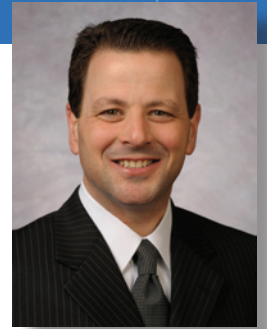


By Joseph DiBella

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You know the dangers. You know the facts. You've heard the stories. You've seen the results. And despite repeated warnings from the Surgeon General, you know people who do it daily, if not hourly.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that in the U.S. alone, 44.5 million people smoke or nearly 1 in 5 Americans. The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates 1 in 4 U.S. adults smoke. And there is little evidence that smoking use will decrease. ACS reports nearly 1 in 3 people age 18 to 24 smoke.

AN AVERAGE OF 1 IN 4 U.S. ADULTS SMOKE



AN AVERAGE OF 1 IN 3 PEOPLE AGE 18 TO 24 SMOKE



Smoking, however, is more than just a bad habit. It's a leading killer in the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use causes more deaths worldwide than AIDS, illegal drugs, motor vehicle accidents, murder and suicide combined. In the U.S. alone, nearly 500,000 people die each year from tobacco use. That means approximately once a minute someone will die from smoking. By the time you finish this article, five more people will die because they were smokers.

These statistics are alarming, but they aren't news. Nor are the many reasons not to smoke. But, what you might not have heard or considered is how much damage smoking causes to your business and to your bottom line.

Annually, smokers cost their companies a significant amount of time and money. Sources agree that the average employer spends \$1,300 in additional healthcare costs per year, per employed smoker. That's above and beyond basic, regular health coverage. The National Business Group on Health estimates that



44.5 million people smoke in the U.S.

collectively, employers spend an additional \$170 billion on smoking-related health expenses and productivity costs. Businesses pay an average of 10 times more in workers' compensation costs for smokers versus nonsmokers: \$2,189 compared to \$176, respectively.

SMOKER HEALTHCARE COSTS

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NONSMOKER HEALTHCARE COSTS

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Sadly, that's just the beginning. It's not just healthcare and workers' comp fees that are raiding company pocketbooks. Smokers cost companies an exorbitant amount in lost productivity time, absenteeism and recruitment and retraining costs (resulting from death

and/or disability related to smoking). The average smoker takes between three and five smoking breaks, per day. Even conservatively estimated, that's a lot of lost time: one hour per day; five hours per week; 20-plus hours per month; and 240 hours per year. Employers lose more than 6.5 weeks of productivity for smokers.

Beyond just the smokers' lost time, nonsmoking employees end up subsidizing the smokers across the board. They have to make up for lost work time and lost sick time. And their healthcare costs increase because of their colleagues who smoke.

There is, however, a light at the end of the tunnel. Researchers agree that nearly 3 in 4 smokers want to quit. The biggest hurdles to doing so, they say, are lack of resources or lack of willpower. Studies have shown that the majority of employers still have not adopted broad-based campaigns to help encourage smoking workers to quit. And yet, some businesses have showcased that the strategies and solutions are easier to develop and implement than expected. It's clear that an employer who helps employees to quit smoking will be better off. The upside is improved employee health and wellness, increased morale, better productivity rates and a healthier bottom line. Some of these tactics include:

■ CREATE A "SMOKE FREE" WORK ENVIRONMENT.

Companies are not just paying higher healthcare and workers' compensation costs for smokers. They are also paying for the effects of secondhand smoke among the non-smoking staff. By creating a smoke-free corporate campus, you will improve quality of work and also will improve your corporate image. A smoke free workplace will also improve air quality, promote a healthier work environment





and will help cut building maintenance costs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that U.S. employers could save \$4 billion to \$8 billion per year in building operations and maintenance costs just by creating a smoke free policy.

■ **OFFER AND COVER SMOKING CESSATION PROGRAMS FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES.**

Instead of viewing a smoker's bad habit as a lifestyle choice, view it as a life-threatening addiction that could not only cost your company a lot of money, but also some of your most talented workers. When compared with health-related costs caused by smoking, cessation programs are relatively inexpensive and they are one of the most successful preventive services out there. By offering these programs to your employees, you are not only showing them you care about their wellbeing, but you are also promoting a healthier work environment for all of your workers.

It's important to understand that providing comprehensive benefits and encouraging smoke-free lifestyles are not enough. Once these policies and procedures are in place, employers need to go the extra mile to ensure workers are engaged. Most importantly, businesses need to quantify the program use, quality and effectiveness.

Making the personal decision to quit smoking is difficult. But resolving to create a healthier, smoke free work environment for your organization's employees shouldn't be. By taking some simple steps, you can improve the quality of life of your workforce, increase office morale, boost productivity and, at the end of the day, improve your company's bottom line.

4 to 8 billion could be saved each year by creating a smoke free policy.

For more information, please visit the Conner Strong website at connerstrong.com or contact Joseph DiBella at 1-877-861-3220.



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