



Physical and mental well-being are the hallmark of happy and motivated staff. Some new takes on the incentive programmes that incorporate both mind and body.

HIGHER FASTER STRONGER

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Corporate clients and their participants are taking a step away from tired and traditional-themed events and incentive programmes, opting instead for custom events designed strategically to give their attendees tools they can use every day in their personal and professional lives.

The Corporate Wellness (uscorporatewellness.com) programme provides each employee with a personal wellness coach. It doesn't matter what an employee's current fitness level is, as the coach works hand-in-hand with each individual to formulate and deliver a tailored fitness programme and a regime to achieve them. The company benefits are improved employee wellness, lower turnover, fewer sick days and, ultimately, lower health costs.

Another twist on the sporting theme is CEO Challenges (ceochallenges.com), a leader in sport competitions for chief executive officers.

In 2001, the first CEO Ironman Challenge was held in Lake Placid, N.Y., and the company now offers CEO Ironman Challenge programmes in seven locations around the world. They have since expanded the programme to include CEO Challenge events in cycling, triathlon, sailing, golf, skiing and tennis, with other sports to follow.

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CEO Challenges owner and president Ted Kennedy says, "CEO Challenge events are open to CEOs, owners and presidents of companies with at least \$2.5-million in annual gross revenue. CEOs who qualify at one of our events will be invited to compete at the CEO Challenge World Championship, and in the case of Ironman, for the title of world's fittest CEO. Assuming the CEOs keep in reasonable shape all year long, they should allow four to six months to get ready for an Ironman event." Five-time triathlon world champion Simon Lessing provides each CEO with a four-week starter training programme, and CEOs have the option to upgrade to one-on-one coaching with Lessing, allowing for changes due to travel, work or family commitments. Lessing is also available – for an extra cost – to do a speaking engagement at the CEO's company, to kick off a corporate-wellness programme.

IN-HOUSE FITNESS

The installation of an in-house fitness centre is something more corporations are investing in and would be the perfect add-on to a company's well-being programme. Bolton, Ont.-based Personal Best is available to work with event planners and their clients to design a custom workout facility.

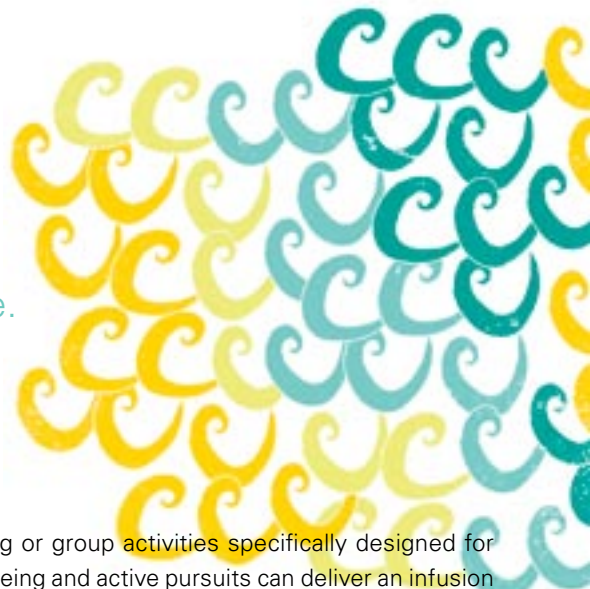
Barrie Shepley, president of Personal Best Health & Performance and Olympic coach (gold-winning Canadian triathlon coach at the Sydney Olympic Games; personalbest.ca), explains some of the advantages of having an in-house fitness centre. "There have been a number of studies showing a two to five times return-on-investment for companies that develop a wellness programme. One of the key returns of a wellness programme is a positive and motivated company culture. Another benefit is the use of the wellness centre as a recruitment tool. Younger employees are looking to see if a company is committed to their health and vitality. As a former Olympic coach and CBC analyst, I am very aware that organizations and individuals have a tremendous amount of untapped capacity and a well-designed programme can help them achieve their optimal performance. While our gold-standard programme includes a physical building with staffing, we are able to create different wellness services for smaller organizations or virtual-reality programmes over the Internet, for groups that are travelling around the country and are rarely ever in the same building."

Team-building or group activities specifically designed for personal well-being and active pursuits can deliver an infusion of new energy. During the summer, a day of mountain biking, hiking or golf can be followed by a first-rate "après" relaxation experience in the heart of nature at a facility such as Le Scandinave Spa Blue Mountain (ScandinaveBlue.com), located within minutes of Collingwood and Blue Mountain Resort, in Central Ontario. The venue offers guests a unique spa experience in a tranquil forest setting. Participants can relax for the day or just a few hours. The Scandinavian Baths are renowned for their ability to cleanse the skin and provide a sense of well-being. At the spa, guests can enjoy a Finnish sauna, Norwegian steambath, thermal and Nordic waterfalls as well as hot baths and cold plunges. Guests complete their experience by enjoying the serenity of the spa solariums, relaxation areas and outdoor fireplaces. Massage treatments can be arranged for the group and can include Swedish massages, hot stone therapy and Thai-Yoga.

GROUP PACKAGES

"We offer a variety of group packages – from experiencing the Scandinavian Baths to offering a meeting room/function room with catering option (breakfast, lunch or à la carte offerings) and/or massage treatments," says Mylisa Henderson, co-owner – director of marketing and sales, at Le Scandinave. "Depending on the size of the group, we can offer 30- to 60-minute massage treatments. We order catering specifically for groups. If using the meeting/function room, our capacity is 35 people maximum. Our capacity for the Scandinavian Baths is 140 people. Our capacity for massage is 12 treatments at one time – daily capacity varies depending on the day of the week and the length of treatment."

The Collingwood area offers a wealth of physical activities. "We have great watersports – kayaking, dragon boating, hiking, ropes courses, mountain-biking, windsurfing, swimming, beach volleyball and a scenic cave adventure area. There is a huge arsenal of options, which accommodates all levels of fitness," says Sarah Applegarth, strength and conditioning coach, with Active Life Conditioning Inc. (activelifeconditioning.com). Applegarth, a master trainer whose company focuses on health and wellness, injury prevention, team-building and training,





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works with planners to create team-building fitness activities year-round. "In winter, there are great downhill and cross-country ski trails (Scenic Caves has a great corporate programme) and snowshoeing trips out of Intrawest Village. To tie in with the fitness theme, Café Chartreuse caters events using all local and organic foods."

In winter, skiing and snowboarding team-building events can be held at Craigleith Ski Club (craigleith.com), a private club located in Collingwood. Dave Campbell, head coach at the club, says companies can participate in fun racecourses that the club will provide. Craigleith's facilities can accommodate groups from 20 to 400. Meals can be catered and served in the Base Lodge, with its soaring cathedral ceilings and majestic stone fireplace set against the backdrop of beautiful Georgian Bay, or the smaller, more intimate South or North Lodge.

CELEBRITY SIZZLE

Providing memorable experiences with private performances has always been popular with corporate marketing and sales events. Corporations are now taking it a step farther and creating celebrity incentive travel.

Flavia St.Clair, owner of Burlington, Ont.-based Exclusive Travels International, designs luxury group travel experiences for incentive-travel programmes, corporate retreats and private groups. "To date, we have offered programmes that include three different celebrities: nutritionist, cookbook author and TV celebrity Rose Reisman; Canada's top-rated TV chef, Michael Smith; and bon vivant and TV celebrity Kevin Brauch. Each of these celebrities brings a different type of experience to the group-travel programme. So it is vital that we learn as much about the travel participants in order to suggest the best fit for a programme. Reisman shares her knowledge about healthy lifestyle, which includes everything from making healthy food choices to the power of exercise to the benefits of moderation in daily living. So trips with Reisman would include activities such as walking and hiking and informal talks about healthy choices. Smith is an accomplished chef, who is warm and down-to-earth and loves to share his knowledge and experience of easy, healthy meals that make cooking a pleasure. Trips with Smith would include a visit to a local market, to learn how to select the best ingredients,

followed by a hands-on cooking class. Brauch, star of the Thirsty Traveler, Mega World and Iron Chef America [TV programmes], is a lively and informative celebrity host. He loves to share stories about his travels and is very spontaneous with the group. Activities with Brauch include everything from lessons on whiskey tasting to beer appreciation, accompanied by great travel stories that illustrate how people all over the world have so much in common."

MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

With regards to group size, St. Clair says, "there really is no maximum or minimum numbers for a group. For fewer than 20 people, they would be with the celebrity host most of the time. For groups of more than 20 people, we would have them together for some of the events and then divide the whole group into smaller groups, in order to have more intimate experiences with the host."

St. Clair relates the success of a recent celebrity event. "We had a group of 20 people, for whom we rented a medieval villa in exclusivity in Tuscany, [Italy]. We had a celebrity chef with the group for the entire week. Each morning at breakfast, the chef would ask for volunteers to assist with the preparation of the evening meal. The chef and his happy volunteers (usually two to four people) would be driven to the nearby town to search out the best ingredients and plan the evening feast. In addition, they would visit some of the local wineries to taste and find suitable wines to be served with each course of the dinner. It was a very hands-on group, so they were thrilled to be working side-by-side with an esteemed chef, who was making the whole experience fun and informative. While the group was shopping for ingredients and wines with the chef, the rest of the group were off sightseeing, wine tasting or shopping. The chef prepared the evening meal every night (except for one night, when everyone, including the celebrity chef, had a fabulous private dinner at a wine estate), with the assistance of that day's team. The long dinner table was beautifully set with fine linens, porcelain china and antique stemware. There was much congratulatory toasting and every evening was indeed a celebration of the day's accomplishments." ■

— Judy Allen is the author of the best-selling Event Planning series of books.