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MASSAGE IS IN BUSINESS

MORE AND MORE EMPLOYEES ARE LYING DOWN ON THE JOB—AND THIS MAKES THEIR EMPLOYERS HAPPY. Workplace massage, both table and chair, is a growing trend at some of the most highly regarded companies. *Working Mother* magazine, in its 18th annual survey of the “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers,” reported that 77 percent of the “best” companies offer therapeutic massages, versus 11 percent nationwide. The 11 percent nationwide figure is based on the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation 2003 Benefits Survey, which also reported that the figure is 18 percent for large employers (more than 500 employees).

MASSAGE THERAPY JOURNAL (MTJ) conducted its own informal, yet extensive, survey to find out more about companies that offer workplace massage, and what their experiences are with it. In consul-

tation with Marilyn Kier—who operates a successful workplace massage firm for large businesses in Chicago’s northwest suburbs—an eight-item survey questionnaire was developed. The survey was mailed to 500 companies, all with more than 500 employees. (See *Figure 1, Page 59*, for survey results.) One hundred of the companies were those named in *Fortune* magazine’s 2003 survey of “100 Best Companies to Work For.” The other 400 companies were members of the Fortune 500, an annual list in which the top U.S. companies are ranked in order of sales. While the results of our “home-grown” survey are not statistically significant in terms of percentage response rate or controlled variables (see *Figure 2, Page 63*, for more detail about the survey’s methodology), the subjective results are overwhelmingly clear—massage is definitely “in business.”

Corporations are increasingly incorporating massage into their benefits packages. In this article, we summarize how these programs have worked, according to the human resources directors who run them.

BY JEAN IVES



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In today’s bustling, frantic world, employees are more stressed out than ever.

As a result, many of the “best companies to work for” offer massage.

More than 75 percent of the MTJ survey respondents said their company offers workplace massage as an employee benefit. When we compared the responses from Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" with other companies' responses, we found that massage is an employee benefit at 90 percent of the "best" companies, versus 66 percent of those not on the "best" list. The fact that the MTJ survey said 76 percent of all the companies that responded offer workplace massage—compared with 18 percent reported by the SHRM survey—is possibly because workplace massage was a minor part of the SHRM survey, whereas it was the only topic of the MTJ survey. It could be that many companies that don't offer massage as a benefit chose not to respond to the MTJ survey at all, rather than to respond that they do not offer it.

The purpose of the SHRM annual survey was to collect information on the types

of benefits employers offer to their employees. Even though the survey did not focus strictly on massage benefits, it did report results that arguably support a trend toward wellness benefits, as opposed to strictly medical benefits. The 2003 survey showed that employers increased their coverage of preventive health-care benefits and benefits designed to promote a healthy lifestyle. It also reported that 57 percent of employers offer a wellness program, up from 53 percent in 2001. Meanwhile, 23 percent of employers offer alternative/complementary medical coverage, up from 8 percent in 2001.

The SHRM report's statement about alternative care options bodes well for a corporate climate favorable to massage therapy: "Of note over the past five years is the shift away from HMOs in favor of PPOs and alternative medicine. ... This shift away from traditional health-care offers a cost savings opportunity in that alternative medicine options—at least at

this juncture—are generally less costly for the employer to subsidize."

COST CONTROL

The belief that massage therapy can be expected to lower employers' health-care costs is one shared by Baptist Health South Florida. At South Miami Hospital, a member of Baptist Health, employees pay a discounted rate of \$50 per hour for a table massage. By the time the hospital pays the massage therapist his or her hourly rate and pays staff for room set-up and take-down—cleaning the linens and wiping the massage table down after each massage—the workplace massage program is slightly under cost. But that's okay, according to Kathryn Bishopric, manager of counseling services, who directs the behavioral and collaborative medicine program under which workplace massage resides.

"Baptist Health is self-insured, so we have a really strong interest in wellness," Bishopric says. "We promote anything that helps employees take care of themselves. Studies clearly show that if employees are healthy, they'll use less in health insurance benefits and be more productive."

Another company that echoes the belief that workplace massage is an important part of its overall health and fitness program is S.C. Johnson (Racine, Wisconsin), the maker of such consumer products as Pledge®, Windex® and Raid® insecticide. This company's workplace massage program is more than 10 years old, and is extended to retirees and to employees' families as well.

Spokesperson Therese Van Ryne attributes the success of workplace massage at S.C. Johnson to the convenience and lower cost compared to off-site locations and to outstanding massage therapists who help build up repeat clientele. "Demand for services has dramatically increased in the past five years," says Van Ryne. "We are seeing more and more managers who recognize the benefits of offering massage to employees and thus are picking up half

the cost. This seems to work especially well in departments such as customer service, where the employees deal with a lot of stress."

The experience is similar at Valassis, a maker of advertising fliers, located in Livonia, Michigan. "Not only does workplace massage help relieve stress," says Tamara Oliverio, communication center specialist, "but it also helps our employees focus and do a better job."

Valassis shares the costs 50-50 with employees, and schedules independent contractor massage therapists to come on-site twice a month.

OUTSOURCED MESSAGE

Many large corporations have a commitment to employee wellness but choose not to develop and staff their own programs. Fortunately for them, there are fitness and wellness firms that specialize in outsourcing health services to other companies. Those services may consist of everything from fitness training, massage therapy and sports and recreation programs to flu shots, blood pressure monitoring and bone density tests.

One such firm is TimeOut Services, based in San Jose, California. It serves high-tech companies such as Cisco Systems, Yahoo! and KLA-Tencor. Tori Valencia had been providing massage therapy to Cisco employees for about 10 years as an independent contractor before TimeOut Services took over management of the fitness/wellness program there in 1998. TimeOut learned that Valencia was Cisco's massage therapist, and asked her to join them. Valencia says the quality of her experience at Cisco since becoming an employee of TimeOut is even better than it was as an independent contractor,

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MTJ WORKPLACE SURVEY

Does your company offer massage therapy as a benefit to its employees?

Total Responses: 56

Completed surveys: 49

No answer: 7 (12% replied that they do not participate in surveys)

Yes: 37 (76%)

No: 12 (24%)

If yes:

How frequently is massage available to employees?

Daily:	10%
Twice a week:	10%
Weekly:	24%
Twice a month:	24%
Monthly:	14%
Annually:	4%
Not regularly scheduled:	14%

Who pays for the massage?

Employee pays discounted rate negotiated by company: 69%

Company pays total: 13% (often for employee special recognition)

Company and employees share 50-50: 9%

Employee pays entire cost: 9%

What has been the participation rate from employees for massage benefits?

Less than 30%:	60%
About 30%:	15%
More than 30%:	5%
More than 70%:	5%
Don't know:	15%

How long has your program been in effect?

Less than one year:	18%
More than one year, less than five years:	56%
More than five years:	26%

What prompted the company's decision to provide massage as an employee benefit?

Employees requested it:	30%
A massage therapist contacted the company and proposed it:	18%
The company initiated the benefit without external influences:	39%
Don't know:	13%

Figure 1. Here are the results from MTJ's comprehensive survey on workplace massage.



Ellen Wilson gives a Gannett/USA Today employee massage in the workplace at the company's health/works fitness center in McLean, Virginia.

Photo by Leslie Smith/USA Today

THOSE LUCKY EMPLOYEES

Here are the names of a few of the companies that offer massage as an employee benefit:

Adobe Systems
Allstate Corp.
ARUP Labs
Baptist Health South Florida
Best Buy Co.
Cisco Systems, Inc.
The Container Store
Dollar General Corp.
EMC Corp.
FedEx Corp.
First Tennessee National Corp.
Gannett/USA Today
General Electric Co.
Griffin Hospital
Guidant Corp.
Hewlett-Packard Co.
Home Depot
International Truck & Engine
JCPenney Corp.
Kimberly-Clark Corp.
KLA Tencor
Paychex
S. C. Johnson
Silicon Graphics, Inc.
Texas Instruments, Inc.
Valassis Communications
VHA Inc. (has employee-sponsored benefits through Health Allies that offers discounts on massage services)
Yahoo!
Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital

Photo by Erik Dreyer/Gaity Images



because the company takes care of advertising, which she used to handle herself.

"It leaves me free to concentrate completely on my clients," says Valencia.

Nichols, national director of program development for Health Fitness Corp. "Companies that never offered massage in the past are asking for it, and companies that already offer it are expanding it."

Of the companies that make massage therapy available to employees, Nichols says 90 to 95 percent of them offer chair massage, and about 50 percent also offer table massage as an option.

ALREADY PART OF STAFF

Some companies have built-in resources to develop workplace

As companies continue the trend of asking employees to do more with less, we see a parallel trend in the demand for massage therapy rising. Companies that never offered massage in the past are asking for it, and companies that already offer it are expanding it.

"Cisco employees are very loyal to their company. Their adage is 'we work hard and play hard,' and as a result, they need and appreciate their massages." In addition to Valencia's weekly and bimonthly standing appointments with a number of employees, she also provides what she calls "crisis massage" for such ailments as migraine headaches and muscle strains.

Another firm that specializes in outsourcing wellness services and programs to large companies is Health Fitness Corp. Among its clients are such recognizable corporate names as Federal Express, Best Buy, General Electric, Allstate, Hewlett-Packard, Underwriters Laboratories, Texas Instruments and Verizon.

"As companies continue the trend of asking employees to do more with less, we see a parallel trend in the demand for massage therapy rising," says Sarah

massage programs. Most hospitals and rehabilitation centers already have massage therapists on staff, so extending their services to employees is a logical next step. At Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital in Washington state, Kathy Franz, director of human resources, says: "As a hospital, we have therapists on staff for patients, so we decided to offer it to employees as well."

Although employee participation is less than 30 percent at Yakima, Franz says the ones who do use it really appreciate it.

Baptist Health is another example of a hospital that extends its massage program beyond patients and community to include employees. Josie Houtenbrink, a licensed massage therapist at South Miami Hospital, likes the fact that working on employees in a hospital setting usually means working on nursing staff, physical therapists and physicians. In fact, about 50 percent of her clientele are

employees. "One benefit I get is the satisfaction of giving massages to people whose stressful and strenuous jobs really make them appreciate massage," Houtenbrink says. "The other is that they go back to their jobs as proponents that their patients should all get massages."

According to physical therapist Mary Ellen Price, the staff at Griffin Hospital in Derby, Connecticut, experienced similar insights when the hospital collaborated with Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy in a student externship program. "The program helped educate staff and patients more fully, and helped us make the leap from chair massage, where staff were seated and fully clothed, to full table massage," Price says.

Workplace massage has been a part of Griffin's program almost from the beginning. It is an inherent part of the philosophy of Planetree, a patient-focused model of care developed by Griffin, which now is adopted by more than 70 hospitals nationwide. Planetree advocates a holistic health-care philosophy. "It would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide the level of patient service that Planetree holds as a standard if we didn't empower employees to share in total patient- and self-care," Price explains.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRACTORS

But not every company that offers workplace massage has a ready-made staff or can hire a specialty firm to handle its program. Many contract directly with individual massage therapists. Such is the case at the Dallas location of Memphis-headquartered First Tennessee National Corporation, where Stephanie Smith, organizational development consultant, reports that the massage therapist who is on-site two days a week regularly has every appointment slot booked.

Lisa Horn, fitness center manager in the medical unit of JCPenney's Human Resources Division, has seen its workplace massage program at corporate headquarters in Plano, Texas, evolve



Laura McManis-Hockenbury gives a JCPenney employee massage in the company's fitness center at its Dallas headquarters.

over the last 10 years. What started as chair massages in a vacant office in 1993, has now grown into full table massages in the corporate fitness center, fully booked two days a week. Workplace massage fits well into the company's overall commitment to employee health. "JCPenney cares about the health and well-being of employees," Horn says. "We have a fitness center, a medical clinic and a day care center, which are important benefits when you're competing with other companies to recruit and retain good people."

She describes how the workplace massage program has flourished and faltered over the course of its 10 years. When chair massages were first offered to employees, the only site available was

a vacant cubicle at the back of the fitness center. Not many employees took advantage of it, and the massage therapist finally quit due to lack of business.

Still thinking massage might be an attractive benefit for employees, the company decided to convert a storage closet into a private massage therapy room, with lights that could be dimmed and a stereo music system. A new massage therapist came in two days a week and offered the option of chair massage or table massage. Employees more often chose table massage than chair massage, but rarely booked evening appointments. The program was then changed to offer table massage only during the workday hours.

Today, the program has been expanded to make gift certificates available, and to include retirees, and employees' family

members and friends. Horn stresses that even though it is the employee—not the company—who pays the full fee for his or her massage, the company makes it available and promotes it by providing a massage room, advertising it in company communications and scheduling appointments through the fitness center. “Massage is an important part of JCPenney’s commitment to supporting a total wellness environment for employees,” Horn says.

Massage therapist Laura McManis-Hockenbury (Page 61) works at the JCPenney Fitness Center from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. two days a week; she is almost always booked solid. “Many of the employees who book massages regularly with me, especially appreciate having massage at work because of the convenience,” she says. “Most employees come during their lunch break and have the option of staying fully clothed or being professionally draped...It makes me feel good to know I’m sending them back to work in better shape and with information on managing their stress. It allows them to focus on their job, not on their various aches.”

Focusing on the job and being more productive as a result of getting a massage during the workday was a common theme among the MTJ survey respondents. The Container Store has massage therapists on-site at its corporate headquarters in Dallas twice a month, up from once a month four years ago. Employees pay just \$10 for a 15-minute chair massage.

“Our employees strive to accomplish a lot of work every day, and a chair massage is a great way to rejuvenate them for the rest of the day,” says Audrey Robertson, public relations manager. “I especially enjoy it when I get one myself on a Friday—it’s such a great way to lead into the weekend.”

At Gannett Corporation, the publisher of *USA Today*, employees book appointments via E-mail with mas-

sage therapist Ellen Wilson, who has worked in the company’s fitness center for seven years. In addition to Wilson, the fitness center is staffed by a nurse five days a week and a doctor one day a week. The workplace massage program started more than 15 years ago, championed by the company’s founder and former CEO Allen Neuharth.

“Since Mr. Neuharth was a big proponent of massage for his own health care, he decided it would be a good thing to offer to employees as well,” says Wilson.

Employees pay Wilson \$55 for a one-hour massage, and, in turn, she pays the company a modest monthly rate for the use of the facilities. The company provides a 500-square-foot private massage room, promotes her services on the intranet (for employees only) and launders and folds the linens.

Workplace massage is not the domain of one particular type of company or industry. Still, the SHRM survey found that employees in high-pressure industries particularly welcome workplace massage. The finance

industry was the largest user of workplace massage, at 24 percent, followed by high-tech and insurance at 21 percent and 19 percent, respectively.

The popularity of workplace massage also isn’t limited to one region of the country. Guidant, an Indianapolis-based manufacturer of medical products, saw its first workplace massage program launch at its California location. But when Indianapolis employees learned of its popularity there, they wanted to try it themselves. According to Sandy Mills, communications assistant at the company’s headquarters, the program has enjoyed a good response at the Indianapolis location after starting in May 2003.

It’s possible that companies whose workplace massage programs are growing will observe a similar growth in employee appreciation. For example, Home Depot partnered with the American Massage

THEY OFFER MASSAGE, BUT KEEP IT UNDER WRAPS

Of the 37 companies that responded “yes” to massage, 8 asked that we not name them in this article. We wondered why. Was it out of a concern that stockholders might think the company was offering a frivolous benefit? Or because the company offered massage at its headquarters location, but did not want to generate interest at its other locations? Perhaps because of any stigma attached to the word massage?

When we followed up, we found that the answer was simple—the respondents said they didn’t want to go through the red tape of getting their company’s public relations department to approve the use of its name in an article.



Photo by Erik Dreyer/Getty Images

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Number of survey questionnaires mailed: **500**

Number of survey responses received: **57**

Response rate: **11%**

Survey questionnaires were mailed to the head of the human resources department at 500 companies. One hundred of those companies were on *Fortune* magazine’s 2003 survey of “100 Best Companies to Work For” list. The remaining 400 were on the Fortune 500 list. (Note: 65 of the “100 Best” companies were not part of the Fortune 500 list. Therefore, we mailed to 435 of the Fortune 500 list, bringing the total number of surveys mailed to 500.)

Follow-up was conducted by telephone and E-mail to the contact person named on the survey response.

Figure 2. The MTJ survey was compiled from data submitted by many blue-chip companies.

Therapy Association to introduce the Building Better Health program.

“It has been a lot of work,” says Wendi Bailey, who works with the program. “The phones have been ringing nonstop with questions regarding payment, billing and budgets.”

But Bailey adds that it also has been a rewarding experience, especially after the clean-up from Hurricane Isabel that hit Virginia last fall. There, associates were offered massage to relieve their tired mus-

cles from the clean-up efforts. “Associates said they have never worked for a company who cared enough to offer a program like this,” Bailey says. “This program gives us a heart and shows the associates we care.”

Jean Ives is a freelance writer and editor whose enthusiasm for massage started more than 30 years ago. She writes about the profession of massage and receives it regularly and gratefully. She can be contacted at: jeanives@comcast.net.