

Power Driving - Program Synopsis

Being fit to drive means living, eating and driving well. The long hours and sedentary lifestyle associated with heavy vehicle drivers and equipment operators make it very difficult for these workers to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Drivers and operators are also subject to high rates of injury and accidents, and recently interest has been brought to bear on the role of health in many of these events.

Dr. Delia Roberts, Weyerhaeuser and the BC Forest Safety Council conducted a study to examine the factors contributing to poor health and high injury and accident rates in log haulers and heavy equipment operators in order to determine whether enhanced health and wellness could impact injuries and accidents in the log hauling industry.

Not too surprisingly, the study showed that these workers have very long hours; poor eating habits and get very little physical activity. In fact, 75% of the drivers and equipment operators that were tested in western Canada and the United States were obese, 37% were undiagnosed pre-diabetics (11% fully diabetic), and 95% of them suffer from chronic joint or muscle pain.

About the research

One of the focal points of the study was to assess the impact of eating behaviors on the ability of these workers to remain alert, react to unexpected stimuli and make good decisions. Robert's data shows that drivers were able to respond to an unexpected visual stimulus as much as 18% faster and more accurately when they followed healthier eating patterns. Drivers also reported feeling better, experiencing less fatigue and having more energy at the end of the day when consuming the modified diet.

The study findings were used to create the Power Driving program, a health and wellness strategy specific to the lifestyle and demands of heavy vehicle drivers and equipment operators. The program consists of a small pocket sized Top Ten Tips and an accompanying Power Driving Manual (coil backed 21.5 by 14 cm), workshops and support sessions. When the program was tested in western Canada and the United States the outcomes were remarkable. Within approximately six-weeks of participating in the Power Driving sessions, 50% of drivers and operators had lost between 20 and 55 lbs, by 4 months an additional 10% had joined this group and 40% of drivers were meeting their daily physical activity goals. Of those identified with serious health concerns 80% had been able to reduce their reliance on prescription medications. Although motivation remained a problem for many participants, 87% reported that when they used the program they felt significantly better, were more alert, had more energy and a more positive outlook.

The impact of the Power Driving program won't be known for years to come; however, the response of participants suggest that there is good reason to believe that the program will help keep this aging workforce healthy and safe. Given that the modified eating behaviors can improve reaction time by up to three quarters of a second, or approximately 44 feet of stopping distance for a loaded truck traveling at 55 km/hr, as well as significantly affect a number of health issues that place a driver's performance and license at risk

(hypertension, diabetes, sleep apnea) this program is very likely to have significant impact on the bottom line. Robert's research has consistently produced these types of results in the past, her Fit for Planting program for silviculture workers decreased injuries by 40% while raising productivity by 12.5% and after ten years has become firmly entrenched in the culture of tree planting. Even big business is starting to recognize the impact of poor health and wellness on profitability. A paper published in the Harvard Business Review concludes that when implemented correctly, programs like Power Driving can provide a 6:1 return on investment in increased productivity and lowered human resources costs.

Large group presentation

This presentation is an opportunity for all staff to gain exposure to the Fit for Driving program. Several formats are available, from 30 min up to an hour. All presentations start with the rationale behind the program, a brief description of the study and its findings, and some illustrative demonstrations to establish the validity of the program. The longer formats are more suitable to workers that will not participate in the workshops but for whom you would like to introduce the concepts of Power Driving; they include some detail about the dietary recommendations. The shorter format is for those workers who will move on into the workshops. Up to 100 participants are acceptable, but a more effective size is around 50 staff.

A cautionary note: The culture of drivers and operators does not lend itself well to the classroom lecture format. The workshops are a much more effective medium for information transfer.

Workshops

There are two workshops that cover the basics of the Power Driving program. One focuses on nutrition; the components of a healthy diet and a very practical approach to how to implement healthy eating behaviors. The second workshop focuses on posture, joint stability and physical activity. Order of attendance at the two sessions is not important, but the groups should be discipline specific and include between four to eight participants. The workshops are each designed to take 30 minutes, but if time is available 45 minutes allows for a more relaxed, interactive process, particularly if the groups are larger than five participants. The space required should be private as participants will be required to participate and they are encouraged to engage in a discussion about lifestyle that is confidential. Each participant will receive a copy of the Power Driving Manual and the Top Ten Tips as well as a goal setting exercise that they will use during the workshops.

Supervisors

Supervisors and health and safety personnel should be required to attend the presentation and workshops. In addition, they will be offered an additional hour of information with coaching strategies and more in-depth information about how the program can be used to develop healthy lifestyles as well as context specific strategies to promote behavioral change.

Management

As many management personnel as possible should also attend the presentation, specifically those involved in Human Resources, Safety, Maintenance and Food for those residing in camps. It is very important that the leadership for the program comes from this level and that there is the opportunity to look to each of these departments for demonstration of their support for the program. A workshop for this level of participants could also be offered, both on a personal level and as a management strategy looking for a solid return on investment.

On-going support

Weekly events, newsletter items, texts, phone calls, contests and other forms of engagement can be provided by the Fit to Drive team to assist participants with maintaining their motivation to achieve their health goals. The most common comment from participants in the study was that they would have liked to receive more coaching for continuing motivation; this is a critical component of the program. If possible, in-house facilitators should be identified and supported in acquiring basic nutrition and movement knowledge with the aim of providing the program coaching internally.

Testimonials

"I have worked as a driver and equipment operator for 42 years. When I first heard about the program the talk was that it was just another thing that would be shoved down our throats... but it got me thinking about some things I had wanted to change for a long time."

"...they listened to what I needed and worked with me to help me get there....."

"When I follow the recommendations in the Power Driving book I don't feel as tired at the end of the day. I stay more alert when working and have more energy for my family. And I am losing weight, it feels so much better."

"For the first time in 20 years I can tie my bootlaces"

"The email and texts gave me the information and support I needed to lose weight and lower my blood pressure (Weight loss 35 lbs)..."

"...I have stayed the course and have lost an additional 15 pounds (for a total of 50). I could not have done it without the Power Driving program. It is amazing how well it works and how easy it is"