyle on an individual level, along with supporting a positive group dynamic both during and after the program.”

Depending on the destination of a corporate retreat, teams also can build local cultural offerings into their activities for a refreshing, unique experience.

On the island of Maui, the Travaasa Hana resort organizes some truly Hawaiian experiences for corporate groups, such as outrigger canoeing, spear throwing, lei making, or fishing with nets and bamboo poles. When colleagues are learning something new — along with the laughs that usually come with picking up such different, out-of-the-box skills — they have a greater opportunity for bonding in a completely different way than they do in the office.

More hotels nowadays are injecting wellness into meeting breaks. Just to name a few:

Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch just introduced a new yoga break option for meetings and groups. Meeting planners can choose to add a yoga session to their program to refresh their minds and elevate their experience.

The Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland's Apple a Day Break takes advantage of the nutritional profile of Ohio apples, full of

Hotel Brand Programs

MGM and Marriott: Stay Well Meetings

With support from world-renowned wellness guru Deepak Chopra and nutritional direction from Cleveland Clinic, Stay Well Meetings offer a comprehensive wellness meetings experience featuring premier meeting spaces, state-of-the-art air purification, energizing lighting, nutritious menu options, soothing aromatherapy and other wellness features to help enhance productivity. <http://staywellrooms.com/meetings>

Hilton's Meet With Purpose

Mindful Meeting, Mindful Eating and Mindful Being are the components that make up the Meet With Purpose program, which aims to provide social, responsible and healthier options for meetings and events. Mindful Meeting centers on a waste and resource tracking system; Mindful Eating, balanced menus and light activities; and Mindful Being, uplifting meeting activities. There are two Wow Certified events — Yoga & Yogurt and Puppies & Ice Cream. The Meet With Purpose program is offered at 275 Hilton hotels. www.meetwithpurpose.com

Hyatt's Be Well

Hyatt and Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman, an internationally recognized pioneer in integrative and functional medicine, have collaborated to help make it easier for guests to continue their health routines, or try new ones, on the road. Guests at participating hotels will experience healthy refreshments at arrival, curated in-room amenities, increased fitness offerings, expanded menu options and nutritious to-go alternatives. Hyatt also recently launched Five Feet to Fitness, an in-room wellness concept that brings more than 11 different fitness equipment and accessory options into the hotel room. <https://meetings.hyatt.com> — SS



Credit: Hilton Worldwide

Yoga & Yogurt at New York Hilton Midtown.

phytonutrients and antioxidants, and it then adds an element of fun for guests experiencing conference fatigue.

The Hyatt Regency Indian Wells Resort & Spa's Agua Serena Spa offers mini-aromatherapy treatments during meeting breaks customized to the individual needs such as stress relief and clarity.

Physical and Psychological Well-being

As Glasscock pointed out, keeping employees healthy not only affects their physical wellness, but their emotional well-being as well — and has become a high priority for many meet-

ing professionals. In an IMEX survey of nearly 1,200 people, more than three-quarters of the respondents confirmed the importance of well-being during business travel: 79.5 percent of hosted buyers, 78 percent of visitors and 83 percent of exhibitors all stated that this was important to them.

Properties such as the Omni La Costa Resort & Spa in Carlsbad, California, incorporate the mental state as much as the body, partnering with The Chopra Center to provide a nurturing retreat where people come to heal, empower themselves, find emotional freedom and experience spiritual awakening.



Fitbit employees ran the San Francisco Marathon. Credit: Fitbit

Their programs include yoga and daily meditation sessions, as well as a wide variety of workshops and spa treatments — combining the healing arts of the East with the best in modern Western medicine.

Mindfulness

According to the American Psychological Association, mindfulness can improve cognition, increase focus and boost productivity. With world-renowned holistic physicians Deepak Chopra and David Simon behind The Chopra Center, the retreats offered at Omni La Costa have drawn global law firms, national restaurant and retail brands, and entertainment/talent agencies.

The intimate sanctuary, named the top luxury spa in San Diego by *Discover SD* magazine, draws on cutting-edge research from top health experts and physicians in behavioral health, nutrition and fitness.

“Beyond the 110,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meetings and event space, companies bring their teams to Omni La Costa because of the resources and amenities we offer to help them enrich their employees’ lives outside of a corporate environment,” says Patsy Bock, director of sales and marketing at the resort. “The teams that encourage partici-

pation in the vast array of wellness activities provided by our award-winning spa, championship golf courses and the world-renowned Chopra Center located at the resort, all leave with something tangible they can incorporate into their everyday lives. While golf and spa treatments remain popular options, attendees are starting look for a broader approach to recreation and wellness.”

IMEX recognizes this tilt in favor of holistic wellness at its industry trade shows, offering a Be Well Lounge sponsored by Hilton Worldwide. Mindfulness trainer Lee Papa and her expert team, who believe that business and mindfulness go hand in hand, offer regular sessions in the lounge on yoga, mindfulness and meditation.

Puppy Love

Research studies have shown that people with pets have lower rates of stress, obesity, cholesterol and high blood pressure — and they are just a lot of fun. At its last annual educational conference for clients and partners in Texas, consulting firm Travois partnered with local nonprofit Austin Pets Alive to bring rescue puppies into the agenda.

“Attendees hear instruction on highly complex and detailed tax credit programs, which involve Excel spreadsheets,

legal jargon and flow charts,” says Eden Rensing, who plans the Travois events. “We wanted to provide them with a real break. Not just a snack and phone call break, but one that would allow them to smile and laugh and recharge for the next sessions. There were lots of hugs, puppy kisses, and photos and videos.”

When asked if they would do the puppy program again, Rensing says, “I think our clients will be mad if we don’t!”

Rensing also has incorporated other unique activities into the conferences, including a wake-up morning mile walk with Olympic Gold Medalist Billy Mills; afternoon conference room stretches; and welcome reception dance lessons. While the walk and dance lessons were hits, the stretch sessions didn’t go over so well. “Stretching in business casual attire isn’t the easiest. We learned.”

Hilton’s Meet With Purpose offers The Puppies & Ice Cream group activity, which has the dual benefit of reducing stress while helping out the community. This guaranteed feel-good, meeting break for attendees works in conjunction with local no-kill animal shelters that provide the pups and volunteer handlers. Groups have fun interacting with the animals while enjoying a special ice cream menu courtesy of the hotel catering department. Participating hotels ideally provide an outside space with a nearby entrance for pets to encounter their newfound friends. Groups can present a check to the shelter during the event in exchange for their time. Toni Zoblotsky, director of B-to-B marketing at Hilton Worldwide, who helped launch the Meeting With Purpose Program, notes that this activity sparks a spontaneous enthusiasm unlike any other. “There’s a wow factor with it,” she says and has observed that the irresistible allure of happy, wagging dogs fully engages attendees. “They’re not on their phones — except to take pictures. It’s really something to see.”

Volunteering as a Healthy Team Habit

As with having pets, studies have shown that people who do volunteer work are likely to be happier and health-

ier than those who don’t. They have lower blood pressure, live longer and experience less depression. Organizing team volunteer opportunities as part of a corporate meeting can have benefits to both employees and the community.

IMEX, for instance, debuted a new program at its 2016 trade show held in Las Vegas: Garbage Grabbers Clean Up. Meeting professionals and IMEX staff joined the Outside Las Vegas Foundation to “netwalk” through the city’s green spaces, cleaning up the walking trails and parks as they did so.

“Nature is a tonic for humans,” says Janet Sperstad, CMP, and program director of the Meeting and Event Management Degree Program at Madison College in Wisconsin. “Even a picture of nature revives a tired mind. The experience of nature doesn’t have to be real for it to have a calming, relaxing effect on us.”

Getting Started

There are many healthful improvements that can be made to company events and meetings relatively easily, by simply being aware of the decision to shift in that direction and making planning choices with intention toward that goal.

Food Choices. Choosing a menu to offer healthful food options has gotten a lot easier these days, fortunately. Most large hotels and convention centers, as well as many local meeting spaces and restaurants, provide a wide range of options and work carefully with clients to plan the menu.

Healthy cooking demonstrations while employees dine, or having informal speaker sessions on healthy living topics, are naturals to set up during these times. Meal breaks also offer a great opportunity to build in some physical movement — try a stretch session, encourage group or buddy walks during lunch breaks, provide maps to local walking trails and passes to the onsite fitness facility, if there is one.

Downtime. We all know that one of the biggest pitfalls of meetings, conventions or trade shows is the hectic pace, which can easily lead to burnout. It’s at this point that the attention and focus

of attendees wanders — and the rest of the event can be virtually lost on them.

Simply having a peaceful area for attendees to “escape” and recharge is extremely beneficial, and easy to do. It can be as formal as nap pods with noise-canceling headsets and massage therapy sessions; or as simple as setting up a calming space with low lights,



For fun and networking, dance lessons were offered at an annual educational conference for clients and partners in Texas, planned by consulting firm Travois. Credit: Travois

soothing music and a break away from the buzz of activity.

Fun. Oftentimes we underestimate the benefits of laughing and having fun together as a team — which can reap tremendous wellness benefits in and of itself. From the examples already described, such as playing with puppies and making leis, to tried-and-true team efforts such as obstacle courses and fitness challenges, think about activities that people can really enjoy together.

Google is really good at this. At their headquarters in Mountain View, California the company sponsors regular experiences that keep employees from getting in a rut, physically or mentally — part of what the company’s fresh, innovative environment is known for.

“A lot of the events they do on campus are fun and high energy,” says the care coordinator at the Google Wellness Center. “Each quarter they have themed events all around campus, from setting up ice rinks in winter inside one of the

cafés, to live music and a food festival meet and greet.”

Google also celebrated holidays with themed parties — such as The Beatles “All You Need Is Love” at Valentine’s Day — and encouraged team members to bring family members. Letting employees’ loved ones be a part of these activities is often appreciated more than companies

estimate, especially with most people’s tight schedules these days, when they’re scrambling to fit in extra personal time.

Other healthy meeting ideas that have been successfully incorporated into corporate events include:

- Onsite fitness classes.
- Meditation lounges.
- Sports event reimbursement.
- Health fairs.
- Lunch and Learn presentations.
- Provide local fitness and wellness resources and ideas.
- Invite employees to share their success stories.
- Create a Wellness “Wall of Fame.”
- Set up team challenges.

Travois provides wellness activities for its conference attendees because they enhance the experience, says Rensing. “It helps us foster relationships while everyone is having a good time. We know healthy, happy employees are more productive — better equipped to serve our clients.”

C&IT