

Rig personnel and professional athletes both depend on physical fitness to accomplish their goals. In essence, rig workers are really a breed of Industrial Athlete. Conditioning and nutritional wellness should therefore play as important a role for the Industrial Athlete as for the pro—maybe even a larger role, given that the Industrial Athlete on average might depend on fitness for a 25-year-plus career, while the pro is active only 5-20 years. Unfortunately, few Industrial Athletes and their managers view it from this perspective. This article outlines a plan for conditioning and general wellness for the Industrial Athlete.



Employee wellness strategy translates to healthy bottom line for Global Marine

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THE CONCEPT OF PREVENTIVE maintenance is not new. People spend millions each year on it, from changing the oil in the family car to painting the house. And companies know that downtime, unscheduled repairs, poor performance and shortened life expectancy of equipment can erode not only the bottom line, but also customers' trust. The idea is simple — take care of what you've got and what you've got will take care of you. So why not apply the principle to your company's work force?

Other professions have applied the idea of preventive maintenance, in the form of preventive health, for years. Take professional athletes — an easy comparison since offshore work requires similar levels of energy and expendable calories as the most demanding sports. But professional athletes, unlike most offshore crew members, have been trained that body conditioning — eating the right ratios of carbohydrates to proteins to fats, endurance, flexibility and strengthening exercises, and proper levels of rest — is essential to achieve peak performance and reduce the risk of injury.

Why do companies find it hard to justify the costs of implementing a preventive health program for their employees? It is because people have been educated only to the *long-term* health benefits of a balanced diet and exercise. Preventive health is much more than managing high blood pressure and heart disease. It has real, measurable *short-term* effects as well. Sports

medicine teaches us that a balanced diet and exercise improves hand-eye coordination and boosts endurance, skills especially important for the physical offshore environment.

Crews have trouble buying into the idea of preventive health, too. Generally, rig crews work hard and want to relax during off time. Most feel they've done enough exercise during the workday, so working out is not on their agenda, and hearty meals are one of the known highlights of offshore life. Prevalent is the misconception that if it's good for you, it can't taste good. Roll *heart-healthy meals* and *roughnecks* off your tongue in the same sentence and you may be met with some pretty coarse language or the removal of the cook.

Can the energy sector transfer the concept of preventive maintenance to its employees without revolt and measurably contribute to the overall wellness — health, energy, endurance, strength and alertness — of its employees? A preventive health program can. But, since there are generally no incentives to improve lifestyle choices among rig crew members, changes in perceived food quality and off-time activities can be a tough sell and stop a program at the get-go. Building awareness and creating demand must be tackled before companies can sell lifestyle changes to their crews. The barriers inherent to implementing a well-rounded preventive health program require more than a casual approach.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

A nutritional wellness strategy should focus on 3 fundamental goals:

- Enroll the whole team;
- Alter employee self-perception;
- Transform existing programs to increase health benefits.

You are what you **EAT!**

ENROLL THE WHOLE TEAM

Visible management support and participation will increase the program's impact. If employees sense the company's preventive health program is just idle "corporate speak," the program is doomed. Enrolling the entire team includes helping each department understand how the preventive health program can improve their individual accountability. The payoffs should be traceable to the bottom line.

An effective preventive health program might begin with the engineering department finding the space needed in the constrained marine city for fitness equipment. Quality of life considerations, such as noise levels and air quality, are also key.

Safety and risk management departments also need to be involved. A preventive health program can be one of the tools of injury prevention, because employees who maintain healthier lifestyles are proven to require less rehabilitation when they are injured. An effective sports medicine approach that emphasizes accident prevention will likely translate to fewer employee medical claims — which takes companies full cycle, all the way to the bottom line as fewer claims help companies contain costs and in some cases reduce their medical premiums.

Offshore medics should be charged with implementing a preventative health program on the rigs. Their role should be considered more of a coach or trainer, than as just on-site providers of medical care. Also important to a preventive health initiative are the offshore food service providers, whether employees or contracted staff. They should be challenged to see mealtime preparation not as the traditional cafeteria-style buffet, but as a training table; and offshore workers not as rig hands, but industrial athletes.

ALTER EMPLOYEE SELF-PERCEPTION

A successful preventive health program means helping crews see themselves not as industrial workers. They are industrial athletes, requiring body conditioning to achieve their own personal best and to keep them in the game. Offshore medics are key to making this mental shift happen. The medics should be charged with selling the concept to the crews. Theirs is an educational and advocacy role to maintain program continuity and build crew enthusiasm. The reality is most people who work offshore are active, hardworking and do not think they are at risk. So why should they change? Educating employees about the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices is ground zero. They must help crews to see themselves as athletes. In a comparison between offshore workers and professional athletes, a number of parallels can be drawn. These are summarized in Table 1.

TRANSFORM EXISTING PROGRAMS

A preventive health program must be simple. Employees need to be the owners of the program. They provide the energy and are ultimately responsible for their health behaviors. To be suc-

Table 1: The professional vs the industrial athlete

	Professional athlete	Industrial athlete
Job description	Specific to sport, position	Specific to industry and position
Physical demands	Blocking, tackling, throwing, catching, running, kicking, jumping	Pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, repetitive arm movements
Career longevity	5-20 years	25-40 years
Staff	Coach, team physician, athletic trainer, sports dietician, teammates	Manager, industrial physician, wellness coordinator, company dietician, co-workers
Education	Conditioning strategies, safe play techniques, safety equipment, game plan	Conditioning strategies, behavioral safety, ergonomics instruction, safety equipment, preventive health strategies
Conditioning	Cardiovascular, flexibility, strength	Cardiovascular, flexibility, strength
Nutrition	Light, low-fat, high-energy meals before sport, during lunch and on breaks; hydration during sport	Light, low-fat, high-energy meals before work, during lunch and on breaks; hydration during work
Motivation	Winning, financial gain, achieving personal best, team support, decrease injuries and prolonged career	Feeling better, financial gain, co-worker support, decreased injuries, prolonged career, decreased stress

cessful, any preventive health program must be transparent to the crews. It's basic psychology. People are creatures of habit and hate to deny themselves anything. If employees perceive the changes as limiting and of lesser quality, they will rebel. That means mealtime choices should offer the same hearty selections, but with ingredient substitutes that are low in fat and cholesterol.

Global Marine understands that healthier employees are safer employees. This is why the company has taken a systemic ap-

proach to moving the various wellness efforts under the accountability of the safety department. One of the first initiatives was to establish a training program in culinary excellence for its offshore stewards to teach them how to prepare meals that are both appetizing and nutritionally balanced. Take for instance the following traditional menu:

- Salad: Tuna salad, carrot and raisin salad;
- Entree: Fried chicken and lasagna;
- Vegetables: Potato au gratin, broccoli casserole and rice dressing;
- Dessert: Carrot cake.

By making the right substitutions in the recipe, the meal is reduced from 163.7 grams of fat to 40.6 grams of fat. The fat to carbohydrate and protein ratios can have real, immediate consequences on crews' job performance. Historical LTA statistics show safety-related incidences peak directly after mealtime.

Other areas where **Global Marine** made simple, but powerful changes include providing each employee access to health risk appraisals to identify their individual risk factors. Exercise equipment was installed on all rigs, wellness information and health screenings were provided at company picnics. Doctors have been stationed on remote rigs in West Africa not only to provide emergency care to crews, but also to educate them about the value of preventive health. Global Marine's efforts have not gone unnoticed by international health associations. In the North Sea, the company won the bronze award from the **Heart Association** for its efforts in promoting smoking cessation and providing healthy options in the canteen.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A high-carbohydrate diet can triple an athlete's endurance;
- Eye-hand coordination can improve 54 % on a low-fat diet;
- Non-smokers have half the recovery time for bone fractures;

Diet and exercise are the first line of medical treatment for 65 % of all medical conditions (i.e., high blood pressure, adult onset of non-insulin-dependent diabetes, insomnia, obesity, and a host of other diseases).

REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

To measure the progress toward achieving company wellness goals, baseline health risk data should be established, and re-evaluated on an ongoing basis. The evaluation criteria should include population and site-specific risks as well as company-specific expectations. **Chevron**, awarded the prestigious C. Everett Koop Award for Corporate Preventive Health Programs, reports the following from baseline data measured from 1991-97 (Chevron employees who regularly use the on-site fitness centers as compared to those who don't):

- Injury rates decreased by 50 %;
- Lost time accidents decreased by 60 %;
- Smoking cessation efforts decreased smoking rates by 35 %;
- Exercise and education resulted in decrease of alcohol use by 20 %;
- Less than one percent increase in medical costs (factored for inflation translates to 38% decrease);
- In-patient and drug expenditures decreased by 37 %;
- Hospital stays decreased 63 %.

Even modest sports medicine programs can increase employee productivity and morale, while reducing absenteeism, injuries and severity rates along with fewer chronic and catastrophic illnesses. This translates into reduced insurance costs. Health care costs are estimated to rise approximately 10 to 14 percent this year, which compounded over time, suggests insurance costs will rise disproportionately to other operating costs. Companies can see that healthy employees can contribute to the bottom line.

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