

MESSAGE IS IN BUSINESS {Reduces Health Costs, Reduces Stress & Improves Productivity}

By Jean Ives

More and more employees are lying down on the job – and this makes their employers happy. Workplace massage, both table and chair, is a growing trend at some of the most highly regarded companies.

In 2003, [Massage Therapy Journal](#) (mtj) conducted its own informal, yet extensive, survey to find out more about companies that offer workplace massage. In consultation with Marilyn Kier, who operates a successful workplace massage firm for corporate customers, an eight-item survey questionnaire was developed. The survey was mailed to 500 large companies, including those selected by Fortune magazine as the “100 Best Companies to Work For.”

Because of the small sample, the results of the mtj survey are not able to statistically represent the population of all businesses. But, when taking the responses from the mtj survey and comparing them to other surveys on the topic of massage in business, there are vast overlaps in results. Based on this, it is clear that massage is in “business.”

When *mtj* compared the responses from Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” with other companies’ responses, it found that massage is an employee benefit at 90 percent of the “best” companies, versus 66 percent of those not on the “best” list. *Working Mother* magazine, in its 18th annual survey of the “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers,” reported that 77 percent of the “best” companies offer therapeutic massages, versus 11 percent nationwide. The 11 percent figure is based on a 2003 benefits survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management Foundation. Among the many motivations behind these programs is the belief that complementary and alternative (CAM) therapies, such as massage, might help reduce health costs.

MESSAGE MIGHT REDUCE HEALTH COSTS

Kathryn Bishopric is manager of counseling services at Baptist Health, ranked 18th in Fortune’s 2005 “100 Best” companies. Bishopric, who directs the behavioral and collaborative medicine program under which workplace massage resides, firmly believes that massage therapy can be expected to lower employers’ health-care costs. “Baptist Health is self-insured, so we have a really strong interest in wellness,” Bishopric says. “We promote anything that helps employees take care of themselves. Studies clearly show that if employees are healthy, they’ll use less in health insurance benefits and be more productive.”

Another company that echoes the belief that workplace massage is an important part of its overall health and fitness program is S.C. Johnson, of Racine, Wisconsin, who moved to seventh-place rank in Fortune’s “100 Best” in 2005. This company’s workplace massage program is more than 10 years old, and is extended to retirees and to employees’ families as well. Spokesperson Therese Van Ryne says, “We are seeing more and more managers who recognize the benefits of offering massage to employees and thus are picking up half the cost. This seems to work especially well in departments such as customer service, where the employees deal with a lot of stress.”



Massage at the workplace is helping employees manage and overcome stress. When *mtj* compared the responses from Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” with other companies’ responses, it found that massage is an employee benefit at 90 percent of the “best” companies.

OUTSOURCED MESSAGE

Many large corporations have a commitment to employee wellness but choose to collaborate with fitness centers and wellness firms rather than develop and staff their own programs. TimeOut Services, based in San Jose, California, serves high-tech companies such as Cisco Systems, Yahoo! and KLA-Tencor, and Health Fitness Corp. counts among its clients such recognizable corporate names as Federal Express, Best Buy, General Electric, Allstate, Hewlett-Packard, Underwriters Laboratories, Texas Instruments and Verizon.

“As companies continue the trend of asking employees to do more with less, we see a parallel trend in the demand for massage therapy rising,” says Sarah Nichols, national director of program development for Health Fitness Corp. “Companies that never offered massage in the past are asking for it, and companies that already offer it are expanding it.”

ALREADY PART OF STAFF

Many hospitals, which already have massage therapists on staff, include massage therapy as a benefit to its employees. Josie Houtenbrink, a licensed massage therapist at Baptist Health’s South Miami Hospital, likes the fact that working in a hospital setting usually means giving massages to nursing staff, physical therapists and physicians. About 50 percent of her clientele are employees. “One benefit I get is the satisfaction of giving massages to people whose stressful and strenuous jobs really make them appreciate massage,” Houtenbrink says. “The other is that they go back to their jobs as proponents that their patients should all get massages.”

INDIVIDUAL CONTRACTORS

But not every company that offers workplace massage has a ready-made staff or can hire a specialty firm to handle its program. Many contract directly with individual massage therapists, such as at JCPenney. Lisa Horn, fitness center manager in the medical unit of JCPenney’s Human Resources Division, stresses that it is the employee—not the company—who pays the full fee for his or her massage, but the company makes it available and promotes it by providing a massage room, advertising it in company communications and scheduling appointments through the fitness center.

Massage therapist Laura McManis-Hockenbury, who works at the JCPenney Fitness Center two days a week, says, “Most employees come during their lunch break and have the option of staying fully clothed or being professionally draped....It makes me feel good to know I’m sending them back to work in better shape and with information on managing their stress. It allows them to focus on their job, not on their various aches.”

If massage allows employees to focus on their jobs, it seems only natural that employers should focus on massage.

Summary of mtj Workplace Study

<p>Does your company offer massage therapy as a benefit to its employees? Yes: 37 (76%) No: 12 (24%)</p> <p>If yes: How frequently is massage available to employees? Daily: 10% Twice a week: 10% Weekly: 24% Twice a month: 24% Monthly: 14% Annually: 4% Not regularly scheduled: 14%</p> <p>Who pays for the massage? Employee pays discounted rate negotiated by company: 69% Company pays total: 13% (often for employee special recognition) Company and employees share 50-50: 9% Employee pays entire cost: 9%</p>	<p>What has been the participation rate from employees for massage benefits? Less than 30%: 60% About 30%: 15% More than 30%: 5% More than 70%: 5% Don't know: 15%</p> <p>How long has your program been in effect? Less than one year: 18% More than one year, less than five years: 56% More than five years: 26%</p> <p>What prompted the company’s decision to provide massage as an employee benefit? Employees requested it: 30% A massage therapist contacted the company and proposed it: 18% The company initiated the benefit without external influences: 39% Don't know: 13%</p>
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This article is adapted and updated from “Massage Is in Business,” by Jean Ives, which originally appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of mtj.

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