

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# FROM “DESK SENTENCE” TO A CULTURE OF HEALTH: MAKING MOVEMENT PART OF THE 9-TO-5

**FEBRUARY 28, 2013**

Simple moves and social media can help employees avoid the “desk sentence” of health problems that result from the prolonged inactivity that is typical of the modern workplace.

Sean Foy, author and nationally known fitness expert, and Josh Stevens, CEO of Keas, shared the lessons from their groundbreaking approaches to employee health and fitness during The Alliance Learning Circle, “From ‘Desk Sentence’ to a Culture of Health: Making Movement Part of the 9-to-5” on Feb. 28 at the Monona Terrace in Madison.

### “Sitting Disease”

The average employee sits for 7.7 to 15 hours daily, Foy said, which leads to the “sitting disease” sometimes described as a “desk sentence.” Sitting for two to three hours without moving leads to a 50 percent increase in heart disease and contributes to other problems. The Mayo Clinic equates sitting more than three hours a day to the damage done by smoking one and one-half packs of cigarettes daily.

Studies show sitting too long even negates the benefits of an hour of exercise before or after work, Foy said, because your body “shuts off.”

“We’re actively creating a fat-storing body by sitting too long,” Foy said. The problem worsens as you age, since you lose half a pound of muscle and gain one and one-half pounds of fat every year. Every 10 years, your metabolic rate decreases between two and five percent.

“When we sit too long, we lose our health,” Foy said. The cost of inactivity is estimated at \$147 billion annually, not including obesity or other problems worsened by lack of movement.

Workers in manufacturing plants or other active settings may be slightly better off, but may also fall short of fitness because of repetitive movements that strain the body while only activating a few muscle groups.

The traditional approach toward fitness is based on setting aside long chunks of time to complete complicated routines. But Foy said that approach typically fails to appeal to today’s time-starved workforce.

### Simple Moves

Corporate clients hired Foy to develop a simple exercise routine that could be performed during work hours on a voluntary basis without causing employees to sweat, yet would counteract the “desk sentence.”

### The Impact of Exercise

Exercise has a role in the treatment and prevention of more than 40 chronic diseases. Regular exercise can:

- › Reduce the risk of heart disease by 40%.
- › Reduce the incidence of diabetes by 60%.
- › Improve cardiovascular endurance.
- › Improve muscular strength, tone and endurance.
- › Improve bone health.
- › Improve immune function.

*Source: American College of Sports Medicine*



*More than 70% of Americans don't exercise enough to maintain health.*

– Sean Foy

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**1/4**

## Simple Moves, continued:

The seven simple moves developed for these clients became the foundation of Foy's "Fitness That Works" program, including a book with the same title. Foy said introducing these simple moves makes a significant difference to workers, who reported:

- › **Moving more.** Moving makes employees feel better so they want to further increase their fitness.
- › **Eating better.** Moving more helps persuade employees to make other changes such as improving their diet.
- › **Feeling better.** Physical motion affects emotion and even helps overcome depression.
- › **Thinking differently.** A healthier, fitter employee is willing to make changes elsewhere.

Equally important, the 12-week pilot program boosted productivity as much as 84%.

Foy said it's easy to underestimate the results of simple changes. But the program's results prove "a little exercise is better than no exercise." He recommends setting your cell phone alarm to go off every hour to remind you to get up and move.

## Taking Part

Performing the seven moves throughout the workday burns 200 to 300 additional calories daily and "flips on fat-burning enzymes" while increasing energy, reducing fatigue and improving sleep.

The versions of the seven moves performed by Alliance Learning Circle participants included:

- › Balancing first on one leg for 30 seconds, and then the other, while raising arms to shoulder level.
- › Reaching down to bring hands to knees while standing with legs straight or slightly bent, then standing tall with arms reaching overhead. Repeat the move several times, gradually reaching lower until touching the toes, if possible.
- › Marching in place while seated in a chair by moving arms back and forth while alternately raising legs.
- › Walking in place and gradually increasing the effort until you are stepping with knees high.
- › Jumping an imaginary rope, starting by bouncing on the balls of your feet and then gradually moving to a slight jump off the ground. At the same time, "turn" an invisible rope with your arms.
- › Standing with arms extended straight in front, then squatting as if to sit on a chair.
- › Dancing in place to music with the moves of your choice.

Variations of these fitness moves are offered in Foy's book, which lists the seven simple move categories as balance; reach; step; push/pull; squat/lift; twist; and lunge.

Foy also shared strategies that help make simple moves stick for employees. One of those strategies - fun - was apparent in the laughter and cheerful conversation that accompanied the exercises at the Alliance Learning Circle. Foy recommended restoring recess to the workplace to recapture that sense of fun.

"Don't put yourself in a box and say I've got to do 'this,'" Foy said, referring to exercise formulas. "Do what you like."

## Workplace Fitness Strategies

- 1. Simple:** Easy-to-do strategies encourage "self-efficacy" so employees willingly make fitness part of their day. "Self-efficacy" is the belief you can successfully set and attain goals.
- 2. Personal:** Employees may prefer to exercise alone, in a group or in a spontaneous manner that takes advantage of opportunities as they arise. A personality profile can help employees identify these preferences.
- 3. Measured:** Employees should identify their strengths and weaknesses and measure their improvement and participation.
- 4. Fun:** If an exercise is enjoyable, such as dancing, employees are more likely to stick with it.
- 5. Progressive:** Exercise should gradually become more challenging to improve overall fitness levels.
- 6. Supported and Rewarded:** Employers can offer support by providing tools and education as well as rewards, such as allowing employees to "earn" a lower deductible or paying for fitness-related expenses.
- 7. Intentional:** Fitness becomes intentional as employees plan ahead to make time for more exercise and better nutrition in their lives.

more >>>

2/4

## Progressive and Intentional

Once employees adopt simple moves, they become open to pursuing more demanding fitness activities. Foy recommends a 10-minute commitment that includes four minutes of high-energy aerobic training to bring the heart rate up; three minutes of resistance training; two minutes of work for the body's core; and one minute of deep breathing and stretching.

After employees conquer this "4-3-2-1" system, they can progress to a 10-minute interval workout that brings the heart rate up for short bursts between stints of lower-level aerobics.

"Studies have shown by incorporating interval training into your exercise program you can burn nine times the body fat," Foy said. Interval training can boost metabolism for 36 hours after an exercise session ends.

The final step in this fitness progression is often pursuing longer exercise sessions that suit the employee's personality, which might range from hiking to a Zumba class. At this stage, fitness becomes "intentional." Foy noted that fitness is about movement, not perfection.

"We all have to give ourselves some grace," Foy said. "People that are fit are not perfect. They just keep moving forward."

### Foy's Tools You Can Use

- › Keen Footwear offers a free Instant Recess® Tool Kit online at [recess.keenfootwear.com/recess-at-work](http://recess.keenfootwear.com/recess-at-work). The toolkit includes a recess benefit calculator, fact sheets, quizzes, a step-by-step Human Resources Guide, activity ideas, tracking tools and videos.
- › The Wellness Council of America ([www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org)) offers many free or low-cost resources, including incentive campaigns and tracking tools.
- › The Movement is a fee-based software program available for desktop computers or as a mobile application to prompt employees to take stretching "micro-breaks."

## Making Wellness Work

Stevens said a social marketing approach can encourage wellness adoption by harnessing the power of online social interaction.

The six-year-old Keas company was founded to offer care plans and protocols to people with specific health conditions. Stevens said that approach failed because the care plans and protocols felt like "homework," which meant people refused to participate.

### 360/365

A wellness program that takes a 360-degree look at employee needs and seeks to engage them 365 days a year will:

- › Align with workflows.
- › Offer more than "on/off" challenges.
- › Include hard data.
- › Lead with soft content, such as games.
- › Offer competitions.
- › Enable a social fabric.

**Source:** Keas

Next, Keas focused on using games to promote wellness participation. Stickiness and engagement skyrocketed, Stevens said, but corporate sponsors wanted a direct connection to health. Today, Keas balances the fun of online games with content and activities that aim to improve the health of employees at participating companies.

Stevens criticized traditional wellness programs for relying on classroom settings, gyms and printed materials. He emphasized the importance of offering easy-to-do exercises that can become part of the normal flow of employees' everyday lives.

"Asking the unfit to go to the gym is like asking a kid with dyslexia to read," Stevens added. "It's not fair, it's not reasonable and it's not good marketing."

Stevens added that wellness programs must also be simple for overburdened human resources departments to implement.

**more >>>**

**3/4**

## A Social Approach

Keas developed a social marketing site because making health fun and social makes it “stick,” Stevens said. Keas’ social marketing site offers a portfolio of games, fitness activities and wellness information to appeal to a wide range of users, who can participate as individuals or teams.

“Teams are six times more engaged in a wellness program from beginning to end” when compared to a program focused on individuals, Stevens said. Allowing spouses and children to participate also boosts engagement.

Keas’ social marketing approach gives employees points for simply sharing information in online posts. This creates a viral effect as team members encourage each other to eat better and move more. Employees stop earning points when they reach a specified time limit on the site, usually in the 10- to 15-minute range to prevent overuse. Team leaders can remove employees from a team if they fail to participate; employees then have to “earn” their way back onto the team by resuming fitness activities.

Pilot programs are now providing online access to blue-collar workers in manufacturing plants so they can share the benefits of online interaction. One manufacturing company gave email addresses and mobile devices to all employees, including those who work in the manufacturing plant.

Giving employees an iPod Touch costs about \$100 per employee, which pays off if the social approach can save 1% of the annual per-employee cost of more than \$12,000 for health benefits, Stevens said. Early results are promising.

## The Best Program

Both speakers emphasized that employers may have to take a new approach to wellness programs to get employees off their seats. They appeared to agree that an employer whose workforce is facing a “desk sentence” should have no doubt about the “best” exercise program to offer employees.

“The best program is the one that employees will actually do,” Foy said.



### Wellness Impact

A company with 8,776 employees tracked the impact of using a social media approach to wellness from March through December 2012.

- › Health literacy participation of more than 10 times a month: 95%
- › Engagement, or participation continuing after nine months: 51%
- › Habit formation of 25% or more increase in fruits and vegetables: 49%
- › Habit formation of 50% or more increase in weekly exercise: 48%
- › Sustained weight loss (minimum of five pounds lost): 21%
- › Productivity improved with fewer paid-time-off days due to being “sick:” 15%

Source: Keas