Procter and Gamble’s Vibrant Living Health and Wellness Program
An Interview with Dr. Cherryl Christensen and Dr. Cheesan Lee

Background

Dr. Cherryl Christensen is the Corporate Medical Director for Procter & Gamble (P&G), a global FMCG company with over $70B in sales, serve over two billion customers and has 19,800 employees worldwide. In 2009, P&G created Vibrant Living to accomplish its vision of having “The Healthiest, Most Engaged People in the World”. Under Dr. Christensen’s leadership, Vibrant Living, started in the U.S. as a branded employee health and wellness program, integrating all existing programs to focus on three areas: creating a Culture of Health, facilitating Health Education and Training as well as promoting Consumer Engaged Health Care.

Vibrant Living Origins

In the U.S., P&G was faced with steadily increasing health care costs per employee approaching US$10,000/year. While the potential savings from a health and wellness program capable of producing positive behavioral changes make a compelling business case, P&G pursued Vibrant Living because it was the right to do by its employees. To create an impactful program, several steps were taken to assess employee needs, effective communication strategies and establish correct benchmarks to measure success. Vibrant Living was launched in the U.S. in 2009 and continues to be deployed globally.

At the start of the program, 300 face-to-face interviews in addition to employee surveys were conducted to establish a consumer segment study of P&G employee health status. Four segments of employees with unique needs were identified: “Healthy and Know It”, “Healthy Without Trying”, “Wanted to be Healthy but Did Not Know How”, “Were Unhealthy but An Obstacle Prevented Them From Change (e.g. single moms who were too busy to focus on improving their health)”. The needs of these segments provided the basis for the activities of the wellness program. Once established, communications strategies using mediums ranging from home-mailings to an Internet portal to consistent messages on internal televisions were used promote Vibrant Living. Finally, benchmarks like health care costs per employee and participation levels in health assessments were created to assess the success of the program.
Activities, Challenges and Successes

P&G’s Vibrant Living Program has a rich portfolio of services and initiatives that include: health assessments, smoking cessation programs, Corporate Athlete programs that focus on improving spiritual/mental/emotional/physical health as well as professionally staffed gyms and health clinics. When asked what the implementation challenges were for P&G, Dr Christensen pointed to creating a culture change, achieving consistent global Vibrant Living branding, and executing an effective communication strategy as the main hurdles. Since its inception, Vibrant Living has 50% health assessment participation in the U.S., 25,000 Corporate Athletes trained corporately and 35 sites deployed as ‘Vibrant Living Health Centers’.

Vibrant Living in Asia

Dr. Chee San Lee offered several insights on the unique health concerns in Asia and how Vibrant Living is tailored to meet the employee needs and tastes in the region. Taking the global framework and conducting consumer segmentation surveys, needs were identified. In Asia, the average P&G employee is younger with challenges related to stress, work life balance, eldercare, parenting and childcare. Unique solutions like a dance studio in Guangzhou, was created to provide a social means for employees to exercise.

Achieving Sustainability

To ensure Vibrant Living is a sustainable program that continues to bring value to P&G, Dr. Christensen talked about the Vibrant Living Site Certification. Requirements of the certification include having a calendar of events with planned activities, providing health services locally and having a champion to drive the initiatives of the program. Continuous effective communication was also mentioned as a key success driver where employees are consistently educated of program offerings and benefits.
Interview Questions for Dr. Cherryl Christensen: P&G’s Vibrant Living Program

P&G Vibrant Living Initiative Synopsis
- Launched in 2009 to bring all P&G health and wellness programs together
- Vision “To become the Healthiest, Most Engaged People in the World”
- Three Focus Areas
  - Culture of Health - nutrition, fitness, access to health information, and an environment that encourages healthy choices and personal management of health risks
  - Health Education and Training e.g. China Wellness and Fitness Idol, Corporate Athlete, Blueprint for Healthy Living in the US programs
  - Consumer Engaged Health Care – how employees can make effective use of health care and control own health choices

Source: P&G 2009 Sustainability Report

Questions:
1) How was Vibrant Living conceived and what were the challenges in implementing the program? What is the benefit of consolidating the health and wellness programs of P&G?
Goal was to become the “healthiest, most engaged people in the world”. Held 300 face-to-face meetings with employees. Assessed health needs of employees by conducting “consumer study”. Segmented employees into 4 categories:
- “Healthy and know it” ~ 20%
- “Healthy without trying (e.g. strong genetics)” ~ 29%
- “Wanted to be healthy but did not know how” ~ 25%
- “Were unhealthy but an obstacle prevented them from change (e.g. single moms who were too busy to focus on improving their health)” ~ 26%
Vibrant Living was prioritized when P&G projected increasing health care costs per employee that needed to be addressed.
Challenges
- Effective communication strategy
- Creating culture change
- Training

2) What has been the return of investment on P&G’s Vibrant Living program?
Background A study of 8,334 employees who participated in Procter & Gamble’s wellness program had significantly lower health care costs (29% lower total and 36% lower lifestyle-related costs) when compared with non-participants in the third year of the wellness program.” Source: http://www.corporate-wellness-companies.com/wellness-program.html
Program is still in implementation stage, measured results unavailable.
Metrics include % participation in health assessments and health care costs per employee.
3) How does HR convince senior management to invest in wellness programs? Do you think it is the employer’s responsibility to ensure employee lifestyles focus on health and wellness?

Vibrant Living is consistent with the P&G values and purpose of “improving and touching” lives of its customers. “It’s the right thing to do”. As a means to curb rising health care costs, it presents a compelling business case for senior leadership. Therefore, alignment with values while increasing profitability is key.

4) What advice would you give for organizations that want to look at revamping their health and wellness programs?

Need to internalize the right data. Need to conduct health assessment of employees. Be persistent. Challenges: managing costs, explaining to employees who are not familiar with health care programs, effective communication programs. Global branding and web portal are effective communication strategies.

5) Would Vibrant Living be effective if financial incentives were not offered?

Background P&G’s Blueprint for Healthy Living Initiative offers “$40 incentive for workers who take an online health risk assessment, $80 for completion of a weight-loss or smoking-cessation program, $160 for completion of a disease management program and 24-hour phone access to a registered nurse and health advocate” Source: Employee Benefit News, “Communications, wellness prove challenging to HR”, Nov 1 2007, Leah Carlson Shepherd Historically (empirically) financial incentives work to promote the right health behavior. Other corporations have had the same success.

6) How do health wellness programs differ in Asia compared to the US/rest of the world?

How do you figure out what factors affect employees in Asia (top down design or localized)? Health/wellness profiles are different. There are country specific health services with services tailored to country’s needs. 25 facilities have health services on site. Challenge was to consistently rebrand all the wellness programs under “Vibrant Living” brand. Took global framework branding and made it relevant to Asia. Specific to Asia – younger population (demographics) affected by stress, providing elder care, parenting/childcare issues, work life balance. Did consumer segmentation study/survey. Solutions are unique, e.g. dancing studio in Guangzhou.

Miscellaneous Notes:

- 2/3 costs in U.S. are dependent costs (family plays important role in influencing health choices of employees). P&G does home mailings to communicate to families.
- Sustainability (how P&G ensures longevity of program)
  - Vibrant Living Certification Requirements
    - Calendar of Events – planned activities like “Breast Cancer Awareness”
    - Have health services locally available to employees
    - Need a champion for Vibrant Living