



Cubicle Karma

CORPORATE AMERICA IS EMBRACING ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE TO HELP EMPLOYEES STAY HEALTHY — OH, AND TO INCREASE PROFITS, OF COURSE BY MELISSA CHESSHER

A few months ago, a day like today would turn Diane Delia-Sumner into a frazzled, sweaty, annoyed mess. Just as the 53-year-old leasing manager for the Tower Companies, one of Washington, D.C.'s largest real-estate development companies, welcomed two new trainees, her colleague called to say she needed to stay home. This left Delia-Sumner juggling phones, educating the newbies, and attending to the stream of interested

customers who walked in and wanted tours of the property. The stressors continued. An unannounced representative from corporate headquarters arrived with instructions to observe the office. And she agreed to do an interview with a reporter.

"Any other time I probably would have been pulling my hair out," she says. "I would be perspiring. I would be calling someone else for help." Delia-Sumner credits her daily commitment to two, 20-minute

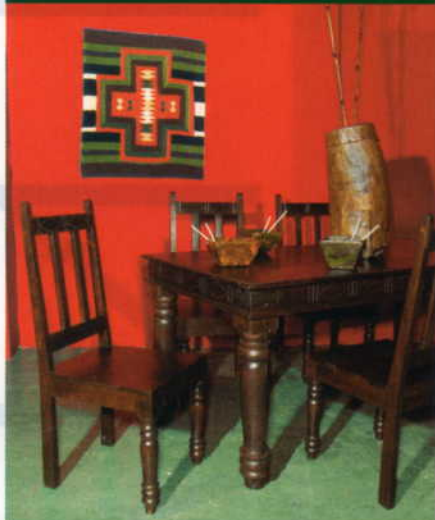
meditations for her ability to navigate the stresses work and life throw. "Meditation changes your quality of life. You can deal with problems," she says, noting that everyone comments on her coping skills and how young and relaxed she looks.

The seven classes Delia-Sumner took at the Peace Palace in Bethesda, Maryland, cost \$2,300, but she contributed not a penny. It was part of her benefits package with Tower Companies, which offers any employee with

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BUSINESS

three months on the job the chance to take company time to learn the technique. Of the 35 employees at the main office, 70 percent practice transcendental meditation.

"The employees are the most critical asset to a company. So any time you invest in your human resources, you improve their lives and you increase your own opportunities and grow your company," says Jeffrey Abramson, one of the partners of Tower Companies, one of America's top green commercial developers (real-estate ventures that address environmental and social concerns). Abramson added transcendental meditation to the healthcare package

because of the benefits he gained from practicing it and because of the scientific research that reinforced its credibility. Abramson readily cites the technique's long list of scientific validation: stress reduction, increased longevity, decreased hospitalizations and doctor visits, improved clarity, reduction in cardiovascular disease and sleep disorders. "People felt I had invested in them," says Abramson, noting that the

technique is effortless and requires no philosophy or change in lifestyle. "The people who practice this are more available to their family, fuller and happier individuals."

Meditation is just one of a growing list of complementary and alternative medicine practices (CAM) being offered by employers to combat staggering healthcare costs, which consume more than 15 percent of our gross domestic product, or approximately \$1.85 trillion, by shifting the focus to prevention and wellness and tackling things like stress, absenteeism, and injury in the process.

Stress earns a lot of credit for that tab.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health reports that stress-related ailments cost companies about \$200 billion a year in increased absenteeism, tardiness, and the loss of talented workers. Moreover, stress is considered the culprit in between 70 percent and 90 percent of employee hospital visits.

"Healthcare costs for many industries are the number-one supply cost," says Robert Schneider, MD, one of the leading CAM researchers and director of the federally funded Center for Natural Medicine and Prevention at the Maharishi University of Management. Schneider

has earned more than \$20 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health for research on alternative approaches to health. "Modern medicine is not particularly cost-effective. It seems like modern American culture has been focused on symptom reduction and a magic-bullet approach." As an example, he cites coronary bypass surgery, which cuts out and removes a portion of a diseased artery, ignoring the

fact the remainder of the arteries in the heart are diseased.

"Healing from the inside out is not characteristic of the American approach to medicine, and I think that's why we have the highest healthcare costs in the world and have among the lowest healthcare rating in the developed world," Schneider says.

Companies credited with incorporating CAM therapies into an improved wellness program make an impressive list: Apple, IBM, General Motors, Google, AT&T, Chrysler, Johnson & Johnson, Coors Brewing Co., Citigroup Inc., Yahoo!, Texas Instruments, Deutsche Bank, Hughes Aircraft, and women's clothing maker

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