



### **For Immediate Release**

Disability Management Employer Coalition

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## **Keeping Blue-Collar Employees Healthy, Happy and Productive**

**San Diego, California. June 15, 2009**—The Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) has released a white paper detailing measures that employers can take to keep blue-collar workers healthy, happy, and productive in an economically challenging environment.

“Rather than push for the maximum productivity, which is unsustainable, companies must promote optimal productivity to help employees achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives,” explains Marcia Carruthers, CPDM, MBA, CEO of DMEC. “Employers that fail to meet these challenges will lose their most precious resource—their human capital—to burnout.”

### **Key Recommendations for Employers with Blue-Collar Workers**

- Employees typically experience corporate culture through their relationships with direct supervisors. Employers should encourage their front-line managers who have the closest contact with employees to make emotional connections with the people they supervise.
- Allow employees to make suggestions and design the production workflow. Employees who perform the work and know the tasks often have the best insight into how they can minimize job-associated stress and gain efficiency. At one production plant, for example, employees are able to rotate to different tasks in an order and at intervals they pre-determined to decrease physical and mental stress and optimize productivity.
- Make the link between health and workplace safety to secure buy-in from top management to health, wellness, and work-life initiatives. Top management needs to understand that it is important to lead by example but employees may not always be able to relate to their lifestyle goals. For example, the CEO training for a marathon may not influence an employee who is working two jobs to make ends meet.

### **Other suggestions for employers with a blue-collar workforce include:**

- Complete an annual survey with questions about the employee’s role in decision-making and whether his/her manager fosters teamwork, minimizes work stressors, is supportive, gives feedback, or schedules work shifts fairly. Discuss as a group and look for solutions. Check back each year.
- Allow employees to bid on extra overtime hours.
- Build a more supportive workplace by giving employees the tools they need to do their jobs.
- Stay in touch with front-line workers’ concerns, especially in paternalistic organizations.
- Involve labor unions in discussions of problems and resolutions. Work with unions to secure their buy-in and assistance.
- Establish a mentoring system.

- Perform an organizational risk/hazard assessment.
- Encourage employees to tap into their employee assistance program.
- Create an environment of open communication.
- Assess vulnerable populations in terms of the type and amount of work they do. Try to make accommodations.
- Assess job design to reduce the feeling of being overworked.
- Eliminate unnecessary tasks to reduce workload.
- Set realistic goals.
- Encourage workers to take time out a few minutes each day to take a brief walk or to sit quietly.

To read the full report:

[http://www.dmec.org/associations/5959/files/2008ThinkTankSupplement\(LoRes\).pdf](http://www.dmec.org/associations/5959/files/2008ThinkTankSupplement(LoRes).pdf)

It is more common to see these kinds of recommendations made for white collar workers but DMEC and its Think Tank partners found that the underserved segment were those doing more manual labor, but still struggling with stress issues.

#### **About DMEC**

*The Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) is a non-profit organization that provides educational resources to employers in the areas of disability, absence, health, and productivity. The primary goal of DMEC is to assist employers in developing cost-saving programs, encouraging responsive market products, and returning employees to productive employment. Visit [www.dmec.org](http://www.dmec.org) for more information about educational publications and events.*

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