

# raising the stakes

BOOZY LUNCHES ARE OUT AND LUNCH TIME RUNS ARE IN AS HARRIET MORLEY DISCOVERS WHEN SHE TALKS WITH THREE CORPORATE RUNNERS.

**Y**OU CAN BARELY SEE YOUR DESK FROM THE PILES OF paper, take-away coffee cups and latest techno gadgets like that new blackberry you bought last week. The phone is ringing again, emails are banking up and your diary is jam-packed with afternoon meetings. 'Come on 5pm', you think. 'Maybe it's time for a day off...'

These are exactly the thoughts corporate organisations are trying to avoid. According to a 2007 Medibank Private study *Sick at Work: The cost of presenteeism to your business, employees and the economy*, unproductive workers cost the Australian economy \$25.7 billion a year.

That's equivalent to six working days of lost productivity a year, due to illness or injury, for every employee.

The solution: running. Businesses are introducing lunch time running groups, corporate team competitions, health risk assessments, mental health awareness programs and online education in a bid to improve productivity, while employees enjoy a better quality of life. But is corporate running more about the bottom line, or solving our human energy crisis?

## AGENDA SETTING

With the task of coordinating physical, psychological and occupational health programs for more than 40,000 employees, Karen Oldaker, health and wellbeing group manager at Telstra has her hands full. But results from a May survey of 800 Telstra Resilience Program participants were exactly what she was hoping for.

After taking part in the fitness program introduced in 2006 – designed to help employees regain balance in their lives – survey respondents reported a 49 per cent improvement in work/life balance and 46 per cent had greater work efficiency. "This is significant," says Karen, "it's made people think about work/life balance for a start, and now they have more energy, more concentration, and they are working to the best of their ability."

Karen says corporate fitness is equally about Telstra's bottom line as it is about employees' physical and mental health. "We look at how we value our people: we need to retain our talent, our employees need to feel this is a good company to work for, and we increase productivity by having a happy and healthy workforce," she says.

Adrian Bauman, professor of public health at University of Sydney

and author of *Evaluation in a Nutshell: A practical guide to the evaluation of health promotion programs* says the corporate fitness trend stems from a wave of "executive health checks" that swept the business world 20 years ago.

Similarly to back then, he says, the trend only benefits top end of town, white collar workers, while blue collar workers are among those missing out.

Adrian says while corporate events typically attract people who are already active, major health risks such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes and stress could soon be reduced as growing social corporate pressure encourages less active people to get involved.

National Australia Bank is one organisation working to target all 23,000 employees, with in-house relaxation and massage classes, yoga and rock climbing sessions, and gym membership discounts. NAB also plans to provide a free health and fitness assessment to every worker by 2010.

Melbourne-based Debra Smith, health, safety and wellbeing manager at NAB, explains: "Providing opportunities to pulse check employees health takes the extra burden off our people in finding the time to see their GP, who are often difficult to get access to."

## PHONE A FRIEND

When it comes to calling on health professionals, many businesses hire health and wellbeing services like Peter Waterhouse's, The Corporate Fitness Company.

The New Zealand company director says his 12-week program costs \$200 per person. A personal weekly training program is set for each employee with the aim of them running, jogging or walking a half marathon at the end. In the past year more than 300 participants completed the 21K challenge, and post-race survey results show 90 per cent of participants had improved work performance. "vsays Peter. "The 'bottom line' benefit is a consequence and should not be the prime intent."

Jeremy Whelan, managing director at Ignite Architects – a business of 75 staff in New Zealand and 15 in Sydney – says when the company used Peter's program in 2005, employees were pushed out of their comfort zone. "The program created a training structure which many staff still use to get fit for our regular team entries in Xterra in Rotorua and the Auckland Half Marathon," he says.

The objective of the business world is for human beings to move as little as possible, says Dr Paul Magnus, medical adviser to the

## FIRE FIGHTERS DO IT FOR DIGGERS

**Defending their homeland, more than 10,000 Anzac's made the ultimate sacrifice at Gallipoli in 1915. This year, 24 Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade runners paid tribute to the diggers by running 4075 kilometres across six countries, in 22 days – making The Great Anzac Run a corporate running event like no other.**

Participant and leading fire fighter Karl Paton says that while a corporate running event the concept for the run was primarily driven by the firefighters.

"Our running club started 28 years ago and has done more than 50 long distance road events, including the Anzac Memorial Run from Canberra to Melbourne," he says. "But when Paul Ritchie [event director] came up with this idea to

run from Gallipoli to London two years ago, no one believed it would actually happen."

Karl says, after planning the logistics including mapping out the course, the MFB came to the party with running gear, trucks, communication equipment, not to mention allowing the team to take annual leave together. "The support we got from other fire fighters and police in every country was amazing," says Karl. "They stopped traffic and ran with us at all hours of the day and night."

The team, which raised about \$100,000 for the Alfred Hospital Burns Unit, hope to do the event again next year. But Karl says plans are underway for a MFB run from LA to New York in 2010 to commemorate 9/11. For more information see [thegreatanzacrun.com](http://thegreatanzacrun.com).



**HISTORY HIKE:** Metropolitan Fire Brigade runners begin their three week relay from Gallipoli's Anzac Cove.

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**"OUR PUSH TOWARDS CORPORATE WELLNESS IS ABOUT GETTING PEOPLE FITTER AND HEALTHIER SO THEY WILL PERFORM BETTER IN BOTH THEIR PERSONAL AND WORKING LIVES."**

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. "We are constantly trying to save ourselves from any form of movement, and that's a great success story in a sense because we don't have to do everything by hand anymore, but we may have over-shot the mark because being immobile has enormous medical risks."

He says while employers have a major role to play in getting people active, there is no getting away from one uncomfortable implication. "As individuals, most of us will still have to exercise some will-power and self-control in a way that previous generations never had to."

### CLICK TO ENTER

In a bid to take control, more and more business people are ditching boozy lunch time meetings, says Debra from NAB, and instead choosing to negotiate over lunch time runs and gym sessions.

Lyween Eade, pharmacy key account manager at Johnson & Johnson Pacific in Auckland, New Zealand agrees. The lunch time runner says: "Business opportunities are definitely discussed, outlined and put into action over a lunch time run. I know myself a number of business relationships have been enhanced due to the fact that we have a common thread, running."

And with so many corporate running events on offer, it's easy to see why the track is more appealing than the boardroom.

About 180 corporate teams are expected to enter this year's Samsung Melbourne Marathon on 12 October, double the entries of last year's corporate field. While 12 per cent of the July 2008 Gold Coast Airport Marathon were corporate team entries.

Stephen Brown, race director of the Adidas Auckland Marathon says 72 corporate teams entered the event last year – 22 more than in 2006. "Corporate running is taking off in New Zealand," he says, "particularly among banks and financial institutions, legal and accounting firms, and drug companies." Stephen says corporations enter as a team building exercise, to improve staff wellness, boost company profile and to raise money for charity.

This year's Foxtel Lap, held in five cities across Australia, is expected to collect \$1.5 million for the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

Meanwhile, the 125 day Global Corporate Challenge, founded by Australian Olympian Herb Elliott, this year attracted almost 50,000 participants. ANZ entered a record 370 teams from Australia, India and Samoa – costing almost \$260,000 in entry fees.

### GET INVOLVED

The Foxtel Lap [thelap.com.au](http://thelap.com.au); Global Corporate Challenge [gcc2008.com](http://gcc2008.com); Melbourne Marathon [melbournemarathon.com.au](http://melbournemarathon.com.au); Adidas Auckland Marathon [aucklandmarathon.co.nz](http://aucklandmarathon.co.nz); Fitness2Live (AUS) [fitness2live.com.au](http://fitness2live.com.au); The Corporate Fitness Company (NZ) [corporatefitness.co.nz](http://corporatefitness.co.nz)



## LYWEEN'S REALITY CHECK

When Lyween Eade's parents both died in their 50s – her mother of cancer and father from a heart attack – she decided it was time to put her own health in perspective and she did so with the help of her employer.

"It's important to do the things that make you happy because you never know when your time is up and there are so many wonderful things to do, see and achieve in life," says the 38-year-old. Luckily for Lyween, her employer, Johnson & Johnson Pacific in Auckland, New Zealand encourages employees to become involved in health and fitness, offering sponsorship for both staff and their families to participate in sporting activities.

Most importantly for Lyween, a runner of 10 years, the company enters team running events that raise funds for charities like the Adidas Auckland Marathon, which supports the Heart Foundation.

"As both of my parents passed away, the Heart Foundation and cancer charities are particularly close to my heart," she says.

When preparing for a corporate fun run, Lyween and her running colleagues train together at lunch times and after work. During winter, they hit the Company gym where they share fitness goals and business plans. "Running together creates camaraderie, team building, and the 'feel good factor'," says Lyween. "And I love the pre and post race buzz in the office as people take-part in events together."



Gary Vesbit

**HEALTHY LIVING:** Lyween heads out for a lunch time run.