

Bicycling to Work at Quality Bicycle Products A Case Example for Active Transportation in the Business and Industry Sector

Physical activity is slowly but surely being engineered out of the work day. During the past five to six decades, occupation-related energy expenditure has decreased by more than 100 kcal per day for workers across the United States (1). In the early 1960s, roughly half of all jobs in the United States required moderate-intensity physical activity levels. Today, less than 20% of all jobs require that level of activity. Among other reasons, the introduction of technologies and work tasks that require computer use also has brought about work situations where employees sit for long durations. Indeed, prolonged sitting time has become a recognized workplace hazard (6), and it is recognized that prolonged sitting time primarily comes from three sources: television viewing, sitting at work, and time spent commuting to work. Whereas workplace wellness programs traditionally have focused on physical activity promotion during the workday, commuting to work represents another important opportunity to significantly impact the health and well-being of employees. More specifically, bicycling to work is recognized increasingly as an effective strategy to improve health, well-being, and the company's bottom line.

BICYCLING BENEFITS

Bicycling is a healthy mode of transportation and can confer substantial health and economic benefits to individuals and employers. Its benefits include an overall increase in physical activity and a positive impact on obesity rates and chronic diseases (9). From a safety perspective, the more people use bicycling as their mode of transport, the lower

the injury rates and the safer bicycling becomes (2). Unfortunately, weighing in at 1% of all trips, bicycling also is the least used mode of transportation in the United States (8), although that may be changing. Employers are interested in promoting physical activity among their employees as a means to improve health and manage costs, both direct medical care expenditures as well as those related to productivity losses (5), but also are connecting the environmental benefits of bicycling to their efforts to promote such behavior among their employees. For example, Entergy Corporation partnered with the City of New Orleans to extend the city's bicycle path network, thus making it a more bicycle-friendly community (12). Connecting employee health and well-being goals to the corporate social responsibility agenda, a greener community, and energy conservation is a powerful means to stimulate active commuting to work. As a result, anecdotal evidence suggests that bicycling to work is supported increasingly by employer groups and the number

of Americans who ride to work may be increasing (13).

BECOMING A BICYCLE-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

Any company has the potential to become a bicycle-friendly organization. To do so, creativity to align supportive action with the culture of the organization is important, but several factors have been identified that provide sound ideas to get started. Such important factors in stimulating the adoption of bicycling behavior include improving safety from cars and traffic (10,14), financial incentives for cycling to work (7,14), supportive trip-end facilities (4,14), and cultural supports in the workplace (4). These factors may show up in the workplace setting as various behaviors, policies, and cultural supports. Examples are outlined in the Table.

QUALITY BICYCLE PRODUCTS: A CASE STUDY FOR BICYCLING TO WORK

Relatively few case examples are available that describe employers' efforts to



TABLE: Selected Examples Employers May Deploy to Actively Promote Bicycling to Work

Factors	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving safety from cars and traffic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company advocates for community-based and federal policies that address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated bicycle lanes Complete streets Legal protections for bicyclists Corridors and connections among and between community bicycle path networks that allow for commuting to work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial incentives: bicycle commuting reimbursement is part of the qualified transportation fringe benefits covered in section 132 (f) of the Internal Revenue Service code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking cash-out: Federal tax law allows employers to pay employees the cost of having a parking space they do not use and avoid paying a tax on this benefit Employer offers financial support to employees toward the purchase of a bicycle or bicycle accessories Employers may provide reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred by employees related to their commuting to work (reimbursement of up to \$20/month) Financial incentive provided for every day the employee commutes to work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive trip-end facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor bicycle parking Showers and locker rooms Free use of bike repair shop on the company premises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coworkers who actively commute to work Company bicycle club Free emergency rides home Access to a company-owned pool of bicycles to be used for short trips, errands, or recreation (e.g., activity break)

stimulate bicycling to work as part of their overall workplace safety, health, and well-being program. Quality Bicycle Products (QBP) is a medium-sized manufacturer and major distributor of bicycles and bicycle parts located in Minneapolis, MN. Founded in 1981, QBP has built a strong bicycle-friendly workplace culture and has closely aligned both its corporate health and well-being program and its corporate social responsibility efforts to its business goals and objectives (11). As a result, QBP has emphasized bicycling to work as a specific strategy to optimize worker health and well-being. QBP has done so using a variety of initiatives.

Financial Incentives

To stimulate bicycling to work, QBP implemented a financial reward for every

day an employee did so. For each day an employee bicycles to work, \$3.00 is credited into a QBP commuter credit account that may be used to purchase QBP products for personal use (internal QBP product discounts). Employees enrolled in the medical plan who complete a health risk appraisal receive lower deductibles/co-pays the following year compared with those who do not (\$250 increase for employee-only coverage and \$500 for family coverage). This benefit is administered by the health plan and provides good insight for the company at a population level to identify areas in which employees are interested in making changes to their current lifestyles. To complement the high deductible health plan that more than 90% of employees are enrolled in, QBP

rolled out a new commuter incentive on January 2014 that deposits \$10 (6 to 11 round trips) or \$15 (12+ round trips) monthly into employee health savings accounts. This new benefit was implemented with the main target of engaging employees who are not commuting often — or at all — and stimulating a lifestyle change. It also has incited employees who have not yet opened a health savings account to do so. Having a financial base to cover health care expenses when they occur leads employees toward feeling better about the medical benefits provided to them. In addition, a bicycle gear purchase benefit was introduced, providing \$150 every 3 years toward the purchase of new in-house products or refurbished/recycled bicycles from local bike shops (benefiting employee health and well-being, environmental initiatives, and supporting QBP's customers).

Trip-End Facilities

QBP has built a large indoor bicycle storage facility to support the program (Figure 1). Male and female locker rooms and shower facilities, including towel service, are available for those who want to store clothes and freshen up after the commute. An on-site bicycle repair shop, well stocked with repair tools, is available for employee use. In addition, QBP promotes and celebrates monthly bike-to-work days, social bike rides, paid bike leave, pro deals, demo bike fleet checkout, bike repair classes, cycle-cross training and on-site dirt tracks, cycle-cross, and snow courses.

Cultural Supports

QBP has a focus on supporting environmentally sound initiatives including building architecture being LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, outdoor community space, and a paid community volunteer time and volunteer match program. The presence of the trip-end facilities, the financial incentives, the overall employee health and well-being program, and the leadership displayed by both employees and executives to stimulate local and national growth in bicycling across school-aged



Figure 1. QBP's indoor storage facility to support employee bicycling to work.

and adult populations create a strong culture of health in the company.

Improving Safety From Cars and Traffic

Many QBP executives are engaged in local and national advocacy efforts to support infrastructure changes that support safe bicycling. Some of these efforts relate to issues that fall under transportation policy and recreational resources, whereas others relate to leading nonprofit coalitions to increase bicycle use by school-aged children through road racing programs, among others.

Becoming an Employer of Choice

All of the bicycling-focused supports are couched within a larger strategy of safety, health, and well-being for employees. The overall workplace health program includes such traditional resources as medical and dental benefits, access to 401(k) savings programs, college savings accounts, employee assistance programs, referral bonus, profit-sharing bonus, mentorship program, and tuition reimbursement. In addition, novel workplace benefits are offered such as balance balls, massage service, yoga, and snow shoeing events, among others. With specific reference to

integrated worker health and safety, the company has partnered with its health plan (HealthPartners), the HealthPartners Institute for Education and Research, and the Harvard School of Public Health to investigate the feasibility of an integrated worker health protection and promotion approach patterned after the Total Worker Health™ program introduced by the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety.

RESULTS

Company records were reviewed to identify the number of employees who bicycled to work and the overall amounts of incentive paid out during the past 5 years. Figure 2 presents the absolute increase in the number of employees bicycling to work

between 2009 and 2013. The relative participation increased less because of the total number of employees increasing from 425 to 623 during those same years. The average annual percentage of commuters during these 5 years was 57.6%. Employees received a financial payment for the days they commuted by bicycle, which meant that QBP paid a total sum to bicycle commuters that ranged from almost \$37,000 in 2009 to as high as \$51,000 in 2012. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that the program was successful from the beginning and continued to grow within the context of the overall workplace health program.

In addition, based on a review of QBP's Human Resources Department records, the company reported an overall reduction of health care premiums of 4.4% between 2007 and 2011. This is in stark contrast to the average increase of 24.6% in per member per month costs for companies across the country during this same period. It seems that this program focused on bicycling to work, within a company that builds bicycles and bicycle parts, has been able to leverage intrinsic motivations and interests of its employees. The program is designed to fit within the existing culture of the company; aligns closely with its mission, products, and services; and enjoys leadership support and visibility.

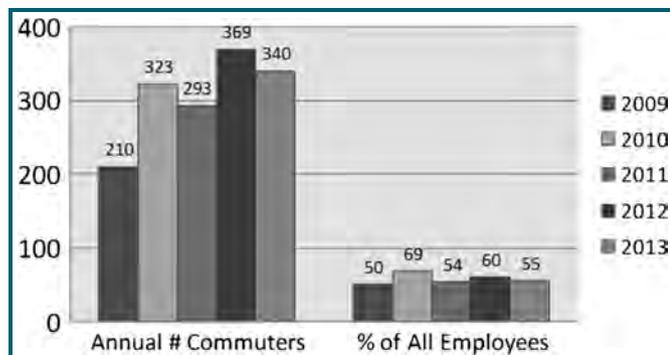


Figure 2. Absolute and relative number of commuters by year.

INTERPRETATION

This case study shows that QBP has adopted some of the most important predictive factors related to successfully increasing the adoption of bicycling to work as identified through research (4,7,10,14). These factors included improving safety from cars and traffic (10,14), financial incentives for cycling to work (7,14), supportive trip-end facilities (4,14), cultural supports in the workplace (4), and connecting workplace health programs to the company's business goals and objectives. As a result, more than half of the employee population is engaged actively in the commuting to work program, and this result was sustained during the course of 5 years. Ongoing evaluation and continued focus on how to improve provide a means for sustainability and growth of the program.

The QBP bicycling to work program also represents a case example that may serve other companies in enhancing physical activity among their employees. Recently, the National Physical Activity Plan published case studies across eight different sectors to support this national effort (3). This QBP case study would fit the "business and industry" as well as the "transportation" sectors in terms of their expressed strategies and tactics to reach the National Physical Activity Plan goals.

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Jason Gaikowski, B.A., serves as Quality Bicycle Products' chief marketing officer and director of brand design. Jason believes that simple motivations hold the key to enriching the human experience while unlocking exceptional business, social, and environmental value. After a dozen years of leading digital strategy, brand science, and innovation with Young & Rubicam Group, he currently is focused on leveraging the capacity of design and intelligent infrastructure policy to address important national population health issues including physical activity and transportation.