

San Antonio Business Journal - March 8, 2010
</sanantonio/stories/2010/03/08/smallb1.html>



Friday, March 5, 2010

Prevention best Rx for company's growth

San Antonio Business Journal - by [Mike W. Thomas](#)

The nationwide focus on health care costs has proven especially beneficial for the team behind FIT for WORK, a San Antonio-based occupational health consulting firm.

Tom Tobin and Keith Adamson, who launched FIT for WORK about 10 years ago, have seen their business grow by tenfold in recent years as more companies seek ways to reduce health care expenses. FIT for Work has built a loyal client base over the years helping companies save money by reducing their workers' compensation costs, reducing the number of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recordable injuries, and by increasing worker productivity.

They do this with a portfolio of early intervention, onsite evaluation and testing programs and a focus on education.

Some of their clients include **Frito Lay**, **Republic National Distributing Co.**, KCI, Checks in the Mail, and **H.E. Butt Grocery Co.**

"This has been one of the best programs I have ever put in place," says Joe Kutach, site safety specialist at Frito Lay Manufacturing in San Antonio. "I call it Preparing Now for the Future, because if you do the right things now you will have a better future."

Kutach says it is not just the money that the program saves that makes it valuable. It is the ability to keep quality, experienced workers at their jobs longer.

"I don't have to spend time recruiting new employees when we can keep our experienced people around longer," he says. "When they don't have to go to the doctor and when they don't have to take off time from work it not only saves us money, it makes everyone more productive."

Humble beginnings

Frito Lay was one of FIT for WORK's first clients when they launched the company more than a dozen years ago. At the time, Adamson and Tobin were both working in the physical therapy industry in outpatient rehab facilities. After crossing paths several times, they decided to team up and launch their own business. It was slow going for the first year. "We could have dug ditches for more money than (we made in) the first year," Adamson recalls.

But the duo pressed on, encouraged by the fact that their work was helping others.

The partners used their specialized knowledge of ergonomics to effectively set up shop in their new clients' workplaces, aiming to provide therapeutic relief for workers, in some cases, even before symptoms started.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes, and that has proven true for FIT for WORK as they have applied their prevention techniques in the workplace. Tobin compares it to an athletic trainer working with a star pitcher.

"You don't wait for the pitcher to blow his shoulder out before you address the problem," Tobin says. "We look for the root cause of the problem at the first sign of trouble and try to prevent it from becoming a more serious problem."

Statewide expansion

Kutach says the biggest difference between FIT for WORK and other occupational health consultants is that they don't just treat the ailment when a worker complains of an injury, they seek out the source of the problem to keep it from happening again.

The Frito Lay plant in San Antonio produces more than 77 million pounds of salty snacks a year — 16,000 pounds an hour — and to keep up with that level of production it is important to keep their best workers happy and healthy.

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FIT for WORK has expanded statewide as their clients have expanded. They now have employees based in Dallas, Houston and San Marcos in addition to 18 employees in San Antonio. The company had revenues in excess of \$2 million in 2009.

Kevin Holguin, corporate safety manager for H.E. Butt Grocery Co., says FIT for WORK has become an integral part of their company.

"Our facility leaders look to them for support and advice and it has become an accepted part of our business," he says.

Holguin says they began using the firm to provide in-house physical therapy, but it soon grew into the proactive program that they now rely on today.

Tobin says they don't advise their clients to do anything that they don't do themselves. That is why they provide 100 percent of their employees health care benefits. "We would look pretty hypocritical if we were out there telling our clients how important it is to take care of their employees if we weren't taking care of our own," he says.

Tobin notes that FIT for WORK is paid on an hourly basis for its consulting work and is in no way incentivized by treating people who get sick or injured.

"We are not goal-driven to keep clinics full of injured workers," he says. "We see that as a failure of our efforts to prevent it."

Tobin says more than half the company's growth over the years has come from the internal growth that comes with the expansion of their original client base. The fact that their clients have stuck with them for so long and continue to see value in their work is the best testament they can get that they are doing a good job, he says.

"They have seen what we do as a best practice and they are expanding it outward," he says.

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