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Toyal America, Inc.: "Changes That Last a Lifetime®"

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Recently, one of our members, Toyal America, Inc. in Lockport, Illinois, was recognized for its implementation of a company-wide wellness initiative by the Institute for Health and Productivity Management. As a winner of one of the IHPM'S "Value-based" Corporate Health & Productivity Management Awards in April 2011, they were cited for reversing a multi-year trend of health insurance premium increases and encouraging their employees and spouses to adopt a wellness program named "Changes That Last a Lifetime®" by Abbott. Most significantly, the company underwent perhaps the most substantive cultural shift in its long history – all during the trough of the worldwide economic recession. I met with Toyal America's President and CEO, Bud Loprest, and their HR Manager, Mary Orga, to discuss their company and the shift to wellness they undertook.

In reflecting on Toyal America's journey thru the economic collapse, Loprest explained, "We assessed all options and came to the conclusion that everything was on the table and that something had to fundamentally change. We had done everything in the business world that you're supposed to do when the orders dry up. We looked at our financials, crunched the numbers, eliminated as much duplication in our systems as possible, but it just wasn't enough. We were financially healthy and our product line was robust, but our people weren't healthy and we needed to get them healthy in order to get healthy as a company, and you know what, our people got that in a big way." Changing the mindset and modifying behavior are no easy tasks for a company, and not a light burden on a workforce already having to do more with less either. "We basically didn't have any choice anymore," said Mr. Loprest, "we had been hammered like other companies in healthcare costs and recognized, as did our employees, that something had to change." The wellness plan they adopted approached the challenge in a holistic and comprehensive manner. The company set guidelines and then elicited employee support. "We gave everyone a choice prior to implementation, to be in or out," said Mary, "and we honestly were unprepared for how wholeheartedly our staff took to the program."

The program that took shape, as a behavior modification plan, was introduced in partnership with a global health care company, Abbott, headquartered in Abbott Park, Illinois through their "Changes That Last a Lifetime®" wellness program. The program begins with a 12 week "Challenge" to get healthier, biometric screening including blood pressure, height, weight, total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose. There is an initial focus on assessing actual and potential disease risk based on a number of factors, but also a post program screening to follow up and evaluate progress. The program stresses that it is not about weight loss, but rather about adopting a healthier lifestyle. Participants were given access to online health guides and an online fitness journal including a way to monitor their diet and exercise regimens, as well as daily reminders and facts emailed to them to keep them on track. There was even access to a personal trainer, nutritionists and motivational speakers for encouragement and to answer questions. Finally a 'celebration' event was held where the individual and family winners were awarded cash prizes for their overall achievements.

Clearly, what made the program a success was the support of Toyal America's

leadership. "We all got involved and pushed each other to stick with it," elaborated Mary, "it wasn't only a lead by example effort; we had fresh fruit delivered weekly, company-wide, to give people a healthy choice for a snack." Many of the plan participants were family and spouses of the employees, who accessed the healthy grocery shopping plans online, set up exercise plans at home and even changed their cooking habits or reduced meals out on a weekly basis in support.

After the first year of implementation, even the holdouts among the staff were clamoring to be a part of it for the next year. "We had phone calls from spouses and an increased demand from our employees to 'do it again'" said Mary, "and this time, when our health care spending started going in the opposite direction, we knew we were on to something." Loprest mentioned that in two years their health care spending has dropped over 25% since the "Challenge" was introduced and their return on invested dollars across all their wellness initiatives was recouped in less than 4 months. While no one knows what the future holds for any business, the gamble to implement such an intense, collective endeavor in wellness has definitely paid off for Toyal America, Inc. As Mr. Loprest put it so eloquently, "We've come out the other side of this recession healthier as a company and much healthier as people."

Toyal America, Inc. can trace its ancestry to the original patent holder for aluminum powder and paste production. Now, a wholly owned subsidiary of Osaka, Japan-based Toyo Aluminum KK, Toyal America's history draws heavily on its ingenuity and business acumen. Their proprietary process of aluminum powder production, later recognized as the "Hall Process" was pioneered during the First World War when a new technology was required to produce large quantities of aluminum powder for military explosives. From that basic technology a niche industry developed that has pushed forward and now serves as the basic foundation for special effect metallic aluminum pigments found in most automotive topcoats; as well as applications across a broad range of industrial and chemical applications. Some of these applications go unseen, while some are a bit more obvious, like on the solid rocket motors that propel the Space Shuttle into orbit. True to its historical roots, Toyal America, Inc. still maintains a leadership position in the aluminum pigment market as well as the defense and aerospace market where its products play a crucial role.

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