

Health & Wellness's Growing Role in On-Site Dining

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Second of two articles about the changes in campus and corporate dining services to focus on nutrition and wellness.

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The first article in this series (*Dining Insights*, Summer 2015) discussed the importance of providing the healthy, well-prepared foods employees and students, now expect in the on-site dining center.

This means the food service operator must winnow out the over-processed, over-sprayed and poorly delivered food that is now so widely available.

As for the “high cost” of organic vs. conventional foods, conventional crops are heavily subsidized by the federal government making them artificially inexpensive.

Those subsidies, which have been in place since the New Deal plus the cost of cleaning up pollution and treating health problems created by conventional farming, means we're paying a lot in taxes in order to pay a pittance at the grocery store – or from the big supplier who delivers to your loading dock.⁽¹⁾

So for health and wellness that will save the good health of our employees and students, we must press further.

Dining and Employee Relations

We have learned that the dining amenity is one of the strongest elements in employee relations and retention and in student satisfaction with campus life.

That half hour or more that the employee spends in the on-site cafe is as important as a face-to-face talk with the HR representative. That person is aware, keenly, that what he is offered in his corporate cafeteria represents quite accurately just what his employer thinks of him or her.

In colleges and universities, we start with students who have just left home, accustomed to eating what the family chose to provide by parents with personal biases or who have raised their children on fast food.

Meeting the Challenge

Suddenly, confronted with life at school, the choices freshmen make often add unwanted pounds. Stress takes over; food becomes part of the problem. Schoolwork suffers; sports become almost impossible.

The enlightened food service operator can make a huge difference, but it is a responsibility far more challenging than just “getting it out” for three meals a day, plus snacks. It is this change, this challenge, that the chef and manager will have to decide which way they will guide those students.

The challenges will come from the parents and from many of the students as well, who say they are proud to brag to their friends that their campus food service has become part of the new paradigm. Chefs and managers have to be part of the new awareness and bring fresh, natural unadulterated foods to their kitchens.

Generation Z Will Lead the Way To a Better-for-You Lifestyle

“The generation that experts say has the real potential to make a better-for-you lifestyle priority No. 1, Gen Z, is making their way through college, where they're making their own dining choices . . . and delivering their activist/participation culture right to the doorsteps of food service operators.”

- Kelly Killan, editor, *Restaurant Business*

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Cutting Insurance Costs

As we drill down and look at what employers are paying for health insurance, and then what discounts are available for companies who are willing to support a health and wellness program, the results are available and quantifiable. So altruism isn't the only governing factor. Solid financial results count.

Aetna, Cigna and dozens of other insurance companies are becoming aware that they can approach health and wellness in a positive way. Not just to cover illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, back problems and depression, but to support good health, fitness, higher levels of productivity and employee satisfaction.

Tracking Wellness

Programs that employees can join to track their health and wellness levels, allow tracking of their numbers and being evaluated, can directly work to reduce the corporate health insurance premiums.

Risk management and HR consulting firm Towers-Watson tracked a number of corporations who have responded to health and wellness initiatives and instituted them with full support from management.⁽²⁾

The movement toward a healthier life, and a more productive and comforting work environment is what many organizations now understand is possible through encouraging and helping their employees or students to be healthy.

The ones who choose these benefits will find the favor returned. For the dining service operator, it can only be a win-win situation.

(1) *Eartheasy.com*, "Systemic Pesticides and Food Health"

(2) *Towerswatson.com*, "Capturing the Value of Healthy and Productive Programs"