

Health Promotion Practitioner

Practical solutions for health enhancement programming

How to Motivate Participants in Their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s

You have an advantage when inspiring people of your own generation to improve health habits: you know what your peers like. For other age groups it's a bit more difficult, but still achievable with an advisory board or committee that reflects the diversity in your organization. If you don't have one, start working on it this week.

In the meantime, here are our recommendations for age-based programs and promotions.

20s

These are the up and comers. They like challenge and opportunity; they're attracted by the latest and greatest. Some ideas:

- Be on the cutting edge for fitness classes; use young, well trained instructors
- Host outdoor adventure excursions like white water rafting and rock climbing; promote with training classes leading up to the event
- Make programming available online — not flat brochure-type information, but interactive logs, chats, incentive programs, etc.
- Offer incentive awards such as electronics, travel, golf gear, and travel bags.

30s

The change in tastes, interests, and lifestyles from early to late 30s is significant; be sure to take that into consideration. But in general, the Gen X group leans toward a sense of family or community. They've been

through the heady '90s and are less excitable, a bit more grounded than their 20-something colleagues. Some suggestions:

- Package services so they can be done at any time and at different levels — flexibility is a key feature
- Recognize that learning is important to 30-somethings, so expert instruction on nutrition, stress management, exercise will get their interest (credentialed guest instructors will have more draw than the fitness specialist talking about walking campaigns)
- Offer items to use around the kitchen or tools as incentives.

40s

40-somethings are entering their peak earning years and are considering the prospects of sending kids off to college and dealing with aging parents. They're often very involved in school and community, with little time for personal health improvement. Consider these approaches:

- Try simple, short, little-time-required interventions instead of 8-week programs
- Use flexible scheduling as well as "house calls," where you go to their office to review HRA results or do nutrition counseling
- Offer gift cards as incentives as well as spa treatments and high-end leather goods.


Continued

50s

This group is typically the most settled in their career and themselves. They feel comfortable with who they are but are beginning to think about retirement as well as their own mortality. More than anything they want time spent to have meaning and purpose. Some tips:

- Take advantage of what they've learned about life, using their experience to help you expand your program and your influence
- Create a health mentoring program where 50-somethings are trained to support the behavior change efforts of others in your organization

- Make one-to-one counseling available — they want to do what they can to live a vital, long life, but don't necessarily want others to know they're thinking about it
- Offer incentives such as tickets to local cultural events, rounds of golf, a chance for soft adventures like cruises, and a pat on the back for contributing.

More important than knowing what each group wants is being open to the fact you won't know unless you do a little homework. Rather than guess, ask. Health interest and readiness surveys are an easy way to segment your population by age group and look for ways to serve all of them better. 



Dean Witherspoon is President of Health Enhancement Systems, a leader in behavior change innovation serving organizations in North America and throughout the world. With 20+ years experience, Dean has served on the Board of the Association for Worksite Health Promotion, spoken at more than 70 conferences, and published hundreds of articles. Before founding Health Enhancement Systems he held health promotion management positions with Kimberly-Clark Corporation, Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas, and The Dow Chemical Company. You can reach Dean at deanw@hesonline.com.