



SUCCESS STORIES

Human resources coordinator gets a lesson in ergonomics

Human resources professionals ensure employees are getting the most out of a company's benefits offerings. What happens when the roles are reversed, and the human resources representative becomes the one in need of counsel?

A human resources coordinator at a health insurance agency was undergoing physical therapy and chiropractic care for chronic back and neck pain, along with numbness in her upper extremities. Her employer knew that addressing its valued employee's pain would not only help improve the employee's productivity but also prevent an absence for a disabling illness.

New way of working

A human resources representative from the employer contacted the Workplace PossibilitiesSM consultation service, an offering available to small businesses that have group disability insurance through The Standard, to discuss potential accommodations for the employee. Within one week, a consultant was on-site to help the employer determine a way to help mitigate the employee's pain at work.

The consultant met with the employee to discuss her job responsibilities and assess her work environment to identify any workstation issues that might be exacerbating her pain. He noted that the placement of her monitor, keyboard and mouse were most likely contributing to her discomfort.

The consultant made several adjustments to the employee's workstation, moving her keyboard tray to a negative tilt to place her arms in a neutral position when she typed and adjusting her large monitor so she could avoid rotating her neck. In addition, her mouse was replaced with a portable touchpad that could change its position, enabling the employee to avoid making repetitive motions that are common with a stationary mouse. The consultant also recommended the employee incorporate microbreaks into her day to vary her body movements and help relieve her pain.

Stay-at-work solution

The final cost of the accommodation was covered through the employer's Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit*. The accommodation was far less expensive than the cost of the employee's decreased productivity as a result of her pain.

The consultant observed that the workstation accommodations have increased her comfort and decreased her pain, and regular microbreaks have helped her further manage her symptoms. Most important, the employer's willingness to make reasonable accommodations enabled the employee to remain at work with no other job modifications — and without having to file a disability claim.



SUCCESS STORIES

Supportive employer's quick action helps valued administrator stay in school

Administrators are the “face” of a school to faculty, students, parents and the community. These leaders have a number of demands on their time, so they often don't think about what happens if one of their own — such as the head of a school — is forced to take a leave of absence due to a disabling illness or injury.

That is what faced a prestigious private school when its headmistress suffered from several chronic illnesses, and her declining medical condition started affecting her mobility and her productivity.

To help the employee address these issues and avoid a disability claim, her human resources manager contacted the Workplace PossibilitiesSM consultation service, an offering available to small businesses that have group disability insurance through The Standard. The human resources manager was connected with a Workplace Possibilities consultant to help its employee mitigate the effect her medical conditions were having on her and help her remain at work.

Creative accommodations

The Workplace Possibilities consultant knew of the unique challenges associated with the school's work environment. The school sat on a sprawling campus, and much of the terrain was uneven or on a steep grade. The consultant identified this as a major productivity barrier, as it aggravated her condition and contributed to a fair amount of pain.

The consultant worked with the employee's physician, who helped determine that she would benefit from a cart or scooter to help her move around campus. Using the Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit* included with the school's disability policy, the school purchased a canopied cart, which allowed the employee to move around campus easily and comfortably in any type of weather.

To a lesser extent, her workspace layout and improperly adjusted desk chair also contributed to her pain and discomfort. The school purchased an ergonomic chair specially adjusted for the employee, and the consultant provided recommendations on desk, monitor and keyboard placement to ensure the employee could work comfortably.

Pain-free resolution

In a follow-up with the employee, the consultant observed she was using the golf cart for extended travel on campus, and the ergonomic chair and modified desk layout were helping to manage her pain.

By reaching out to the Workplace Possibilities program before the employee had to take a disability leave, the school's human resources department was able to facilitate a solution to keep the headmistress at work and reduce her symptoms during the workday. Working with the Workplace Possibilities consultant not only helped the headmistress manage her health but it also helped the face of the school be able to better support her teachers and students.



Employer gets creative to help beloved automotive industry employee stay at work

Assembly work requires knowledgeable, specialized employees. That need is even greater when it comes to assembling complicated electric panels. Finding replacements for these valuable employees can be difficult — and potentially expensive — if they are out of work due to a disabling injury or illness.

A chronic condition becomes a risk

An assembly line employee — who was diagnosed at an early age with a severe condition that resulted in partial paralysis — was having difficulty moving to various workstations. Her health had declined to the point where she was unstable on her feet, and could have risked a fall and/or other serious injury.

This could have turned into a long-term disability claim. That's when her human resources manager contacted the Workplace PossibilitiesSM consultation service, an offering available to small businesses that have group disability insurance through The Standard.

Thinking outside the box

A Workplace Possibilities vocational case manager worked with the human resources manager to get an understanding of the employee's job responsibilities and workstations and to learn more about her condition. Once the initial assessment was conducted, an industrial ergonomist with The Standard also was enlisted to help

and made on-site visits to the employer to collaborate on a workflow analysis with the employer, line engineers and human resources.

The workflow analysis determined that the employee could be helped by a scooter to help her reach the assembly stations, while mitigating fall risk. Workplace Possibilities consultants worked with a vendor to design a custom, motorized scooter, which was purchased with the employer's Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit* from its disability insurance policy. The scooter's features eliminated fall risk by not requiring her to transfer from the scooter chair to a stool, helped maintain circulation in her lower body and enabled her to sit for long periods of time.

The consultant observed that the employee is still working full time and is more productive because of the accommodations. Without the accommodation, her long-term leave could have turned into a permanent disability. She was adamant about wanting to stay at work, and her employer was just as adamant about helping her. The employer's willingness to think creatively saved money by retaining a valued employee, rather than initiating a search for and training a replacement who would have had big shoes to fill.

*The Standard's group disability insurance policies include a Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit, which will cover up to \$25,000 of workplace accommodation expenses approved by The Standard. These policies have exclusions, limitations, reductions of benefits, and terms under which the policies may be continued in force or terminated. Please contact The Standard for additional information, including costs and complete details of coverage.

The Standard is a 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. Product features and availability vary by state and company, and are solely the responsibility of each subsidiary. Each company is solely responsible for its own financial condition. Standard Insurance Company is licensed to solicit insurance business in all states except New York. The Standard Life Insurance Company of New York is licensed to solicit insurance business in only the state of New York.