

Delivering Productivity:

Unique partnership helps design customized program to re-imagine the workplace



CASE STUDY

SCHWAN FOOD COMPANY

The employing subsidiaries of The Schwan Food Company¹ recognized years ago that their employees needed help remedying common work conditions that led to missing time at work. Through partnering with The Standard and its Workplace Possibilities program, Schwan subsidiaries² have made great strides in helping employees utilize services available to keep them at work, or help them once they've returned from a disability leave. In the process, the Company has saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in disability claims and saved time by not having to recruit and train new employees.

“The consultants have made a significant impact on establishing a successful Workplace Possibilities program. We look forward to expanding the program and continuing to deliver positive results.”

A large reason for the program's success is the partnership between the team of Workplace Possibilities consultants and the Company's Benefits Team that works day in and day out with the Company's many plants, distribution centers, offices and HR staff around the country. They work together to design a customized program that ensures employees get the care necessary to be productive at work in general, as well as when coming back from leave.

“Our Workplace Possibilities consultants believe there's no such thing as a cookie-cutter approach when it comes to improving productivity,” said Norma Streich, benefits manager for the Company. “Our program is catered specifically to our Company and developed as situations arise. We're all members of the same team, making it a true partnership.”

Improving Productivity

For most people, the Schwan's Home Service, Inc., truck is a recognizable staple on America's roadways and in our neighborhoods' driveways. But behind every Inca Gold[®] truck are the people who manufacture the food products, distribute the products to the depots and load the trucks full of food. So, it's no surprise that once in a while a hard-working employee will experience aches and pains that may put them at risk of having to claim some type of disability.

For instance, the Company recently became aware of a group of people with a common blood disease in one of the Company's food-manufacturing plants. Because their job required them to stand a significant part of their shift, they were at risk for several complications, from loss of balance to ulcerous sores on their feet. Some employees described the resulting pain as “...hundreds of bee stings.” Upon learning of this, the Company's team of Workplace Possibilities consultants looked for options to assist the employees.

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The team identified a specific kind of boot designed to: cushion feet; provide ankle, arch and heel support; and evenly distribute body weight to avoid painful pressure points. The consultants also found seamless socks with extra padding that reduced friction and irritation. By taking the few extra preventative steps to help, the Company was able to keep employees at work — benefitting both the employees and the Company. Not one of them required any subsequent leaves of absence related to their disease.

¹The Schwan Food Company includes, but is not limited to, a manufacturing division and three (foodservice, retail and wholesale) areas of selling frozen-food products.

²Collectively “Company”

Workplace PossibilitiesSM

Case Study: **Schwan Food Company**

"In this day and age when so many companies are doing more with less, we want our employees to know that we appreciate what they do for us, and we'll work with them to address any accommodation needs we are able to," said Lori Skewes, leave of absence supervisor with the Company. "The Workplace Possibilities consultants help us do that. They're not just members of the insurance company's team. They're invaluable members of our team."

Improving Workspace

In addition to the drivers on the roads and the people working in the plants and distribution centers, the Company also has several office locations. One particular office employee struggled to get through the workday because of a disease that left her feeling chronically fatigued from several complications. For example, this employee sat in a chair wrapped in an old sweater for extra cushion. In addition, the fluorescent lights in the office made this employee's optic nerve flare up, stressing the eyes while working on the computer.



Recognizing this employee's discomfort, the Workplace Possibilities consultants reconfigured the office space. They purchased an ergonomic chair and keyboard to make sitting for long periods of time in front of a computer more comfortable and better for posture. They also replaced the overhead lighting with full-spectrum lighting, which mimics natural daylight to relax the employee's eyes.

"Our employees mean a lot to the Company, so we want to provide them tools and make accommodations when appropriate," Streich said. "Our goal is to help people stay at work and be productive, engaged employees. If we are able to help someone stay at work, it is very rewarding."

Promoting Mental Health

Sometimes employees' minds can be occupied with various things other than work. They can be worried about a family member's illness, a friend's divorce or maybe even their own health. The Company acknowledges this, and with the support

Workplace Possibilities saved
\$327,000

of its Workplace Possibilities team has a mental health adviser on staff to assist with whatever an employee may need in this area.

For example, one Company employee was recently hospitalized for severe depression and chronic worry over family finances. The mental health adviser stepped in and assisted this employee in getting the needed help through the Company's employee assistance program.

"As an employer, we recognize that employees may have things other than work on their mind when they walk in the door each day," Skewes said. "We're all human, and as a Company we want to be there to help people through difficult times in their lives. Workplace Possibilities helps us do that."

Measuring Positive Results

The Company and The Standard had a partnership for several years before implementing the current return-to-work program. In 2010, the Company saved nearly \$327,000 in disability costs with the Workplace Possibilities program. More than 300 people have participated in the program, and the number of employees engaged in the program has doubled in just four months.

"When Schwan's decided to take advantage of the Workplace Possibilities program, it really jumped in with both feet," said Kathy McCarthy, one of the Company's consultants. "We get suggestions every day of employees who could benefit from the program in some way, and the results are astounding."

For the employees who did require disability leave, the Company noticed a drop in the number of days they were gone. In 2009, employees on average were gone for 64 days, and in 2010 that number dropped to 57.

"Most employees want to come back as soon as they can, so they're willing to engage in this process with us," Streich said. "It turns out that it's a very easy process when we have consultants who understand our business and culture. The consultants have made a significant impact on establishing a successful Workplace Possibilities program. We look forward to expanding the program and continuing to deliver positive results."

The Standard is the marketing name for StanCorp Financial Group, Inc. and subsidiaries. Insurance products are offered by Standard Insurance Company of Portland, Ore. in all states except New York, where insurance products are offered by The Standard Life Insurance Company of New York of White Plains, N.Y. StanCorp Equities, Inc., member FINRA, distributes group annuity contracts issued by Standard Insurance Company. Third-party administrative services are provided by Standard Retirement Services, Inc. Product features and availability vary by state and company, and are solely the responsibility of each subsidiary.