



More Businesses are Offering Massage Therapy as an Employee Benefit

American Massage Therapy Association
Pete Reinwald, June 21, 2009

Boeing features an “Industrial Athlete Program” that offers massage to help improve employees’ physical and mental resilience.

Eddie Bauer offers massage as part of a wellness program that includes mammograms, a wellness room and a personal trainer at the company’s on-site gym. And Google has its own “Massage Program Manager,” who boasts on a [YouTube video](#) that the company has “massage going in multiple massage rooms eight hours a day, five days a week.” Massage has not only gone mainstream—it’s gone corporate.

Companies big and small have discovered the benefits of wellness in the workplace, and they’re using massage as a way to attract and keep employees, while also keeping them productive.

Growing Need

No data are available on the number or percentage of companies that offer massage therapy as a benefit. Some industry experts, however, say they think the numbers are growing, and massage therapists from coast to coast are seizing the opportunities.

“It has been looked upon in a much more favorable way,” says Burt Abrams of B.J. Abrams & Associates, an executive recruiting firm in suburban Chicago. “Only in the last five, seven, eight years has massage started to get some notice.”

Abrams has offered his employees chair massage over the past several years. “It is a benefit for stress relief, and it feels good,” he says. “It is a benefit that doesn’t cost a whole lot of money, and it gets a lot of good will from your employees.”

Research on corporate massage is so scarce that massage practices and therapists widely rely on a 1992 article in the *Financial Times* to trumpet the benefits that companies can reap by offering massage therapy to employees. The article claims a company based in Ontario, Canada, reported a 25 percent decrease in time off for work-related injuries, and a \$200,000 decrease in compensation claims after it implemented a massage therapy program.

John Hasmonck can relate. Hasmonck is a certified public accountant and partner at Ronald J. Borden & Company, a Chicago-based accounting firm that offers employees monthly on-site massage therapy. The company began offering the benefit about a decade ago in response to extremely long work hours during certain parts of the year, especially tax time.



“Our people get tired,” explains Hasmonek. “So, we decided to offer them a massage in the office once a month in order to give them a little break to see if it would increase their energy levels. And it has. It has increased their morale even more than we anticipated.

People really look forward to that monthly massage.” Debbie Jordan, an administrative assistant at the firm, speaks highly of the program. “We brag about it,” she says. “I’ll go to the health club, and I’ll tell people that the massage people are coming Monday. They can’t believe it. They’re very jealous. They say ‘that’s a nice perk you have from your employer.’”

The Colorado Health Institute in Denver began discussing a wellness plan to combat employee stress and heavy workloads about two years ago. The organization implemented on-site massage as part of a program that included yoga and “two o’clock walks” involving voluntary 20-minute walks on and around the organization’s grounds.

Many companies that don’t currently offer massage therapy to their employees could be convinced of the benefits. Executives and managers at companies that offer massage to their employees offered these ideas for therapists interested in getting in on the action:

Make a presentation at the local chamber of commerce. Marilyn Kier, a massage therapist located in Chicago, landed Ronald J. Borden & Company, as well as many other companies, by doing just that. “We were very impressed with her presentation,” says John Hasmonek, a certified public accountant and a partner at the company. “We thought that we could give it a try in our office.”

Target companies where you know somebody who can speak on your behalf. Referrals are important to managers and executives who make the decisions on whether to offer massage to employees. Julie Wallace got a reference at the Colorado Health Institute in Denver from a relative who works there. “Family referrals count here,” operations manager Michele Christiansen explains.

Target companies that have wellness programs. These businesses may already be aware of the benefits offered by massage therapy and more receptive to the idea of offering the service to their employees. To get your foot in the door, think about offering a free massage.

Offer testimonials and make the benefits to the company clear. Increasing employee productivity, promoting employee good will and setting that company apart from its competitors are all powerful incentives to mention when approaching a company.

“People were really getting stressed out,” says Michele Christiansen, the institute’s operations manager. “We couldn’t change the workload. What we could do is help people manage the stress of the workload.”

The organization’s efforts apparently have worked. Christiansen cited the case of one employee who recently had a follow-up visit with her doctor. “Her doctor saw noticeable improvements in her health,” Christiansen explains. Although the employee’s improved health can’t entirely be attributed to the company’s wellness plan, Christiansen says “that’s kind of a measurable result.”



Christiansen believes the organization's wellness plan and massage therapy has made a difference in employee morale as well. "They're more productive and happier if you help them manage their stress," she adds.

Tallying the Cost

The Colorado Health Institute offers an on-site massage therapist once every four weeks. The company posts a sign-up sheet in advance for employees to reserve 20-minute blocks with the therapist. Employees pay \$20 for 20 minutes, not including tip.

Employee contributions for massage benefits vary from company to company. Sometimes the company pays all of the costs, and sometimes the employees and company share the costs. Sometimes, too, the employees pay the entire cost of the massage. In fact, many employers say their employees are happy to be given the time to get a massage during work hours, especially since they might not take the time out otherwise.

Then there are companies like Google that pull out all the stops. The company boasts approximately 35 massage therapists in the United States and looks to add more. "The goal is to triple the number of massages we give each week," declares Google massage program manager Babette Villasenor on a YouTube video accessible from the company's website.

"We have chair massage and table massage, prenatal massage and Thai massage," Villasenor continues on the video. "The most common feedback that I get from Googlers is that Google massage has ruined their experience of massage outside of Google—you literally have to work here to get a massage this good."

The Google video underscores the extent to which companies, and employees, are embracing massage.

Some therapists employ a tiered pricing system where they charge the company \$60 per hour as a base and will adjust the rate depending on how much time they spend giving massages. Under this pricing system, the company is charged a higher rate, perhaps \$70 per hour, if the therapist spends fewer than, say, three or four hours at the company. Generally, though, employers and/or employees can count on the rule of thumb of \$1 per minute, plus tip, for chair massage.

Enjoying the Benefits

Suburban Chicago law firm Kovitz Shifrin Nesbit treats employees to a free 20-minute chair massage once every two months. Therapists are on site once every two weeks, and employees can pay \$20 for a 20-minute massage on the weeks that they're not due for a company paid massage.



The company covers gratuity, explains firm administrator Ivie Cohn. “It’s something that we sometimes share in an interview with potential employees,” Cohn says. “It definitely speaks to our culture and our environment.”

At the Colorado Health Institute, Kathy Helm sits at a computer all day. She said one of the benefits of a massage is that it reveals problems that she didn’t realize existed. “You go in and get the massage, and you’ve got this problem and this problem and this knot,” Helm says. “Once you get it worked out, you’re able to do things better. You don’t have that tension.”

Jordan agrees, saying she gets an immediate sense of relaxation from lying in the chair and listening to the music played by the on-site massage therapist. “You immediately feel the stress level drop,” she explains. “After you’re in the chair, the therapist asks what is bothering you, if there are any areas you want her to focus on.”

Often, she’ll have the therapist work on her shoulders, tight from spending so much time in her chair in front of her computer. “So she’ll massage my arms and go down to each finger,” she remembers. “And when she’s done with that, you just feel so relaxed. Last month, I had so much stress in my back, and when she was done, I had nothing.”

Stories like these are what sway some corporations to add massage therapy to their existing employee benefits.

Employees who are happy and free of stress are more productive. “We spend a lot less for this benefit than some of the other benefits that we give them,” explains Hasmonek. “Employees look at discounts, overtime and bonuses as things they have earned as a right. This is something they look at as an employer’s good will, something they do because they really care.”

Abrams suspects the opportunities for massage therapists are many. “I’d bet that if you did a poll or a survey, it’s got to be well below 5 percent of the companies out there that are offering it,” he estimates. Even with a flagging economy, massage therapists might still find opportunities in the corporate world. Abrams is proof that employees love the benefit. “They said, Burt, take anything away,” he recalls, “but don’t take away the chair massage.”

Source: <http://www.amtamassage.org/index.html>